A Few Afterthoughts on Places, Cuts, and Promises

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During the summer 2010 I wrote the paper "Hermeneutics of Emplacement: On Places, Cuts, and Promises" for the international symposium "Questioning Oriental Aesthetics and Thinking: Conflicting Visions of 'Asia' under the Colonial Empires," organized by Professor Inaga Shigemi of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyōto. As I was uncertain whether I would be able to deliver the paper in early November, I decided to include it in my volume of essays on Japan, which appeared a few weeks prior to the symposium.[1] Fortunately, and somewhat unexpectedly, on November 8, 2010 I was able to present my paper at the beginning of a three-day event on art and aesthetics. Readers can find the original (unabridged) version of the paper in my volume of essays. In what follows I will try to present the few thoughts, which I introduced in the forty-five minutes allowed for my talk and Q & A session, attempting to stay as close as possible to the major ideas I discussed.

At the beginning of my presentation I voiced the concern that, perhaps, my paper did not directly address the topic that Professor Inaga had chosen for the conference—the colonial enterprise in the formulation of an aesthetic related to Japan. I pointed out that the very practice of presenting this paper was an example of colonial enterprise for the simple reason that the language on which the paper relies is the product of a specific and notably Western modernity. I also promised to rethink the subject of the symposium at the end of the paper, thus trying eventually to link it to the possibility of questioning "oriental aesthetics."

The task of my presentation was immodestly (and perhaps naively) ambitious: I wanted to establish whether it is possible to link pre-modern and post-modern Japan (two temporal entities) through notions of space and place which I believe are essential in the understanding of pre-modern Japanese cultural phenomena and, in my opinion, quite relevant (again) to discussions of Japan's post-modern culture. I attempted to do so by employing a category developed by the philosopher Ōhashi Ryōsuke (b. 1944), the notion of *kire* (cuts), which is essentially a category related to time rather than to space. In other words, I used a temporal category to demonstrate the spatial structure of cultural phenomena in pre-modern and post-modern Japan. I believe that Ōhashi's philosophy is somehow indebted to the ideas of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), whose

1 Michael F. Marra, "Hermeneutics of Emplacement: On Places, Cuts, and Promises," in *Essays on Japan: Between Aesthetics and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 249–273.

theory on time is an essential guide to a reassessment of the importance that the concepts of space and place have played, and continue to play, in Japan. Nishida's concern with time was inevitable due to the nature of modernity immortalized in the early work of Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), whose *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time, 1927) is an existential analysis of human life along futural dimensions of time. One would never dispute the importance that space has in Heidegger's philosophy, especially after the brilliant work of Jeff Malpas, who could almost be credited with producing the book that Heidegger never wrote, *Sein und Ort* (Being and Place).[2] And yet, one cannot deny the fundamental role played by temporality in Heidegger's explanation of existence: "Only on the basis of ecstatic and horizontal temporality is it possible for Da-sein to break into space. The world is not objectively present in space; however, only within a world can space be discovered. The ecstatic temporality of the spatiality of Da-sein makes it intelligible that space is independent of time, but on the other hand this same temporality makes intelligible also the 'dependency' of Da-sein upon space."[3]

Maybe Japanese philosophers rushed to the conclusion of denying the spatial component in Heidegger's masterpiece.[4] At the same time, this alleged lack inspired them to develop spatial models of temporality based on Buddhist structures of eternal return. Nishida spelled out the spatial elements of time by linking temporality to his theory of "place" (*basho* 場所)—the ultimate place that gives place to ("emplaces") things, including time. For Nishida, Being was definitely "place"—even if it is only a place of "absolute nothingness" (*zettai mu no basho*)—as he stated in his seminal essay by the evocative title "Place" (*Basho*, 1926): "That which is, i.e., being (*arumono*), must be thought of as being located in (*oite aru*) something… For example, I think of the various colors as being located in the general concept of color; the general concept of color is the *basho* wherein the various colors are located."[5] After all, Nishida was attempting to solve Plato's enigma of the "receptacle" (*chōra*)—an attempt to overcome the duality of oppositions by finding out the receptacle that was "giving place" (donner lieu) to these oppositions, a third space beyond the traditional conflict of logos and mythos.[6] It goes without saying that Nishida was critical of Plato's concept of *chōra* inasmuch as, for Nishida, Plato's "receptacle" still remains "that which locates itself in," rather than "that in which" (*ni oite aru basho*) things are located. Nishida believed that Plato's *chōra* could still be further included in a

2 Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006).

3 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*. Trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 369.

4 See, for example, Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960): "I perceived that herein lay the limitation of Heidegger's work, for time not linked with space is not time in the true sense and Heidegger stopped short at this point because his *Dasein* was the *Dasein* of the individual only. He treated human existence as being the existence of a man." Watsuji Tetsurō, *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study*. Trans. by Geoffrey Bownas (New York: Greenwood Press, 1961), pp. v–vi.

5 The essay appears in *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965), p. 225.

6 The expression *donner lieu* is coined by Jacques Derrida, *Khôra* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), p. 18. For a discussion of the relationship between Nishida's *basho* and Plato's *chōra*, see Jacynthe Tremblay, *Introduction à la Philosophie de Nishida* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 59–72.

more enclosing structure (*tsutsumu* 包む), "a circle without circumference, whose center is everywhere," as Nishida often repeated quoting Pascal, who actually used the word "sphere" rather than circle.[7]

Within this circle one finds what Nishida called "eternal now" (*eien no ima*)—an eternal present, or absolute present (*zettaiteki genzai* 絶対的現在) that contains all times. For Nishida, time is spatial, as he identifies the present as a "there" (*soko* そこ) or "place" (*tokoro* 所) in which the self limits itself and, thus, defines itself; a "here" (*koko* 此) that is reached by everything that comes from an eternal past, and from which everything that goes on to an infinite future departs. This is a "place in which" (*koko ni oite* 此に於て) the eternal past dissolves and where the eternal future begins.[8] It is a "place" (*basho* 場所) beyond "objective time" (*kyakkanteki ji* 客観的時), beyond "history" (*rekishi* 歴史)—a place enveloping (*tsutsumu*) an eternal dialectical movement of negation (*hitei* 否定) and determination (*gentei* 限定).[9] Nishida's abstract and dense writing rarely leaves any room for concrete examples. Keeping in mind his upbringing as a loyal imperial subject in Meiji Japan, however, one can relate Nishida' theory of temporality to the structure of Japan's monarchy. His notion of an "eternal now" can be visualized by calling to mind the enthronement ceremony of the current emperor Heisei in November 1990. The extremely slow movements of the imperial parade staging the Emperor preceded by the imperial regalia (mirror, sword, and jewels), followed by Empress Michiko, the Crown Prince, imperial princes, and other members of the imperial family are a re-enactment of a ritual that is well known to readers of the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters, 712), which describes the ultimate positioning of the imperial couple under two canopies enshrining the ancestral deities Izanagi (male) and Izanami (female). The circularity of time (the iteration of acts and rituals) leaves no room for speedy and straight movements toward future goals. The whole scene takes place in the present—a special present that encloses the entire history of the land and its promised future. The division of time according to imperial epochs (we are now in the twenty-second year of the Heisei era), rather than according to a foundational act (the birth of Christ or of the first human emperor, Jinmu), assures the circular determination of time, and the establishment of numerous times that has a center that is everywhere, yet a circumference that is nowhere to be found. In this sense, according to Nishida, time is not a line of objective determination, but rather a continuous self-determination of the present according to a dialectic of absolute negation (death negating life, life negating death). In other words, the emperor is dead, but the monarchy continues unabated. Or, to use Nishida's technical language, the eternal now is a process of "continuity of discontinuity" (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続).

This discontinuous continuity is at the basis of Ōhashi Ryōsuke's notion of "cut-continuance" (*kire-tsuzuki* 切れ続き).[10] In order to understand this concept one should focus on the movement of the

7 Nishida Kitarō, "Eien no Ima no Jiko Gentei," in *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, Vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1965), p. 187.

8 Nishida Kitarō, "Basho," pp. 190–191.

9 Nishida Kitarō, "Basho," pp. 192–193.

10 Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *'Kire' no kōzō: Nihonbi to gendai sekai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1986), p. 294.

Emperor's feet in the enthronement ceremony, mentioned above—a movement well known to spectators of Nō theater. Actors on stage rub their feet—clad in white socks (*tabi*)—on the floor, raise their toes, and bring one slow step to an end at the exact moment when the other foot begins the next step. As one step comes to completion (cut, or *kire*), this cut movement continues (*tsuzuku*) on into the next movement. In this vein, the movement of the emperor's or actor's feet differs from the movement of a car's tire, which is constantly touching the road; instead, it mimics the rhythm of breathing: inhaling, exhaling, stopping for a brief moment, then starting again, until, one day, the breathing will stop forever, though life itself will never cease. In other words, the rhythm of "breathing" (*iki* 息) is the rhythm of life (*iki* 生き) and death—a rhythm of discontinuous continuity rather than of an impossible continuous continuity.[11] Ōhashi has applied his notion of "cut-continuance" to a variety of phenomena in Japanese culture. For the sake of this presentation, I will focus on three possible applications of the idea of "cuts": the first two are at the core of Ōhashi's *Kire no kōzō*, the third is my own interpretation.

The first application relates *kire* to artistic pursuits, such as, the art of flower arrangement (*ikebana* 生け花); the composition of seventeen-syllable verses (*haiku*); and, the setting of stones and sand in Japanese rock gardens (*karesansui* 枯山水). In the art of flower arrangement the flower is cut from its roots, as to be made into a "living flower" (*ikebana*)—a flower whose death (removal of the flower's resistance to time) guarantees the perennial expression of the flower's eternal existence in art. The poetic life of the haiku master Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) is also guaranteed by him cutting himself off from ordinary life—a *kire* symbolized by the poet's physical and spiritual journeys. Death to life, enables the discontinuous movement of the continuous stream of life—a movement expressed in the space of a haiku.[12] Another striking example of the "structure of *kire-tsuzuki*" is the rock garden at Ryōanji in Kyōto. In this garden, rocks represent mountains and the sand symbolizes water. In other words, the rocks are "like" (*gotoku/nyo* 如く) mountains; while, the sand is "like" water. Rocks and sand (the inorganic world) cut off (*kire*) the garden from the organic world of nature, since the "real truth" (*shinnyo* 真如, lit., "true like") is closer to an "as if," than to conventional landscape. Rocks and sand are true forms of nature. The *tsuzuki* part of the structure is carried out by the earthen wall surrounding the garden—a wall that also works as a second *kire*: it cuts the garden off from the surrounding landscape of fields and mountains beyond the wall. At the same time, allowing the viewer a glimpse of the reality beyond the garden, the earthen wall rejoins the inorganic world of the rock garden with the nature outside of the wall that is customarily (and erroneously) perceived as "real." A continuation is established between the internal dry landscape and the external "natural" world.[13]

The second context to which *kire* relates is the time framework of modernity—a time that,

11 Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *'Kire' no kōzō: Nihonbi to gendai sekai,* pp. 8–10.

12 In English, see Ōhashi Ryōsuke, "The Hermeneutic Approach to Japanese Modernity: 'Art-Way,' '*Iki*,' and 'Cut-Continuance,'" in Michael F. Marra, *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), pp. 31–35.

13 Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *'Kire' no kōzō: Nihonbi to gendai sekai*, pp. 81–86.

according to Ōhashi, witnesses the demise of *kire*. The predominance of science in modern times has led to a transformation of the arts along lines of reproduction and imitation. Painters began producing realistic, "naturalistic" portraits of nature. As a result, there was no longer a need for the "cuts," which had traditionally made nature immortal by entrusting to the arts the cutting of the natural roots of the objects of representation. The continuance between "natural beauty" and "artistic beauty" could no longer rely on the "cuts" that, in pre-modern and early modern times, had sublimated nature into art. In other words, art was "naturalized" to the point that the imitation of nature had finally led to the demise of art and of the practice of "cut-continuance." Once an unforgiving rationality had taken control over the imagination—a process that Japan had to embrace in order to compete with the Western giant—the process of *kire* was cut off from its roots. One of the ills of modernity, among other consequences, was the forgetting of *kire*.[14]

This insight on the part of Ōhashi leads me to postulate a third, very positive, context for *kire*—the possibility that *kire* could deflect the ills of modernity. I would like to argue that modernity stands as a major "cut" between a past that feeds on nostalgic memories (a past continuously invented) and a monstrous future of uncertainties (the abyss into which all values have crumbled). In this sense, *kire* could easily be reduced to a hundred essential years of Japanese history between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries—the crevice between the pre-modern and the post-modern. In other words, recycling the pre-modern could be a chance for modern Japan to create a more meaningful post-modernity—a post-modernity that excises the ills of modernity with the scalpel of the past. There is no doubt that Ōhashi's category of *kire* is basically a category related to time. His concerns are located in the space of a person's life and death (*shōji* 生死)—the temporal dimension of the individual. The idea of "cut-continuance" is, after all, the killing (*kire*) of nature (the religious training of a holy man as a way to escape the bondage of everydayness), so as to be able to go on living (*tsuzuki*) an authentic life of spiritual depth forever (as a recluse, or an artist). In other words, Ōhashi's notions of "nature" and "art" are temporal. However, Ōhashi's temporal structure of "cut-continuance" provides me the opportunity to deal spatially with the relationship between pre-modern and post-modern times (continuance) via the cut of the modern era. I will apply Ōhashi's concept of *kire* to the century between the late 1860s (the time of the Meiji Restoration) and the late 1960s (the end of the US "occupation")—the time of Japan's modernity.

If we bracket this century that witnessed the birth of everything modern in Japan (science, technology, language, politics, economy, philosophy—in a word, modern knowledge), and try to find a common denominator between pre-modern and post-modern attempts to overcome modernity, one is necessarily confronted with a re-thinking of the idea of "progress." That is to say, the obsession with time that characterizes modernity (including Ōhashi's category of *kire*) forces one to reconsider time in pre-modern Japan. At that time, the calendar turned around the seasonal recurrence of rites and ceremonies at the court. Protocol defined action at the court, including the time in which such actions took place—spatial seasonal boxes (spring, summer, autumn, and winter) that sustained the structural framework of the political and

14 Ōhashi Ryōsuke, *'Kire' no kōzō: Nihonbi to gendai sekai*, pp. 216–220.

cultural life of the aristocracy. From 905 until 1439 emperors ordered the compilation of twenty-one poetic anthologies organized around the same seasonal blocks—another example of Nishida's "eternal time" of recurrence, or "discontinuous continuity."[15] This was a time made of space—the space of the court and of courtly achievements that were oblivious to "time" in the sense of progress as conceived of by modernity. At the death of an emperor a new era began (with a new name) in order to avoid producing a sense of linear history. One constantly had to go back to origins (the ancestral couple) in order to make sense of what was happening in the present. The future was basically a reproduction of the past—an idea that finds little support in modern times. In short, one had to go back to the original box, or to use a word related to poetry and the arts, to draw on the original "patterns" (*kata* 型) codified by centuries of repetitive practices. In poetry, these "patterns" (what today we would call "styles," without the temporal component) were dictated by the choice of words that were set in the cultural databases of the aristocracy—databases that were not easy to access, as demonstrated by the intricate history of the appropriation of court culture on the part of monks, warriors, and merchants. The spatial nature of these databases—words that had to be used independently from the actual languages in vogue at the time—guaranteed that, structurally speaking, poetry would follow the exact same structure at work as would a court that strove to maintain sameness and reduce otherness. That is to say, people always knew what to expect from a poem on its way to be formulated—an unbreakable "promise" (*o-yakusoku*) on the part of the poet to apply the poetic database to his or her composition. There were no surprises, no betrayals—or, maybe sometimes a small surprise: that tiny turn of expression that would distinguish a great poem from a good one.

If *kire* seems to work relatively well in defining the cut between pre-modernity and modernity (one should think of modern Japanese poetry—aside from good *tanka* or *haiku*—in which rules are considered obstacles to the creation of well-written poetry), then *tsuzuki*, could be applied to post-modernity (us), with a word of warning. We will always be modern—after God's demise, one can only count on a very personal subject; under no circumstance our modern self will ever be short-circuited. At the same time, however, a possible critique of modernity in Japan points to a surgical removal of modernity in post-modernity, and to an attempt at stitching together the walls of pre- and post-modernity. It is interesting to notice in this regard the resurgence (with a vengeance) of databases in contemporary culture—especially the popular culture of animation, computer games, and cartoons (*manga*), which define Japanese post-modernity more eloquently than any other artistic endeavor. Interestingly, in modern-day Japan the most popular "artistic" expressions—the realm of the solitary *otaku*, so often vilified by believers in "high" culture—have replaced, in terms of popularity and charisma (read, the market), the remnants of "court" culture and their epiphanies (the literature known in Japan as "pure literature" or *jun-bungaku* 純文学). Pure literature continues to inquire about the deep crises of the subject and its profound interiority, following a time line that defines the core of modernity. On the other hand, animation presents de-subjectivized characters which are made

15 See Michael F. Marra, *Seasons and Landscapes in Japanese Poetry: An Introduction to Haiku and Waka* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).

of common elements produced by databases. Namely, viewers already know what to expect from these characters (no new existential surprises) since a promise was previously made to them before they began watching the film. Something new will pop-up from the character (maybe the position of a single hair on the character's head, which in Japanese is known as "*ahoge*," or silly hair)—a slight variation that distinguishes a great anime from a good one. The concept of slight variation defines what modernity called "originality"—a reshuffling of the elements found in the database.

In the remainder of this paper I will discuss the notion of "promise" (*o-yakusoku*) in relationship to two spatially structured artistic pursuits, *waka* and anime—eloquent representatives of Japan's pre-modernity and post-modernity. Tani Motoko argues that in the composition of classical verse (*waka*) a poem "comes with 'a promise'".[16] The reference is to what Japanese poets called, "the pillow of songs" (*uta-makura* 歌枕) or, more generally speaking, "poetic language" (*uta-kotoba* 歌ことば). Poetic language comes with specific promises that poets must keep—acts of loyalty to and humility in front of the poetic databases that provide such language. The poet does not create language; language is given to the poet in that the poet must find a location within these databases. In other words, the place of poetry speaks, and the ability of the poet is measured against his or her ability to place the word within the right context. It is interesting to notice that in the Heian period the general expression "poetic language" gave place to the more specific term *utamakura*, a word that is mainly related to concrete places (*chimei* 地名). From as early as the ninth century poetry was already considered a "place." If the databases worked as empty places inasmuch as, to use Edward Casey's words, they acted as "a reservoir of connections yet to come, or a least yet to be specified,"[17] the finished poem worked as "a common place," or a place that dictates to poets the subject of composition. This becomes clear if one thinks of the practice of composing poems on specific geographical areas (a famous mountain, a well-known river, or a barrier between regions)—a practice called, *uta-makura*. Technically speaking, these are not compositions about a place; they are actually compositions by the place in the sense that the place dictates to the poet the areas to be sung according to the database, what needs to be seen, and the pathic relationships between the place, the poet, and the listener (or the reader in later ages). That is to say, places come with a memory of their own—a memory constructed by earlier poems, maintained by the poetic databases, and transmitted by later poets. The subject is erased in favor of an alleged coming into being of the Being of the place. The self (the poet) is meaningful only insofar as it is presented as the disclosure of the place. Nothing more than a pillow-song succeeds in making authorship (what Ōhashi referred to as the human time of life-and-death or *shōji*) a secondary issue. It was only with the canonization (or historicization) of poetry, that readers began paying attention to authors who, with their newly acquired fame, succeeded in making these places immortal even in the mind of those unfamiliar with poetry. A concrete example might help to envision the working of the poetic database of places.

16 Tani Motoko, *Waka bungaku no kiso chishiki* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2006), p. 101.

17 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 48.

From hundreds of possible places, which to this day are gathered in alphabetical order in specialized dictionaries, I will choose a place located in the heart of the Yamato culture, Hatsuse (or, Hase)—a famous location in the Yamato Province, south of the ancient capital Nara.[18] Today this location is known as the Hase district in Sakurai city in Nara Prefecture. The region is shaped like a narrow gorge, surrounded by mountains on three sides (North, East, and West), with a river flowing down through the valley. Higuchi Tadahiko (b. 1944) considers this configuration to be one of Japan's seven classical types of landscapes, which he calls, "the *komoriku* type" (secluded valley, hidden land) after a word provided by an ancient poetic database of *makura-kotoba* (pillow-words)—epithets associated with specific names. *Komoriku* 隠国 (the hidden land) was actually an epithet used to introduce the name Hatsuse in ancient poetry. As Higuchi points out, "The inner recesses form a secluded space, which is apt to have a mysterious, otherworldly atmosphere about it."[19] Hatsuse was also a place of burial or cremation, from which the spirits were thought to float about like clouds. Furthermore, Emperors Yūryaku (r. 456–479) and Buretsu (r. 498–506) established their palaces in this area. Located on a major thoroughfare to Ise, Hatsuse became a renowned center for the cult of Kannon after the establishment of the Hase Temple in 686 on the west side of the mountain. In 727, a statue of an Eleven-Face Kannon was placed on the east side of the mountain. We find poems on Hatsuse as early as the eighth century, the time when the poetic collection *Man'yōshū* (Ten Thousand Leaves, 759) explained the meaning of the name Hatsuse as "swift currents." The poem is recorded anonymously—a fact mirroring the diminished importance of the human presence that is suggested by the attentive ear listening to the sound of the rapids.

Hatsusegawa	On Hatsuse River
Nagaruru mio no	The rapids in the current
Se o hayami	Flow so swiftly
Ide kosu nami no	There is cleanness in the sound
Oto no kiyokeku	Of waves across the dam.[20]

The valley of Hatsuse became a site of production of human perceptions—a deep, hidden bottom from which sounds, colors, and fragrances reached the poet's sensorial world. After all, Hatsuse Mountain was known as "the hidden mountain" (*Komoriku no Hatsuse no yama*): the mountain where one could perceive the presence of the plum or cherry blossoms even when they were hidden from sight, thanks to the fragrance

18 See, for example, Katagiri Yōichi, *Uta-makura uta-kotoba jiten* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1983).

19 Tadahiko Higuchi, *The Visual and Spatial Structure of Landscape*. Trans. by Charles S. Terry (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 95. See also, p. 138.

20 *Man'yōshū* 7:1108. English translation by Edwin A. Cranston, *A Waka Anthology*, *Volume One: The Gem-Glistening Cup* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 652. Kojima Noriyuki, Kinoshita Masatoshi, and Satake Akihiro, eds., *Man'yōshū* 2, *NKBZ* 3 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1972), p. 212.

reaching the poet's nostrils. [21] Fujiwara no Shigeie (d. 1134) attempted to enjoy the view of the cherry blossoms at their peak, only to realize that they were shrouded in mist. The fragrance, however, was such that he could visualize the white blossom by admiring the white clouds trailing over the mountain.

Ohatsuse no	Looking far in the distance
Hana no sakari o	In search for the flowers' full bloom
Miwataseba	On Mt. Hatsuse—
Kasumi ni magau	White clouds on the peak
Mine no shiragumo	Scattered in the mist.[22]

The poet's "ability to feel" (*aware*)—a central term in the vocabulary of Japanese aesthetics—derives from the "nature of the place" (*tokorogara*), which becomes a "common place," not in the sense of a trite topos, but in that the place must be sung by any poet worthy of the name. The place dictates to the poet the imagery that is needed in order to feel. It is not surprising that almost a century after Shigeie composed his verses on the hidden flowers on hidden Mt. Hatsuse, Fujiwara no Yoshitsune (1169–1206), the most powerful member of the aristocracy in the late twelfth century, would try his hand at the same theme:

Hana wa mina	All the flowers
Kasumi no soko ni	Shine and fade
Utsuroite	In the bottom of the mist—
Kumo ni irozuku	Mt. Hatsuse
Ohatsuse no yama	By the tinged clouds.[23]

This poem also appears in the *Yamato meisho zue* (Illustrated Description of Illustrious Places in Yamato), a guide to the Yamato region by Uemura Ugen (d. 1782) and Akisato Ritō (fl. 1780–1814).[24] The tourists of the eighteenth century were guided along the bottom of the Hatsuse valley by a string of poems that allowed them to experience the feelings evoked by the spirit of the area. In 1772, when Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) traveled to Hatsuse during his trip to Yoshino, he felt the urge to compose a poem, which would in turn locate him within a long line of distinguished versifiers:

We came down until we reached the front of a shrine called Yoki-no-Tenjin. Here the river flowing

21 *Man'yōshū* 13:3331.

22 *Senzai waka shū* 1:74. Katano Tatsurō and Matsuno Yōichi, eds., *Senzai waka shū*, *SNKBT* 10 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), p. 32.

23 *Shinchokusen waka shū* 2:114. Nakagawa Hiroo, ed., *Shinchokusen waka shū*, *WBT* 6 (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 2005), p. 27.

24 Tsuruoka Gorō, ed., *Yamato meisho zue: Zen* (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Meisho Zue Kankō Kai, 1919), p. 368.

beneath the wooden bridge was the Hatsuse River, the river by the swift rapids. In other words, on the other side of the river stood the village of Hatsuse. We stopped at a local inn, had something to eat, and took a rest. Since the back of the house was set against the riverbank, the waves resounded beneath the floor.

Hatsusegawa	River by the swift rapids,
Hayaku no yo yori	You come flowing from early times—
Nagare kite	The waves on the rocks
Na ni tachiwataru	Make the rapids
Seze no iwanami	That gave you a name.[25]

The contemporary poet Takahashi Mutsuo (b. 1937) could not avoid including Hase in his 2005 collection of "Poetic Matches of Scenic Spots" (*utamakura awase*). Takahashi's portrayal of the Hase River associates the area with female pilgrims to the Hase Temple, one of the few temples in ancient Japan that had allowed women to enter its grounds since the Heian period. The river sustains the metaphor of fluids associated with women: the sacred water purifying the monthly cycles of menstruation, and the liquid life of discarded fetuses. To this day the Hase Temple is a site for the pacification of unborn children, as one can see from the group of statues of baby Jizō clad in warm clothes and caps that meet the eye of today's pilgrims. The Eleven-Face Kannon enshrined in the temple stands for the benevolent mother: the Buddhist manifestation of an original female local god (*kami*). Takahashi indicates that the shape of the Hase area looks like a vagina that has the power to give life, but also to withhold it or to abort it. The silent tragedies of many women are carried by the swift rapids of the river, made of the tears of grieving mothers. No monument stands as a reminder of personal tragedies like that of waters in constant flux.

Monoomoi	The end of anxious thoughts
Hatsu wa hajimaru	Is the beginning
Hatsusegawa	Of the Hase River—
Sono minamoto no	I will visit the tears
Namida tazunemu	At its source.[26]

The collection is structured like an ancient poetic match (*uta-awase*) written by the same person. Originally, poetic matches were composed by two groups of people or by two poets, known as the poet of the right and the poet of the left. A judge would decide the winner of each match that would continue for a

25 This quotation is from Norinaga's *Sugegasa no nikki* (The Sedge Hat Dairy). See Michael F. Marra, *The Poetics of Motoori Norinaga: A Hermeneutical Journey* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 42.

26 Takahashi Mutsuo, *Utamakura awase* (Tokyo: Shoshi Yamada, 2005), p. 21.

hundred, or six-hundred, or even a thousand two hundred rounds. There is no judge in Takahashi's match, only a commentary by the poet himself who provides some interpretative keys. The poem on the Hase River is followed by a verse on a sacred spot in the south-west of France, Lourdes, which lies in a central position with the fast-flowing river Gave de Pau running from the south. Between February 11 and June 16 of 1858, the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous on twenty-two occasions in a grotto on the riverbank. Every year thousand of pilgrims converge on Lourdes in hopes that the water springing out of the grotto might heal their diseases. In "hidden" (*komoriku*) Lourdes human suffering is purified by the compassionate mother of Christ. In Takahashi's poem, not even the purity of water can bring consolation to the myriad examples of human suffering that only the water can witness in the concealed space of the grotto.

Komoriku no	The clear water
Rurudo ni kumamu	That I try to scoop up
Mashimizu no	In hidden Lourdes
Sumikimawaru wa	Is so extremely pure
Kanashimu gotoshi	As if it were grieving.[27]

In the twenty-first century, Takahashi brings to life a twelve-hundred-year-old practice of relying on ancient poetic databases that provide him with time-revered rhetorical techniques such as "associated words" (*engo* 縁語) and "pivot-words" (*kakekotoba* 掛詞). Both poems are structured around a series of associated words related to the fluidity of life (river, tears, and clear water). "Tears" (*namida* 涙) flow like "waves" (*nami* 波) in the rapids of the Hase River—a tour de force of rhetorical skill in which *engo* and *kakekotoba* are actually combined in the space of two words. "*Hatsu*" in the first poem means both "first, beginning" and its opposite, "end." The Chinese character hints at the second meaning, although the first meaning introduces the verb "*hajimaru*" (to begin) that modifies the name of the river "*Hatsu-se*" (swift rapids, but also the rapids of beginning and end). By incorporating several meanings in one simple expression pivot-words amplify the voice of the place, almost silencing the poet who can hardly be found in his compositions. The subject scooping up water is unidentified in the original text— could be the poet, the pilgrim, the reader, or anyone in need of salvation—a salvation (or an omission of) that only comes from the landscape from which the poems originate. Takahashi has fulfilled the "promise" handed down to him by centuries of poetic practice. His words, techniques, places, all come from pre-modern poetic databases. His poems would be fully intelligible to a tenth-century reader—with a minor exception, the inclusion of a new name, "Rurudo" (Lourdes), for which the reader would have searched in vain in his dictionaries of famous places. However, had someone told the reader that this was a place-name, he might have wanted to add it to the dictionary. Lourdes was far away, but this was not a major hurdle. Most poets who composed poems on famous places, never actually had a chance to travel to these places. This is why they had *uta-makura* in the first place. Textual traces spared

27 *Ibidem*, p. 21.

poets the challenge of long and difficult journeys. The major challenge in this particular case was posed by the fact that Lourdes did not have a memory of its own—at least not yet, unless someone succeeded to enter it into Japan's general poetic database.

Okabayashi Hiroshi (b. 1952) argues that in the post-modern world of anime, cartoons, and figurines—a world which has been labeled as *otaku*—consumers of such "literature" derive most of their pleasure by knowing "the promise of quotation" (*o-yakusoku*). At the bottom of this pleasure there is an anti-individualistic attitude that prohibits one from interpreting a character from an anime series, or a figurine representing such a character, as anything other than a quotation of another character that is already known to the viewer. In other words, viewers already possess in their minds an image of the new character even before they see it.[28] Okabayashi poses a *sensus communis* among consumers of post-modern popular culture that reminds one of the *sensus communis* of consumers of pre-modern culture, the writers and readers of waka. According to Okabayashi, knowledge among *otaku* consumers is actually created by "the promise" that allows each and every member of the group to profoundly enjoy the characters of anime. *O-yakusoku* is the mechanism that creates pleasure derived from understanding. For example, in *Otaku no Bideo* (The Video of *Otaku*, 1991), a comedy anime on the phenomenon of *otaku* culture, the character of the pretty girl Misty May comes on stage. This erotic image with bulging breasts and rabbit-like coiffure, reminiscent of Playboy bunnies, would be lost on most *otaku* experts were it not for the fact that it is quoting Daikon IV Opening Animation—a short anime produced in 1981, in which an elementary-school girl grows up into a bunny girl, an alluring female who fights off a multitude of science-fiction monsters.

Okabayashi applies to his interpretation of anime characters, the tripartite scheme that Kuki Shūzō (1888–1941) employed to explain the phenomenon of "*iki*." In '*Iki*' *no kōzō* (The Structure of *Iki*, 1930) Kuki's explained *iki* in terms of the allure (*bitai*), pride (*ikuji*), and resignation (*akirame*) that distinguish an accomplished *geisha*. Okabayashi sees the first two elements in the concept of "*tsundere*," in which *tsun* refers to the girl's will power that at times makes her appear aggressive and bad tempered to outsiders; *dere*, on the other hand, underscores the girl's flirtatious behavior, similar to a spoiled child trying to sweet talk someone in order to achieve her goal. An example would be Ayanami Rei, the pretty and strong girl from the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* series. There is also a cold, emotionless side to this character that at times makes her look like an artificial being—a component that Okabayashi explains in terms of resignation. These elements, together with their expressive features, make up the "promise" of what *otaku* experts expect from a successful character, with all the variations that only reinforce the original expectation. If these three requirements (hard face, soft character, and detached component) are not met, the promise is broken and the anime fails to please the "common sense" of the *otaku* consumers. This is the case, for example, of Miss Ko, the "art" figurine of Murakami Takashi (b. 1962) that, according to Okabayashi, lacks these basic elements. This alleged departure from the conventions of the successful anime character has led *otaku* fans to criticize

28 Okabayashi Hiroshi, "Structure of '*Otaku* Culture'—Reorganized Aesthetic Consciousness of '*Iki*,'" Paper presented at the Conference of the Asian Society of Arts (Kyoto: Ritsumeikan University, 2007).

Murakami for not being a real *otaku*. In other words, Murakami has broken the promise that generates knowledge among and sustains the *sensus communis* of the *otaku* aficionados.

The contemporary critic Azuma Hiroki (b. 1971) has called attention to the importance that databases have gained in contemporary Japan to the point that his definition of post-modernity is directly linked to what he calls "database model."[29] Unlike the "tree model" of modernity in which the outer surface layer of things hides a deep inner layer like the roots of a tree, the database model is an exchange of messages within a double layer structure. In post-modernity the depth of grand narratives is gone. Instead, a series of small narratives bounces off the huge database in the background. The distinction between an original and a forgery has disappeared since the elements provided by the databases can be reshuffled in a countless number of ways and re-shaped through a variety of media (television series, cartoons, anime, video games, t-shirts, coffee mugs, and so on). The database provides the visual vocabulary of the *otaku*'s narratives: the antenna hair, the cat ears, the loose socks, the tail, the bells, the maid uniform, et cetera. These elements appeal to the burning passion (*moe*) of the consumers who become obsessed with the "cute" (*kawaii*) expressions of the characters. Such obsessions are not dissimilar from the mad attachment (*suki*) that medieval poets felt for their art.[30] The database provided the poetic words that were combined and recombined at a maddening speed, so as to appeal to the expectations of readers who frantically searched for the perfect expression of *yūgen* (mystery and depth). In contemporary popular culture one witnesses an obsession for the most appealing erotic figurine instead of the quietest image of autumnal twilight. The idea of obsession, however, remains the same—an obsession that urges consumers to go back to the database and try new combinations. Azuma talks about a desire for the database rather than for the story, since the numerous simulacra (the individual stories) are "woven together out of the same database."[31]

I wonder whether the space of the database could be the third space that Plato called "*chōra*" (receptacle)—a receptacle that gives place to all oppositions, starting from the opposition between surface

29 Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Trans. by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 30–35. See, also, Azuma Hiroki, *Gēmuteki Riarizumu no Tanjō: Dōbutsuka Suru Posutomodan 2*, Kōdansha Gendai Shinsho 1883 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007), p. 64: "Whereas the narrators of ancient Japan (*kataribe*) lived within a collection of mythologies and folk tales, and whereas modern authors, readers, and citizens live within naturalism, *otaku* live within character databases."

30 I have discussed this issue of similarity in "Aesthetic Categories: Past and Present," in Takahiro Nakajima, ed., *Whither Japanese Philosophy? Reflections through Other Eyes* (Tokyo: The University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2009), pp. 39–59; and in "The Dissolution of Meaning: Towards an Aesthetics of Non-Sense," in *The Asian Journal of Aesthetics & Art Sciences* 1:1 (2008), pp. 15–27. Both articles can be found in Michael F. Marra, *Essays on Japan: Between Aesthetics and Literature*, pp. 187-201, and 227–247.

31 Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, p. 55. See, also, the following statement (p. 33): "In *otaku* culture ruled by narrative consumption, products have no independent value; they are judged by the quality of the database in the background. So, as these databases display various expressions depending on the differing modes of 'reading up' by users, consumers, once they are able to possess the settings, can produce any number of derivative works that differ from the originals. If we think of this situation as occurring only in the surface outer layer, the original product or work can seem swallowed by the chaos of a sea of simulacra. However, in reality, it is better to assume the prior existence of a database (i.e., settings) that enables both an original and the works derived from it, depending on how one 'reads up' the database."

and depth, phenomenon and *noumenon*, *noetón* and *aisthetón*—an opposition that underlines the very notion of metaphysics. After all, the definition that Edward S. Casey has given of Plato's receptacle can be easily applied to Japan's post-modern narratives which are inspired by the database model par excellence, the World Wide Web: "If we can think of [Plato's] Receptacle as some kind of no-place, this is only because, as a reservoir of connections yet to come, or at least yet to be specified, its place-full and place-filing potentiality is always still to be realized in time-to-come. There is, after all, a right and full time for places to come into being, and even if we have found places to be pervasively present at the creation of things, their destiny is also to be ongoing and ever-increasing in their connectivity."[32] This connectivity may explain the pervasive resilience of *waka* to this day, 1300 years after the first *waka* was anthologized. The degree zero of expression of databases promises an infinite number of possible combinations that continue to drive to insanity the practitioners of the poetic art. The openness of infinite possibilities is actually predicated on a closed system—the finite number of words present in the poetic database. Similarly, the database of contemporary popular culture offers a finite number of *moe* elements. And yet, as in the case of *waka*, the possibility of playing with these kinds of narratives remains infinite. This might be an indication of the long-lasting destiny of post-modern visualities that have been increasingly eclipsing the modern Japanese novel, apparently reducing its lifespan to as little as one hundred and fifty years. Video games, cartoons, and anime are here to stay and to redefine notions of literature—a redefinition that, interestingly, draws a good deal from the spatial configurations of pre-modern poiesis.

In this paper I have discussed another form of connectivity—the connection between pre- and post-modern Japan. The "cut" (*kire*) that I have applied to a hundred years of Japanese modernity inevitably applies to all practices of knowledge known to us today—aesthetics, literature, and all the historical practices related to art, religion, language, and history. The question remains: How to cut all these practices that, by definition, can only be "colonial" practices, since they hardly match the reality (of objects and interpretations) that these practices are set out to elucidate. "Colonial" are not simply the policies that Western countries have imposed and continue to impose on "third-world" countries. Practices of knowledge in which scholars inevitably continue to engage irrespective of their nationality are "colonial." Knowledge continues to be "a colonial empire," as long as one does not reflect on alternative models of knowledge at work, such as, in pre-modern Japan. Post-modern artists in Japan are leading the way, reminding scholars that maybe they should follow suit. "Critical" discourses may well apply to products of modernity but, perhaps, a critique of "critical discourses" can be elicited from interpretative practices that modernity has cut off from the screen of interpretation.[33] Symposia are prime occasions to learn how colleagues respond to and deal with the stumbling block of "colonial" methodological practices. I will be reading the papers presented in this symposium–not necessarily in order to learn more detail about authors and works known and unknown (we

32 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, pp. 48–49.

33 See, on this issue, "History and Comparability," in Michael F. Marra, *Essays on Japan: Between Aesthetics and Literature*, pp. 491–495.

can do this until the end of history with the certitude that one last detail is missing at the end)—but, rather, to learn how to escape the trap of watching Akira Kurosawa's *Rashōmon* through the Western lens of a foreign camera; posited that, indeed, there is a way out of it.[34]

34 "Inquirer: That temptation is reinforced by a process which I would call the complete Europeanization of the earth and of man…Japanese: A striking example for what you have in mind is the internationally known film *Rashomon*. Perhaps you have seen it." Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," in his *On the Way to Language*. Trans. by Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 15–16.