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Subject of the Absence and Absence of the Critique

Megumi Sakabe

I

The Japanese language is characterised by the fact that the predicate is predominant and the subject can often be omitted. The subject therefore remains more or less virtual, ambiguous. This fact is often regarded as the basis of the philosophical thinking of Nishida Kitarō as well as the linguistics of Tokieda Motoki.

In any case, in the Japanese language, the proposition basically exists as a propositional function (Fx) rather than a definite proposition (Fa, Fb, etc.). The subjects (a, b, c, etc.) can be identified in many cases from the situation referred to by the occasion of the speech act. But once the ties with the concrete situation become loose, an indefinite series of subjects (a, b, c, d, etc.) are evoked in the imagination of the hearer and even of the speaker, against the background of this absence. (Nishida would call this *mu no basho*, that is, "the field of nothingness", or *hyōgenteki sekai*, "expressive field".) Thus, the border between ordinary language and artistic or poetical language is ambiguous: most expression in ordinary language can be open to a metaphorical transposition of the subject and even of the predicate.

II

To these features of the language, and the philosophical and linguistic thinking that can be related to them, correspond the following characteristics of traditional Japanese culture: (1) Collectivity; (2) Predominance of the mimetic; (3) Predominance of metaphoric expression; and (4) Closed social system.

(1) Collectivity

In *renga* (a jointly-composed linked verse which later developed into *haiku*), we find a typical case of the collective creation characteristic of Japanese arts. While each member of the group never loses his or her individuality or creativity, what is dominant in the meeting field of *renga* is neither this poet nor that poet but, so to speak, an anonymous Subject (with a capital S), at the same time absent and present. And in that anonymous Subject, or rather anonymous predicative field, each member of the *renga* participates.

(2) Predominance of the mimetic

Origuchi Shinobu, celebrated ethnologist and poet of modern Japan, regards *modoki* (the comical imitation or parody of an originally solemn performance of divinity) as an archetype or prototype of Japanese performing arts. *Kyōgen* (comic interludes) can be regarded as a case issuing from this prototype. In any case, what is remarkable is that the comical repetition of the original presented by *modoki* has in itself a strong critical function directed at an excessively formalised style of life. The absolute subject becomes subject of the absence, driven away by its *modoki*.

The survival of mask-theatre (*nō*) or puppet-theatre (*bunraku*) can be deemed to be evidence of the predominance of the mimetic in Japanese culture. Even in some Japanese expressions themselves, we find traces attesting to the predominance of the mimetic: *furumai* (behaviour) can be broken down into *furi* (mimesis, pretend, feign), plus *mai* (dance); *manabi* (learning) comes from *manebi* (imitation, mimicry).

(3) Predominance of metaphoric or symbolic expression

It is hardly necessary to evoke here the fact that in the tradition of Japanese literature, the short poem (*tanka*, *haiku*) plays an important role. Especially

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in *haiku*, the expression is reduced to a minimum (17 syllables) in order to intensify the allusive power of verbal expression.

Neither is it necessary to recollect how black ink painting, which originally came from China, occupied a remarkable position among other styles of painting in the history of Japanese art. Black ink painting is more colourful, so to speak, than any coloured painting, by virtue of the very absence of colours other than black and white.

(4) Closed social system

Within the family group of Japanese *geidō* (traditional arts), *hiden* or *sōden* (secret inheritance) is highly respected. In *kabuki*, for example, the (stage) name of a famous actor is inherited by his son or other relative. In this succession to the name (*shūmei*), the name inherited is not, strictly speaking, a proper name (the name of a subject) but rather, a kind of predicate to denominate or symbolise the predicative field of the family group.

This kind of predicatively determined and closed field can be subjectively (concerning the subject) indefinite and to some degree, open. It can be elastic and embrace an indefinite number of members. This kind of predicatively closed social system can, if it works well, function as a highly intensive field of artistic creation.

III

The features of Japanese culture described above have had the following influence on criticism or critique:

(1) In each *geidō* (traditional art), initially there were original and superb critics such as Teika, Zeami, Shinkei, and Bashō. But their fecundity very soon diminished under the influence of the bad aspects of collectivity. The *geidō* group inclined to collectivism in the worst sense of the word, so that its productive force was soon exhausted. The critique also naturally lost its productive force and became merely manual.

What is remarkable here is that those early superb critics — Teika, Zeami, Shinkei, and Bashō — were all at the same time superb creative artists in their respective fields. How is it possible to be both artistically creative and a superb critic? This is my question.

(2) As mentioned above, the comical repetition of the original presented by *modoki* has in itself a strong critical function with respect to an excessively formalised style of life and its kernel subject, Divinity. The case of *kyōgen* is similar. But regrettably this critical productive force of the mimetic also tends to become merely conventional and lose its creative force. I think that in the case of the mask-theatre and the puppet-theatre, the situation is now as severe as in other *geidō*.

The mimetic, on the other hand, became, in the *kokugaku* (philology of Japanese classic literature) of the 18th century, *inishihenomanebi* (the mimesis of the old Japanese tradition of Shintoism). In this situation, in spite of such superb philological critique as that of Motoori Norinaga, fanatic obsession and purism led to the formation of a narrow ethnocentric subject of ideology. The strong critical force of the old rite of Shintoism (*modoki*) was completely forgotten.

(3) In the initial stage of *geidō*, metaphoric or symbolic expressions also functioned as kernel moments in criticism. For example, such key concepts in the criticism of Zeami as *hana* (flower, elegance), *yūgen* (occult, subtle and profound), and so on, are themselves metaphoric, symbolic expressions. Zeami insisted also on the symbolic function of bodily expressions. However, these metaphoric and symbolic expressions, depending on the tacit comprehension of the predicative field of each *geidō*, very soon became stereotypical once the productive power diminished or was exhausted. Criticism very much inclines to reduce itself to *geidan* (the personal talk of the virtuoso on his or her artistic experience). Even today, Japanese critique is not free from these tendencies.

(4) I stated above that the predicatively closed social system I outlined can function as a highly intensive field of artistic creation. This is especially true of the initial stages of each *geidō* (traditional art), because there was no fixed convention to hinder the productive force of the predicative field.

From the standpoint of critique or criticism, as we have seen, this is also true in the case of Teika, Zeami, etc. In having metaphoric expressions as key terms in their criticism, that criticism contained in itself the seeds of its own decay, because such metaphoric expressions had no efficacy outside the intensive predicative field of their respective *geidō*. With a predicatively closed group, it is very difficult to establish an open and public criterion of arts. Even in modern Japan, in spite of the efforts of the critics, Mori Ōgai, Kitamura Tōkoku, Kobayashi Hideo, and Hanada

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Kiyoteru, an open public criterion of arts has not yet, I think, been sufficiently established.

IV

What is the actual situation of art and its criticism in Japan today? What are the possibilities for artistic creation and productive criticism, or in other words, for collaboration between artistic creation and criticism? I must say that I am rather pessimistic about the actual situation of art and its criticism. Nevertheless, I would like to make some points regarding these questions.

(1) If a predicatively closed social system functions well, it can certainly be intensively productive, as in the initial stage of *geidō*. But, the other side of the coin is that it has a remarkable tendency to become stereotypical and conventional. It does so because there is naturally no objective or objectified standard in this type of society. So, by a kind of defence mechanism, the predicatively closed society becomes also subjectively closed, strengthening the barriers between itself and other groups, other cultures. The obsessively closed subject of the ethnocentrism of *kokugaku* is a typical product of such a process. This kind of short-circuit between predicative field and subjective field survived until about 50 years ago. Even today, there are symptoms of the survival of this kind of mentality.

(2) The predicatively closed society, which is closed concerning its way of life, its style of performance, and so on, is certainly productive by virtue of its intensity. But, when it is really productive, is it in fact wholly predicatively closed? Is it not rather, at a deep stratum of the mind, at least partly open to others, to other groups and other cultures? If so, the at least partly predicatively-open society or group must inevitably be, to some degree, hybrid, having double or multiple codes.

In fact, if we carefully examine the case of the founders of *geidō*, we can easily find everywhere the characteristic traits of such hybrid or multiple codes. For example, the *nō* scripts of Zeami are a weave of various sorts of quotations: in a mixed style of Chinese words and Japanese sentences, he quotes Japanese classics such as *Genjimonogatari*, Chinese classics such as *Hakurakuten*, and Buddhist sutras. In the style of dance, too, he quotes the styles of other dances of his time. Also

in the *tanka* of Teika, we find the quotation of various sorts of classic literature, both Japanese and Chinese, and frequent use of the method of *honkadori* (fabricating *tanka* by the transformation of an original *tanka* from ancient times). These examples lead me to believe that productivity by an individual artist or a group cannot be attained (and maintained) without that artist or group being, to some degree, predicatively open and therefore hybrid, multi-encoded.

(3) The condition of the possibility of artistic creation (or at least one of the conditions) is to be open to other groups, other cultures, and consequently to be hybrid from a cultural point of view. In other words, the condition of the possibility of artistic creation is to be capable of the mimesis of other cultures, other cultural codes. In fact, this openness of mind is just what we find in some contemporary Japanese artists: Takemitsu Tōru, Isozaki Arata, and Ōoka Makoto (as a master of contemporary international multilingual *renga*).

The maxim of artistic creation should be: *don't be afraid of breaking through towards other predicative fields, other groups, other cultures. Don't be afraid of being hybrid.* In light of this maxim for artistic creation, it follows that the task of criticism should be to encourage and stimulate the artist towards becoming hybrid, through that mimesis of mimesis, which is sometimes like *modoki*.

To conclude with a maxim for both artistic creation and criticism: *don't be afraid of breaking through towards other predicative fields, don't be afraid of becoming vacant in this process, don't be afraid of being the subject of the absence, of being deracinated.*

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