II. “How strange I see a faint glimmering light”

9

Aporia of Kokoro

The Passion of Being in the Noh Play

I. For arbor philosophica

In any country or any culture we can find words expressing the way humans exist in the world—words signifying humans are human, that is, we exist in the world in a way completely different from "things." We also use specific words to indicate that we are conscious of our existence defined as such. Such words in English may include mind, soul, spirit, heart or conscience, in French *âme*, *esprit*, or *cœur*, and in German *Geist, Herz, Seele* or even *Dasein*. These words cannot be reduced to a single root. Rather, they are multiple deriving from different roots. Such multiplicity has resulted in overlapping shades of meaning that even native speakers cannot easily distinguish. On the contrary, each one of the words, in its essence, is ambiguous since it has been a bearer of various meanings under different human conditions in the long history of language. What matters most however is that through the ambiguous words we have endeavoured to understand the world as well as human beings in the world. Through what I call "root-words" or those which are by nature polysemic and ambiguous and hence untranslatable in their own right, we have posed questions towards the world and man in order to situate them. Starting from there, we have also attempted to answer the question of "how to live." While this cannot of course be identified with "philosophical" pursuit as a "strict discipline," we cannot necessarily deny its possibility that "philosophia" or most primordial "philo-sophia" that I will translate as "being open to knowing and understanding" is alive; for "philosophia"means above all learning to love the world through "the way"—(which one may venture to translate as "logos")—of "word"—

which itself is the "root-word" per excellence.

Those who do philosophy—I would like here to stress the word "do" most emphatically—would inevitably know that the place where the philosophical act is carried out is pregnant with its history and culture; that it is changing from day to day, not easily susceptible to the article, "a," indicative of identity; in short it is the place of difficult language. In modern times and later, moreover, the language of the philosophy can never settle for monolinguism. It is the heterogeneous place where always multiple borders of language are intertwined in a complex manner. "Root-words" and "graft-words" intermingle. A new "root-word" comes out of a "graft-word" in the space of no time, whilst "words from without" have obstinately remained "foreign," refusing to take root in the thoughtful soil of given culture.

What has been taking place in the region of thought in our times, it seems, is the constant liquidity of *terra philosophica*. The evolution of science technology and global capitalism that have come to dominate the entire surface of the planet is about to deprive "roots' depth" of what is designated by the "root-word," closely related to "culture" or "ground" of European origin. As information networks are extended superficially and rapidly, thought has apparently lost its "radical" possibility of tying itself with "love"; it has transformed itself into something floating in desertified land without borders. Everything has become superficial at the present time. Reflecting now on the thirty years from 1960 in which French modern philosophy played the leading role in world thinking, it seems extremely significant that the philosophy set its targets in criticizing a centralizing metaphor of tree while anticipating, predicting and proposing decentralized and superficial movements such as "grafts" or "rhizomes." French philosophers even meditated upon the desert or total "deracination" as their ultimate hope.

But times have changed. I cannot here discuss what "path" thoughts took in detail, and yet I myself have come to think that philosophy must plant trees once again in defiance of a growing pace of superficialization and desertification—just as the old man plants apple trees in

Sacrifice, Tarkovsky's brilliant film. One must attest to the fact that thinking, even human thinking on individual scales, can become a tree, taking root in the depth of the world.

I must add at once that I am not sure if this "tree" can take root in the traditional "soil." I have analysed a "poplar tree" in Paul Celan's poem. The popular tree falls headlong into the water with its "roots" poking through the sky (which of course implies people). I therefore do not believe in the "rooting in the soil" as Heidegger did. Nor do I take an optimistic view that a "forest"—be it black or otherwise—suddenly emerges out of the "desert."

We are here today in Berlin with "traces" of "deep forests" to discuss the possibility of philosophy in our times. I have ventured to use the word, "kokoro" as an index for this conference. *Kokoro* is a term perhaps most deeply rooted in our culture and therefore is charged with politically controversial meaning. By naming the conference as such I do not of course intend to promote cultural nationalism or register *kokoro*, a word deep-rooted in Japanese culture, as a "philosopheme" in global lexicon. Over the century or so, our thoughts have imported, grafted and assimilated Western philosophy. In order for us now to grow *arbor philosophica* from the very beginning, I simply wish to examine whether it is possible to have a dialogue with you from the "depth" of our "roots."—My intension here is not opposing to but having a dialogue with Western philosophy.

We preserve our "roots" almost unknowingly. Amnesiac of their presence we tend to behave as if they do not exist at all. Historically speaking, we all know too well of such a trap in which our thought can be caught. If our thought ought to grow like a "tree" we need to know where we stand. *Kokoro* is originally a polysemic word. It is an almost untranslatable gigantic "tree-word." This "tree-word," one is almost tempted to say, is the source of the entire Japanese culture stretching well over a thousand years—whether poetry or religion, arts or ethics. Even this word, however, is in the process of deracination, as our modern soil has become fluid. Taking advantage of this, politicians attempt to recover *kokoro* in

its pure form as quickly as possible, urging people to hold on to the misleading fantasy that such is indeed feasible. It is essential, therefore, to call into question *kokoro* in the contemporary context and examine the potential "root-taking" of thoughts.

I have thus found it necessary to expose our potential "roots" to "dialogue," to others' "root-words," that is, "fresh air" and "external light." We are here, therefore, not to advocate or even communicate something of the Japanese culture to people in Berlin. Rather, we attempt to open our cultural "roots" to others by questioning. If we start from our cultural "roots" and can successfully have a dialogue with others on our way to the universal, we will be able to show that our "roots" are not still "root rot," capable of "watering" the future. What is at stake is the very possibility or impossibility of such an attempt.

This is my manifesto for the present symposium or the introduction to today's meeting. Moving now on to the principal topic, Professor Sakabe Megumi who is going to give a talk after me and I have attempted to confirm our "roots'"around medieval Noh plays. In a sense, both of us have found in the Noh play the gravest look towards human kokoro and "truth" that until now cannot be exhausted. I consider myself as a bridge for Prof. Sakabe's talk, playing the role of a *waki* (supporting actor) whose role it is to call forth a shite or the protagonist. Allow me now to discuss the *kokoro* of a Noh play.

II. Renouncing One's Kokoro

So, let us begin with the *waki*.

As you might know, in the middle of Muromachi Era or what I call "quatrocento in Japan," Zeami suddenly brought to completion "a new ritual" called Noh. (Today I don't consider the Noh play simply as an artistic or theatrical genre. Rather, I seek to go beyond that and regard it as what belongs to more radical "rituality.") This can be compared to a crystal suddenly emerging out of water, reminiscent of Stendhal's *De l'amour*. The ritual in any case took the form of "double-structured fantastic Noh play."

The ritual is divided into two scenes or *ba*s. [One could also say the ritual is conducted in two different places as *ba* literally means a place.] Typically in the first *ba*, a wandering monk, *waki*, appears and arrives at a privileged "place." He meets a person. Rather than the protagonist, this person is a being that infinitely goes beyond a framework of drama. For, unlike in drama, nothing happens in Noh plays. In effect, everything "has happened." The person the *waki* encounters is the dead. S/he comes to the *waki* to tell him what has happened to himself/herself while alive. More precisely, s/he does not tell a story. S/he enacts or just dances it.

In the second *ba*, the *shite* appears in the person of what s/he used to be, as the figure of remorse, in the monk's dream. The dream here takes place in a "limbo" where the deceased cling to the residues of their lives. The limbo is somewhere "between" "life" and "death." Beings live in this world of "betweenness," no longer alive but incapable of dying forever.

The *shite* certainly plays the principal role of Noh as a drama. His/her dance in the second *ba* (*kuse-mai* or introductory dance for example) marks the apex of its dramaturgy. His/her singular being is manifested in the graceful form of dancing. This is the "flower" (essence) of the Noh play.

In a sense, however, all that the *shite* expresses in fact happens *in and through the "waki*." What you will find truly alive on the stage is only the *waki*. The *shite*'s drama is only present to the *waki* who we do not know is really awake or asleep. We can observe it only through the anonymous being of "a monk wandering around the country"—who is passive, a "nobody." The *waki* stays calm and simply exists at the corner of the stage where the *shite* continues to dance a frantic drama of his or her own. The *waki*'s being is not at all influenced by strong emotions that the *shite* expresses. He leaves the stage as calmly as before, as if nothing has really happened. The *waki* is calm and tranquil. He seems to have renounced his own *kokoro*. This tranquillity of the *waki* is what makes the drama of

Noh possible. Only by "renouncing his *kokoro*" can he open "the dream-like betweenness" beyond "life" and before "death."

At the beginning of *Atsumori* for instance, the *waki* says :

> I became aware of the transience of this world, left it and became a monk. The surest thing in this dream-like world is my renunciation of the world.

Similarly in *Tadanori* :

> I shall be mindless of the moon overshadowed by clouds, as I have quit the world to be a monk, being weary of cherry blossoms that troubled my *kokoro*.

Lastly in *Nue* or the *Raven* :

> I do not know whence I have come. Who cares? I am a wandering monk after all, having renounced the secular world and entered the priesthood.

"Renouncing the world" means leaving one's community, breaking away from one's obsession with life, land or family, and even abandoning one's preoccupation with the "name" in every sense of the word. It also implies the forsaking of one's attachment to the aesthetic and the sensible, love of "flowers" and "the moon." It ultimately signifies the renunciation of one's *kokoro*, simply being "beside" [incidentally, this is what the *waki* means] *kokoro*. Because the *waki* has no *kokoro* of his own, he can be all the more open to every *kokoro*. Just "being" there is the very condition of the being of the *waki*.

The *waki* in the sense just explained is an existential figure of "the renunciation of *kokoro*," the ethics—I dare say the aesthetic principle or even "existential attitude"—of which originally derived from Buddhist principles and were brought to perfection in medieval times. While relating to an aesthetic idea of *yugen* [the subtle and profound], it also leads

to the practice of *mujo* or anicca (impermanence), the most radical of Buddhist ideas. I cannot go into details of the ethic-aesthetic of the "renunciation of one's *kokoro*/body." It suffices for now to quote verses of Saigyo from the S*hinkokinwakashu* or *New Collection of Japanese Poems from Ancient to Modern* (c.a., 1205) and of Ippen almost every Japanese would know, just to suggest its extensiveness. Here is a well-known line of Saigyo:

> The autumn sunset makes even the *kokoro*-less *aware* (sorrowful)
> Ducks are taking off from the river.

And Ippen, archetypical *hijiri* (or wandering saint) thus sang:

> Renounce your *kokoro*, still desirous of renouncing your body, and you will be free from any worries in this world/but what is it that the sleeves of your black robe are so wet with tears?

I would like to call your attention to the fact that the logical structure of the medieval Japanese "renunciation of *kokoro*/body" is comparable (I do not say it's identical but comparable. I am just proposing a rough idea anyway) to that of the western apophatic tradition of Dionysius the Areopagite (Areopagita), Meister Eckhart and Angelus Silesius. Its manners of thought and practice are analogous to those of negative theology. By and because of negating and renouncing his *kokoro*, Saigyo was able to effectuate inversion, reaching the state of sorrowfulness or *aware*, yet another untranslatable "root-word." This *aware* event (or Heidegger's *Ereignis* if you like) is the time of the autumn sunset coming to "the *kokoro*-less." The *mujo* [impermanence] of the ever-changing time of the world (*le temps du monde*) happens to the one who has renounced his *kokoro*—renouncing or renunciation, perhaps, must be thought in parallel with Eckhart-Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*—to the renounced, open and extended, as ducks are taking off.

But this is not all. The plane of *kokoro* connecting *mono no aware* (sensitivity to things) to the *mujo*—which Karaki Junzo has studied thoroughly and completely—alone is not enough to reach *kokoro*'s plane

the Noh play has opened up. The *waki* has renounced his *kokoro* and has flung himself (his body) to the *mujo* of the world. Only such a *kokoro*-less being can attest to the forever burning fire beyond the *mujo*, that is to say, beyond "time" and beyond life and death.

Here begins the *shite*'s drama.

III. Higaki*: "Being—Fire" in "Time"*

Zeami's *Higaki* is one of the "Three Old Women's Tales," gravest and noblest of all Noh plays. The *shite* is an old woman. She was once a dancer called "shirabyoshi" (dancer-demimonde) without any historical significance. She is the "residue" of her being, coming to the *kokoro* of the *kokoro*-less with "fire" and "water." This contrast between fire and water, in fact, has made me choose *Higaki* among many. The text *brings to surface* the texture of our beings by weaving metaphors of "water" and "fire" into the narrative. I cannot here trace their fine folds in the original text.

I can summarise the story none the less. In the first *ba*, the old woman lives by the Shirakawa river (White River). Everyday she draws water out of the river and offers its *arghya* (a Sanskrit derivative meaning holy water offered to Buddha) to the bodhisattva in her neighbourhood. She sings: "You must realize by now that the way of this transient world is pliable like running water and ephemeral like water bubbles." There is "the reason of water" or "the logos of water," indicating the *mujo* of this world and ephemeral beings like bubbles. This is a radical principle of the play. The old woman draws "the water's logos" to save herself from her "deep sin." Then, she goes to the shelter of a *waki*-monk people call "a hermit."

Every day the *waki*-monk sees what the old woman does. One day, he stops and asks her: "Tell me what your name is." The name is uttered and told. The being is named, as if something could be "transferred (or brought)." As I have already drawn an analogy between the renunciation of *kokoro* and negative theology, I might confess that if possible, I want

to relate this Noh play back to an interesting passage on "name" in Jacques Derrida's *Sauf le nom*, the work on Angelus Silesius I have translated with my colleague. My secret wish is to discuss the question of "the God's Name" in the apophatic tradition in parallel with the question of *kokoro* in medieval Noh plays. This is by the way. Let us return to the old woman by the river.

How does the old woman pronounce her name ? How does she tell it to him ? The name she tells him is a song: "Over time, my black hair has turned into white like the river Shirakawa (=White River), my back is bowed in years as I draw water." This song was selected for the *Gosenshu* (*Later Collection*, 951), an imperial anthology of Japanese poems in the tenth century.

One should not make a mistake here. The song is not just a song or poem. It is her "name," identity or *kokoro*. It is "the name of her *kokoro*." (More specifically, her name is *mitsuhagumu*, a mysterious play on words in the original text.) Asked by the *waki*-monk, she gives her name the *Gosenshu* has picked up, saved and thus retained in this world. She gives the name that persists in this world while exposing her being. The being exposed is dead and gone, and yet that being or "*kokoro*" *continues to remain* beyond death.

In the second *ba*, therefore, the *waki*-monk will have to go down to the "between-ness of life and death," beyond the boundary separating life from death. He will slither down to the margins of the boundary, which may resemble a riverside. There he will see "fire" in the darkness of the night: "How uncanny the night fell so abruptly/how uncanny the night fell so abruptly/Mist rises in thick clouds over the river/how strange I see a faint glimmering light in a shanty. How strange I see a faint glimmering light."

He realises soon that the "fire" is far from "a glimmering light." Asked by the monk the old woman shows up. He thought she was drawing water from the river but she is in fact drawing "fire" from the Mitsuse river in hell, similar to the Styx, "carrying a tub of burning iron, draw-

ing a well bucket of ferocious fire." (Note a mystery of "mitsuhagumu" is found here too; "mitsu-" of "mitsusegumu" is a homophonic word plays on three, water, the Mitsuse, etc.)

She is burnt in hellfire after death. But what sin has she committed ? The text simply says: "she is sinful on account of having been a famous dancer…" According to a commentator, literature and arts were believed to keep one from Buddhist ascetics in Buddhism. Is this correct ? Is this all that accounts for her sinfulness ?

I have already indicated that the song is her "name." This song is not about aging in general. It was composed under a special circumstance. Fujiwara Takanori, aristocratic governor of the region, asked for some water in passing by the old woman's shanty, and she returned the song. At the climatic moment of the second *ba*, the *shite* dances a *kusemai* of the very scene in which Takanori meets her.

Takanori did not merely ask for some water. He also said to the old woman who was once a famous *shirabyoshi* (dancer-demimonde): "come, the old *shirabyoshi*, dance for me a while." She refused, saying my back is triple stooped (this is also implied by "mitsuhagumu"), but he would not listen. "Humbly rubbing off drops of dew on her linen sleeve, she began to dance."

Her gentle *jo no mai* (introductory dance) or *ranbyoshi* (which involves a significant question of Noh's mis-en-scene, but this is too technical to expound on it now)—a subtle and delicate dance.

She danced, singing: "the rope of a well bucket for drawing water, the rope of a well bucket is twisted round and round. Return to the past, Oh, waves of Shirakawa, waves of Shirakawa, of Shirakawa."

The dance was what she danced before Takanori. Yet it is also what she keeps dancing in her *kokoro* even beyond death. No, this is still misleading. The dance can hardly be different from her *kokoro*. It is her *kokoro* that dances it.

She drew "the reason of running water" and "truth of the *mujo*," but "the rope of a well bucket" with which she drew water repeatedly told the water "to return to the past." It is here that "fire" came in—"ferocious fire" that kept burning itself. She ardently desired to return to the young and beautiful self, master of dancing against "the reason of water." And this very passionate desire was her sin, deeper than the water.

There is a desire, I believe, which lies deeper down in the text, and never ever emerges in the surface. Nowhere can it be written and nobody has uttered it. Nevertheless it is obvious to everyone that the old woman of *Higaki* was in love with Fujiwara Takanori. If "love" is too grotesque a word, we can rephrase it as "desire for the Other." "Desire for the Other" flamed up and kept burning within herself. The aging body could not extinguish or change it. "Drawing water" for Takanori was at the same time "drawing her body" as a dancer and "offering" or "giving" it to him. When the old woman, whose back was triple stooped, began to dance rubbing off drops of dew on the worn-out sleeve, she trembled with her secret pleasure of being seen by Takanori, while exposing her "burnout body." It is "this fire of passion" that related to Takanori the Other and burned within her being. *Higaki* might have been "*hi-gaki*," that is, "a hedge of fire." Whether the passion was "sin" or not, it nevertheless held the old woman's being of *Higaki* between "life" and "death." It kept her remaining as the irresolvable. Since then the woman of *Higaki* has remained, beyond her "death," as *kokoro* which is none other than "dance." "Mitsuhagumu" is the name (and emblem) of the mysterious *kokoro*. It is by definition untranslatable.

IV. Aporia of Kokoro

The Noh thus discloses a place. "Nothing objective or earthly"—this is what Jacques Derrida has said in connection with Silesius' "Der Ort is das Wort" in the text I have mentioned earlier. Immediately before the phrase, Derrida mentions that "in this case some have translated the *Wort* simply as the God." Likewise, we have called it not the "God" but *kokoro*. Strangely enough, though, apropos of the *Ort* Derrida has written as

follows : “Neither the subject nor the object can be found in the *Ort*. Rather, this *Ort* is found in ourselves, resulting in the inevitable ambiguity of at once affirming and liberating ourselves from it.”

Such inevitable ambiguity is, to be sure, the *Ort* of the old woman’s *kokoro* in *Higaki*. At the close of the play, the old woman asks the waki-monk “to bring my sin into surface.” In order to liberate herself from the *Ort*, she draws, carries and offers water. By “drawing water,” however, she at the same time is detained, remains, and is retained in the place named by “mitsuhagumu.” This is the radical aporia of *kokoro*. No, on the contrary, as the old woman says, “like floating weeds whose roots are cut off, ” it has no such root as the “God.” The aporia of *kokoro* is rootless or deracinated.

Perhaps, “God” had no part in the play insofar as such a radical=non-radical aporia was evidently visualized and enacted in the nameless and aged being of the old woman. It may be that there was no need to conceptually think transcendence, whether through affirmative or negative paths. Instead of but on the same footing with it, *kokoro* or place of aporia has been enacted over and over again.