

Wayfaring across Japanese Studies

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”Time does not always flow according to a line ... nor according to plan but, rather, according to an extraordinarily complex mixture, as though it reflected stopping points, ruptures, deep wells, chimneys of thunderous acceleration, rendings, gaps—all sown at random, at least in a visible disorder. Thus, the development of history truly resembles what chaos theory describes.” Serres with Latour⁵⁷

I am fascinated by this statement by Michel Serres because we still operate in a Newtonian world that assumes time flows according to a line, the way he (as well as a whole bunch of scholars and scientists who have written on time) says it does not. The history that he envisions is not the history that we understand and practice today. It is a history and understanding our our world that is oriented and structured to a more current time, say that of Einstein. Events and our lives operate in this latter time¹; yet we—academics and moderns—privilege the line, some plan or

¹One might also invoke statements from prior to the nineteenth century. For example, Thomas

structure of order and predictability.

As I have thought about my nostalgic, but not always pleasant days at UC, Bill reminds me of this juxtaposition between the line of a learned enterprise (today industry is probably the most appropriate word) and the myriad lines that are part of our lives. I am learning that he was able to translate between these realms, that history is more than history. He conveyed (and conveys) to me the importance of remaining sane, that life, friendship, and civility are equally important to our engagement with academia, that it is important to step back from the treadmills of academic production.

I use the metaphor of the wayfarer to think about this betweenness. Tim Ingold, in his recent book, *Lines: A Brief History*, juxtaposes our modern world, not as the new against the old, modern versus tradition, or linear versus circular—those are points of a linear connection—but through different kinds of lines that do not necessarily impose such a linearity of absolute time. The wayfarer moves *along*, taking in the surroundings, and inhabits that which he traverses. This is juxtaposed to the traveller who moves *across*, from point to point; an apt metaphor here is transport. Translation can be either wayfaring or transporting. Ingold argues that communication does not move from oral to written, but from communication as a visual apprehension of manual gesture to apprehension shorn of that manual gesture. Here, early readers of the medieval texts and readers of hand-written script inhabit

Carlyle writes in 1830, “things done were not in a series, but in a group.”

the page they read. Similarly, Ingold applies this formulation to narrative, and I would extend it to disciplines "This fragmentation... has taken place in the related fields of ... and *textuality*, where story telling is replaced by the pre-composed plot. It has also transformed our understanding of *place*: once a knot tied from multiple and interlaced strands of movement and growth, it now figures as a node in a static network of connectors." 75 Translation in the former would be to inhabit the text, to see within the complex interplay of ideas, people and events embedded within. In the other, it is the transportation of one to the other, of Japanese to English.

We operate within a world of production, a bunch of points, nodes, and categories that we connect as if in a series or contained within some larger, dare I say meta-category. Modern life is to negotiate these points. In a different essay, Serres uses the race, a competition that is the incessant endeavor to go somewhere. It is the constant desire for advancement or development, the fear of not being. My use of wayfaring in relation to translation is to think of the possibility of an understanding of pasts that are not beholden to those pre-composed plots that organize our work and thinking.

If you have followed my summary of Ingold's juxtaposition, my title should not be possible; wayfaring moves along, transport moves across. I use across though to question whether one should inhabit Japanese studies. This question comes up in my concern about the writing of history. One connection to Bill is that he reminded me that history is more than history. While he did not teach me history (that is the

discipline of), he opened up the possibility that I would not be confined to one of those nodes, of history. It has taken me a while to learn this lesson.

I am thinking of translation in two ways; one is the making of the previous understandable and related (or not) to the present; the other is the rendering of one language into another. These are now divided into history and literature and in the case of Japan, the formulation of two of these nodes, of literature and of history, emerged during the late Meiji period. It was a moment, like other places becoming a modern nation, where heterogeneous forms, what Serres calls "an extraordinarily complex mixture... in a visible disorder," were seen as a problem, a reason for backwardness. Intellectuals debated how to make sense of that disorder; in short, to create order. This discovery of history and literature was an act of translation, of transporting texts and documents from a knowledge system of myriad pasts to one with a singular past.²

A figure who was involved in this endeavor to translate the past is Konakamura Kiyonori, professor at the University of Tokyo, founder of the Kōten kōkyūjo (Center for Investigation of Ancient Texts), and co-founder of the first historical society in modern Japan, the Shigaku kyokai. Konakamura, though is interesting here for his failure; he is a transitional figure in the formulation of literature and history who ultimately failed to transport the past. His history society closed to be replaced by the shigakkai, and kokubungaku replaced the koten kokyūjo.

²An important text for seeing the past in need of translation is David Lowenthal's, *The Past is a Foreign Country*.

Konakamura argued for the ancient texts, that they should be seen as the key documents for understanding the spirit and sensibility, he called this the kokutai, of Japan. The difference between his work, and successors, however, was that his past was not dead. He argued for the importance of literary texts in relation to the community and context within which they were embedded. His past was that of storytelling; it was not succeeded by the present. The two coexisted. Though he saw these of parts of a national space, his past was closer to what Ingold calls a “knot tied from multiple and interlaced strands of movement and growth.”

His successors, his students, such as Haga Yaichi, Mikami Sanji, and Ueda Kazutoshi, became the founding members of kokubungaku (Japanese Literature) by organizing the past according to a “pre-composed plot,” the linear emergence of the nation. Their task was to transport the old texts into classics, nodes that comprise that “the static network of connectors.” Haga and Tachibana argue “In some way, each piece of prose and poetry conveys a sense of the writer; each writer conveys a sense of the literature of the era; the literature of an era conveys a sense of a national literature, and the national literature conveys a sense of world, that is human, literature” (199). Place is transformed from the knot to the nation; the era becomes the unit that facilitates connections; the writer and the era become nodes for a that meta-category, the nation. Here, there is the possibility that these translators of the past inhabit rather than transport. Yet, they argued that “Literature stores within a kind of originary spirit; even more, it is that which influences politics, religion,

feelings, and customs” (2). In other words, *kokubungaku* explains the historical formation of the permanence of a nation, those ahistorical characteristics of the nation-state. Importantly, they organized these eras into a linear framework that paralleled the emerging discipline of history. Literature becomes one of the forms that stops time, creating the nodes with which a chronology can be manufactured.

Konakamura’s efforts in history was also replaced; here, a scientific history, the “precomposed plot” through which the past could be mechanistically employed. Mikami and Takatsu write, “using accurate facts, to investigate the cause and effect of change and clarify the vestiges of our country’s ebb and flow” (22) Underlying the cause and effect and the ebb and flow is chronology, a linearity as if it is natural, what de Certeau calls an “alibi of time,” where time is only experienced within the productive process.” History’s adoption of chronology brings in those connectors for the nodes.

break here

This organization of scholarship and life emerged in an era of relative information scarcity. Scholars were scouring the archipelago for information, creating archives and libraries, and re-organizing universities into evermore complex bureaucratic units. These institutions and scholars became the principal authority figures for reliable information, the filters through which people would know, or know what they are supposed to know, not what they experienced or simply were.

Today we are in world that is the same and very different. We still operate

within knowledge and institutional structures that value those who bring knowledge to others, as if it is still scarce and hard to acquire. That is the university; that is Japanese history. This does not mean I am calling for their end. On the other hand, we live in a society where transport, physical and digital, now facilitates information transfer in both quantity and quality to the extent that we operate in a realm of information abundance, but have a scarcity of good filters and of attention.

The digital technologies facilitate a retrieval of fragments of the past in ways that are shorn from the contexts within which they had operated. My point here, is that problem of abstracted knowledge, of nodes seemingly connected is the basis of our current system. Electronic technologies are amplifying this abstraction.

I will end here with an admission that I don't know the answer, or how one can be a wayfarer in our capitalistic and academic realm. Nevertheless, Norbert Elias offers a place to start,

“An enquiry into 'time', as one may have noticed, is a useful point of departure for the great spring-cleaning that is long overdue. there is always a need for it when an intellectual tradition providing the basic means of orientation within its societies has run its course for several centuries, as ours has from the (so called) Renaissance to the present time.”⁹³⁻⁴

In conclusion, spring cleaning is an apt metaphor for we know that many of the knowledge structures we have inherited are no longer appropriate. This is where

my memories of my encounters with Bill and wayfaring connect. Academically, Bill helped (helps) me remember that the past is not data to be extracted from the past, but documents that live and should be cared for in such ways. Personally, it is the knot, the lived rather than manufactured place that is to be valued. Wayfaring for me is a way to explore other ways of engaging with life and pasts without privileging the structures, strictures, and containers that have become so ingrained in our academic work and modern lives.