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# Komagata's "Paperscapes": Theatricality and Materiality in *Blue to Blue*

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In picturebooks, the text, the image and the material book compete or cooperate with each other to convey and perform the narrative. The incorporation of material elements into the picturebook narrative at the same time extends reading beyond a purely cognitive activity: the reader enacts and interprets the narrative by interacting physically with the architectural space of the book. In Katsumi Komagata's *Blue to Blue*, the paper steps forward to take up a significant narrative role rather than retreating as the decorative backdrop or mere material support for the visual and textual elements. Not only do the qualities of the paper like texture, transparency and luminosity evoke features of the landscapes and characters in the story, but the shapes of the paper and the die-cuts also create physical depth and form characters that spring into life at the turning, poking and caressing of the reader's hands.

**Keywords:** Japanese book history, Katsumi Komagata, materiality, narratology, paper art, theatricality

Katsumi Komagata's *Blue to Blue* (1994a) is a story about growth. As the tidal waves rise and fall, the salmon babies swim towards the sea and the adult salmon swim back to the river, through hands of the reader that open and reopen the book. While text and image still play a role in advancing the story in this picturebook, the main stage of the narrative is relocated to the very surface of the paper. A river stream gently flows beneath our fingers in the form of undulating lines raised from the surface (see Fig. 1), the eggs laid by salmon becomes translucent when we hold the watermarked paper up to a light (see Fig. 2), and the continuous northward journey of the baby salmon is re-enacted as our hand glides across the extremely smooth page (see Fig. 3).



**Fig. 1.** *Blue to Blue*, the opening page. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata  
**Sl. 1.** *Blue to Blue*, prva stranica. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata



**Fig. 2.** *Blue to Blue*, the mother salmon laying eggs. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata  
**Sl. 2.** *Blue to Blue*, ženka lososa polaže jaja. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata



**Fig. 3.** *Blue to Blue*, the baby salmon swimming back to the river. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 3.** *Blue to Blue*, lososići plivaju natrag u rijeku. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

Very often, however, the stage of the narrative consists of more than one surface. The die-cut within the pages and the pages themselves cut into shapes, create physical depth and allow layers of surfaces to be seen through each other. As the reader turns from one page to another, the scene gradually changes, as if in a stage-like space with movable foreground, middle ground, and background (see Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** *Blue to Blue*, the baby salmon travelling in the seaweed forest. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 4.** *Blue to Blue*, lososići putuju kroz šumu morske trave. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

The theatrical effect of the material space of the book is further heightened when material qualities of paper like texture, transparency, and luminosity not only evoke features of the landscapes and characters within the story, but also call for certain movements of the reader's hand, like turning, caressing, and flipping. The versatility of paper thus allows it to function to some extent as a semiotic code, and it is a language that is at the same time visual, tactile, and kinetic. In *Blue to Blue*, the book's materiality is therefore inevitably connected with its theatricality. Far from most printed texts that serve as a mere "visual container" to fix the narrative in its entirety (McLuhan 2014: 123), and closer to the kind of mass produced art examined by Walter Benjamin in which "intimacy and imaginative investment in objects may still be possible" (Leslie 1998: 11), Komagata's book interweaves the materiality of the print with the spontaneity of the reader's engagement by drawing elements from the theatrical scene. The physical book becomes at the same time a stage, a script, and a collection of stage directions for a narrative that can only truly spring into life when animated by the readers' hands and voices.

### The paper as the stage

Although Komagata attributes the birth of *Blue to Blue*, a part of the "Paper Picturebook Series" (1994), to "his fortunate encounter<sup>1</sup> with a paper company" (Beckett 2012: 54), the complex paper design pays tribute to the rich Japanese tradition of paper production. Paper is commonly used as an additional mode of expression in early Japanese literary texts. As Thomas LaMarre points out, in the production of paper intended for poetry inscription in the Heian period (794-1185), the aim is not to create a "neutral" surface whose smoothness effaces its own material presence, but to let the "effects of fibers" of the paper emerge and be in conversation with other modes of expression, pictorial or textual (LaMarre 2000: 93). The relief on each paper in *Blue to Blue* imbues the narrative on each page with a tangible quality of the natural world, which is not unlike the "paperscape" that LaMarre unfolds before our eyes (2000: 94):

[...] with dyes that seep and swirl, with flecks of colored paper scattered with figures and designs that twine and creep [the paperscapes] seem to anticipate or prefigure poems that sing of celestial and terrestrial movements: petals fluttering, rivers flowing, autumn leaves scattering, bugs chirping and susurrating [...]

Unlike the direct representation of written text in "pictography or illustration," the paperscape is loosely connected to the "naturalscape" depicted in the poetic text, and the "mode of mimicry" in the paperscape is rather open-ended (LaMarre 2000: 94). Far from an exact replica of natural elements in the text, the "paperscapes" are abstract enough for both text and the material surface of paper to retain "a degree of autonomy" and relevant enough for them to be linked as a coherent genre (LaMarre 2000: 96).

<sup>1</sup> Such partnership is not at all unprecedented as earlier publishers of illustrated books for children as early as Tokugawa times (1603-1867) often include advertisements for products of "sellers of quality paper goods" and the books themselves are usually sold side by side with "patterned paper, ornamental stationery, and other luxury printed items" (Herring 2005: 169).

There is a similar relationship between written text and the material surface of paper in Komagata's paperscapes. While the text threads together distinct surfaces of paper and is configured in turn by the colours and the shapes of the paperscapes, the textures of paper may escape the realm of representation and go on to bring forth elements beyond verbal description or narration. As Komagata describes it, the lush textures of the paper to some extent diminish the authority of the parents of the child readers and the verbal text as the sole channel for the transmission of the narrative, as they offer a playground for the curious child to explore, to be surprised, and to create things for themselves through imagination (Komagata 2016).

In works predominantly written in prose, the *Tale of Genji* scroll (*Genji monogatari emaki* 源氏物語絵巻物) (ca. 1160) for example, the paper design also makes use of a range of material elements, from special dyeing substances such as pomegranate juice, indigo, or mica powder (*unmo* 雲母), to decorative metallic elements in various forms and shapes, like gold or silver foil (*kiri-haku* 切箔), wild hair (*noge* 野毛), or silver dust (*mijin* 微塵) (Jackson 2009: 7). Similar to their poetic counterparts, these material elements coordinate with each other to conjure up a diffuse visual context for the accompaniment of the more explicitly communicative lines of the calligraphic script. There are, however, instances in which these elements of the paper interact directly with pictorial and calligraphic designs to perform certain aspects of the narrative literally on the page. In the *Kashiwagi* 柏木 chapter, the central character Kashiwagi, troubled by his former lover's indifference to his sickness and his anxiety over the upcoming of death, struggles to produce some legible inscription, but his faltering body threatens the act of writing and his trembling hand betrays him (Jackson 2009: 5). In sheet two of the scroll *The Oak Tree I*, according to Reginald Jackson, the added decorative elements of squares of foil leaf and silver dust in the paper create a spectacle of illness as they both interfere with the flow of the calligrapher's hand and infect the reader's visual experience of the text. The foil leaves make the paper less "porous [...] to allow ink to permeate easily" and the calligrapher has to increase the "brush pressure" (Jackson 2009: 13) to let the characters leave a feeble trace over the paper's non-absorbent parts, thus conveying the weakness of the illness-stricken hand. At the same time, these "brazen bits of gold and silver" (Jackson 2009: 15) act as visual impediments to the readers, since they leap up from the page and interrupt the linear tracing of the text, introducing a "breakdown of the calligraphic order" (Jackson 2009: 14) and emphasizing the fragility of the script.

In Komagata's *Blue to Blue*, there is a similar interest in the luminosity of paper and the visual effect of reflective surfaces. On a striking page (see Fig. 5) where the subtle glow of the black paper in the foreground meets the radiant surface of the white paper in the background, we are first confronted with the black paper whose blunt indented texture—as if the paper has been kneaded by hand—mimics the skin of the whale, our guide into the arctic ocean.<sup>2</sup> As we turn over the black cut-out page, the

<sup>2</sup> “どうどうとおよぐおおきなくじらがみちあんない。Les énormes baleines aux mouvement majestueux leur montrent le chemin.” – Swimming with majestic strokes, the giant whale shows the



**Fig. 5.** *Blue to Blue*, the baby salmon greeted by the whale. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 5.** *Blue to Blue*, kit pozdravlja lososiće. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

lustrous sheen<sup>3</sup> of the white paper recalling the reflective surface of the ocean in sunlight now dominates our entire field of vision, and it is supplemented with the crazed tactile surface that evokes scratches and cracks in the ice. Together, the visual and tactile surfaces stand as signifiers for the cold and shiny surface of the icy sea described in the text,<sup>4</sup> but they also further elaborate on the image of solid, crackled surface of ice that the text only allows us to imagine but never directly mentions. The texture of paper becomes narrative voice or tangible brushstrokes embedded in the medium itself that strike the reader first through seeing and are rediscovered through touching. Komagata's investment in the interaction between the visual and the tactile is therefore in some way working against the "visual homogenizing of experience" in modern print culture as the senses of hearing and touching are not dismissed into the background but are embraced as integrated parts of the narrative's semiotic whole (McLuhan 2014: 144).

way. Komagata's *Blue to Blue* is published in both Japanese and French: both the original texts are quoted in this paper, but I choose to translate only the Japanese text as it presents a more intriguing interplay between the reader's senses.

<sup>3</sup> The sheen evokes the decorative use of mica powder in earlier Japanese tradition of paper-making while the leathery texture reminds one of the kind of paper treated with plant oils.

<sup>4</sup> “つめたくこおったうみがキラキラとかがやいていた。L'océan glacé scintille.” – The cold and icy ocean shines, *sparkling in the sun* (visual effect of the mimetic expression “kira kira”).

## Readers as actors

Just as different images propose different ways of seeing, paper with varied textures inspires various gestures of the hand: a gentle poking, a swift slapping, a lingering caress. In addition to inviting readers to engage with the narrative through bringing together their senses of seeing and touching, *Blue to Blue* pushes the reader to explore new ways of incorporating each sense into the performance of the narrative. As Yoshirō Imai 今井良朗, Tomomi Fujimoto 藤本朝巳 and Michiyo Honjō 本庄美千代 argue, in the case of Komagata's book, when it comes to "seeing" or "seeing with eyes," not only the visual sense is of great significance, but it seems essential to acknowledge anew that we come to perceive and recognise the object through the entire sensorium that is based in physical movements (Imai, Fujimoto and Honjō 2014: 91). Thus, not only are the visual and tactile elements in a signifying relationship with the narrative, but also the gestures of the hand, moving on top of the paper surface or tapping and turning paper-characters that spring up from the gutter, are all part of the reader's encounter with the book object and become semiotic codes in themselves. For example, in the spread narrating the baby salmon's journey to the further north, the visual surface's overall haziness hints towards the vast ocean space they have traveled and the accelerated passage of time.

The smoothness of the paper surface (see Fig. 3) echoes the continuous swimming of baby salmon in the text,<sup>5</sup> and the glazed quality of the page highlights the swiftness of the fish's movement. The paper is too slippery for the reader's hand to resist gliding quickly across the page, thus it is as if the hand is enacting the moment when a school of fish escapes from its grip. In another spread at the beginning of the book (see Fig. 2), the co-presence of the red dots printed on the surface of paper and the watermark of polka dots embedded within the material page creates a sense of depth. The readers' fingers may comb through "the numerous cuts in the tail" of mother salmon to perform in live the swaying of the tail "as it lays its eggs in the river" (Beckett 2012: 55).

By inviting our hands to slide across, caress, poke, bend and split the paper figures, Komagata emphasises the paper cut-outs' fabric-like suppleness rather than their crispy edges. The paper's close affinity to textile is also manifested on its texturised surfaces. The undulating lines that flow across the opening page<sup>6</sup> (see Fig. 1) evoke the touch of a woven fabric whose woof made of threads irregularly spun protrudes from the surface under tension (Nisennenki washi iinkai 2006-2010) and the tiny vertical crinkles (see Fig. 6) representing the feathers of mother swan on another page resemble those on the surface of the crepe cloth.

<sup>5</sup> それでもあきらめずにおよぎつづけると…… Ils nagent sans relâche ... – Nevertheless, they continue to swim without giving up.....

<sup>6</sup> The texture of this specific paper, named レザック80ツムギ/空 (*Rezaku 80 tsumugi/sora*) by the specialised paper trading company Takeo Co., Ltd., bears strong resemblance to that of the sample given of *shūsōwashi ōtakadanshi* paper in the book 和紙総鑑: 日本のこころ *Washi sōkan: Nihon no kokoro (Washi: the soul of Japan, fine Japanese paper in the second millennium)* vol. 6 no. 524.





**Fig 6.** *Blue to Blue*, baby swans looking at their mother. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 6.** *Blue to Blue*, labudići gledaju u svoju majku. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

The transference of the texture of the crepe cloth (*chirimen* 縮緬) onto the surface of paper was achieved well before Komagata's book. *Chirimen-gami-e* 縮緬紙絵 prints (woodblock prints on crepe paper) were popular since the beginning of the nineteenth century. By 1886 a Japanese publisher named Takejirō Hasegawa has devised and published his first set of books of the *chirimen-bon* 縮緬本 series (illustrated books for children printed on crepe paper). It was first targeted at Japanese learners of foreign languages but later gained greater fame overseas (Ishizawa 2005: 12). The rare fabric-like quality of the crepe paper<sup>7</sup> elevates the *chirimen-bon* to the status of a luxury item, as its soft pages drape delicately in the hands of its readers once the book is opened, thus announcing the book as an object that deserves lavish attention and care. In Komagata's book, however, the paper's affinity to textile is not the result of an aesthetic choice. Instead, the fabric-like quality allows the paper to maximise the representational capacity of its surface and reminds the reader of the paper's flexibility as a material whole. The patterns and folds on the surface of cut-out figures not only disclose extra clues to what animals they represent but also suggests that the paper figures, like fabric ones, invite bending, flipping and plucking by the reader's hands.

As we have seen, the possibilities of enlivening the narrative through physical interaction with a textured paper are multiple, and the verbal text may also play a role in suggesting the most relevant enactment. In the luminous page of the icy ocean that

<sup>7</sup> The texture of the crepe paper can still be found today in the series ユニテック GA *Yunitekku GA* sold by Takeo company.



we have come upon (see Fig. 5), and in the layered page of foamy seaweed that we will soon encounter (see Fig. 4), the mimetic language (キラキラ<sup>8</sup> kira kira and フワフワ<sup>9</sup> fuwa fuwa) not only introduces a kind of musical sound that helps set off the theatrical scene within each page, but also leaves clues, or “small hints”<sup>10</sup> in Komagata’s own words (Komagata 2014a), for how to better respond to the demands of the paper texture whose relationship to the narrative remains silent on the surface before the intervention of the hand. These hints in the verbal text make it function as both a script that anticipates its enunciation by the reader’s voice and stage directions that suggest specific gestures of the reader’s hand. While it seems that the verbal text comes first to greet and orient us on the page, thus assuming more of a leading role in the play, the paper texture does develop to some extent its own language, subtly threading together aspects of the narrative whose connections are less pronounced in the verbal text. For example, the specific paper chosen for the scene at the bottom of the sea (see Fig. 4) gives an immediate impression of a lush greenery, while it is in fact of the same texture as the paper used in a previous spread to mimic the feathery body of mother swan. By repeating a paper of a texture that the reader has already encountered, the artist establishes a connection between the seaweed and the feather: the leafy texture, on the literal level, describes the thick foliage of the seaweed, and on the metaphorical level, reminds us of the seaweed’s lightness in water as a feather, subtly hinting towards the tactile sense of softness and suppleness implied in the expression “fuwa fuwa”.

If we leaf through all three books, *Green to Green* (1994b), *Yellow to Red* (1994c), and *Blue to Blue* (1994a), in Komagata’s “Paper Picturebook Series”, we find similar instances of overlapping paper textures, not just within each self-contained narrative but even across different ones. The leafy texture described above also appears in an earlier book, *Green to Green*, to signify thick foliage in the deep forest of the mountain where the black bear lives. The dim green color further corroborates the image of lush vegetation suggested by the infinite tiny rippled strokes (see Fig. 7). When transposed into the aquatic world, the crepe-paper-like texture not only adds a connotation of lightness through its *intratextual* link with the swan feathers, but also brings in a sense of lushness through its *intertextual* connection with the green forest. Just as the verbal expression “*kaisō no hayashi*” ‘seaweed forest’ neatly seams together the topic (seaweed) and the vehicle (forest) of the metaphor, the paper page physically fuses the topic of the seaweed evoked through the colour and the shape of the paper cut-out with the vehicle of the forest suggested by the leafy texture.

<sup>8</sup> This expression is used to describe the effect of the shimmering light.

<sup>9</sup> This expression is used to describe the lightness and the softness of the seaweed.

<sup>10</sup> Komagata uses the term “small hints” to point towards the lack of a fully traced out path in his picturebooks and this openness leaves room for children’s curiosity and imagination to determine the direction of the discovery: the transformations that take place both inside the narrative and physically on the page surprise the children, make them curious, and inspire them to imagine and create (Komagata 2014a).



**Fig. 7.** *Green to Green*, encounter with the black bear in the deep forest. © Katsumi Komagata

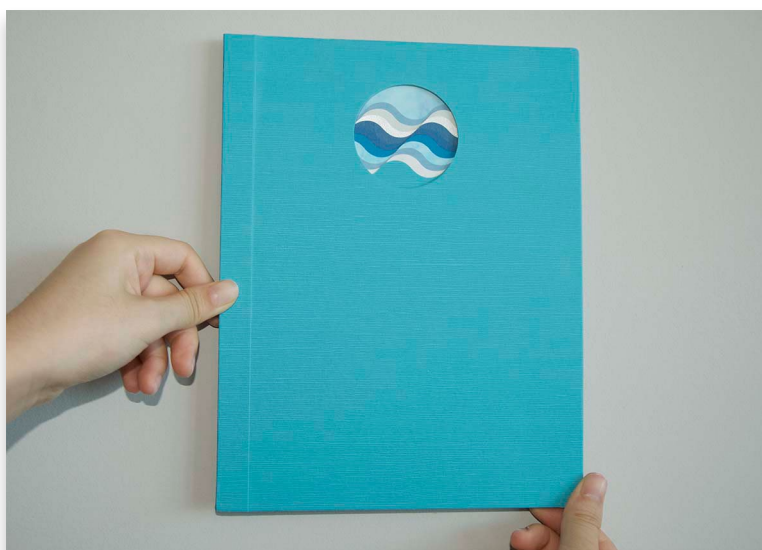
**Sl. 7.** *Green to Green*, susret s crnim medvjedom duboko u šumi. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

### Theatrical effects of cutting

The architectural world of paper in *Blue to Blue* draws our attention to both the physical space of the page and that of the book. The two spaces are connected and interwoven into each other through paper-cutting, which gives birth to shapes, underlines depth by trimming the pages into a multi-layered stage, and conjures up shadows, as the die-cut openings literally “sheds light into the surrounding areas” (Fleming 2015: 454). Cutting becomes indeed what Juliet Fleming calls “the cause of writing” (ibid.), since it not only turns each cut page into a sign, but also creates meanings by forging connections between pages across the space of the book. In an interview for *Illustratour* in 2014, Komagata explains that his practice of creating images through means other than illustration is shaped by his formation as a graphic designer and not an illustrator, a practical limitation that makes him resort to other forms of expression, like those of paper-cutting and paper-landscaping (Komagata 2014a). Rather than being chosen as a

last resort, cutting is perhaps the optimum mode of writing if the paper is to assume the central role in narration. Large surfaces of illustrations printed over may obscure what the paper itself can signify. Limiting the creative gesture for the most part to cutting thus defamiliarises the readers from their preconceptions of the printed page and allows the narrative capacity of the paper – which is usually overlooked – to be rediscovered in full.

The predominance of cutting in *Blue to Blue* is perhaps reminiscent of the variegated forms of printed material which flourished in eighteenth and early nineteenth century Japan,<sup>11</sup> such as single sheet prints, printed toys and construction books, designed specifically with a child audience in mind. The construction books among them often contain designs in their covers that await to be cut out and reassembled at the hands of their child readers, so that even “children who have become bored” (Herring 2005: 186) with the stories inside can still engage with the book through its outermost layer. Unlike the covers of these construction books that look no different from any ordinary book prior to their deconstruction, the cover of *Blue to Blue* (see Fig. 8) is stunning because it does not fully conceal the body of the text.



**Fig. 8.** *Blue to Blue*, the cover. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata  
**Sl. 8.** *Blue to Blue*, prednja strana korica. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

<sup>11</sup> Book-cutting as a practice of reading is by no means unique to Japan. Early modern readers in Europe too cut their books for both pragmatic and creative purposes (Fleming 2015: 448) and Adam Smyth’s account of the communal book manufacturing through cutting up of printed Gospels at Little Giding underlines how “the consumption of texts was [indeed] regularly accompanied by the cutting up of printed and manuscript pages” (Smyth 2012: 455).

A cut-out hole in the upper half carves out a space for a pattern of wavy shapes formed by pages inside the book to emerge and to interact with the undulating lines in the texture of the cover. In this case, the cover is neither an optional extension of the main narrative, nor a component in "le plus extérieur" (the outermost) (Genette 1987: 20). Instead, the body of the book becomes a constituent of the cover. By offering the reader "a glimpse of the range of colours and shades of the graduated pages inside" (Beckett 2012: 54), the cover summarises the baby salmon's round-trip journey in a poetically condensed form even before opening the book. The cover of *Blue to Blue* thus escapes Genette's description of the "péritexte" as extrinsic and accessory, and literally pursues what Kohei Sugiura 杉浦康平, a Japanese book designer, puts forth in his book *The Birth of Shapes* 「かたち誕生」: to compare the cover to clothes is to assume the cover as separable from the book, but to consider the cover as the face, and thus an extension of the body of the book, captures how the cover condenses the content of the book, and thus makes visible what cannot be seen from the outside, just as the face extracts and exposes the activity of the vital organs and internal processes (Sugiura 1997: 165). It is also our encounter with this book's face and our curiosity at this unexpected opening that motivates our entry into the narrative.

If we now open the book and take a look at each spread inside, mini-paper sculptures spring out from the gutter for people to touch and handle as soon as one turns the page, as if setting foot onto the theatrical stage of the spread in real time<sup>12</sup>. In a spread mentioned earlier, the tail of the mother salmon rises up from a warm background of translucent polka dots as the reader turns over the page and lands at the spread. The act of turning creates the impression of the salmon "swim[ming] into the gutter" (Beckett 2012: 55). The readers do not see the first half of a fully grown salmon until the very end, when the baby salmon mature and return to the river where they were first born (see Fig. 9): "the front half of the salmon suddenly swims out of the gutter" and the reader now discovers the beautiful fin in delicate die-cut, echoing the tassel-like tail at the beginning (ibid.).

The disappearance of the first half of the body at the beginning and the appearance of the second half in the end not only signify respectively the departure and the arrival of the baby salmon's journey, but they also create an image of a grey salmon swimming through a thick stack of texturised paper which is the physical body of the book. The continuation of the life cycle of the salmon is therefore achieved through both the baby salmon's travel across the surface of individual spreads and the anamorphosis of the body of salmon from the mother to the matured baby through the material space of the book.

<sup>12</sup> While much attention here is given to the architectural space within each spread, and especially the kinetic energy embedded in the gutter that forces smaller paper cut-outs to pop-up and larger full paper pages to bend, in the picturebook published one year before *Blue to Blue* that is also interested in the marine world, *Umi no bōken* (1993), more focus is directed towards the movement between the pages than within them, as "pages [unfold] irregularly in changing directions" to creat[e] "a flexible space like that of the sea that the child can play with, on, and underneath" (Veryeri Alaca 2018: 63).



**Fig. 9.** *Blue to Blue*, the body of salmon swimming through the gutter. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 9.** *Blue to Blue*, lososovo tijelo koje pliva kroz pregeb u knjizi. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata



**Fig 10.** *Blue to Blue*, mother swan looking at the baby salmon passing by. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 10.** *Blue to Blue*, majka labudica promatra labudića koji prolazi. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata



**Fig 11.** *Blue to Blue*, the flatfish at the bottom of the sea. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

**Sl. 11.** *Blue to Blue*, riba list na dnu mora. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Katsumi Komagata

In some spreads, as Beckett observes, the whole scene does not consist of only one single element leaping up against the background, but is “formed by a complex superposition of multiple intricately cut pages” (2012: 55). In folio 9 recto, baby salmon, after finishing their journey through the river and taking their first sip of salt seawater, disappear from the page as they dive deeper and deeper in the sea. The tiny eyes of the baby salmon in the previous spread (see Fig. 10) now become grains of sand floating in the water (see Fig. 11) and the narrative voice too shifts from that of a third person to that of a first person at the turn of the page. Here, through the eyes of the baby salmon, the readers both see and are seen by a flatfish, but like baby salmon, they do not know what kind of flatfish it is. The shift to free indirect discourse in the text further invites the reader to enter into the curious mind of the baby salmon and voice their question in their absence: what is it that observes us in secret, a sole or a flounder?<sup>13</sup> Because the form of the flatfish is determined by the cut shape of the azure blue page, once turned, the brown page behind transforms from a flatfish into a foreground of rocks (see Fig. 4). It is first supported by a middle ground of seaweeds, and then a background of a school of salmon that have well matured and are now heading northward. The first-person narrative voice goes on in both the foreground and the middle ground, describing the salmon’s passage through the floating “forest

<sup>13</sup> ごつごつしたうみのそこからみつめるのはだれ？ ヒラメ？それともカレイ？ Qui donc nous observe du fond sableux？ L’œil droit d’une sole ou l’œil gauche d’un turbot？ – Who is the one observing us at the gritty bottom of the sea？ A sole？ Or is it a flounder？

of seaweed.”<sup>14</sup> The figures of the salmon too remain out of sight until the final page in this spread, as if foretelling the return to a third-person narrative at the end of this mini-adventure. The salmon’s journey over the rock and through the seaweed forest, therefore, can be performed by no one but the reader. As our hand unfolds each layer of the landscape, we first leap over a rocky mound and then pull back the curtains of seaweed. The reader thus not only sees through the eyes of the travelling salmon but also enter into their skin and experience movement underwater by interacting with the material structure of the book. The superposition of paper pages, an element of material manifestation,<sup>15</sup> thus creates a stage for the enactment of the story and is able to signify a feature of the narrative discourse once animated by the reader’s hand.

Similarly, in another spread towards the beginning, when baby salmon encounter a family of swans (see Fig. 6), the double insert gives the reader an opportunity to participate in the performance of the narrative, perhaps in a more open-ended way. The spread consists of two cygnets in the foreground, with the mother swan in the middle ground, against a background of tiny baby salmon floating down in swirling river streams. According to Beckett, this specific spread is one of the many instances in *Blue to Blue* and in the “Paper Picturebook Series” where multiple viewing possibilities are presented to the reader: the “die-cut shapes of animals” are colored and textured on both sides so that they can “be viewed against the recto or the verso” (Beckett 2012: 55). Although Beckett suggests that there are three different ways to read the spread – “the [cygnets] can be viewed on the verso opposite their mother, they can appear nestled against their mother on the recto (see Fig. 6), or they can disappear behind her (see Fig. 10) when the mother is viewed on the verso under the baby salmon” (Beckett 2012: 56) – her reading assumes the pages as static illustrations and the spreads as discontinuous, without seeing that the gesture of the reader, the plasticity of the paper, and the skilful cuts are all elements that seek to transcend the fragmentation of the narrative imposed by the codex form. These three viewing situations can actually be temporally connected at the reader’s hand. The flipping of the first insert to the verso and then back to the recto creates the movement of the little swans turning their heads to look at the fish on the verso and then turning back to talk to their mother on the recto. The flipping of the second insert to the verso enacts the mother swan, after conversing with her cygnets, turning to look at the baby salmon who now have swum from the verso to the recto.

<sup>14</sup> フウフウゆれるかいそうのはやしをくぐりぬけ。Louvoyant dans les forêts d’algues ondulantes. – Slipping through the forest of seaweed that sways and floats in the water (as previously mentioned the mimetic term “*fuwa fuwa*” accentuates the lightness of the seaweed and its sinuous movement in water).

<sup>15</sup> I borrow this term from Chatman, who originally designates it to mean “mere physical disposition of narratives – the actual print in books, movement of actors or dancers or marionettes, lines on paper or canvas, or whatever” (Chatman 1983: 26) that are external to the narratives themselves and that are only useful as “a means to ‘fix’ the work, or rather to make it accessible to the reader” (Chatman 1983: 27). But I see what is included in the term “material manifestation” (the material book) as a unique participant in the creation and experience of the narrative and especially in our discussion on picturebooks.





**Fig. 12.** *Maman renard*, mother fox looking to the left. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Amandine Momencaeu

**SI. 12.** *Maman renard*, majka lisica gleda ulijevo. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Amandine Momencaeu



**Fig. 13.** *Maman renard*, mother fox turning back. Photo by Honglan Huang. © Amandine Momencaeu

**SI. 13.** *Maman renard*, majka lisica okreće se unatrag. Fotografija: Honglan Huang. © Amandine Momencaeu

Such reading may not seem obvious at first, since the stab binding, an inevitable choice due to the book's exclusive constituents of textured single sheets, makes it difficult for the swan figures to turn smoothly from one side to the other. The need to tame the pages in order for them to stay on either side of the spread resists the hand's mechanical turning of the page: the book refuses to be consumed in a hasty flip and requires time of the reader to explore each spread as a kind of theatrical space. A partially similar composition in Amandine Momenceau's *Maman renard* (2015) may provide a way for us to better imagine what the same scene would look like in a normal sewn binding: just as the mother fox turns her head around a full 180 degrees (see Fig. 12) to discover the little fox hiding right behind her back when the reader moves the cut-out page from recto to verso (see Fig. 13), the focus of the mother swan in *Blue to Blue* shifts from listening attentively to baby salmon conversing with her cygnets to seeing off the baby salmon herself as they leave the river for the sea. While Komagata's cut-out figures hardly cooperate when it comes to fixing their position in a scene as they tend to spring out from the gutter, such resistance may in another way highlight that these paper figures belong to the space of a semi-spherical stage rather than the surface of the spread.

### **The drama of re-reading**

Finally, we can say that not only are the physical space of the pages and the material space of the book intrinsic to the unfolding and enacting of the narrative – paperscapes are at the same time signifiers of specific aspects of the narratives and theatrical stages for the reader to perform the narrative in live – but they are to some extent the required medium for the specific narrative. Different from digital media which do not leave traces of physical usage, books are fragile, they age, they grow wrinkles, and they share time together with the reader. The delicate paper-cuts in Komagata's *Blue to Blue* that are intended for the child reader even seem to dramatise such fragility. In the *Illustratour* interview (Komagata 2014b), Komagata tells the story of his daughter's experience with this book: although the pages were first crumpled and torn, after seeing her dad repeatedly repairing the book by fixing scraps of paper with layers of tape, his daughter gradually grew to learn that things are fragile and need to be taken care of. If it is the subtleness and suppleness of the paper that leave the text open and let the rhythmic cycles of marine life be endlessly explored through repeated reading, it is then the fragility and delicateness of the paper that teaches the child reader about its possibilities and limits. The material book helps the child grow into a caring person and grows old along with the child. *Blue to Blue*'s theatricality therefore lies perhaps not only in its capacity as a script to generate different performances, but also in the susceptibility of its material form to age and transform in the course of each reading.

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### **Komagatini “papirnati predjeli”: uprizorenost i materijalnost slikovnice *Blue to Blue***

U slikovnicama se tekst, slika i sama knjiga kao predmet međusobno natječu ili surađuju kako bi posredovali i predstavili pripovijed. Uključivanje materijalnih sastavnica u pripovjednu slikovnicu istodobno proširuje pojam čitanja preko granice čisto kognitivne aktivnosti: čitatelj izvodi i interpretira pripovijed na taj način tako što fizički surađuje s arhitektonskim prostorom knjige. U slikovnici *Blue to Blue* [Plavo do plavoga] Katsumija Komagata (1994), papir preuzima važnu pripovjednu ulogu umjesto povlačenja u ulogu dekorativne pozadine ili pukoga materijalnoga oslonca vizualnih i tekstualnih sastavnica. Osim što svojstva papira, kao na primjer tekstura, prozirnost i svjetlucavost, prizivaju značajke prikazanih krajolika i likova u priči, oblici papira i prorezi u njem također stvaraju dubinu i formiraju likove koji oživljavaju kad ih okreću, guraju ili miluju čitateljeve ruke.

**Ključne riječi:** povijest japanske knjige, Katsumi Komagata, materijalnost, naratologija, umijeće savijanja papira, kazališna uprizorenost