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Hibiki and nioi

A study of resonance in Japanese aesthetics

Abstract

In this article I will attempt a definition of “resonance”: first reflecting about it in general terms and then trying to address its role in Japanese aesthetics, in particular poetics. While far from being limited to East Asian aesthetic expressions, I will show how the experience of “resonance” has played a comparatively more central role in this cultural context, shaping peculiar forms of poetry. It is therefore useful to observe non-European sources, if only to understand our hidden cultural assumptions before this kind of phenomenon and suspend our prejudices more effectively in examining it. After examining the use of atmospheric resonance in waka and in renga I will focus on haikai 俳諧 poetics and on the notions of hibiki 響き (echo) and nioi 匂い (scent) in the theoretical discussions on poetry among Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1844-1894) and his disciples.

Keywords

Resonance, Synesthesia, Japanese poetry

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1. *Resonance*

How do we define “resonance”? A first safe assumption is declaring that resonances are phenomena. A resonance is not, however, a single, isolated phenomenon: in order for a resonance to occur, it is necessary for two elements, two noemata, to be both present in our consciousness. This is not enough, however. Two cubes on a desk are most likely not in resonance: they are just two given elements within my horizon. Similarly, we do not talk of resonance when we hear two synchronous sounds, whether harmonic or disharmonious. To have a “resonance” we clearly need a certain pause, gap or spacing: one of the two elements has to hide or recede into non-presence. Our definition is not yet complete, however: simple sequentiality is not enough. Finding out that today on my desk there is a cube and tomorrow there is a prism will not necessarily, or likely, ever produce a resonance. Similarly, hearing two identical trumpet blows is not automatically a kind of resonance. In this case we find, within the classical structure of time retention described by Husserl, the substitution of object A by object B, or a repetition of the identical A in two different moments; both these noetic modalities are not, in my opinion, the interesting and aesthetically active case of resonance. Through the exclusion of these cases I want to define a resonance, paraphrasing an expression of the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, as what happens in the presence of a “continuity of discontinuity” (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続). This paradoxical character is characteristic of an active, aesthetically valuable resonance. Resonance is therefore a dialectic *within* the phenomenon, or even better dialectic *as* phenomenon, unfolding within what we feel and perceive, rather than in abstract thought.

According to this tentative definition, a resonance can occur when two elements are *close* and *similar* enough to be given within a relation, and at the same time, however, *separate* and *distinct* enough (both spatially and temporally) to allow us to perceive their connection in a mode different from that of identity or unity. If an acoustic echo produces a resonance it is by restituting the original sound in a fragmentary, distorted, even melancholic way, as the nymph Echo from the original legend. For a resonance to occur, the medium through which the first element passed through needs to transform it and produce a discontinuity, without, however, transmuting it into something so different as to be wholly other. It has to keep something of the original “air”, also in the sense of Benjamin’s aura or Schmitz’s and Böhme’s idea of

atmosphere. Without putting too much emphasis on it, we should admit that in the aesthetic perception of resonance we go against both the law of identity and that of non-contradiction. We meet something that has to manifest to us as both united and distant, one and two, old and new at the same time. In this case, *tertium datur*.

2. Acoustic metaphors and synesthesia

It is significative that the expressions and concepts dealing with resonance do not usually rely on visual metaphors. With their powerful pull towards abstraction and their clear-cut definition of “things” – their differentiation both between things and things and between perceived objects and perceiving subjects – visual traits, and especially formal traits, seem less central in a style of perception based on a *blurring* between phenomena. If we accepted too quickly and too literally the acoustic metaphor, however, we might be inclined to think that resonances are simply or mostly relative to musical and auditory aesthetics: phenomena that can be grasped within a pre-understood arrangement of aesthetic matters and kinds of perception.

Far from it. While the absence of form and their temporal extension makes some acoustic phenomena some of the most obvious examples of resonance, what I tried to define as “resonance” in the first paragraph is first of all a noetic style (just as perception, phantasy or abstract thinking), much wider than what the acoustic metaphor alone would seem to suggest. We can have resonance, for instance, between the hues of a painting, of a garden, or why not between the clothing items of a well-dressed person. To expand this last example, a good attire is not simply a matter of fine materials and good tailoring. “Dressing well” also and even chiefly manifests itself as a “resonance”, not only between different items of clothing and accessories, but also as their overall relation to the moving, expressive body of the person wearing them. Clothing items are not appreciated as isolated objects, but because they (hopefully) blend into the personal aura, the “air” of a person. This process is even more important in the case of costumes, whether religious or artistic: we can think of resonance as the expressive relationship that blends together costume, dance movement, music, scenography and story in a ballet. Many, if not most aesthetic *Gestalten* are thus examples of “resonance”, if we define the latter in this way.

The noetic model of resonance has therefore a fundamental aesthetic role, implicit in our example of ballet. Music can resonate in a sharp movement; the red of a costume complements the aggressive or sensual gait of a dancer. This happens because resonance does not simply occur among *noemata* within the same axis of perception, but it is the primitive kernel from which synesthesia arises. The Japanese phenomenologist Ogawa Tadashi tried to address this “mutual erosion” between senses, refusing to dismiss it in terms of association and recognizing in it a fundamental “irradiation” between senses at the core of perception and imagination:

Synesthesia is often considered, as in the case of the famous linguist Roman Jakobson, as a problem of rhetoric (metaphor), collocated on a level of purely linguistic structures. It is true that describing a sound as high or low is already a kind of metaphor. A sound is an acoustic phenomenon; it essentially lacks a connection to spatial coordinates. And yet if we look at the senses in this way, considering them as reciprocally isolated, we are just trying to avoid the inescapable problem of what sort of thing lets us understand synesthesias, even in rhetorical terms, what it lets us comprehend metaphors such as “high pitch” or “a velvet music”. “A yellow voice” does not surely look yellow, nor does a “velvet music” have the tactile texture of velvet. Nonetheless, we do understand these metaphors. Moreover, such comprehension cannot possibly happen on the level of predicative language: it presupposes a sort of mutual erosion between sight and hearing or hearing and touch. [...] What we experience is that a meaning arising in one sense is “irradiated” on a meaning belonging to another, “resonates” onto it. (Ogawa 2000: 16-7)

Ogawa points out how resonance in this deeper sense is something that is always involving our bodies and producing itself as horizon or atmosphere. It is, in other words, part and parcel of our *leibliche Befindlichkeit*: “what makes us grasp the totality of atmosphere manifesting itself throughout the world is nothing else than what makes the various senses reciprocally resonate and project onto each other by their common ground: in other words, it is the affectedness of the body.” (Ogawa 2000: 17-18).

This nexus of living body and atmosphere, which Ogawa dubs “the world’s logos”, is communication of the body into the world – both natural and intersubjective – and conversely of the world into the body. Elsewhere Ogawa considered this logic of “suggestion” (*kehai* 気配) as comparatively more developed attitude in East Asian culture (Ogawa 2004). It is worth noting, however, that even while employing notions such as *ki* 気 (breath/feeling/spirit, cfr. Marinucci 2019) or *kibun* 気分

(*mood*) to describe this process, Ogawa (unlike other Japanese theorists, who emphasize their alleged cultural uniqueness) conceived them to be universally valid, despite their cultural imprint. The problem of resonances intersects that of *sensus communis*, both in the Aristotelian meaning of common perceptual ground and in the Kantian one of requisite for intersubjective communication.

Indeed, if we look for a very clear, if suggestive, description of this deep structure of resonance, we can turn to what is likely the most famous synesthetic poem written in Europe, *Correspondances* by Charles Baudelaire:

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.
Comme de longs échos qui de loin se confondent
Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté,
Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.
Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,
Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens.*

Nature is a temple, where the living pillars
Sometimes breathe confusing speech;
Man walks within these groves of symbols, each
Of which regards him as a kindred thing.
As the long echoes, shadowy, profound,
Heard from afar, blend in a unity,
Vast as the night, as sunlight's clarity,
So perfumes, colours, sounds may correspond.
Odours there are, fresh as a baby's skin,
Mellow as oboes, green as meadow grass,
— Others corrupted, rich, triumphant, full,
Having dimensions infinitely vast,
Frankincense, musk, ambergris, benjamin,
Singing the senses' rapture, and the soul's. (Baudelaire 1993: 19)

The “living pillars” faced by the poet are beings that don't stay put as objects, and instead keep “breathing” around themselves an aura, suggesting through their expressive effusion a shift into the spiritual or the

fantastic. By being more than simple objects, expanding around and above themselves in this poetic atmosphere, their “long echoes” “blend in a unity” in which “perfumes, colours, sounds may correspond.” Here is a powerful example of resonance that highlights how this “continuous discontinuity” does not simply occur between *noemata*, but also between sensory modes. Baudelaire in the second part of the poem focused not on acoustic echoes but on the atmospheric ecstasies (in all senses of the word) of perfumes. As we will see later, a theory of resonance stressing olfaction just as much as hearing is a distinctive product of Japanese aesthetics.

3. *Resonance as an aesthetic mode*

From this cursory introduction it should in fact have become clear already: a phenomenology of resonance needs not only a theoretical definition (my attempt: an atmospheric and living-bodily, perceptive and imaginary “noetic style”) but also insightful examples. Occurring as a *located relation*, resonance cannot be discussed *in general* and *in abstract*. Moreover, such examples would not do if they ignored another central fact: that is, how a typical effect of resonance are the “raptures” of the senses and of the soul sung by Baudelaire. Even when such raptures are not so total and decadent, they occur and are relevant: they make out an essential part of what moves us. What resonates with us and with other things, all the while keeping its difference and discontinuity, seems to engulf us and these other elements in a kind of non-logical, affective unity. This dynamic can be described as one of the fundamental traits – not the only, but a fundamental one – of natural beauty (Rosa 2019: 453-71).

There is resonance, for instance, between the song of a cuckoo and a summer evening; the fresh air of dusk reverberates in the voice of the bird, and the staccato of his song resonate acoustically within the calm of summer. In this case, the correspondence occurs between two natural *noemata*, involving a human subject as a simple perceiver.

Resonances however are by no means confined to natural phenomena: as we saw in paragraph 1, even something as banal as dressing (well) is a management of resonances. Another field of human activity that is heavily involved in spatial resonances is architecture: we might even say that spatial resonances are one of the fundamental tools of architecture. Browsing on the internet several hundred images corresponding to the query “aesthetic resonance”, one image made me consider this point in

particular, also for its similarity to the Japanese poems that we will analyze in paragraph 5. It is a picture of the uniquely brilliant full moon of November 2016 shining over the Gate of All Nations of Persepolis, Iran. Apart from its immediately striking character, the picture suggests several kinds of distance. One is the extreme remoteness of the ancient ruin, physically available but separated from us by the “cloak of history”. By contrast, the moon shining on it bears witness of an even greater cosmic distance, and at the same time speaks of an eternal present, of a perpetual cycle of waxing and waning that opposes the historical, finite permanence of stone. The two kinds of time resonate with each other: each one needs to touch the other to become aesthetically and emotionally active. The interaction between ancient ruin and landscape (not as a collection of objects, but as horizon of manifestation) is reminiscent of Heidegger’s description of a Greek temple in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In this passage, Heidegger actually sketches something that is already very close to the definition of “resonance” we are attempting:

A building, a Greek temple, portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rocky, fissured valley. [...] It is the temple work that first structures and simultaneously gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth and death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire for the human being the shape of its destiny. The all-governing expanse of these open relations is the world of this historical people. [...] This resting of the work draws out of the rock the darkness of its unstructured yet unforced support. Standing there, the building holds its place against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm visible in its violence. The gleam and luster of the stone, though apparently there only by the grace of the sun, in fact first brings forth the light of day, the breadth of the sky, the darkness of night. The temple’s firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air. The steadfastness of the work stands out against the surge of the tide and, in its own repose, brings out the raging of the surf. Tree, grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter their distinctive shapes and thus come to appearance as what they are. (Heidegger 2002: 20-1)

As a nexus of cultural and natural, visible and invisible (“wind and earth” in the sense of Watsuji’s *fūdo*, cfr. Watsuji 1961), the aesthetic sense of a temple or a monument like the Gate of All Nations does not simply abide in the positive form of its construction. It resides instead in its capacity of becoming the focus of resonances that gather and clash throughout it. In the case of the two *lammasu*, too, “eagle and bull”, together with human shape, acquire their expressive force through their reciprocal fusion into

a chimeric being, a majesty that would not belong to a line of distinct figures.

It is not by chance, however, that these first examples of resonances deal with forests or ruins. Even Heidegger, when later in the same essay tries to expand his discussion on *physis* and “Earth” and turns to the “famous picture” of a pair of shoes by Van Gogh and to the “farmer woman” supposedly wearing them, suddenly becomes much less convincing. The reader, Derrida claimed, has the right to be “disappointed by the consumerlike hurry toward the content of a representation, by the heaviness of the pathos, by the coded triviality of this description, which is both overloaded and impoverished” (Derrida 1987: 292). Derrida argued that in this contrived example, Heidegger failed to recognize the discontinuity between the actual field (or the ageless temple) and a modern artwork, framed in terms of authorship and debatable content. In the context of our inquiry, this example highlights another important element of resonances: their spontaneity. While that of resonance is a noetic mode that occurs freely and even frequently on a fundamental aesthe-siological plane, it is harder (not impossible, but harder) to voluntarily create the middle space of “continuous discontinuity” necessary for its manifestation in the definite space of a single artwork¹. This is a limit of the artwork in the modern sense, as concluded opus of a single author, a tight unity of form and content that does not include often the gap or opening needed for a resonance. The loss of the aura lamented by Benjamin affects in this sense even original artworks: as they become more object-like, they lose their “unbridgeable distance”. In neophenomenological terms, this is the heart of the dispute between Hermann Schmitz and Böhme about the structural possibility, denied by the former and affirmed by the latter, of willingly producing atmospheres through artworks. In the case of resonances (a subset of atmospheres in general), what is the cause of our inability of not only producing at will, but also of foreseeing or definitely arrange a resonance? My answer is that once we understand resonance as a noetic mode (not simply as a subjective projection), the more the artwork tries to exhibit and present positive traits, the less

¹ We used the example of an elegant person as one of personal air and resonance. While this seems to contradict this point about the spontaneity of resonances, we only need to think of how often “elegance is innate”, or at least very slowly embodied, to admit that beyond all the objective elements of clothing, elegance is definitely *not* something that can be produced at will. Nonchalance, as a defining trait of a dandy, is what ultimately distinguishes true elegance and a pose.

guaranteed is the spacing or gap that would allow such resonances. For something to resonate, there must be some kind of internal fissure, a nexus of presence and absence.

4. Apollo's command

Aesthetic resonance before a work of art will often happen, however, through another axis: the surprising, moving and somewhat uneasy sense of distance opened between the work and ourselves. Resonance in this sense is a paradox, since on one hand it makes us correspond and attune to the work, no matter what it is, on the other hand forces us into a relationship that passionate but often bittersweet, or even painful, since it is asymmetrical. The work speaks to us, can even feel like observing us, but does it through something that cannot become a dialogue. A powerful poetic example of this interrupted dialectic dynamic is the famous poem composed by Rilke after seeing a headless statue of *Apollo* in the Louvre:

*Wir kannten nicht sein unerhörtes Haupt,
Darin die Augenäpfel reiften. Aber
Sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber,
In dem sein Schauen, nur zurückgeschraubt,
Sich hält und glänzt. Sonst könnte nicht der Bug
Der Brust dich blenden, und im leisen Drehen
Der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln gehen
Zu jener Mitte, die die Zeugung trug.
Sonst stünde dieser Stein entstellt und kurz
Unter der Schultern durchsichtigem Sturz
Und flimmerte nicht so wie Raubtierfelle;
Und brächte nicht aus allen seinen Rändern
Aus wie ein Stern: denn da ist keine Stelle,
Die dich nicht sieht. Du mußt dein Leben ändern.*

We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.
Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders

and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:
would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life. (Rilke 1995: 67)

The poem builds on the traditional picture of *Apollo* as a god of light. But here Rilke speaks with great precision of “gleaming” (*glänzt*), “dazzling” (*blenden*), “translucent” (*durchsichtig*) and “glistening” (*flimmerte*) elements in the statue. Far from being a self-enclosed object, as the Nietzescan Apollo as patron god of forms would dictate, the artwork is an active field of mobile, even feral curves, a blinding *aura* in the original double sense of “air” and “light”. Rilke’s poetry has an almost phenomenological vocation, as it states that the stone can burst open and observe the observer in turn. Here is a case of aesthetic resonance with a human product. The iconic ending of the poem, *Du mußt dein Leben ändern*, is however totally ambiguous. In which sense, towards which direction? The command of the divinity (and following Schmitz we can say that divinity, *qua* atmosphere, actually exists as such inescapable, blinding authority), like an ancient oracle, cannot be asked further questions. Thus, Rilke’s poem seems to include both the ecstatic sense of resonance and the frustration inherent to its artistic manifestation. While Baudelaire’s resonating nature was mysterious and yet welcoming, inviting human subjectivity towards a blissful (if temporary) communion, in the case of a statue attraction cannot be returned: this is the essential difference between a resonance with nature or other humans and that with artistic products. But there is undoubtedly a certain pleasure even in this striving or *Sehnsucht*: its unattainability allows for an unlimited movement of imagination and desire, the striving towards absence typical of aura, the “strange web of space and time” that always gives itself as “the unique appearance of a distance, no matter how close it may be” (Benjamin 2008: 285). This negativity, no matter how pleasant or rarefied, is an essential element of our relation to the artwork as a human artefact.

5. Resonance and Japanese poetry: three examples from waka

The example of a statue (one adopted by Benjamin, too, in his discussion of aura) suggests quite clearly what kind of frustration (and, masochistically, pleasure) unfolds in the resonance sparked by a work of art. The statue

has a human form, but it will never be available for a dialogue, or able to reciprocate our falling for it: this is the gist of Pygmalion's myth. Needless to say, falling in love for someone else in flesh and bones puts us in a state of ecstasy, engendering a powerful resonance: and yet this does not imply an aesthetic production. On the contrary, the stress on the autonomy of a single aesthetic subject (with the passage from archaic demonic inspiration to inborn *genius* first, and then further on to the judging subject of Kant) and on the inherent qualities of the work of art has often erased this dialectical dimension of the aesthetic. In Europe it would be hard to find a genuinely dialogical art form until the early 20th century avant-garde. Even then, the stress often still lies on the bold innovation of a disruptive subject.

This does not mean, however, that an actually dialogical art practice, one in which resonance is an essential part of the productive process and not a possible outcome of contemplation, does not exist elsewhere. In the next three sections I will deal with a uniquely Japanese kind of poetic practice, *haikai*, which has taken, in a way perhaps unique in the world, the noetic mode of resonance both as *object* of its poetic discourse and as *form* of its poetry itself. *Haikai* 俳諧 is an intersubjective composition, made possible by the interaction and resonance – not only between the “continuous discontinuity” of the world elements gathered in the minimal space of 17 syllables, but also between the heterogeneous subjectivities of different authors gathered in a poetic session, the *za* 座.

Haikai literally means “comic”, and it is the abbreviation of *haikai no renga* 俳諧の連歌: “comic linked verse poetry”. *Renga* is in fact a way of composing poetry collectively, which evolved from one of the oldest Japanese forms of poetry, the *waka* 和歌 or *tanka* 短歌. To better understand this genealogy, we will have therefore to begin from the oldest of these three forms and explain what *waka* is. However, quickly browsing through these genres also offers us a chance to observe the important role of resonance in all three.

Waka literally means “Japanese poetry”, as opposed to those composed in Chinese; its alternative name *tanka* means “short poetry”. *Waka* is a short poetic form composed in a 5-7-5-7-7 *morae*² metric scheme, often suggesting a switch in theme between the first 17 and the

² A *mora* is a metric unit; it does not completely equate a syllable since it distinguishes between long or short vowels, as it happens in ancient Greek and in Latin too; in the case of Japanese /o/ and /u/ can be either short or long and also the sound /n/ counts as a *mora* when not followed by a vowel.

last 14. Affirming itself (alongside poetry written in Chinese, *kanshi* 漢詩) as the official poetic language of Japanese aristocracy, its history reflects the refinement but also the competition for status and the often suffocating etiquette characterizing the Japanese Imperial court. Its composition was bound by very complex formal rules, and mastering its language was often a means for hierarchical ascent within the court. Its vocabulary eschewed both the Chinese influences in the Japanese language and colloquial expressions. Its tone was set instead by purely Japanese words (*yamato kotoba* 大和言葉) and by precisely defined and sophisticated seasonal themes: often times the nature praised by *waka* was more a pattern of literary *topoi* than an actual exposure to anything wild (Shirane 2012).

Even if heavily conventionalized, in *waka* nature was a powerful screen on which human emotion would resonate. The resonance effect in *waka* often occurs not through explicit similes or metaphors, but rather hinges on the non-explicit shift between the first 17 *morae* and the closing 14. Out of thousands of possible examples, I choose three well-known masterpieces that should work as examples of resonance in *waka*.

隠りのみ 居ればいぶせみ 慰むと 出で立ち聞けば 来鳴くひぐらし	<i>Komori nomi wareba ibusemi nagusamu to idetachi kikeba kinaku higurashi</i>	Shut indoors And sunk in gloom What could ever console me? Going outside I hear He evening cicadas come calling
(Ōtomo no Yakamochi, MYS VIII: 1479)		

In this poem by Ōtomo no Yakamochi (718-785), the resonance mostly spatial, on an axis of sound. There is a cathartic correspondence established between a gloomy interior monologue – literally interior: produced by prolonged stay indoors, likely due to long rains – and the enveloping voice of the *higurashi*, the evening cicadas. Ōtomo no Yakamochi lets these two worlds – inside and outside – resonate through a “pivot word” (*kakekotoba* 掛詞), a poetic trope that consisted in choosing a homophonic expression and working both its meaning into the poem. *Idetachi kikeba*, can be in fact translated both as “I come about asking” and as “Coming out I listen”. The enveloping sound – not that of a single bird but an environmental, spatialized noise in the approaching dusk, visually contributing to a loss of distinctions – works as a response to the subjective state of uneasiness and boredom: it reworks the human subject into an atmospheric flow. The word *ibusemi* expresses in fact not

simply personal sorrow, but a state of atmospheric oppression: like gloom it can refer to weather too, or even to an unappealing, disheveled appearance of another person. A subject forcibly disconnected from the world and from others, far from gaining its autonomy from it, quickly becomes stuffy and obtuse.

月やあらぬ	<i>Tsuki ya aranu</i>	Is the moon not the same?
春や昔の	<i>haru ya mukashi no</i>	Is the spring not that
春ならぬ	<i>haru naranu</i>	of a long time ago?
わが身ひとつは	<i>waga mi hitotsu wa</i>	It seems that just I am
もとの身にして	<i>moto no mi ni shite.</i>	The one I have always been.

(Ariwara no Narihira.
KKS XV, 747)

In this second poem by Ariwara no Narihira (825-880) the resonance is temporal, arising from the paradox constituted by the “discontinuous continuity” of a natural *topos* like spring and the “continuity of discontinuity” of individual human existence. Moon and spring are always the moon and the spring of a given moment: the first waxes and wanes, the second is fleeting; and yet as natural phenomena they are enshrined in a circular time or an “eternal now”. In comparison, personal existence (*wagami* 我が身, literally “my own body”, “my embodied self”) faces the contradictory identity of impermanence and sameness in an inverted way: it is only when the self realizes its own underlying impermanence (Jp. *mujō* 無常) that its biographical, continuous existence acquires its meaning. Through the resonance with these aestheticized natural phenomena, human existence can recognize the linear time from birth to death as something *forced* upon itself, but not exhausting the totality of possible temporalities. The temporality of this resonance is not the linear one of the Heideggerian *Sein zum Tode*, and as such offers to human existence a kind of deliverance, even when it unfolds as the melancholic recognition of one’s finitude in an infinite nature, like in Narihira’s poem³.

³ About this metaphysics of time in Japanese aesthetics of nature, see Kuki, KSZ-1:70.

花の色は	<i>Hana no iro wa</i>	The hue of flowers
うつりにけりな	<i>Utsurinikeri na</i>	Has gone away
いたづらに	<i>Itazura ni</i>	Like nothing at all
わが身よにふる	<i>Wagami yoni furu</i>	On my body I've felt the time
ながめせしに	<i>Nagame seshi ma ni</i>	Of long showers falling
		(Ono no Komachi KKS II: 113)

In the third poem by Ono no Komachi (825-900), resonance as a spatialized atmosphere and resonance as a continuous discontinuity in time are intertwined through her mastery of poetic language and “pivot words”. If in Yakamochi’s poem we found the relatively straightforward play between two meanings of *kiku* 聞く, “to listen” and “to ask”, in the case of Komachi’s almost every verse is open to multiple translations. Mostow has collected and compared many different English versions of her *waka* produced by 19th and 20th century English-language Japanese studies, showing how before such an ambiguous text different translators are bound to express different emotive responses and scholarly agendas (Mostow 1998: 59-82). Even translation can be interpreted in this sense as a kind of resonance. In the case of Komachi, the first pivot word is *iro* 色; a word that can mean “color” but also “beautiful appearance” and “erotic love”. In the first verse *hana no iro* the natural (if conventional) spring scenery of blossoming cherries and the beauty of the poet, for which she was famous in her youth, are expressed together, resonating with each other. *Itazura ni* is an adverb that can convey a sense of loss, disappointment, or the sense of “in vain” as well; flowers falling are a reminder of impermanence, but *itazura* as a pivot word can refer to Komachi’s own “idly spent” beauty, as she was left alone and miserable in old age. In fact in the following verse the verb *furu* ふる is another pivot word: it represents both “rains falling on me” (降る) and “becoming old” (古). Lastly, *nagame* ながめ too can be read as the verb “while I watched”, “while I was lost in thought” (眺め) and as the substantive “long rains” (長雨). The last 14 *mora*e can be therefore translated as “I have seen myself turning old” just as “Long rains have fallen on my body”, and its overall meaning is never an either/or between the two, but rather resides in their reciprocal pivoting (or resonance). This level of language craftiness might be considered a kind of sophistry; and yet the chaotic overlap between these two lines of description conveys a scene in which the whole is greater than its parts. On one hand brilliantly colored flowers falling under the long rains, quickly disappearing into nothing; on the other the beauty of a woman

that goes away and is lost in vain, as her body grows old and she gazes upon the world lost in thought, likely seeing herself in those very flowers. As Brower and Miner commented:

By establishing a symbol and developing it at length by means of pivot-words, Komachi has managed to suggest – in the very act of statement – the relation between nature and herself. Her view of nature and her attitude of what might be called passionately resigned despair are part of one brilliant poetic whole. (Bower, Miner in Mostow 2015: 79)

This relation is what we have defined as resonance. Far from being a simple show of poetic craftsmanship, the overlap of the natural and the personal in Komachi's language is the result of an effort to convey their common, inextricable arising. The idea of a "passionate resignation" suggested by Bower and Miner seems to apply also in the two other examples. This paradoxical state, in which the subject finds itself both in a heightened emotive state and able to accept a wider flow of things, seems like a common feature of resonances in general. While it has surely been explored in depth and often in Japanese artistic thought, it could be used to describe, for instance, also Rilke's attitude before Apollo's statue.

6. *From waka to renga*

From these three examples only, it should be evident how resonance was a fundamental tool for Japanese poetics already in an early stage. It is undeniable however, that despite its masterpieces the genre of *waka* was often prone to fall into mannerism. The need for more original and more entertaining composition – *waka* was an integral part of the nobility's social life, with recurrent meetings and competitions – resulted in an increasing popularity of *renga*, chained link poetry. The natural hiatus between the first 14 *morae* (*kami no ku*) and the final 14 (*shimo no ku*) in *waka* already lent itself to a dialogical kind of composition, with one person beginning and the other completing it. Examples of this two-person *waka* are much older than the medieval development of *renga*. It is from the 13th century, however, that a more autonomous kind of *renga* emerges, as a long chain of collective composition, balancing witty impromptu and the sophistication of *waka*, or more in general the traditional elegance of court aesthetics (*ga* 雅) and a more informal and playful sensibility. The general rule of *renga* was simple. After the first 17-

morae starting composition (the *hokku* 発句, 5-7-5) by a first author, a different one would add a completion to the first image with another 14-*morae* stanza (the *wakiku* 脇句 or *tsukeku* 付け句). These two poems by different authors would become a new unity of 31, called *tsukeai* 付け合い. At this point another person composed a third stanza of 17 *morae* and added it to the second: now the second and the third stanzas would have become a new unity, with the first one to be “pushed away” (*uchikoshi* 打ち越). As the links chained in *renga* grew, often reaching 50 or 100 (*hyakuin* 百韻), rules were developed to avoid an excessive uniformity of tone, season or images: repetition was to be avoided, and the composition had to unfold with a continuous sense of novelty. Lists of coupled themes were developed, as an additional way to guide the common composition and show one’s skill. *Renga* styles would almost immediately split into a “serious” (*ushin* 有心; literally “with heart”) mode closer to *waka*, and a more relaxed and humorous one, *mushin* 無心 (literally “without heart”, in the sense of “carefree”). In his *Meigetsuki* treatise Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241) describes the competition between a *ushin* and a *mushin* group held in 1206, with the latter winning by outpacing the former group (Konishi et al. 2014: 275).

By the Muromachi period (1336-1573), the relevance and dynamism of *renga* outweighed the nobler but increasingly stiff production of *waka* (Keene 1977: 241), and the *mushin* (or *haikai*, “comic”) kind of *renga* was in many respects more consequential for later literature.

It is not by chance that among the most popular and accomplished authors of 15th century *renga* we find not simply noblemen, but also Buddhist monks of humble origins, such as Shinkei 心敬 (1406-1475) and his disciple Sōgi 宗祇 (1421-1502). Among the most renowned works of Sōgi we find the 100 verse *renga* “Three poets at Minase”, composed in 1488 with his disciples Shōhaku and Sōchō. Without relying on wordplay or clever puns (referring however to many older tropes), it conveys a splendid, melancholic image of flow through natural space, the hours of the day and the seasons of a year. The first four stanzas:

雪ながら	<i>Yuki nagara</i>	As it snows
山もとかすむ	<i>yamamoto kasumu</i>	The mountain foot misty
な	<i>yube kana</i>	In the evening
		(Sōgi)

行く水とほく 梅にほふと	<i>Yuku mizu tōku ume niou sato</i>	Far where water flows a village In the perfume of plums (Shōhaku)
川かぜに 一むら柳 春みえて	<i>Kawagaze ni hitomura yanagi haru miete</i>	A group of willows Swept by the river wind – Spring has arrived (Sōchō)
舟さすおとは しるき明がた	<i>Fune sasu oto wa Shiruki akegata</i>	The sound of a rowing boat Clear at dawn (Sōgi)

[...]

Sōgi also embodied this newfound sense of movement in its very biography, punctuated by long travels across the politically unstable provinces of Japan. *Renga* poetry, as Barnhill noted, embraces and puts into practice two key Buddhist insights (Barnhill n.d.). First, the impermanence of its subject, since the *uchikoshi* means that the earlier verses of a sequence are effectively erased, and they can only linger as a kind of emotive aftertaste or atmosphere. The apparent lack of content unity, which in modern times made *renga* a “non-literary” form in the eyes of both Japanese and Western critics, is a conscious choice, reflecting into poetic practice the East Asian metaphysics of impermanence, heightened by an age of political clashes. In the words of Nijō Yoshimoto (1320-1398), an early *renga* master and patron:

In *renga* the thought of a moment does not remain in the moment that follows. The realms of glory and ruin, of happiness and grief lie side by side, the one slipping into the other in a manner no different from the condition of the floating world. While we think it yesterday, today has come; while we think it spring, it has become autumn (in Ramirez-Christensen 2008: 138)

Secondly, in *renga* the author is not a single subject, but a contingent, unique meeting of multiple personalities. Even a master like Sōgi did not rely on a distinctive personal style to demonstrate his skill, and the quality of a good *renga* sequence lied rather in the resonance between its different scenes (in terms of content) and in the “continuous discontinuity” between the stronger and subtler, faster and slower, finer and bolder movements of poetic utterances. In a definition by Shinkei that would be unthinkable in the context of European notions of the artistic subject and of artwork as form: “the supreme *renga* is like a drink

of plain boiled water. It has no particular flavor, but one never tires of it, no matter when one tastes it” (Shimazu 1969: 146).

7. Nioi and hibiki: *Bashō's* haikai

Despite its innovation and the larger pool of composers, which included samurai and Buddhist monks, earnest *renga* kept itself very close to the original language of *waka*, while its more ironic modes conceived itself as a simple game, more social entertainment than authentic poetic effort. However, it is from this latter *mushin* mode that the great poetic novelty of 17th century, *haikai*, would emerge as a full-fledged poetic form. During its evolution, *haikai* drifted further away from *waka* language, and in anthologies such as the *Inutsukubashū* (1542) by Yamazaki Sōkan 山崎宗鑑 (1465-1553) a quick wit relying on wordplays, often vulgar puns, helped to popularize the genre. It was after the pacification of Japan and the beginning of the Tokugawa shōgunate (Edo period: 1603 – 1868) that a burgeoning and increasingly literate bourgeoisie, lacking the status and the specific education associated to *waka* or *renga*, made this lighter kind of poetic game very popular. Popular *haikai* masters tried to define the status and the potential of the genre: Matsunaga Teitoku's (1571-1654) Teimon school emphasized the continuity between traditional poetic elegance (*ga* 雅) and this minor form; Nishiyama Sōin's (1605-1682) Danrin school relied instead on puns, Chinese terms and everyday language (*zoku* 俗) to create striking expressions. Adhering to both these schools in his youth and then elaborating his own distinctive style from the 1680s, the most iconic poet of *haikai* literature, and perhaps of Japanese poetry at large, was Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉 (1644-1694). Bashō's mature style added to the dialectic between *ga* 雅 and *zoku* 俗 already present in *haikai* a deep spiritual melancholy showing Daoist and Buddhist overtones, associating his poetry to the *hijiri* 聖 culture of spiritual recluses (despite what is often stated, however, Bashō himself never became a monk). In Bashō's style the echo of older noble themes from *waka* in the modern, popular setting of *haikai* is not parodic, but it is meant instead to generate an earnest resonance between high and low, past and present, trivial and sublime. Bashō was a compulsive traveler, spending the last ten years of his life almost continuously on the road and writing travel diaries (in a poetry-prose style dubbed *haibun* 俳文) in which this spatialized resonance with the poetic aura of Japan's cultural

geography is further mixed with their imaginary doubles in Chinese historical landscapes (Shirane 1998: 218-19). Part of the meaning of Bashō's biography as a traveling writer lies exactly in this quest for spatialized resonances.

The temporal echo that constitutes another central element of resonance poetics, as we have seen in section 4, is moreover explicitly theorized by Bashō both as part of the poetic object (nature as something ever-changing and atemporal at the same time) and of poetic style (something historically embedded and yet able to resonate with its unique aura throughout the ages). Bashō expressed this complex idea through the expression *fuekiryūkō* 不易行 “eternal-changing”. It is also in this perspective that the famous verse about a frog jumping in a pond of water is rightly celebrated as a masterpiece. In it, the sudden, fleeting movement of a jumping frog and the metaphysical stillness of the old mire resonate in the sound of the water, something in which both are paradoxically expressed.

古池や
蛙飛び込む
水の音

*Furuike ya
Kawazu tobikomu
Mizu no oto*

The old pond:
A frog jumps in
The sound of water

The other great *coincidentia oppositorum* in Bashō's poetry is that between the two genres of the “unreal” (*kyō* 虚) and “real” (*jitsu* 実). While the tone of *waka* and *renga* was generally earnest in its description of suffering and impermanence, mature *haikai* reaches its emotional effect also by remaining ready to reveal through imagination and humor the underlying “emptiness” (*kū* 空: in Buddhism, the fundamental interpenetration between codependent phenomena) that constitutes the background of both worldly phenomena and our emotive reactions.

Many modern receptions of Bashō, however, tend to look at his work through the assumptions of modern, Western poetic authorship. The worldwide popularity of *haiku*, the modern, single-author 17-syllable poetry that Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) developed in late 19th century detaching the *hokku* from the “non literary” sequence of *renga*, mistakenly creates in many contemporary readers the impression that Bashō's *hokku* were totally independent works, to be appreciated as such. It is important to stress instead that despite the growing appreciation of his single *hokku*, which often appeared between the prose of his travel diaries, Bashō was first of all a master of *haikai no renga*, chained *haikai* poetry. So much that he himself reportedly claimed: “Among my disciples there

are many who can compose *hokku* that have nothing less than mines. But when it comes to *haikai*, none of them can compete with me.” (*Uda no Hōshi*, in KBZ-7: 305). Bashō’s most precious skill, according to this self-evaluation, was not revealed by what he *positively* composed as an author, but lied in his conceiving an innovative model for the *empty* space between verse and verse, poet and poet. In fact while the associations between verses had hitherto been conceived by predefined lexical associations (a heritage of formal *renga*) or by meaning, Bashō began using and recommending to his circle a new mode of connection based on “resonance” (響き *hibiki*) or “scent” (匂い *nioi*). As reported by Kyorai, one of Bashō’s disciples:

The Master said, “The *hokku* has changed repeatedly since the distant past, but there have been only three changes in the *haikai* link. In the distant past, poets valued lexical links. In the more recent past, poets have stressed content links. Today, it is best to link by transference, resonance, scent, or status.” (*Kyoraishō*, KBZ-7: 139)

This collection of metaphors – acoustic, visual, olfactory – does not refer to distinct modes of connection, but to different aspects of Bashō’s typical manner of strophe linking. This style is characterized by a greater distance between the scene of one strophe and the other (*soku* 疎句) and by the impossibility of reestablishing a direct logical unity between the two discontinuous elements, that are thus left free to resonate as such. Today, literary criticism chiefly refers to this kind of link as *nioizuke*, “scent link”, since it was the preferred term in the influential studies on Bashō’s *renga* by Higuchi Hisao in the 1920s. Haruo Shirane, in his seminal article “Matsuo Bashō and The Poetics of Scent”, has observed how the metaphor of scent refers to “the way in which a verse carries the atmosphere of its predecessor much as the fragrance of a flower is carried by the wind” (Shirane 1992: 77), so that “the mood, atmosphere, or emotion of the previous verse is carried over to the added verse or made to move back and forth between the two” (Shirane 1992:82). It is significant how Shirane, even while being not concerned with general phenomenology of resonance we tried to develop in this essay, clearly highlights how this aesthetic effect relies on an undefined “atmosphere” rather than on any positive element. In his study, Shirane also argues that the basic dynamic of *nioi* works on what Jakobson defined as the paradigmatic axis of language, rather than on the syntagmatic level presupposed by the older syntactic or logical links. In the resonance space that the scent

link produces, two verses work as “mutual metaphors”. Ogawa Tadashi too (Ogawa 2019; 2011) has tried to observe this dynamic through explicitly (neo-)phenomenological lenses, conceiving *renga* and *haikai*, especially Bashō’s, as forms of poetic production that ought to be understood *primarily* in terms of atmosphere:

No strophe of the *renga* can stand alone for it is always complemented by a strophe composed from another participant’s perspective. This complementarity, rooted in an individual strophe’s incompleteness, renders each strophe of the *renga* idiosyncratic. Utilizing a phenomenological concept, one can say that this sense of incompleteness opens up a freely moving space [*Spielraum*] or the possibility of a horizon of satisfaction. This horizontality opens up a possibility that could be variously interpreted and, in this sense, it makes possible the complementarity between strophes. Nose Asaji notices “the exchange of moods” and “how each strophe should be, being made alive in the wholeness”, that originates in the opening present in each individual strophe’s incompleteness. In a fundamental sense, one could call this complementarity a “hermeneutical circulation”. That is to say, the respective poets create and interpret each strophe in light of the poem’s totality while at the same time attempting to understand each individual strophe within the contextual atmosphere of the particular *renga* as a whole. (Ogawa 2011: 259)

Bashō’s *haikai* is therefore first of all an “empty space” in which this resonance or perfume can exist and unfold. This applies to present participants, to their relation with older literature and to their common connection with natural times and spaces. “Empty” does not imply that this dialogue of resonances is something simple or automatic. On the contrary, a significant self-discipline, a bracketing of one’s ego, is one of its necessary conditions. This self-effacement, which Bashō incarnated with his ironic and melancholic worldview, is a more concrete and even democratic instance of Apollo’s demand in Rilke’s poem. A first pitfall, into which disciples tended to fall already in Bashō’s times, was believing that the distance between resonating links could be stretched arbitrarily.

Nowadays, poets tend to believe that close connections are to be left to beginners. As a consequence, many poets compose verses that do not connect at all. Afraid of being criticized for a lack of understanding, many informed observers do not criticize a verse when it fails to connect to the previous verse and laugh when a verse is well connected. This is contrary to what I learned from the Master.” (KBZ-7: 143)

An actual response to the alterity of other people’s composition means instead modulating one’s sensitivity as a middle stance, a “not too far, not

too close” that Ogawa considers not only as a radically alternative way of producing art, but also as a transformative experience for the subject. Just as in the case of perfume the scent is at the same time inside and outside of oneself, part of one’s sensitivity and an element of the life-world, the poets gathered in the *za* find themselves in a intersubjective resonance:

The essential basics of *renga* lie in both self-abandonment and the participation in *za*, which is “the opening place” belonging neither to one’s self nor to that of the others. In short, what matters most is to abandon the “funk hole” or “dugout” of the self and enter into the ocean of a shared life with others. Abandoning the belief that the origin of poetic creativity is located exclusively in the “funk hole” or “dugout” of the self, one must now try to face the openness that issues from the presence of others in order to create poetry collaboratively. (Ogawa 2011: 263)

This opinion has already been voiced almost a century ago by Watsuji Tetsurō, in his *Studies on the History of Japanese Spirit* (日本精神史の研究 *Nihon seishinshi no kenkyū*). Watsuji too employed an atmospheric language to express concretely how the contemporary conjunction and disjunction between the human and natural other in *haikai* opened up the dimension of “emptiness” (in the Buddhist sense) which is the active core of both *ethic* and *aesthetic* experience.

It is only because a dialectical unity between individual and totality is concretely manifested between (*aida*) the composers, that linked poetry can be created as a unitary thing [...] People fully maintain their individuality and yet *return to nothingness*; or, in other words, while people that are realized as single and yet dissolved in unity act in this “great void”, the totality of the poetic session is realized, and the flux of creativity can emerge [...] thus the pleasure of “literature” was the pleasure of the non-difference of self and other, the religious *ekstasis* of standing amidst the Great Void. (WTZ, IV: 403)

To conclude we can observe one of the great examples of “resonance” or “perfume” in *haikai* poetics, the beginning of the 36-link sequence (*kasen* 歌仙, one of the most popular formats in Bashō’s time) collected in the 1691 Bashō school anthology *The Monkey’s Straw Raincoat* (*Sarumino* 猿蓑). This work usually referred to as “Summer moon”, from the theme of the first stanza, is an ideal case study, since it includes the theme of scent both *as its poetic object* and *as the formal, noetic element* of its composition (for a full translation: Miner, Odagiri 1981: 249-66).

市中は 物のにほひや 夏の月	<i>Ichinaka wa Mono no nioi ya Natsu no tsuki</i>	In downtown Kyōto The scent of things: Summer moon (Bonchō)
あつし／＼と 門／＼の声	<i>Atsushi atsushi to Kado kado no koe</i>	Hot, so hot Gate by gate voices say (Bashō)
二番草 取りも果さず 穂に出て	<i>Nibankusa Tori mo hatsazu Ho ni dete</i>	Rice ears sprouting Even before being done With the second weeding (Kyorai)
灰うちたゝく うるめ一枚	<i>Hai uchitataku Urume ichimai</i>	Dusting off the ashes A dried sardine (Bonchō)

[...]

The *hokku* opens with the horizontal space of Kyōto's downtown and the many different smells of the market – a vernacular image that apparently bears very little continuity with the poetic refinement of the old capital. But in the expression *mono no nioi*, “the scent of things”, we can feel how the myriad of different elements of a bustling city fuse into a powerful, “chaotic manifold”⁴, from which in turn each ingredient and each voice will reemerge. The particle *ya* is a *kireji*, an internal “cut-word” whose use is typical of Bashō: while almost empty on a semantic level, apart from a faint expression of emotion, its use is that of creating a discontinuous cut, a jump, between the two asymmetric parts of a composition. From this horizontal atmosphere we are in fact suddenly pulled up vertically, as the scent of the city resonates with the summer moon, a visual image that with its (synesthetic) sense of freshness does not negate the sultriness on the ground level, but frees it into a wider aesthetic space. Bashō's *wakiku*, the second stanza, adds a linear movement, a spatial and acoustic progression, to the static (atemporal) image of the first one. The sound of the voices resonates at each gate, echoing the same sentence (the

⁴ A useful definition by Schmitz: “I call *relative chaotic* a manifold, in which the distinction between identity and difference is only partially available and opened up, but which has not fully and definitely dissolved each chaotic relationship between the elements of the manifold” (Schmitz 1964: 312).

verse is based on repetition: *atsushi atsushi ... kado kado*) and highlighting how this atmosphere is perceived as a common immersion in a collective environment: this applies to the citizens in the city and to poets as well, who are delving together in the imaginary summer evening. The poetic sequence keeps going through 36 such movement, a systolic and diastolic progression made up of long shots and close ups, urban and rural setting, humorous twists and scenes of travel. What is conserved, and effectively produces the beauty of the sequence, is the creative contrast – the resonance – between single snapshots and their common flow through the world.

Today despite the great popularity of modern *haiku* throughout the world, *renga* poetry is functionally extinct: even in Japan, only few circles try to reenact it (Ogawa 2019). However, we can see how the notion of resonance developed by Japanese aesthetics and powerfully expressed in this historical form has a validity that goes beyond its original context. On the contrary, all the particular features that we tried to highlight in this text invite us to reconsider how hastily we assume the universal validity of hegemonic categories of modern and Western aesthetics – to the point of obscuring important elements surfacing even in the European canon. This observation of *waka*, *renga* and *haikai* and of their use of resonance should offer us a different insight into resonance as a universal phenomenon, bound to express itself in constantly changing forms both in our aesthetic histories and in our daily lives.

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Abbreviations:

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KKS: 古今和歌集 *Kokinwakashū*, 20 vols., Charlottesville (VA), University of Virginia, 2006 (available on-line: <http://jti.lib.virginia.edu/japanese/>).

KSZ: 九鬼周造全集 *Kuki Shūzō zenshū*, 12 vols., Tokyo, Iwanami shoten, 1980-1982.

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