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THE INCORPORATION OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE IN
YAMAMURA BOCHÔ'S 'PRISMIST' POETRY (1914-1916)

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Abstract
Yamamura Bocho (1884-1924) is mainly remembered as the author of Seisanryohari (The Sacred Prism, 1915), a collection of shi (modern poetry in non-traditional forms) that represents the culmination of his experiments in diction and imagery. One of the most striking elements of his 'prismist' poetry is the presence of scientific language, coming from the domains of geology, botany, biology, and medicine. In this paper, I adopt a historical and textual perspective to attempt an analysis of the incorporation of scientific discourse in Bocho’s poetry. Particular emphasis is placed on the European and Japanese debate on the 'new science' and on the similarities to the treatment of this topic by Bocho and the discourses of the historical European avant-garde (especially Italian Futurism).

Keywords
Yamamura Bocho, Seisanryohari, Prismism, Futurism in Japan, Japanese poetry of the Taishô era

Historical avant-garde, particularly Italian Futurists, had a contradictory stance towards scientific knowledge. However, even though they proclaimed at times to be anti-intellectual, it would be incorrect to say that they were also absolutely anti-scientific. In 1911, Umberto Boccioni and his colleagues triumphantly declared: «We would at any price re-enter into life. Victorious science
has nowadays disowned its past in order the better to serve the material needs of our time (Manifesto of the Futurist Painters)\(^1\).

A reconfiguration of the statute of science is one of the most important themes of the twentieth century European avant-garde. Connected to it are such topics as the relationship between art and technology, the mechanization of life, the renegotiation of the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, the medicalization of matter, and the de-humanization of art.

All these topics are typically foreshadowed in F.T. Marinetti’s manifestos of 1912-1914. In them, the leader of Italian Futurism calls for the destruction of the ‘I’ in literature, brings forth the ‘lyrical obsession with matter’ as the new key subject of art, declares that the mechanized syntax of the ‘control panels’ of the ‘central electric station’ are ‘our only models for writing poetry’\(^2\). These statements imply a new conception of the relationship between art and science, intuition and reasoning, and fantasy and rationality. These realms are now complementary: by combining them, the poet can achieve a new ‘synthesis of life’:

> We must abolish him [the “I”] in literature and replace him once and for all with matter, whose essence must be seized by strokes of intuition, something which physicists and chemists can never achieve. [...] Through growing familiarity and friendship with matter, which scientists can know only in its physical and chemical reactions, we are preparing the creation of the mechanical man with interchangeable parts (Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature).

Let me explain: I want to introduce infinite molecular life into poetry not as a scientific document, but as an intuitive element (Destruction of Syntax – Radio Imagination – Words-in-Freedom).

At about the same time, an obscure Japanese poet was writing such verses as:

> One electric wire goes through the body and soul (Yaga-fuku\(^3\), Late at night, II. 2-3, Shōsai bunban\(^4\), May 1916, YBZ 1: 336)

> 大規模な私的科学

> mercury hysteria

> (Dansu\(^5\), Dance, I. 6, Takaō fumis\(^6\), Apr. 1915, later included in Seisanryōhari\(^7\), YBZ 1: 69)

He used the language of natural science within incoherent associations of images that anticipated Surrealism. In his prose writings of the same period, he declared: ‘My poems are religion, they are almost science (kagakusha)\(^8\), and he defined himself as a ‘scientist’ (kagakusha)\(^9\). That poet was Yamamura Bochō\(^10\) (1884-1924), the author of Seisanryōhari (The Sacred Prism, 1915), a controversial collection that included many of his most daring poems.

In this paper, I will examine the similarities between the conception of the ‘new’ science articulated in the discourse of European historical avant-garde (especially Italian Futurism, which is one of my fields of study) and the literary production of Bochō in the years 1914-1916, an interval corresponding to his ‘prismist period’, an ephemeral but historically relevant phase of thematic and stylistic experiments that induced his colleague Hagiwara Sakutarō\(^11\) (1886-1942) to label Bochō’s poetry as ‘futurist’ in a well-known essay published in 1916\(^12\).

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\(^1\) Boccioni et al. 1912: 30, 32. A Japanese translation of this manifesto was available in Kimura Shōhachi 木村茂八のGeijutsu no kakumei 芸術の革新 (Revolution in Art, 1914) and Miraisha oyoibi rittaisha no geijutsu 未来派及立体派の芸術 (The Art of Futurism and Cubism, 1915). Bochō owned a copy of the latter (Inoue 1988: 33; Tanaka 1988: 191), one of the most influential presentations of Cubism and Futurism to be published in Japan in the 1910s.

1. The Scientific Imagery in Bocho’s Poetry

Bocho is considered among the forerunners of literary Modernism (modanizumu) in his country. As a cultural producer, he described an unusual trajectory: of peasant stock, he became a Christian in his youth and was able to study at the Anglican seminary in Tsukiji, Tōkyō, where he was eventually ordained as a minister. His years as a student before being dispatched as a missionary to different parishes in Eastern Japan coincided with his first steps in the poetry scene of Tōkyō. After his debut as a tankaist, he moved to shi (poetry in non-traditional forms); in the years between the end of Meiji and the beginning of Taishō, he fluctuated between Symbolism and Naturalism, coming also into contact with such personalities as Sōma Gyoju, Kimura Shōhachi, and Hagiwara Sakutarō. In 1915, he published Seisanryōhari, which is commonly considered to be the culmination of his ‘prismist period’. However, Bocho’s experiments were met with indifference, if not with open criticism, by the rest of the poetry scene, which crushed his ambitions and self-confidence. Around 1917 he switched to his personal version of poetry inspired by the ‘humanitarian’ (jindōshugi) and ‘democratic’ (minshūshugi) ideologies that had come into vogue in Japan after WWI.

It is possible to detect in Bocho’s prismist poems a thematic vein that draws from the domains of natural sciences, chemistry, and physics. This vein includes a rather wide group of occurrences, to which secondary branches, such as optics, belong. Moreover, it appears to be often combined with the imagery coming from the sciences of living matter: biology, physiology, medicine, etc., which are significantly represented in Bocho’s poetic universe. From the lexical standpoint, this means that one can detect in Bocho’s poems a proliferation of technical terms taken from these fields. This particular widening of the realm of poetry, especially as far as the realm of minerals and metals is concerned, had been already initiated by Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942). However, in Hakushū’s poetry, this new imagery tended to be exploited in order to express fresher sensorial reverberations, as it was typical of the glamorous exoticism of Jashūmon (Heretic Religion, 1909), or of the mystical brilliance of Hakkin no kome (Platinum Top, 1914), two Hakushū collections that Bocho was certainly well-acquainted with. In addition to this aesthetic vein, in Bocho’s poems a new use of inorganic elements and of the denotative and detached language of science also contributes to conjure up the eclipse of the lyrical ‘I’.

At first sight, Bocho’s purpose may seem the same as the Naturalist poets of the kōgo jiyūshi undō (movement for poetry in spoken language and free verse), who aimed at a realistic reproduction of daily life and ordinary reality, free from sentimentality and subjectivism; but Bocho’s poetry, though it keeps some connections to this movement, goes beyond the positivist rationalism that was at the core of Naturalism, and resorts to expressive methods that are basically irrational, intuitive, and maybe even subconscious, in order to establish unpredictable associations between images and words.

The most radical application of such method in his poetry, and the point where his research reached its limits, can be considered to be the infamous poem Geigo (Delirium).

(Sentiment) in November 1916, Sakutarō proclaimed, among other idiosyncrasies, that Bocho’s poetry was the extreme development of Symbolism, which in Sakutarō’s interpretation corresponded to Futurism. Original text in KSGS shinbun zasshi hen, 2: 24-29.

References:

21 北原白秋. When Bocho published Seisanryōhari, Hakushū was one of the most renowned poets of his generation. Bocho himself was connected to his coterie and had published some of his poems in Hakushū’s magazines such as Chūō junrei 地上巡礼 (Pilgrimage on Earth) and Ars.
22 鬼宗門.
23 白金之狼楽.
24 口語自由詩運動.
25 Bocho’s association with the Naturalist group of the magazine Shizen to inshō 自然と印象 (Nature and Impressions, 1909-1910) was short lived, and on the stylistic level, quite bland. Nevertheless, he retained from this experience a certain familiarity with the modes of Impressionist poetry practiced by such poets as Kawai Ryūkō 川路棱拡 (1888-1959) and Maeda Ringai 前田林外 (1864-1946). See Nakamura 1995: 54-80.
DELIRIUM
THEFT GOLDFISH
ROBBERY TRUMPET
BLACKMAIL VIOLIN
GAMBLING CAT
FRAUD SARACA
BRIBERY VELUDO
ADULTERY APPLE
ASSAULT SKYLARK
MURDER TULIP
ABORTION SHADOW
SEDITION SNOW
ARSON MARMEL0
ABDUCTION CASTELLA

Apart from this most radical instantiation, which arguably delves in the same conceptual framework, I will examine a series of poems where the technical language of science is mingled with apparently absurd and arbitrary associations of images, producing an overall impression of estrangement and contradiction. As I will show, in such poems, a liberated usage of associative

27 YBZ 1: 66. In terms of publication in a magazine (Ars, June 1915), Geigo is one of the most recent pieces in Seisanōyōhari. According to Sekigawa Sakio (1982: 78-81), the term geigo may come from the Japanese translation of Max Nordau's Degeneration (Entartung, 1892), where it is used to mark the ideas of Ruskin and Swinburne: «ラスキンの思想はそれぞれ自身に於て謎語に外ならざりしなり» («Ruskin’s theory is in itself delicious», English ed. of 1895: 79); «彼の思想は真ならず、旦、顧々謎語に類すれども» («His [Swinburne’s] thought is false and frequently delicious», ibid.: 94). Nordau’s controversial book was translated by Nakajima Moichi 中島茂一 as Gendai no daraku 現代の堕落 (March 1914). It appears to have been widely known and read in the Japanese intellectual milieu. It seems, therefore, extremely likely that Bōcho had read it or that he was at least informed about its contents. The first terms of the nominal couples in Geigo come from the Japanese penal code (Keisho 刑法, 1880, 1907). Therefore, when possible, I translate them with the corresponding English technical terms. The second terms have, on the other hand, a more heterogeneous nature; many of them are loanwords reminiscent of the «Southern barbarian» exoticism of Hakushū's Jashūmon: sarasa (saraça, chintz), biródó (veludo, velvet), marumero (marmelo, quince) and kasēra (castella, sponge cake) are all words of Portuguese origin. I resorted to capital letters in order to render the visual effect given by the concentration of kanji in the original, an expedient also used in Sas 1999: 19.

nexuses shares the stage with the debris of a denotative exactitude that is more promised than actually enacted. The language of science acts as a simulacrum: the rationality it is supposed to guarantee is, in fact, illusory. It can perhaps be said that Bōcho’s poetry, probably without its author’s knowledge, conducted in this sense a critique of the language of nineteenth century science and of its claims to universal intelligibility.

One of the domains in which this contradictory use of scientific lexicon is prominently shown is in the interaction between the inorganic and the biological. Besides a number of poems in which the elements of the periodic table and the mineral world are well represented as original poetic images, such interaction renegotiates the boundaries between the world of the living and the non-living, the subjective and the objective, the human and the non-human: these spheres are no longer neatly separated, but mingled and confused. In the same way that it will be possible to capture the «magnetism of body and soul» (application of physical categories to the domain of the living), it will also be possible to sing the «hysteria of mercury» (application of medical categories to the non-living domain): something that can be compared to Marinetti’s «lyrical obsession with matter».

Surely, Bōcho’s endeavor is not as radical and self-aware as that of Marinetti’s or of other personalities of the European avant-garde (e.g., the Surrealists), and certainly a part of his inorganic imagery responds as a merely decorative function, to the quest for original and exotic words. Nevertheless, his poetry reveals a modernist potential that was absolutely new in Japan and, on a more general level, elucidates the possibilities of intersection between different discursive domains, such as those of literature, chemistry, physiology, botany, psychiatry, etc.

In my analysis, I single out three main motifs:

1) The transmutation of organic elements (plants, animals, man) into metals and minerals. This alchemic motif is clearly indebted to Hakushū’s Symbolist poetry, especially when noble metals, such as gold, silver, and platinum, are involved. In this respect, Bōcho is less exploring new uses of these images than, not unlike Sakutarō in the same years, following the steps of Hakushū (Kitagawa 1995: 20).

A «portrait» (Shōzo)28 dedicated to Murō Saishō (1889-1962) stands out as an example of such a process.

28 肖像.
29 星生星星.
Portrait

The head is pure gold,
The heart glass,
The fingers silver,
The eyes pearls,
And the body marble.
(Fûkei, June 1914, YBZ 2: 159)

This portrait can also be considered as a less radical version of the associative method of Geigo: here the semantic and syntactical relationship among the two terms of each verse is made clearer by the positioning of the topic particle wa between them, and by a more consistent and conventional set of images.

Another example is the transformation into crystal (kesshô, suishô, hari, shôgôoku), which frequently affects parts of the body as one of the most common processes within the prismist world. This motif too can be ascribed to the Symbolist tradition.

Suddenly thrust out these hungry hands of crystal...
(Fûyû, Winter, II. 4-5, Shûka, Jan. 1915, later in Seisanryôhari, YBZ 1: 91)

Hands crystallize,
(Genshin, Actual body, I. 4, Takajô funsui, Mar. 1915, YBZ 2: 178)

The two ears have crystallized.
(Aru hi to no onkyô no buteki sayû, 1. 18, Material process of the sound of a given thing, Kûsune no su, May 1916, YBZ 2: 195)

In other poems, Bochô presents even more radical and innovative chemical interactions, by resorting to elements that are not traditionally beautified in literature, and by coupling them with objects that are semantically remote from them. This is a way to describe a world where organic and inorganic domains are no longer impermeable:

Metallic crickets
(Chijô, On earth, I. 2, Mahoroshi, Sept. 1916, YBZ 2: 202)

Poetry aches in the chalcolithic swellings
(My poetry is a metallic placenta
(Teichôshô, Singing birds, Chijô junrei, Jan. 1915, YBZ 4: 179, 857)

Bochô declares his poetry to be a «metallic placenta», an obscure image that perhaps hints at the traditional claim of the creative power of verse, but with a fresher non-human nuance given by the metallic attribute.

2) The reduction of the organic to its bare physical and chemical mechanisms, an operation that can be linked to a positivist interpretation of human physiology. Magnetism, electricity, pressure, and force-fields are all called forth to describe living matter.

Magnetism of body and soul
(Eramaretaru hito ni, To the chosen ones, I. 7, Chijô junrei, Jan. 1915, YBZ 2: 175)

It’s the beggar of spiritual magnetism. [..] Flesh crystal
(Kokin shinjô, Creed in old coins, Henro, Jan. 1915, YBZ 4: 184)

30 風景.
31 結晶, 水晶, 玻璃, 玫瑰.
32 The images of crystal were already quite common in Bochô’s first collection, Sanmin no onome 三人の處女 (Three Maidens, 1913), which proves their Symbolist lineage.
33 Shôgôoku is a word not infrequently used in the poems of Kanbara Ariake 神原有明 (1875-1952), the father of Japanese Symbolism in poetry.
34 冬.
35 現身.
36 或る一の音響の物的作用.
37 狐ノ果.
Our thoughts are phosphor. (Shokkaku yoshō, Addenda to Antennae, Gunshū, Aug. 1915, YBZ 4: 183)

Acting as a scientist of living matter, Bochō is able to detect the manifestation of electric forces that may even appear to have been injected into this matter from the outside.

It puts the electric current in the bosom
(Fuyu, cit., l. 1)

Love of the artificial antiquity / It puts electricity in the soles of the feet.
(Genshin, cit., ll. 15-16)

The dragonflies connect through electricity
(Gogo sanjī, Three p.m., I. 7, Kokumin bungaku, Nov. 1915, YBZ 2: 186)

In some cases, the electric wires get to the point of literally penetrating and assaulting the living matter (perhaps the poet’s body itself).

Electric wires buzz / Electric wires pierce (my) eyes.
(Moyo, Pattern, ll. 7-8, Shiika, Dec. 1914, later in Seisanryohari, YBZ 1: 82)

In this portrayal of mechanized and metallicized living matter, the parts of the body move like automata.

2a) An over-determination of the mechanical traits of inorganic phenomena. This process can be applied to traditional natural elements, such as meteorological phenomena, which can be interpreted as a way to criticize the nature-based lyricism of contemporary poetry.

Confessions of metallic showers / state of the drawing of fossilized human life.
(Jittai, Substance, ll. 5-6, Shūsai bunban, Jan. 1916, YBZ 2: 189)

Shadows of vanished dragonflies / in the mechanical breeze
(Shū, Signs of autumn, ll. 2-3, Shiika, Sept. 1916, YBZ 2: 200)

3) A pathological inflexion of inanimate matter. Once the boundaries between organic and inorganic realms are loosened, in a reversal of what has been shown until now, the inanimate matter, too, can be affected by pathologies typical of living beings (namely, humans). This is not necessarily an instantiation of that anthropomorphization of the non-human against which Marinetti had taken a position in his manifestos. Man, in this case, is no more at the center, but some of his attributes survive, so to speak, without a human body on which they could insist, and these attributes can now be applied to inanimate matter. A passage from a famous Futurist text shows important similarities with Bochō’s poetry:

Our renovated consciousness does not permit us to look upon man as the centre of universal life. The suffering of a man is of the same interest to us as the suffering of an electric lamp, which, with spasmodic starts [keirenteki ni, in Kimura’s translation], shrieks out the most heartrending expressions of colour (Manifesto of the Futurist Painters).

Bochō seems to share with Futurism the refusal of anthropocentrism and a new interest in the phenomena that perturb inanimate matter. He does not con-
fine himself to attributing to objects only feelings or moods (as in traditional
personification), but, with a further step, he speaks of them also in terms of
syndromes and pathological symptoms.
In one of his notebooks of this period, Sakutarō labels Bochô as the «psy-
chologist of the mineral kingdom» (kôbutsu shinrigakusha)54, Murô Saisei
as that of the animal kingdom, and himself as the psychologist of the vegetal
kingdom. This schematization appears to be an over-simplification55. In fact,
as the examples that I am presenting clearly show, Bochô tends, as the result
of a progressive confusion between organic and inorganic matter, to focus his
interest not only on the mineral world.
Electricity (den)56 and spasms (keiren)57 are two common images in pris-
mist poems, as well as their combination. A scenario in which some hints may
have come from the Futurist passage quoted above cannot be easily discarded,
considering the chronology of its circulation in Japan.

ひそかに天体脈管を走れ
Run secretly through the vessels of heavenly bodies
(Eromametaru hito ni, cit., I, 8)

でんせん症候症
Psychic meanderings of electric wires
(Mozō shinju58, Counterfeit pearls, l. 9, Shika, Feb. 1915, YBZ 1: 334)

あらゆる胸の気管支支加答児。
Bronchial catarrh of arc lights.
(Tama59, Beads, I. 5, Chijô jûrei, Mar. 1915, YBZ 2: 177)

The trumpet has a nervous breakdown
(Ishô ni tsuite59, On the design, I. 3, Shika, Apr. 1915, YBZ 2: 179)

It seems that the language of medicine, even more than that of chemistry or
physics, is invested by Bochô with a particular function of linkage between the
living and non-living spheres. This may be connected to another theme that is
present in his poems, albeit not as one of the most prominent: that of disease

54 研物心理学者.
55 See Hashiura 1979: 25. The three poets had founded the short lived Ningyo Shisha
人魚詩社 (Poetry Society 'Siren', 1914-1916), and published an ephemeral dôjin
zasshi (fanzine) Takujû funsui (Tabletop Fountain, 1915) that lasted only three issues.
56 電.
57 症候.
58 靈気真珠.
59 玉.
60 意匠に就いて.
(metaphoric as well as biological), which is often conceived as a moment of condition for truth. The withdrawal of the lyrical self from Bochô’s poetry — the result of a two-fold movement of prismatic diffraction of the apprehension (hence the title of his collection) and of a shifting to matter of the thematic and scopic focus — is at times articulated by resorting to the language of medicine and pathology.

It may be conceded that one could explain the last series of images cited above as if they were analogies: the lamp light is all fits and starts, like the persistent cough of a person with an infection in the respiratory tract; the trumpeter is exhausted, and the music from her instrument fades away to silence; mercury (possibly inserted in a glass thermometer) goes ‘hysterically’ up and down because of sudden variations in temperature; the tangled electric wires may be compared to the tortuosity of the human heart; the motor of an automobile just gave a start, and so on.

But the point is: how could it be that such statements (apparently alien to the traditional poetic discourse) and not others were available to a Japanese poet in the 1910s, and how could it be that he himself felt legitimated in using them in his poems?

What kind of outlook on the world possesses a poetry that detects morbid elements in inanimate matter, a poetry that speaks the language of clinical pathology?

What conditions of possibility for knowledge (in the Foucauldian sense of episteme) are inscribed in Bochô’s prismatic poetry?

All the elements seen above hint perhaps at an epistemic apparatus produced and circulating at Bochô’s time: that in which the language of science was configured, with a series of corrections coming from the incorporation of the so-called ‘anti-positiveist reaction’, as a horizon of truth valid for all fields (human and non-human) of reality.

The purely provisional considerations that will follow cannot but restrain themselves to hint at the perspectives and contours of a wider research that may, someday, be able to globally approach the discursive dynamics operating in Taishô Japan as far as these topics are concerned.

2. Poetry and the New Science

Science has changed the world radically. The ancient poet, spurred by their extraordinary imaginative force, by borrowing the so-called arcane forces of the soul, used to dream a world outside of the world. The modern scientist has staged in the real world miracles even more arcane, even more amazing than these. He has disclosed a world inside of the world. He has brought the mysteries inside reality.

The fluctuations between and intermingling of human and non-human, organic and inorganic, form a significant part (probably the most ‘avant-garde’ part) of Bochô’s imagery. Certainly, in most cases, the obscurity of the texts makes it difficult to understand if the language is referential, hallucinatory, metaphorical, or allegorical, and if the objects presented in the poem are real or imaginary. This may be said of prismatic poetry in its entirety.

Putting aside these interpretive issues, let us come back to the genetic preoccupation. What are the sources of these poetics of living and non-living matter, of the scientifically spoken matter, that appear in Bochô’s poems?

The direct influence of Futurist writings must be reasonably downplayed. The research on this topic shows that when Bochô was writing these poems, only the first Manifesto of Futurism (1909) and the 1911 Manifesto of the Futurist Painters (where the image of the «suffering of an electric lamp» cited above is located) were available in Japanese translations; at the same time, their English versions were circulating among intellectuals interested in things Western (especially yōga painters and art critics). Other manifestos had enjoyed far less visibility in Japan. The best known of them was probably the Technical
cal Manifesto of Futurist Literature: substantial excerpts of it were available in Cubist and Post-Impressionism (1914), by the American art connoisseur Arthur Jerome Eddy. That does not mean that there is no connection at all between the Futurist manifestos and Bochô's poetry. Such a connection should be looked for less in textual correspondence than in a shared way of discursively constructing the modes of scientific knowledge (and of knowledge at all) that at that time was equally present in Japan and Europe.

Since the turn of the century, the debate on the so-called crisis of the positivist conception of science had spread in the Japanese intellectual field, too. In Japan, as well as in Europe and the United States, directly through the circulation of foreign texts, or indirectly through their translation and journalistic debate, the late-nineteenth century commonplace of the 'bankruptcy of science' gained some currency. The 'bankruptcy of science' (banqueroute de la science), which is to be understood first of all as a linguistic formula, was quite successful as a catchphrase in the fin de siècle cultural debate, its coinage (around 1895) being traditionally attributed to Ferdinand Brunetière. The term was literally echoed (kagaku no hasan) in Kuriyagawa Hakuson's influential Kindai bungaku jikki (Ten Lessons on Modern Literature, first ed. 1912) (1948: 221-222). As Pierre Bourdieu noted (1995: 125), the anti-positivist and anti-Naturalist reaction was in many respects a symbolic coup d' état; the circulation of formulas like 'bankruptcy of science' was part of the set of symbolic strategies of such a coup.

It goes beyond my capacity and the scope of this paper to trace here a complete diachronic reconstruction of the anti-positivist and anti-Naturalist reaction in Japan. What should be highlighted, however, is that even though within the process of substantial semantic correction of the status of science as it had been configured during the nineteenth century – a process where the new discoveries in the fields of thermodynamics, electromagnetism, quantum mechanics, non-Euclidean geometries, etc. were often called forth as examples – a wholesale rejection of science as a tool of truth did not emerge. The discourses on art appropriated the latest discoveries of science, which were often perceived as revolutionary, in order to constantly reconfigure the status of their own objects, transferring some elements from the discursive domains of science to their own. This process paradoxically presents a stronger continuity with the poetics of the positivist age than is generally thought, because the assumption remains unquestioned that what is discovered and articulated in the scientific field (e.g., the relativity theory) not only can be transitively applied as well to the fields of painting, literature, philosophical thought, etc., but also that, once applied, it produces truth.

In a way, among some sectors of the Japanese intellectual classes, the anti-positivist and anti-enlightenment reaction had already taken place after the first decades of the Meiji period. When the momentum of bunmei kaika and of the utilitarian, empiricist, and evolutionist theories that had guided it was exhausted, and the (neo)idealistic doctrines had taken the lead, the reaction was often divulged by conservative thinkers as Inoue Tetsujirô (1855-1944), and in literature, by authors as Mori Ogai (1862-1922). At the beginning of the twentieth century, a rough polarization between the followers of pragmatism, especially in its Jamesian version, and those of a neo-idealism with important inserts of neo-Kantian thought got established. The first group had one of its strongholds in Waseda University, while the other was more typical of the Imperial University of Tokyo and, at least in part, of Kyoto. To what extent such a configuration may have influenced the literary scene, possibly through the literary magazines of such universities, Waseda bungaku and Teikoku bungaku, or through several semi-amateurish periodicals (dojin zasshi) edited by their

74 Eddy's book was certainly known to Bochô both indirectly (through some articles published in magazines and newspapers where Bochô was a contributor or a regular reader) and directly (he translated a passage from the chapter Esoragoto in the article Kono geijutsu de aru (This Art of Mine), Gunshû e, Jan. 1916; YBZ 4: 359). There is, however, no conclusive evidence that he read (and when he read) the chapters on Futurism.
75 科学の破産.
76 科学的破産．
77 近代文学十講．
81 井上哲次郎．
82 秦湖外．
83 藤原."
students or professors, is difficult to gauge. A factor to be taken into account is the action of those thinkers and writers who were not so involved in the factional logic of the academic establishment and who, like Takayama Chogyu (1871–1902), were more reactive to less technical issues, such as the definition of the modern individual; in addition, there were also literary critics, like Kuriyagawa Hakuson, who popularized the topics of the Western philosophical debate. In the above-mentioned Kindai bangaku jikkō, Kuriyagawa gave a detailed survey of the latest trends in the works of Bergson, Eucken, Nietzsche, Poincaré, Dubois-Reymond, and even mentioned less famous thinkers, such as Giovanni Papini, an Italian writer who for some time supported Futurism. It is even more difficult to assess how much a marginal author and a representative of the provincial literary world (chihō bundan) as Bochō could be permeable to a philosophical debate that, especially from the 1910s, with the maturation of the Kyoto School—Zen no kenkyū (An Inquiry into the Good) by Nishida Kitarō, a text with strong Jamesian overtones, was published in 1911—came to a nearly sectarian degree of academic specialization.

In any case, the Japanese cultural field of the 1910s had fully elaborated a critique of positivism. This made possible, in a neo-Kantian way, the safeguarding of the heuristic value of scientific knowledge, without elevating it to the position of an absolute paradigm, as had been the case with nineteenth-century positivism. This framework easily presents some points in common with the conception of scientific knowledge as it emerges from Bochō’s writings.

Bochō’s writings implicitly share with Futurism and with other intellectual movements of the early twentieth century the motif that, once it had left behind its more rigidly mechanistic and deterministic phase, science would have been able to renew itself by embracing in its domain those elements that were not traditionally considered as part of it, such as intuition, relativity, indeterminacy, fantasy, and vital force. The so-called ‘anti-positivist reaction’ was able, in this way, to profess the achievement of a synthesis between science and spirituality.

Such a narrative can already be detected in an 1889 essay by Paul Adam that is surprisingly close to the reflections and the images of Bochō’s essays:

L’Époque à venir sera mystique. Et le plus étonnant du miracle c’est que la science elle-même, cette fameuse science positive et matérialiste qui renaît l’orthodoxie, cette science elle-même viendra humblement annoncer la découverte du principe divin apparu au fond de ses cresses, dans les artifices de ses prismes, sous l’ondoiement de ses cordes acoustiques, dans les spasmes de son éther électrique.

The synthesis of science and spirituality, prophesized by Paul Adam, a novelist that Marinetti had listed among the forerunners of Futurism, corresponded in literature to the synthesis of Naturalism (claim to a literary truth of scientific nature) and Symbolism (use of anti-rational techniques such as revealing correspondances, synesthesia, free association of images, etc.) (Zellini 1990: 179).

This is exactly what Bochō, and as Kubo Tadao argued, even more Sakutarō after him, tried to accomplish at a certain point in the twists and turns of the history of Japanese poetry (Sugiyma 1983: 86).

The aspiration to such a synthesis seems to be a common trait in the discourse of the European avant-garde:

Indeed, the avant-garde often adopts scientific ideas to reassert a metaphysical and cosmic perspective in modern literature and art. By providing a model of investigation and discovery of both cosmic and microscopic realms, science may cause a radical reorientation of human self-consciousness and position in the universe. For the avant-garde, science thus joins the inquiring imagination and the natural realm. […] [S]upposedly grounded in the rationalism of scientific thought, the visionary and irrational dimension of avant-garde desire is once again revealed (Russell 1985: 28).90

91 Foreword to L’art symboliste by Georges Vanor. Quoted in Rapetti 1990: 69.
92 Russell traces back this attitude of ‘rationalist irrationalism’ to the oxymoronic program by Rimbaud of a «raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens». 
In this sense, a cluster of declarations by the Futurists deserve quotation:

Our plastic-constructive idealism takes its laws from the new certainties given to us by science.
(Umberto Boccioni, Pittura e scultura futuriste, 1914) 92.

La philosophie en général et la philosophie scientifique, la science en général et surtout cette dernière époque de la Science qui commence par la loi de connaissance originelle de [Rene] Quinton [French naturalist, 1866-1925], ont ouvert des horizons nouveaux à la perception des artistes modernes.

La philosophie scientifique et la méthode des découvertes scientifiques de Quinton nous apprennent à regarder les phénomènes dans leur finalité qui est la vie, et nous expliquent cette vie selon les lois cosmiques, physiques et chimiques qui règlent l’Univers (Gino Severini, Symbolisme plastique et symbolisme littéraire, 1916).

Accordingly, the discourse of the avant-garde could open itself to the incorporation and re-articulation of statements stemming from scientific and technological discourses: with them it shared, after all, a claim to truth and action on life and reality, which was a far cry from the désengagement of the aesthete and décadent school.

Neo-Impressionism was probably the first movement that manifested the possibility of going beyond the Romantic antagonism between the scientific method and artistic spontaneity (Rapetti 1990: 60) 93. And, as Giovanni Lista noted: «Pour les futuristes il s’agissait de prolonger dans une direction vitaliste et moderniste, le principe d’une “esthétique scientifique” qui avait inspiré le néoimpressionnisme» (1979: 28).

From Neo-Impressionism onwards, the discoveries of scholars such as Helmholtz, Faraday, Maxwell, Boltzmann, Van der Waals, Riemann, and so on had made their entrance into the theoretical writings of European painters and critics. This incorporation sanctioned the nexus between art writing and mathematical/scientific parlance, which was nothing but a way to reaffirm scientific discourse in its status as a source of truth. Though a good reader of English, Bochô was probably not endowed with the education and preparation needed to nourish with such authorities his conception of the «new certainties given to us by science» (Boccioni). Nevertheless, it is likely that an echo of the new sensational discoveries in the fields of physics, bio-chemistry, mathematics, etc. might have gotten to him in one way or another, perhaps through the always up-to-date Japanese periodicals. However, with no explicit references available in his works of this period, a more cautious stance on his knowledge of specific discoveries and theories seems to be advisable.

The coexistence (which may appear at times to be unresolved, and at times as a harmonious synthesis) of old naturalist/positivist claims (confidence in science and in its certainties, if only the “new” ones) with calls for a new idealism that must be established through growing familiarity and friendship with matter, which scientists can know only in its physical and chemical reactions (Marinetti) may be detected in Bochô’s writings as well.

In some of his essays, Bochô elaborates, often aphoristically, on science (kagaku), poetry and religion, which he often mentions together in the same passage.

The less he is understood by people, the more the self becomes profound and excellent in the art, and his art becomes religion, his religion becomes science (Mizu no u ni n (Above the water, Shiisai, Sept. 1914, YBZ 4: 181, 858).

True spirit is matter. In true matter there is spirit (Kakusen, Sharp line, Takafu funsui, May 1915, YBZ 4: 340).

Composing poetry is like a woman giving birth to a child, like a scientist kneading gold (Chôshû sentyo, Selection and criticism of long poems, Shûsai bunban, Sept. 1915, YBZ 4: 570).

Can scholars explain the spirit of the crystal? As for me, I just have the presentiment of a Renaissance of instinct (Runessanse wo yakun suru, I have a presentiment of a Renaissance, Bunshô sekai, Dec. 1915, YBZ 4: 177).

Poetry is intrinsic science (Chôshû sentyo, Shûsai bunban, Feb. 1916, YBZ 4: 570).

92 Boccioni 1997: 79. My translation. It seems likely that Bochô did not know this book that, with the exception of few excerpts translated by Arishima Ikuma in 1915, was at that time available only in Italian. The same can be said of Severini’s article.
93 Kimura Shôhachi too, in Miraiha oyobi rittaiha no geijutsu, sensed that the purpose of Neo-Impressionism was to tie science to art (KSGS kanpon hen 1: 433).
I completely abandoned the old instinctive life and now stand in a new science (Hido naru genmetsusha98, The tragic disillusioned, Shinritsushugi, Feb./Mar. 1916, YBZ 4: 361).

Religion despises science, but science truly gives religion its essence (Kaku shōdo99, Thus it corresponds, undated essay (ca. 1918?), YBZ 4: 471).

Poetry gets closer to «science». However, with this term Bochō seems to designate less the methods of experimental inquiry or theorematic demonstration, quantitative studies or empirical approaches to reality, than a certain attitude, not even necessarily intellectual, that produces truth, not unlike (he is a Christian, after all) religion. This attitude penetrates the darkest meanders of matter and life, leaving to poetic intuition the task of expressing its discoveries. Here an explanation of the collection title (The Sacred Prism) can be found: reality is analyzed and recomposed through that combination of rationality and intuition along which that particular epistemological tool that is the prismatic soul of a man operates. Such a conception parallels that of Marinetti in that it underscores the role of integration and completion that art plays in the respects of the scientific study of matter (notice the striking similarity to Marinetti’s sentences: «[to seize the essence of matter] by strokes of intuition, something which physicists and chemists can never achieve»; «not as a scientific document, but as an intuitive element»).

In other words, poetic language shares with scientific language the same object (matter, organic or inorganic, sensorial or psychic) and the same purpose (to attain its truth or essence), even though it is configured along another method, the intuitive one. Putting aside some extreme and isolated cases (one of them is probably Geigo), both Marinetti and Bochō resort in their poetry to a combination of logic and intuition. This is derived from the need to articulate a language that, since not all of its conventional structures are challenged (something that was attempted by Dada, according to the official hagiography100), maintains, however disputed, a logical formalization (for instance in its semantics and syntax).

In the poem Watashi wa bunseki suru101 (Ars, June 1915), characterized (as most typical of the prismatic style) by a parade of incoherent images, this hybrid nature of Bochō’s poetic language coagulates into a verb (bunseki suru, to analyze) that can be seen somehow as an ambiguous epistemological declaration:

I Analyze

I analyze, the spirit of the smoke of a cigarette,
The window has the rose-color of pure flesh,
There’s an extremely pathetic spider
He meditates in my pores,
But, in fact, the value of this world
Is not God, it’s the fool.
(YBZ 2: 182)102

On a more abstract level, the specific content of Bochō’s positions on art and science (which are typically confusing and contradictory) is not crucial in itself. Perhaps it is more important to notice that he did not perceive as improper to resort to linguistic tools taken from the discursive formations of scientific scholarship in order to talk about his poetry, or, as has been shown in the former paragraphs, to write it.

Therefore, in order to answer the questions concerning the origins of his inorganic poetics, I suggest that its conditions of possibility must be located in a particular configuration of the Japanese and European discourses on art and the new science. As far as the stylistic aspects are concerned, a combination of indigenous articulations of such discourses and of the most recent suggestions coming from the European avant-gardes played an important role. In the first domain, one may account for many different endogenous factors: the independent development of Bochō’s reflections on the «negation of self» that he had begun to articulate in some essays of the pre-prismist period (Sugiura 1979), or the influence of Japanese Naturalist/Impressionist poetry and of Hakushu’s alchemic Symbolism. In this paper, I feel content in having sketched a picture of the wider epistemic configuration that presided over Bochō’s most innovative experiments.

Within a productive context where the kōgo jiyāshi undō and Hakushu’s poems were important technical precedents, Bochō came to outline new possibilities for the development of Japanese shi. What I wanted to show was that

98 悲壮なる幻滅者.
99 砂く照応す.
100 See Van den Berg 2006 for a critical presentation of the mythology of Dada radicalism.
101 私は分析する.
Bochō’s poetics and poetry can be placed in a larger framework that involved the discursive construction of the relationship between literature and science.

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