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Becoming Botanical:  
Entanglements of Plant Life and Human Subjectivity in Modern Japan

By

Jon L Pitt

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

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Committee in charge:

Professor Alan Tansman, Chair

Professor Daniel O'Neill

Professor Kristen Whissel

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Abstract

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This dissertation argues that plant life offered a number of modern Japanese writers and filmmakers a model through which to rethink human subjectivity in response to turbulent historical events. Informed by the adaptability and resilience of vegetal life (so-called phenotypic plasticity, in which plants change in response to changes in their environments), the authors and directors I discuss posit a form of destructive plasticity available to humans in the face of crises brought on by war, colonial violence, natural disaster, and economic depression. Across genres and media—in poetry, novels, scientific writing, and films—subjectivity is reconfigured beyond the confines of the human body, beyond conventional sense perception, and beyond human temporality. Drawing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I call the reconfiguration of subjectivity in cultural texts inspired by plant life “becoming botanical.”

My first chapter examines two writers: poet and novelist Osaki Midori and biologist Imanishi Kinji. For both, evolutionary thinking informed by new research in botanical science provided a framework to think through and reconfigure human subjectivity amidst the violence of the early Shōwa period, as well as providing a means to envision a notion of family through shared resemblance that included plants. From their utopian figurations of becoming botanical I turn to the dystopian critique of colonial modernity written into Abe Kōbō’s 1949 novella *Denodorokakariya* (*Dendrocacalia*). A tale of metamorphosis in which a human turns into a plant native only to the Bonin Islands, *Denodorokakariya* uses new theories of botanical life that exposed the previously hidden internal life of plants (as characterized by the novella’s diegetic inclusion of Russian botanist Kliment Timiryazev’s scientific treatise *The Life of the Plant*) to expose a history of colonial violence seemingly fading from memory in the postwar moment. Chapter three examines how three writers (postwar novelist and critic Haniya Yutaka, parascientist Hashimoto Ken, and novelist and rapper Itō Seikō) situate human subjectivity on a spectrum between life and death at the intersection of science and spirituality, and posit a continuation of identity after death within the vegetal world of the forest. This chapter reads trees in the works of these three writers as media that open a channel between the living and the dead in order to work through contemporaneous trauma. Chapter four takes up the eco-films of Yanagimachi Mitsuo and Kawase Naomi, and examines how human subjectivity becomes a part of a greater forest assemblage. In this chapter I argue that Yanagimachi’s *Himatsuri* (*Fire*

*Festival*) and Kawase's *Vision* look to stage a renewal of Japan's rural forestry communities through the logic of disturbance ecology. In both films, a ritual engagement with fire is introduced into the forest ecosystem in order to open space for a future to take hold.

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## Introduction: Men are Grass

This dissertation argues that plant life offered a number of modern Japanese writers and filmmakers a model through which to rethink human subjectivity in response to turbulent historical events. Informed by the adaptability and resilience of vegetal life (so-called phenotypic plasticity, in which plants change in response to changes in their environments), the authors and directors I discuss posit a form of plasticity available to humans in the face of crises brought on by war, colonial violence, natural disaster, and economic depression. Across genres and media—in poetry, novels, scientific writing, and films—subjectivity is reconfigured beyond the confines of the human body, beyond conventional sense perception, and beyond human temporality.

Drawing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I call the reconfiguration of subjectivity in cultural texts inspired by plant life “becoming botanical.” A “becoming” is an ongoing process in which two or more entities enter into an alliance that creates something wholly new that is “neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the inbetween...”<sup>1</sup> The writers and filmmakers I take up proffer this in-between space of human and plant life as holding the possibility for overcoming the crisis unfolding—dramatically, slowly, or even imperceptibly—around them. These writers and filmmakers see “becoming botanical” as a means to adapt to ongoing crises and to construct notions of futurity that reach beyond the immediate violence of the present.

This adaptation to crisis can be understood as a form of plasticity, which Catherine Malabou characterizes as “as a sort of natural sculpting that forms our identity, an identity modeled by experience and that makes us subjects of a history...”<sup>2</sup> Plasticity makes fundamental changes in identity and/or subjectivity possible. It allows us to understand the human as an environmental subject, an “open, living system” that slowly but persistently adapts to (often catastrophic) change.<sup>3</sup> I map the ways in which writers and filmmakers in Japan turned to the botanical world in response to a backdrop of violence and explored both the destructive and generative qualities inherent in the plasticity of human subjectivity. I focus in particular on texts where a kind of slow violence, to borrow Rob Nixon’s term, structures the everyday lives of characters in damaging ways.<sup>4</sup>

When the “natural sculpting” of plasticity takes place in response to crisis (what Malabou calls “destructive plasticity”), the subjectivity or identity that emerges is radically new:

Something shows itself when there is damage, a cut, something to which normal, creative plasticity gives neither access nor body: the deserting of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself, who no longer recognizes anyone, who no longer recognizes herself, who no longer remembers her self.<sup>5</sup>

The writers and filmmakers I examine turned the violence of historical moments into a generative, botanical force. For them, becoming botanical was a form of destructive plasticity resulting in a “deserting of human subjectivity.” What emerged in place of human subjectivity

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<sup>1</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 342.

<sup>2</sup> *Ontology of the Accident* p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Bates p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> This slow violence functions, in Christopher Dole’s words, as “both a backdrop to and condition for the intimate terrain of... everyday lives” within these narratives (Dole p. 1).

<sup>5</sup> *Ontology of the Accident* p. 6.



was a new form of botanical subjectivity formed by the in-between of humans and plants. Most often, becoming botanical was an ideal means of adapting to crisis. Yet it also served, in one novella I examine (Abe Kōbō's *Dendorokakariya*, 1949), as form of critique; becoming botanical in this case results in the disavowal of colonial violence by moving beyond it too quickly, without taking proper account of its lasting effects in the postwar moment.

As an ideal or as a critique, turning to the botanical world in order to find an alternative mode of subjectivity was not an idiosyncratic choice; the authors and directors I bring together in *Becoming Botanical* engage with contemporaneous way of thinking about plant life, both scientific and spiritual, that posited similarities between humans and plants. Their work intersected with scientific theories of plant life, including ecology and evolution, as well as with para-scientific theories of plant intelligence. They employed these theories as frameworks to explore the malleability of human subjectivity. At times, these theories were informed by spiritual belief.

*Becoming Botanical* illuminates how representations of plant life in literary and filmic works are entangled with the very histories that structured the violence to which each text responds. The concept of “entanglement,” which I use in the spirit of writers such as Karen Barad and Timothy Morton, allows for a weaving together environmental history and human history—one that acknowledges that nonhuman life (such as plant life) has played a significant role in the unfolding of Japan’s modern history.<sup>6</sup>

In the chapters that follow, I explore how human engagements with plant life in literary, filmic, and scientific texts are entangled with the histories of Japan’s colonial modernity and the postwar’s negotiation of colonial memory, with the traumatic history of the immediate postwar period, and with the catastrophic triple disaster of March 11, 2011 (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown).<sup>7</sup> The texts I bring together follow the threads that bind together plant life and human history in distinct moments of historical violence and upheaval. As writers and filmmakers make these entanglements visible, they imagine what it might mean to reconfigure human subjectivity to become more botanical, and thus better able to weather the storms of modernity. Plants offered an image of “rootedness” in the face of such storms.

There is a direct connection to the material world and environmental history of modern Japan to be found even in the seemingly metaphorical idea of “rootedness” in plants discussed here. According to Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), author of the foundational work of anthropology and cybernetics *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind* (1972), humans not only understand the living world primarily through metaphor, but in fact a metaphorical logic structures the biological/material world itself. He explains how metaphor belies deep ties to the natural world through what he calls a “syllogism in grass:”

Grass dies.  
Men die.  
Men are grass.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Barad and Morton draw from the scientific theory of “quantum entanglement” to better understand the ways in which humans are co-constituted by the material world. Quantum entanglement refers to the phenomena in which two or more subatomic particles can only be known in relation to the other. I argue that human history and environmental history are entangled in this way—each co-constitutes the other. See Barad and Morton.

<sup>7</sup> I use the term “entangled” in the spirit of Donna Haraway, as she writes of trying to “follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns crucial for staying with the trouble in real and particular places and times” (Haraway, p. 3).

<sup>8</sup> Bateson p. 240. Bateson contrasts this syllogism with the flowing, more conventional “Barbara” syllogism:

Bateson's syllogism in grass distills the new form of subjective experience that I call becoming botanical into a chain of reasoning that is simultaneously metaphorical and yet asking to be taken literally. This is the challenge taken up in the modern Japanese texts that form the core of *Becoming Botanical*.

Chapter one focuses on two writers who witnessed the impending storm of the Pacific War in the first two decades of Japan's Shōwa era (which began in 1926), and who found in plant life and evolutionary theory a means to transcend their contemporary moment and construct a notion of futurity. "Fellow Travelers in Familial Deep Time: Osaki Midori, Imanishi Kinji, and Evolutionary Resemblance," teases out the intertwined histories of Japanese colonial violence, scientific theories of plant life, and the reimagining of subjectivity in the works of poet, short story writer, and early film critic Osaki Midori (1896-1971) and biologist Imanishi Kinji (1902-1992). For these two writers, evolutionary thought provided a framework within which to construct a new mode of subjectivity amidst the escalating violence of colonialism and war in the early Shōwa period. Theirs was a plastic mode of subjectivity that allowed for change, and embraced the in-between of humans and nonhumans (in particular plants) within the unfolding history of evolution.

Following Elizabeth Grosz, I argue that evolutionary thought in Osaki and Imanishi's works constitutes a site of "self-transformation" that presents the possibility of futurity at a time in which the status of the future was very much in question.<sup>9</sup> Evolutionary theory allowed both writers to see plants and humans as sharing common ancestors—and potentially a common form of subjectivity. Their idiosyncratic takes on evolutionary theory pointed the way toward a potential future borne of cooperation and not competition.

In Osaki Midori's best-known work, *Dainana kankai hōkō* (*Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense*, 1931), the botanical figure of moss becomes an integral character in the young female protagonist Ono Machiko's search for a way to overcome the slow violence that of her present situation, staged within the small house she shares with her brothers and male cousin. Osaki's work mentions nothing outright about Japan's colonies nor of Japan's wartime efforts, yet a violent undercurrent runs throughout the narrative. Machiko (who strives to write poetry capturing the illusive realm she calls "the seventh sense") is treated poorly by her male relatives; they ignore her, force her to do things against her will (such as cut her hair), throw her out of a window, and tell her she is mentally unwell.<sup>10</sup> In response to harsh treatment, she finds poetic inspiration in moss. Machiko's brother Nisuke engages in the scientific study of moss. This is a fictional echo of Osaki's real life brother, who engaged in plant research in colonial Korea—a

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"Men die/ Socrates is a man /Socrates will die." For Bateson, how we understand the relationships between differing Bateson recognizes such thinking appears absurd on the surface, but argues that the natural world does not always align with strict logic: "Life, perhaps, doesn't always ask what is logically sound. I'd be very surprised if it did" (Bateson p. 241). So, too, would be the writers and filmmakers I examine in this dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> Grosz p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Here and throughout Osaki's oeuvre, the extra-sensory potential found in the plasticity of becoming botanical is misunderstood and treated as psychological impairment. Machiko's other brother studies the pathology of reverse evolution or "species reversal" (*shugaeri*) found in the embrace of a "moss-like disposition." For him, as a doctor, such botanical subjectivity is deemed an abnormality that must be treated clinically. Throughout her oeuvre, Osaki explored how plants and humans share "nervous disorders" marked by the fracturing of subjectivity. Osaki's work is populated with figures of double consciousness and doppelgängers. These double-selves are not, however, horrific. For Osaki, they were utopian, a way of inhabiting the world that transcended time and space in evolutionary history. They were figures of destructive plasticity, something new created in the wake of crisis. Osaki's doppelgängers were like moss: always spoken of in the plural and seemingly able to spring back to life under the right environmental conditions.

fact that informs the backdrop of violence that runs throughout the novella. By watching her brother work and by reading his scientific writings on the “love lives” of moss, Machiko learns of the expansive potential of vegetal life and discovers a moss-like subjectivity that humans can likewise inhabit.

Osaki’s use of the language of plant “love” points toward a recognition of shared a ancestry between humans and plants made possible through her take on evolutionary thought. Nisuke’s theory of plant “love” in the novella echoes early scientific theories of evolution, in particular the work of Oka Asajirō, author of an influential treatise on evolution published in 1904. Osaki portrays moss as an ancestor of humans in evolution and also as an image of a generative psychological state (a “moss-like disposition”) that humans can attain through a kind of “reverse evolution” or “species reversal” (“*shugaeri*”). It is through this (vegetal) state of species reversal that Machiko gleans the so-called “seventh sense” of the work’s title—a new subjective state in which Machiko finds her senses “working independently of each other.” It is a state I recognize as becoming botanical.

Like Osaki, biologist Imanishi Kinji found in his own iteration of evolution a means to transcend his contemporary moment and to restructure a sense of self threatened by the violence of the present. In his treatise on biological similarity and difference, *Seibutsu no sekai* (*The World of Living Things*, 1940), Imanishi imagines an evolutionary schema based not on competition but rather on cooperation and the resemblances between humans, nonhuman animals, and plants.

Imanishi’s idealistic version of evolution resonates with Osaki’s generative evolutionary imagination, opening doors to the recognition of a shared ancestry between humans and plants in an attempt to overcome the violence of the second decade of the Shōwa era. Imanishi envisioned his book as a document intended to outlive the war, in the likely scenario he himself would not survive: “(A)s I may die in this war, my wish is to leave in my very best capacity some record of one biologist in Japan... To accomplish this, no other way was left for me but to draw a self-portrait.”<sup>11</sup> When read as a “self-portrait” of a man expecting to be drafted to fight in war (and likely not return), *Seibutsu no sekai* becomes a profound meditation on transcending the limitations of one’s place in contemporary society through the act of writing about the human relationship to plant life.

In *Seibutsu no sekai* (a book that resembles the scientific texts featured in Osaki’s fictional works) Imanishi argues for a rhizomatic unfolding of evolutionary history, *avant la lettre*. He resists the traditional, hierarchical schema of the family tree in favor of a messier design in which all living things (human and nonhuman) originate from the same source and come to occupy their own milieu (what Imanishi calls a “society”) without the competitive notion of “survival of the fittest.”

According to Imanishi, all living things share a subjectivity with their milieu: “There exists within living things an environmental quality, and there exists within the environment a quality of living things. They are not separate, they developed from the same unified origin, and they are subject to the same system of organization.”<sup>12</sup> It is from this ecological standpoint (in which subjects are co-constituted by their environment) that Imanishi configures a botanical becoming, positing that humans harbor a “plant-like disposition” (“*shokubutsuteki seishitsu*”)—a proposition similar to Osaki’s figuration of a “moss-like disposition” in *Dainana kankai hōkō*.

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<sup>11</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 76.

For Osaki (who struggled with psychological illnesses that ultimately ended her writing career) and Imanishi (who experienced the impending threat of being drafted in war), the first two decades of the Shōwa period was a time of increasing instability. The botanical “disposition” (what we might call a botanical subjectivity) that both writers discovered in their works offered an antidote to the sense of uprootedness occasioned in the violence of escalating colonialism and war—a sense of uprootedness that literary critic Kobayashi Hideo diagnosed when he wrote in 1933: “I do not easily recognize within myself or in the world around me people whose feet are planted firmly on the ground, or who have the features of social beings...”<sup>13</sup> Through disparate modes of writing (Osaki through fiction and poetry, Imanishi through scientific writing), both writers saw in the botanical realm a means of addressing this uprootedness by exploring the evolutionary linkages between humans and plants, and the plasticity of subjectivity such linkages permitted. To become more plant-like meant to become more rooted.

For one writer grappling to make sense of Japan’s early postwar period, Abe Kōbō (1924-1993), the rootedness found in becoming botanical belied a desire to forget the harsh realities of Japan’s colonial past (in particular the colonial history of the Bonin Islands), and to ignore the complexities of lingering colonial violence. Abe resisted the transformative impulses of becoming botanical in favor of “staying with the trouble,” to borrow Donna Haraway’s phrase. Chapter 2 focuses on Abe’s critique of the generative ideals of becoming botanical, a critique in which the in-between or fluctuation of human and botanical subjectivity becomes the very site of crisis and not a means of overcoming it. “Plant Metamorphosis and Colonial Memory: The Entangled Histories of Abe Kōbō, The Bonin Islands, and Botanical Science” turns away from utopian visions of evolutionary ancestry found in Chapter 1 and explores dystopian fears of bodily disintegration in an allegorical text that suggests that the modern subject is *unable* to transcend her contemporary moment through becoming botanical. In this chapter, I discuss Abe’s *Dendorokakariya* (*Dendrocacalia*, 1949), which is a reflection on the lingering horror of Japan’s colonial memory and its entanglements with botanical life.

The short story imagines the phenomenological horror of becoming botanical as protagonist “Common” repeatedly finds himself turning into a dendrocacalia plant. In order to critique utopian ideals of botanical subjectivity circulating among Abe’s peers in Anarcho-Marxists circles in the postwar, Abe explores in grotesque detail what it would actually *feel* like to become a plant. In *Dendorokakariya*, Abe resists the impulses of his Anarchist contemporaries who saw in the multiple subjectivities of plant life a potential means to transcend the postwar moment. For Abe, the utopian ideal of a botanical subjectivity shared the goals of so-called “Greening Week” projects, organized by the Japanese government and meant to rehabilitate the worn-torn natural environment of Japan. Instead of moving beyond the violence of the postwar, *Dendorokakariya* looks to bring such violence to light and to “stay with the trouble” of colonial memory.

The dendrocacalia plant is an endemic species of the Bonin Islands (also known as Ogasawara), a southern chain of islands with a long colonial history that officially became a part of Japan after the Second World War. As Common struggles to resist a metamorphosis into a dendrocacalia, he is pursued by the staff of a botanical garden (likely based on the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens at the University of Tōkyō) which wants to put the rare species on display in a greenhouse that serves as an allegorical site for the negotiation of colonial history. The greenhouse is government protected and populated with humans-turned-plants adorned with national flags.

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<sup>13</sup> Kobayashi, p. 49. Trans. By Paul Anderer.

*Dendorokakariya* employs the metamorphosis into vegetation as a figure of the return of the repressed (of colonial violence), and thereby constructs a modern Japanese identity that cannot escape its colonial history. In referring to the rarity of finding this species in the Japanese mainland, the story uses the term *naichi* (“interior land,” meaning Japan, as opposed to the *gaichi* or “overseas territories,” used to refer to Japan’s colonial lands). The use of this war-time terminology demands an allegorical reading that acknowledges both the metaphorical role the botanical world played in Japan’s colonial project (the proper word for colony being *shokuminchi*, sharing the same first character as that of the word for plant, *shokubutsu*), as well as its literal role (evidenced in the plant’s scientific name which includes the name Nakai, a prominent botanist who sought to categorize the flora of Japan’s colonial acquisitions). Through his engagement with the language of *gaichi* and *naichi*, Abe looks to destabilize the firm boundaries between colonial space and metropole, subjective interiority and the material exteriority, and human and plant.

Abe exposes a colonial history that was seemingly fading into disavowal by linking it to a new form of plant science that exposed the previous hidden internal life of plants.

*Dendorokakariya* makes explicit mention of Russian botanist Kliment Timiryazev, and his influential text *The Life of the Plant* (which was translated into Japanese in 1934). In Timiryazev’s work we find a new form of science that exposed the interior world of plant life in order to show that humans and plants “do not have qualitative differences”—a claim Abe attributes to Timiryazev in *Dendorokakariya*.<sup>14</sup> Following Timiryazev, Abe suggests that dendrocacalia plants (like humans) have a history of their own—a history entangled in Japan’s colonial project that needed to be reckoned with in the uncertainty of crisis that was unfolding in the early postwar era.

Chapter three begins with a contemporary of Abe Kōbō, Haniya Yutaka (1909-1997), who likewise attempted to reckon with the lingering violence that haunted Japan’s postwar by becoming botanical. Haniya searched for a new form of subjectivity in the metaphysical realm of the forest. I begin this chapter, titled “Plant Media and the Search for Dead Spirits: Haniya Yutaka, Hashimoto Ken, and Itō Seikō,” with an exploration of Haniya’s multi-volume novel *Shirei* (*Death Spirits*, 1946-1949), and move on to the parascientific writings of

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<sup>14</sup> In a 1973 essay titled *Do You Like Brahms? (Burāmusu wa osuki?)*, literary critic Hanada Kiyoteru (1909-1974) argues that a new attitude toward plant life can be found in Abe’s *Dendorokakariya*. Hanada argues the conceit of plant metamorphosis was common enough in the literature of Japanese Romanticism. Yet he claims Abe’s treatment of this becoming botanical was distinct for being a rejection of the tradition of Japanese Romanticism, which Hanada called decadent. Hanada believed Japanese Romanticism had, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, become ossified, and was unable, in Justin Jesty’s words, “to take actuality into account” (Jesty p. 524). According to Yuriko Furuhashi, Hanada was skeptical of the Romantic impulses of rebellion and destruction in his figuration of the avant-garde (Furuhashi p. 30-31). Hanada was not interested in mere destruction, but rather a metamorphosis that extended beyond the individual artist and to the masses. He believed, in Furuhashi’s term, in the “plasticity of the masses.” Romanticism, in its ossified form, was decidedly not malleable. It offered little potential for the politicization of the avant-garde for which Hanada was advocating. In Abe’s tale of plant metamorphosis, Hanada found the kind of plasticity he himself sought in the synthesis of the avant-garde and realism. Hanada traces this new attitude toward plant life back to Osaki Midori’s *Dainana kankai hōkō*, and claims that whenever he thinks about humans turning into plants, he remembers Osaki’s writing: “I have a feeling that within that novella so full of sunlight as to be abnormally bright, the spirit of plants (*shokubutsu no tamashii*) are beautifully captured. If so, those plants—so rare within our immediate surroundings—were plants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (OMZ p. 524-525). For Hanada, Osaki’s work marks a new beginning in the writing of the botanical world: the mosses, fragrant olives, and mandarin oranges that populate her work are “plants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” With its deep entanglements in Japan’s colonial project, Abe’s figuration of the dendrocacalia (in the story of the same name) is likewise a plant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: it bears witness to the role of botanical science in Japan’s wartime efforts.

Hashimoto Ken (who shared Haniya's interest in the metaphysical possibilities of becoming botanical) before concluding with Itō Seikō's 2013 *Sōzō rajio (Imagination Radio)*, a novel that turns to plant life in order to process the traumatic afterlife of the March 11<sup>th</sup> triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

I explore how these works situate a botanical subjectivity on a spectrum between life and death. The three figures I take up in this chapter (novelist and critic Haniya, parascientist Hashimoto, and rapper, essayist, and novelist Itō) found in the plasticity of plants (and in trees in particular) a way to bring together what is known in Japanese as *kono yo* or the material world of the living and *ano yo*, or the immaterial world of the dead. Just as Osaki and Imanishi molded their own cosmologies out of the raw materials of evolutionary thought, so the writers I explore here borrow from scientific and religious thinking to create their own vernacular cosmologies in which the "spirits" of humans and plants co-mingle. They do so through figurations of what I call "plant media." Drawing from environmental media theorist John Durham Peters, I read the plants of these texts as "vehicle(s) in the middle of things."<sup>15</sup> In each case I take up, plants are media that stand in the middle of humans and dead spirits and facilitate botanical becomings.

Haniya's *Shirei* is a long meditation on the ontological and epistemological uncertainty of the lingering violence that served as a backdrop to the postwar Japanese moment. Although its plot is loose, *Shirei* is replete with ideas. Its central concern is the status of subjectivity in the immediate postwar. It asks how a modern Japanese subjectivity might continue after loss, and finds the generative potential of destructive plasticity amidst the trauma of the postwar. The narrative unfolds largely through extended philosophical conversations, along with limited narration, in order to tease out the histories of a complicated web of characters who attempt to come to terms with the existential crisis of reimagining themselves after Japan's defeat in war: protagonist Miwa Yoshi and his former-activist brother; Miwa's fiancé and her mother; the vociferous and argumentative Kubi Takeo; the aphasia-ridden Yaba Tetsugo; a pair of hospitalized sisters named "God" and "Nighty-Night."

The figuration of the forest plays a vital role in the construction of a subject position or sense of identity that persists through crisis and bridges the rupture of Japan's defeat in *Shirei*. Miwa Yoshi displays a penchant for walking among trees in order to process grief and a near-debilitating sense of existential dread. His walks in the forest highlight the vibrancy of nature as the atmosphere that clings to the trees haunts Miwa, resulting in the "deserting of subjectivity" that Malabou posits in the sculpting of destructive plasticity. Within the forest, Miwa no longer recognizes himself as himself—he becomes botanical as a part of the forest and can no longer utter the phrase "I am me."

Drawing from the works of Jane Bennett and Kathleen Stewart, I read the act of Miwa becoming one with the forest as an atmospheric assemblage—a form of subjectivity that extends beyond the confines of the human body and moves into the trees around it. Within this human-forest assemblage, the boundaries between the trees and Miwa himself blur. Haniya gives a name to this mysterious phenomenon: "*kyotai*" or "false-body." The "false-body" of "*kyotai*" emerges through destructive plasticity, as Miwa Yoshi becomes something radically different in the forest.

Central to my reading of *Shirei* and its affinity for the world of plants is Miwa's repeated notice of *kehai*: a sense of "presence" or "trace" that Miwa registers as someone, or something, standing behind him, most often in the forest. *Kehai* is a vital force connected to trees; it is a haunting, wordless presence that moves through the forest, using trees as a medium or conduit.

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<sup>15</sup> Peters p. 46.

Through the ghostly presence of *kehai*, the forest makes the immaterial loss acutely felt in the postwar moment material and rooted in place—it ties the dead spirits of the novel’s title to the trees of the forest. As Miwa Yoshi becomes botanical as a part of the forest assemblage (as he becomes “*kyotai*”), his expanded subjectivity allows him to make contact with these dead spirits through the botanical presence of *kehai*.

Throughout the novel, Miwa Yoshi yearns for a means to adapt to the postwar moment, and yet he cannot find the language to enact such change. He and many of the characters in *Shirei* struggle to speak; Miwa is unable to complete the phrase “I am me,” while other characters suffer from aphasia. The figuration of *kehai* (and the forest through which it circulates) provides Miwa Yoshi with a non-verbal means to work through the trauma of the postwar moment. Miwa seeks transcendence from the historically volatile moment in the silence of the forest, surrounded by the haunting rumble of *kehai*.

While Haniya sought to connect to the spirits of the past through the non-verbal conduit of trees, electrical engineer and pseudoscientist Hashimoto Ken (1924-2007) believed he could communicate *directly* with the spirits of vegetal life, as well as use plants as a conduit for a radio that would be able to speak with the dead, as outlined in his *Yojigensekai no shinpi* (*Mysteries of the Fourth Dimensional World*, 1966). Inspired by the work on plant intelligence conducted by Cleve Backster (founder of the CIA’s polygraph program), Hashimoto conducted numerous experiments with cacti, attaching them to polygraph machines and, allegedly, learning how to both speak and sing with them. Hashimoto’s work was famously included in the best-selling (and highly controversial) 1973 parascientific book *The Secret Life of Plants*—a book that likely influenced Haniya’s thinking on the possibilities of communicating with plant life.

Like the other authors examined in *Becoming Botanical*, Hashimoto’s engagement with the world of plants began within the unfolding of a violent history. He started his tenure as a scientist in an effort to invent new weaponry to assist Imperial Japan’s wartime effort. Disillusioned in the wake of Japan’s defeat in war, Hashimoto eventually turned to the world of parascience, through which he came to embrace the potential for expanded human consciousness through a reconfiguration of subjectivity. Hashimoto wrote many popular science texts that purported to teach humans the arts of telepathy and conversing with plants, and to become botanical in the process.

Like Miwa Yoshi’s botanical subjectivity in *Shirei* (in which tree media put him in contact with dead spirits), the botanical subjectivity of which Hashimoto writes allows one to communicate with the dead. Hashimoto believed that plants could serve as the final component of a spirit radio that could be used to speak with dead spirits.<sup>16</sup> Around fifty years after Hashimoto first proposed this spirit radio, rapper and botanical essayist Itō Seikō wrote about a spirit radio of his own, in a narrative meant to work through the trauma of March 11, 2011. In Itō’s *Sōzō rajio*, survivors of the March 11<sup>th</sup> disaster can make contact with the victims of March 11<sup>th</sup> through the medium of a spirit radio hosted by a deceased DJ named Ark from the top of a giant cedar tree.

The novel engages with spiritual beliefs in which dead spirits “merge” with trees, rending the botanical realm a space between two dimensions: that of the living and of the dead. It

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<sup>16</sup> Curiously, trees were excluded in Hashimoto’s theory of plant media; although he writes at length of the spiritual aura surrounding sacred trees or *shinboku* (an aura that closely resembles Haniya’s *kehai*), he nevertheless claims that trees do not make for the ideal medium—with their long life spans and the complex cosmologies attached to them, trees proved rather too plastic for the parascientific experimentation of Hashimoto.

suggests that in order to overcome the trauma of March 11<sup>th</sup>, Japanese subjects must embrace destructive plasticity occasioned in the crisis of natural disaster in order to forge a new subjectivity that listens to the voices of the dead—a subjectivity made possible by tree media through the act of becoming botanical.

Chapter four remains in the spiritually inflected realm of the forest, and examines how a subjectivity shared between humans and plants within the context of an assemblage takes form in cinema. In “Disturbance Ecology: Visions of Fire and Regeneration in the Eco-Films of Yanagimachi Mitsuo and Kawase Naomi,” I discuss two films that stage botanical becomings through the logic of disturbance ecology, in which disturbances such as fire lead to new growth and a renewed ecosystem; as the ecosystem is destroyed and reconfigured, so is subjectivity as it becomes botanical.

These films—Yanagimachi Mitsuo’s *Himatsuri* (*Fire Festival*, 1985) and Kawase Naomi’s *Vision* (2018)—examine the entanglements of human subjectivity and the botanical world through their portrayal of the foresters that live and work in rural Japan, traditionally known as *somabito*. Both films stage the decline of Japanese rural forestry communities, and feature *somabito* characters yearning for regeneration that is equally ecological, economic, and spiritual (a tripartite equation I align with Guattari’s notion of “three ecologies”), and attempt to enact regeneration through disturbance.

In both films, regeneration of the forest ecosystem comes through the ritual destruction of fire. Yanagimachi (1945- ) and Kawase (1969- ) envision the disturbance of forest fire as part of a recurring cycle that restores ecological balance, and opens up the realm of possibility in which a future can emerge. This is the functioning of disturbance ecology, in which that the act of destruction such as fire is essential to ecological health of the forest, and leads, in the words of Anna Tsing, to “resurgence.” The rich spiritual histories of both films’ settings inform the film’s staging of becoming botanical through disturbance ecology—the fires that serve as disturbances in the forest ecosystems of both films are themselves ritual. Yet *Himatsuri* and *Vision* differ in how they stage this spiritual/ecological renewal. *Himatsuri* relies on the egoist figure of its protagonist, while *Vision* looks to the elimination of the human as a form of evolutionary progress.

Set in the scenic village of Nigishima (in the spiritually significant region of Kumano on the Kii Peninsula), *Himatsuri* tells a tragic tale through the figure of Tatsuo, its a hyper-masculine forester protagonist. The film’s screenplay, written by influential author and critic Nakagami Kenji (1946-1992), narrates the collapse of a local economy based on forestry in the wake of an increasingly globalized circulation of natural resources during Japan’s postwar economic recovery. As *Himatsuri*’s cinematography moves between the trees of the forest and the human foresters, it constructs a botanical subjectivity that draws the human characters within a larger assemblage of the forest. Through a climactic murder-suicide at the film’s end (which Nakagami and Yanagimachi align with the local *Otōmatsuri* fire festival), *Himatsuri* suggests that the only way for the fading rural village that is Tatsuo’s home to survive into the future is through the death, and the botanical subjectivity he embodies. Tatsuo’s death becomes a ritual, a fiery disturbance meant to clear space for the future.

Kawase Naomi’s 2018 film *Vision* is an abstract eco-fable that looks toward the future by returning to a cyclical unfolding of time bound up in disturbance ecology. The film extends this notion of cyclicity to human subjectivity. Set in her native Nara prefecture (in the mountains of Yoshino, which, like Kumano, has a strong spiritual aura), *Vision* is bookended by a painting of the fire in the beginning of the film and an actual fire in its conclusion. The film attempts to



construct a narrative that follows the natural cycles of the forest—an unending process of birth, disturbance, and regeneration. It finds plasticity in this cycle.

Through an embrace of this process, *Vision* calls for the death of the individuated, human ego, suggesting that all of humanity can inhabit the botanical subjectivity of the *somabito* through an evolutionary step. It is uncertain that renewal by fire will usher in this evolutionary change. Nevertheless, the film ends as the human characters look out over a charred forest and remark on how “lively”—how botanical—the forest has become through disturbance.

Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to trace such moments of uncertainty in modern Japanese literature and film, and map the ways in which such moments lead to imagining becoming botanical. The works I analyze all circle around the question of how plant life comes to be entangled with human subjectivity, and how literary and other media practices in Japan have sought, in part, to make the ambiguous “in-between” space (shared between humans and plants) of botanical subjectivity legible. This constellation of texts offers something of an answer to the question posed by plant researcher Stefano Marcuso: “Can we now imagine something completely different, something inspired instead by plants?”<sup>17</sup> *Becoming Botanical* is the story of how modern Japanese writers and filmmakers have imagined something completely different, something inspired by plants.

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Pollan.

## Chapter One.

### Fellow Travelers in Familial Deep Time: Osaki Midori, Imanishi Kinji, and Evolutionary Resemblance

“There is an ancient conversation going on between mosses and rocks, poetry to be sure.”  
-Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Gathering Moss*

“I am destitute moss that has begun to wither.”  
-Osaki Midori, *Mokusei*

### Introduction

In June of 1930, Osaki Midori (1896-1971) went to a triple feature at the Musashinokan movie theater in Tōkyō’s Shinjuku district.<sup>1</sup> On the bill was Max Fleischer’s *Evolution* (1925), a short-form documentary film that recounts the history of the earth from its earliest days to the evolutionary descent of human beings. Osaki would write about her experience watching *Evolution* (which bore the Japanese title *Sekai no ichi’okunen*, or *A Hundred Million Years of Earth*) in the fifth installment of *Eiga mansō* (*Jottings on Film*), her column on cinema published in *Nyonin geijutsu* (*Women’s Arts*) in August of the same year. Throughout the installments of *Eiga mansō*, Osaki demonstrates a witty, playful attitude toward early cinema, offering critiques of actors and directors alike, and complaining often of the noisiness of the transition from silent to sound film. Her discussion of *Evolution* is likewise cleverly critical (she suggests the film has mistakenly been “brought in from an exhibit of Impressionist art”); however, it is apparent the film made a strong impact on Osaki.

For while she claims *Evolution* is devoid of “intellectual curiosity” (*chiteki kyōmi nuki*), it nonetheless inspired deep contemplation in Osaki. She writes,

Within the space of about twenty minutes, my mind (*kokoro*) leaves the earth’s surface, and is released into a time before the gods Izanagi and Izanami.<sup>2</sup> An empty-headed (*ma no nuketa*), unconcerned world. Within the space of about twenty minutes, I ponder a toy box-like philosophy. “I” become gas; “I” become a star; “I” become smoke; “I” become a slice of glacier; “I” become moss; “I” become a chameleon; “I” become a native. How skillful that a world without even the slightest whiff of culture can arouse a naïve empathy in viewers. There are not many films that fully absorb a viewer’s mind, even for a second, into “moss,” into “anger,” into “laughter.”<sup>3</sup>

*Evolution* draws Osaki in, and provides an out-of-body experience that puts her in touch with the deepest of time (before the mythological creation of Japan), and allows her to visit various stops along the evolutionary path toward humankind. As Osaki imagines occupying other modes of

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<sup>1</sup> I follow the custom of referring to Osaki by this name, rather than “Ozaki,” as this is the pronunciation used in her native Tottori Prefecture. See Hideyama p. 62 - 63 for an outline of screening dates at Musashinokan that correlate with the films discussed in Osaki’s *Eiga mansō*.

<sup>2</sup> The gods traditionally ascribed to have created the islands of Japan.

<sup>3</sup> *Osaki Midori Zenshu* (OMZ) p. 345-346. Translation mine throughout.

being throughout time, she loses a concrete sense of self. Her mind is set adrift, and she repeatedly brackets the self-referential pronoun “I.” Her subjectivity becomes fluid, moving both through time and between states of matter.

Of all of the sites of alterity that she occupies while watching *Evolution*, Osaki only mentions one example twice: moss. Osaki’s oeuvre is deeply entangled with moss. It appears throughout her work, and has become something of a symbol for the writer herself. I argue that in her work’s strong affinity for botanical life is a desire to better understand the “I” within brackets. This is true of her best-known work, *Dainana kankai hōkō* (*Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense*, published one year after the fifth installation of *Eigō manso*, in 1931), as well as of the constellation of stories I call the “Machiko Cycle,” which partially continues the story of *Dainana kankai hōkō*.<sup>4</sup> Osaki turned to moss frequently to make sense of a fractured subjectivity occasioned in the wake of colonial modernity. As a primitive plant bearing no roots, moss was the perfect model for a new (yet extremely old) mode of being.<sup>5</sup>

Osaki did not look to stabilize the “I” within brackets. Rather, she sought an alternative framework to better make sense of a non-unified subjectivity than was available in contemporaneous theories of psychology, of which Osaki was intimately familiar through her own diagnosis of *shinkeibyō* (nervous disorder).<sup>6</sup> The fracturing of subjectivity was not a mere literary conceit for Osaki. Osaki struggled with psychological issues that became the subject of much of her work, and ultimately ended her writing career. In 1932, only one year after the publication of *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Osaki left Tōkyō and returned to her native Tottori after suffering from a nervous break down, and by 1935 she had ceased writing.<sup>7</sup>

Osaki wrote in a period of increasing political unrest. *Dainana kankai hōkō*, for example, was published the same year as the Mukaden Incident, which served as pretext for Japan’s invasion and colonization of Manchuria, and the death of Hamaguchi Osachi, the liberal prime minister who had been shot by an ultranationalist. On the surface, her work does not exhibit traces of these shocking events. In their introduction to *The Time of Catastrophe*, Christopher Dole et al. question what it means to rethink catastrophe beyond immediate shock and instead as a part of the fabric of the everyday. The slow and mundane unfolding of *Dainana kankai hōkō* does not present the catastrophes of the early Shōwa period as spectacles. Rather, it presents the violence of this period as “both a backdrop to and condition for the intimate terrain of...”

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<sup>4</sup> The Machiko Cycle is comprised of the following stories, all of which feature an intricate web of characters centered around Ono Machiko, and seem to inhabit the same narrative universe: *Dainana kankai hōkō*; *Hokō* (*A Walk*, 1931); *Kōrogijō* (*Cricket Girl*, 1932); and *Chikashitsu anton no hitoya* (*A Night in Anton’s Basement*, 1932). Another short story, *Shijin no kutsu* (*Shoes of a Poet*, 1928) reads like a prequel of sorts to this cycle, as it mentions moss repeatedly and features a character with a name quite similar to Sangorō (Machiko’s cousin in *Dainana kankai hōkō*).

<sup>5</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in her poetic account of mosses that “mosses are the most primitive of plants and lack any such vascular tissue (to hold them upright),” yet she argues it is precisely this “primitive” state that has ensured their flourishing: “Mosses are successful by any biological measure—they inhabit nearly every ecosystem on earth and number as many as 22,000 species,” p. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Hill writes of the relationship between nervous disorders and literature in the Meiji Period. He concludes, “(The) protean illness of neurasthenia, a confluence of psychological, somatic, and social forces, became the chronically unhappy consciousness that is such a durable theme of twentieth-century Japanese literature. And yet within this aesthetic the decaying body of the neurasthenic remains, an unbanishable reminder of such a turn from the world, at once a signifier of mourning for futures relinquished and of the possibility that they might be regained.” See Hill p. 256.

<sup>7</sup> See Kawaski p.1.

everyday lives.”<sup>8</sup> As Dole et al. explain, this condition has profound implications for a sense of futurity: “Catastrophes also seem to command a monopoly over every imaginable future, such that the idea of a future catastrophe has become a real force in the ordering of lives and worlds in the present.”<sup>9</sup>

This chapter looks at two writers (Osaki and biologist Imanishi Kinji) whose sense of the present was informed by catastrophe, but nevertheless looked to construct a sense of futurity through a new subjectivity. In the case of Osaki, *Dainana kankai hōkō*’s slow violence becomes a site for transformation, as it creates the capacity for plasticity—an ability to reconfigure and change in response to catastrophe.<sup>10</sup> Following David W. Bates’ discussion of cybernetics and plasticity, I read the protagonist of *Dainana kankai hōkō* as an “open, living system” that slowly but persistently adapts to the slow fabric of catastrophe unfolding around her.<sup>11</sup> To borrow the language of Catherine Malabou, Osaki constructs human subjectivity within the context of a “living being as an open structure in which the plural regimes of transmission of memory and inheritance intersect.”<sup>12</sup>

In grasping for an alternative ontological framework through which to make sense of this subjectivity, Osaki searched for a new subject position that was not relegated to psychosis. She found in the botanical realm new forms of “becoming.” I invoke the term “becoming” as it is outlined in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they write of a subjectivity created wholly anew through “alliance” with different forms of life. Karen L. F. Houle has referred to “becomings” as “the name for (a) provisional co-creative zone in which the ‘parties’ and their ‘proper functions’ are themselves effaced and augmented.”<sup>13</sup> A unified subjectivity is lost in a “becoming,” but in its place is an “augmented,” multiple subjectivity of alliance. Within a becoming, things come together, lose themselves as themselves in the process, and form something new that is more than the sum of its parts.

It is evolutionary theory that brings Osaki to this alliance with the botanical world. Although Deleuze and Guattari are skeptical of evolution as a model for new becomings, I argue that this is precisely what Osaki uses in *Dainana kankai hōkō*: an evolutionary paradigm that leads to a *symbiosis* between beings of vastly different dimensions, between, for example, humans and mosses.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, Osaki composed an environmental literature that paid close attention to plant life and its influence on human subjectivity. Yet Osaki did not write of an idyllic natural world. She explored the entanglements of humans and plants from within the urban setting of Tōkyō. In cramped rooms and hospital wards, her fractured characters dream of forging new connections to the natural world. They find this connection through the theory of evolution.

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<sup>8</sup> Dole p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Here I borrow Rob Nixon’s term “slow violence,” which he uses to illuminate the non-spectacular structural and ecological violence inflicted on the poor. Although the context in which I deploy this term differs, I believe it captures the equally non-spectacular background violence that informs Osaki’s work.

<sup>11</sup> Bates p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> “One Life Only,” p. 433.

<sup>13</sup> Houle p. 96.

<sup>14</sup> Deleuze and Guattari write of evolution: “Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation” (*A Thousand Plateaus* p. 287).

This chapter maps how theories of evolution offered a writer and a scientist a capacious frame for subjectivity and thus a new form of becoming amidst the unrest of Japan's early Shōwa period. For Osaki and biologist Imanishi Kinji (1902-1992)—whose *Seibutsu no sekai* (*The World of Living Things*) likewise theorizes an alliance between humans and plant life—evolutionary thinking provided a means to transcend the contemporary moment. Unlike Osaki, Imanishi did not write poetry. His *Seibutsu no sekai*, which he wrote hastily, in fear of being drafted to fight in the second Sino-Japanese War, is a rambling and uneven piece of scientific writing that does not recognize itself as such. In the work's opening pages, Imanishi calls it his “self-portrait.” In its experimental take on the connection between humans and the natural world, however, it too, like Osaki's work, strives toward new becomings. Imanishi's treatise reads like one of the fictional scientific texts featured in Osaki's stories. Through an engagement with ecology and by positing distinct environmental milieus for different species, Imanishi grants plants their own form of subjectivity. For both Imanishi and Osaki, humans retain traces of this plant-like subjectivity.

Evolutionary thinking allowed both writers to see plants and humans as sharing common ancestors, and to minimize the ontological distance between human and botanical modes of being. Osaki and Imanishi embraced the inclusiveness of evolutionary theory and rejected the exclusionary impulses of Social Darwinism. During an age in which concepts of racial difference contributed to the rhetoric surrounding Japan's colonial expansion, both writers envisioned a utopian evolutionary history marked by the similarities between living things, and not merely their differences. Following Elizabeth Grosz, I read evolutionary thought in Osaki and Imanishi's work as a site of “self-transformation” that presents a notion of futurity.<sup>15</sup>

Osaki and Imanishi's affinity for the botanical world, as expressed through evolutionary thought, made a single family of humans and plants alike. This family did not, for them, unfold in the form of an evolutionary family tree. Rather it constituted what Deleuze and Guattari call a “multiplicity.” They both developed their own vernacular takes on evolutionary theory that rejected a hierarchical structure that placed humans at the pinnacle. Weary of a world at war, Osaki and Imanishi reimagined a world in which firm divisions between humans and plants were replaced by familial bonds.

## Uprooting and Blocks of Becoming

Osaki Midori's career as a writer was brief.<sup>16</sup> Born in Tottori prefecture in 1896, she spent thirteen years in Tōkyō as a writer, from 1919 to 1932. This particularly turbulent period saw both the massive destruction of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 and the transition from the relatively democratic Taishō era to the increasingly militaristic Shōwa era in 1926, as well as an increase in Japan's colonial activities in Taiwan (which began the year before Osaki's birth in 1895) and the Korean peninsula (which began in 1910). An ideology of racial difference informed by theories of Social Darwinism helped justify Japan's colonial project, as well as the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Grosz p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Her collected works constitute a single volume.

<sup>17</sup> Weiner p. 102-110.

Osaki's work captures the upheaval of this period. It is formally experimental and marked by anxiety over the sense of uprootedness that Kobayashi Hideo diagnosed in 1933.<sup>18</sup> According to Kobayashi:

On reflection, I know that my life has been lacking in concrete substance. I do not easily recognize within myself or in the world around me people whose feet are planted firmly on the ground, or who have the features of social beings... The spirit in exhaustion takes flight from society and is moved by the curiously abstract longing to come together with Nature. It may well be that a world of actual substance is to be found in the beauty of Nature isolated from society, yet there is no reason to believe any real writing will come of it.<sup>19</sup>

Kobayashi's account of his historical moment captures much of the sentiment wrapped up in Osaki's writing. Yet her exhausted spirit did not take flight to "the beauty of Nature isolated from society," as Kobayashi imagined. Her stories and poetry do not linger over lush scenery or show any trace of influence from schools of Naturalism or Romanticism. Osaki was not interested in comingling, but rather in co-constitution, a new mode of becoming afforded by her embrace of science and technology.

As her out-of-body experience watching *Evolution* demonstrates, Osaki's sense of uprootedness was tied to the new forms of subjectivity associated with the technologies of the modern period that influenced literary modernism. The advent of cinema both occasioned new perceptual experiences that writers attempted to capture in prose and poetry, and participated in the creation of a mass culture.<sup>20</sup> Japanese literary modernism was born from within the rupture of this transition.<sup>21</sup> It reflects an uprooting in which, to borrow Marx's phrase, "all that is solid melts into air," and an uprooting that, to borrow Kobayashi's phrase, "lacks concrete substance."<sup>22</sup>

The texts Osaki produced in her sixteen-year period of activity are full of anxiety over the status of subjectivity and its implications for psychological health (what Kobayashi called an "exhausted spirit"). Osaki's (mostly female) characters seem frequently at risk of losing

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<sup>18</sup> Christy Wampole explores the metaphor of "rootedness" in the Western tradition, and presents ten generalizations about the root metaphor in her introduction. The first speaks particularly well to Japanese modernity: "Interest in one's roots increases in proportion to the perceived level of danger that threatens those roots. People think of themselves most as rooted when something (the foreigner, new values and technologies, forced expulsion) jeopardizes this perceived embeddedness in culture or place." See Wampole p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Kobayashi, p. 49-50. Trans. By Paul Anderer.

<sup>20</sup> Seiji Lippit (who has translated Osaki's *Kōrogijō* into English) characterizes modernity as follows: "As a critical category, modernism has been used to designate a broad range of literary and artistic practices—primarily of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe—that have most readily been identified on the level of formal rupture... More broadly, modernism has also been situated in the experience of life in industrialized, urban environments in this period and has included the emergence of new forms of cultural production and dissemination, the intervention of technology into the experience of everyday life, and the mass commodification of culture" p. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> In designating modernity a site of rupture, I follow both Lippit and Jonathon Crary. While Crary reminds us that "how one periodizes and where one locates ruptures or denies them are all political choices that determine the construction of the present... Such choices affect whether the shape of the present seems 'natural' or whether its historically fabricated and densely sedimented makeup is made evident," he nevertheless invokes the language of "uprooting in his discussion of modernity: "Modernization is the process by which capitalism uproots and makes mobile that which is grounded, clears away or obliterates that which impedes circulation, and makes exchangeable what is singular" (Crary p. 7 -10).

<sup>22</sup> In *Eiga mansō*, it is cinema that uproots Osaki's sense of "I," fractures it, and turns it gaseous.

themselves, as if a loud noise or pseudo-intellectual conversation could set them adrift. In these works, in which Osaki critiques psychological explanations for mental health, predominantly male psychologists pathologize and at times hospitalize their (predominantly female) patients. Osaki's work looks instead to greet the multiplicity of modern subjectivity as generative rather than debilitating.

It is in response to the anxiety over subjectivity that Osaki attempted to become botanical. The world of vegetation offered an alternative framework to grapple with the rapid changes of urban life within colonial modernity. Luce Irigaray has written of the potential of the botanical realm to help humans make sense of this modern anxiety:

(Our) tradition has rendered our subjectivity both weak and rigid because it is frightened of any change. As it has received its contours and forms from an outside world more than from its own life, it does not know how to deal with its presumed self. In the woods, in the garden, I was contemplating the forms that a tree adopted, how it was able to change while remaining itself... Why do we not keep alive and develop our own energy that we may let our natural belonging flower?<sup>23</sup>

Irigaray could well be speaking to Osaki's experience in the early Shōwa period. Osaki looked to plant life as an antidote for a weak subjectivity, and tried to learn how to change while remaining herself. For Osaki, humans and plants became aligned within modern subjectivity. In her writing, humans and plants exist on a spectrum where the boundaries between them blur as they form a symbiotic subjectivity.<sup>24</sup>

In her 1932 short story *Kōrogijō* (*Cricket Girl*), Osaki writes of a character exhibiting signs of this symbiotic subjectivity, which a student of psychology diagnoses as a "nervous disorder" (*shinkeibyō*) for both human and plant:

When he has to pass under the late spring paulownia blossoms, he constantly breathes out from his nostrils, probably to avoid letting the fragrance of a paulownia suffering from a nervous disorder enter inside his body with a hasty breath in through the nose. After all, those with nervous disorders disavow others with nervous disorders. This is done to preemptively ward off sad feelings toward fellow travelers. Be as it may that there exists between he and the paulownia blossom the difference between humans and plants, on the grounds of their being similarly afflicted by nervous disorders, they are fellow travelers.<sup>25</sup>

I contend that the interaction between the paulownia blossom and the human in *Kōrogijō* is what Deleuze and Guattari call a "block of becoming." In their well-known example of such a block of becoming, they turn to the botanical realm: "(A) becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the inbetween... the block of becoming that unites the wasp and the orchid produces a shared deterritorialization."<sup>26</sup> The wasp ceases to be "a wasp" when it aligns

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<sup>23</sup> Irigaray p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> In an essay recounting her close friendship with Osaki, prominent novelist Hayashi Fumiko describes how the relatively verdant Tōkyō neighborhood of Kami-Ochiai (where both Osaki and Hayashi had lived) influenced Osaki's work: "Osaki had lived in Ochiai before I had, and she wrote a truly magnificent novel called *Dainana kankai hōkō* while being caressed (*aibu*) by the scenery of trees: paulownias, chestnuts, peach trees, and the like" (Hayashi p. 156, translation mine).

<sup>25</sup> OMZ p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 342.

with the flower (which in turn ceases to be “a flower” in the conventional, isolated meaning of the term). In their place is a new becoming, a multiplicity of wasp-flower that is an “inbetween.” Deleuze and Guattari stress that “a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself.”<sup>27</sup> The block of becoming in *Kōrogijō* is not simply a relationship between the human and paulownia blossoms, but rather the wholly new event created between the human and the blossoms. To use Osaki’s words, they are “fellow travelers.” To borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s term, they are “deterritorialized,” implying being in motion, being uprooted, and heading somewhere new.

In *Kōrogijō*, humans and paulownia blossoms form a block a becoming. They become an inbetween that is rendered, through the language of psychosis, a kind of antagonism between human and botanical modes of being:

We can think of several explanations for why the Cricket Girl defended herself against the smell of the paulownia blossoming as she walked through the open field. As far as we know, since long ago, writers of emotional poetry would occasionally take up paulownia blossoms, so rejecting their fragrance was behavior that to a large extent bordered on punishment. Nonetheless, that smell of paulownia blossoms that were soon to fall, exhausted, which now enveloped the Cricket Girl—that they were suffering from nervous disorder was the unmistakable truth. And as for the Cricket Girl, she too was suffering from a somewhat heavy bout of nervous disorder, due to an overconsumption of evil medicine.<sup>28</sup>

Although the protagonist “Cricket Girl” tries to maintain some distinction between herself and the fragrance of the paulownia trees, she is unable to do so. She is in “open-system,” susceptible to change from a perceived outside.

In *Kōrogijō*, *shinkeibyō* becomes a point of contact between humans and plants. Written the year that Osaki left Tōkyō due to a nervous breakdown of her own, *Kōrogijō* presents a rather grim destination for humans and plants as fellow travelers. In her earlier works, and in particular in *Dainana kankai hōkō*, unusual psychological states become a site of possibility. Just as Deleuze and Guattari embraced that which was deemed aberrant in psychoanalysis (what they called “schizoanalysis”), so too did Osaki embrace the often poetic *potential* in alternative psychological states. The aberrance of the “moss-like psychology” written into *Dainana kankai hōkō*, which I discuss below, envisions a block of becoming that holds promise for a new subjectivity, even as it is relegated to the category of psychosis.

## Dark Humor and the Multiplicity of William Sharp

The above passages from *Kōrogijō* (and much else of Osaki’s work) may appear humorous on the surface. Given her penchant for associating paulownia blossoms with nervous disorders and mosses with love lives (which I will address in the next section), critics have read Osaki’s work within the context of “*ero-guro-nansensu*” (*erotic-grotesque-nonsensical*). Critics have used this cultural aesthetic term both contemporaneously in the early 1930s and retrospectively to characterize Japanese modernism as a decadent movement more concerned

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<sup>27</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 278.

<sup>28</sup> OMZ p. 114.



with sensual pleasure than with the increasingly unstable politics of the early Shōwa era.<sup>29</sup> This line of interpretation discounts Osaki's engagement with botanical life as either parody or nonsense. One can partly trace this tendency to read Osaki's work as humorous back to the republication of *Dainana kankai hōkō* in 1969, when it was collected in the sixth volume of *Zenshū – Gendai bungaku no hakken (Collected Works – Discovery of Modern Literature)*, titled *Kuroi yūmoa (Dark Humor)*. This volume—edited by Ōka Shōhei and including works by Oda Sakunosuke, Sakaguchi Angō, Abe Kōbō, and Hanada Kiyoteru—reintroduced Osaki's work to a new generation. But once critics dubbed her writing “dark humor,” the seemingly anthropomorphic quality of Osaki's sexual moss was explained away as “grotesque.”<sup>30</sup> Within the *ero-guro-nansensu* paradigm of Japanese Modernism, “guro” or “grotesque,” could refer to acts of sexual perversion.<sup>31</sup> On the surface, *Dainana kankai hōkō*'s sexually active mosses fit this designation.

Yet just below the surface, Osaki's figurations of plant life engage with serious historical realities. The oscillation between anthropomorphism and phytopomorphism present throughout her work (but expressed most clearly in *Dainana kanaki hōkō*) is a genuine attempt to forge a new mode of subjectivity within the uncertain politics of the early Shōwa era, and not a retreat from such politics.<sup>32</sup> She questioned what it meant to be human, and looked for answers within the botanical world. In a poem dating from 1933 (one of the few works she created after leaving Tōkyō), Osaki writes:

A human  
is truly a single, thinking reed  
a single  
slim  
reed that thinks of things  
a single plant, within a thin reed  
a spirit as wide as the cosmos.<sup>33</sup>

This poem, part of a longer series of poems titled *Kamigami ni sasaguru shi (Poems Dedicated to the Gods)*, is too sincere to fit within the culture of *ero-guro-nansensu*; it is a near-devotional tribute to Scottish poet William Sharp (1855-1905), who appears several times throughout Osaki's work, including in *Kōrogiyō*.<sup>34</sup> Sharp secretly wrote under the female pseudonym Fiona Macleod—a fact that attracted Osaki to his work. In the same poem, Osaki writes,

Fiona  
inside your chest  
deep within the gate to your soul  
she dwells, all alone.  
You are one side of a body.

<sup>29</sup> See Silverberg, p. xv. See also Clerici.

<sup>30</sup> See Livia Monnet's reading of *Dainana kankai hōkō* in “Montage, cinematic subjectivity and feminism in Ozaki Midori's *Drifting in the World of the Seventh Sense*.”

<sup>31</sup> Silverberg p. 116.

<sup>32</sup> I use the term “phytopomorphism” to mean the attribution of plant-like qualities to humans. The stem “phyto-” derives from the ancient Greek *phutón*, meaning plant.

<sup>33</sup> OMZ p. 372.

<sup>34</sup> Sharp is mentioned throughout *Kōrogiyō*.

You are a doppelgänger.  
Oh,  
You,  
what a split poet.<sup>35</sup>

For Osaki, William Sharp/Fiona Macleod became a figure of fractured subjectivity, of a multiplicity of selves inhabiting the same body. And Sharp/Macleod also become a figure of the botanical. In the same poem, Osaki writes of Sharp: “fragrant olive smells of you” (“*mokusei wa kimi no nioi*”) only to reverse the attribution a few lines later as “you smell of fragrant olive” (“*kimi wa mokusei no nioi*”).<sup>36</sup> Just as Sharp is both himself and Fiona Macleod, so too is he both human and botanical. Sharp is the smell of *mokusei* and *mokusei* is the smell of Sharp. The human and plant form a symbiosis. They become an affiliation between incommensurate species. In the same poem, Osaki refers to him as “*Misuta mokusei*” (“Mister Fragrant Olive”). The mystery of two writers inhabiting one body finds a kind of resolution in Osaki’s move from human to plant and back again. The human is but a reed, but in its singularity-as-a-multiplicity it is unfathomably expansive. It forms a block of becoming, something new and augmented, occasioned in the enveloping fragrance of *mokusei*.

Osaki casts the botanical world as both a reduction and an expansion of the human. The material body is “slim” and “singular,” but the immaterial spirit or subjectivity is “as wide as the cosmos.”<sup>37</sup> This jump from the vegetal to the cosmic reverses the trajectory in Osaki’s review of Max Fleischer’s *Evolution* in her column on cinema *Eiga mansō*. While watching the story of evolution unfold in the film, Osaki moved forward in evolutionary time, and thus traveled from the cosmos to the botanical realm: “‘I’ become gas; ‘I’ become a star; ‘I’ become smoke; ‘I’ become a slice of glacier; ‘I’ become moss.” In her poem to Sharp, the human becomes plant (reed, in the place of moss), and then ends up among the stars. She reverses the flow of evolutionary time. In *Dainana kankai hōkō*, she ponders the state of subjectivity by going back in evolutionary time, and inhabiting a “moss-like psychology” that opens up human subjectivity to new dimensions. Osaki gives a name to this phenomenon: *shugaeri* (“species-reversal”).

I align Osaki’s notion of “species-reversal,” with a term Deleuze and Guattari propose in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “involution.” The term is not merely the opposite of evolution, but something that turns backwards in the name of a kind of progress: “(The) term we would prefer for this form of evolution between heterogeneous terms is ‘involution,’ on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involuntary, involution is creative.”<sup>38</sup> *Dainana kankai hōkō* is full of attempted becomings and involutions, both involuntary slips into the so-called “realm of the seventh sense” of the work’s title and creative travels back in evolutionary time, toward an involution of human and moss-like subjectivity.

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<sup>35</sup> OMZ p. 371. For “doppelgänger,” Osaki uses the word *bunshin*, with the characters for “divide” and heart/mind” respectively, glossed with the katakana *dopperugengeru*. The phrase I have rendered “split poet” is “*bunretsu shijin*.” Osaki uses the term *bunretsu* often in her work, as I take up below in my discussion of *Dainana kankai hōkō*.

<sup>36</sup> OMZ p. 367. It is somewhat difficult to capture the reversal in English. The parallelism is clearer in the Japanese.

<sup>37</sup> As explained in Chapter 3, Haniya Yutaka also writes of becoming botanical as both an expansion and a contraction in his novel *Shirei*.

<sup>38</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 278.

## *Dainana kankai hōkō* and the Repetitious Anxiety of Naming

It is difficult to summarize the plot of *Dainana kankai hōkō*. This is not because so much happens in the narrative, but rather because so little happens, and what does happen happens slowly, and happens several times, mostly within one location: the house female protagonist Ono Machiko shares with her brothers and cousin. Machiko is a teenage girl of indeterminate age with curly red hair. Machiko leaves the countryside for Tōkyō, where she comes to live with her two brothers, Ichisuke and Nisuke, along with their cousin Sangorō. They live in a small house that will serve as the setting for the majority of the text. Each of these four characters considers themselves a student, formally or otherwise. Sangorō prepares to retake the entrance exam for a music school. Ichisuke studies a type of abnormal psychology referred to as “split psychology” (*bunretsu shinrigaku*).<sup>39</sup> Nisuke conducts research on plants, experimenting with the fertilization of radishes and mosses. Machiko considers herself a student of poetry, as she tries to capture an elusive sensory experience she calls “the seventh sense” in verse.

*Dainana kankai hōkō* reads like a text trying to hold itself together, often reminding itself who and where things are, as a kind of mapping that centers characters in space, to the point of stagnating narrative flow. Osaki initially envisioned the narrative as forming a closed loop, in which the story formed an ouroboros that ends where it begins.<sup>40</sup> Although she ultimately abandoned this idea, the circular logic of the text bears traces of its original plotting. Things develop organically, in repetitious clumps and clusters that look similar from a distance but reveal differences close up.<sup>41</sup>

Osaki’s style is deceptively simple. There is clarity at the level of the sentence that masks a fractured multiple subjectivity underneath. At times things seem too clear, as if Machiko needs to remind herself what she is narrating. Machiko and her relatives often repeat the subjects of conversations numerous times. Yet within the repetition there is always variation. For example, as Machiko arrives to the house early in the narrative, she describes the mandarin oranges that grow outside, repeating the word *mikan* (mandarin orange) multiple times:

As Sangoro and I reached the house, the mandarin orange trees that formed a hedge surrounding the house were illuminated by the sun. The mandarin oranges were small in diameter and bumpy, their color no different from their leaves. This was when I first noticed. I was holding a string bag of mandarin oranges. It was a bag of leftover mandarin oranges that I had eaten while on the train, that I had unknowingly carried here. Anyway, the mandarin oranges from the hedge around this house were late bloomers. Later on, these mandarin oranges turned into poorly formed homegrown mandarin oranges: shockingly behind the season, full of bumps on their peels, full of seeds, and still

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<sup>39</sup> The name for this fictional condition resembles the Japanese term for schizophrenia (*bunretsushō*). It also includes the same word for “split” that Osaki uses in referring to William Sharp as a “split poet.”

<sup>40</sup> OMZ p. 386.

<sup>41</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer explains how mosses do not show their characteristics unless one looks closely. In response to her husband referring to moss as the “wallpaper of the forest,” Kimmerer writes, “That wallpaper, which seemed at first glance to be a uniform weave, is in fact a complex tapestry, a brocaded surface of intricate pattern. The ‘moss’ is in fact many different mosses, of widely divergent forms” p. 10.

small in diameter. They were sour mandarin oranges. However, beneath the light of the late autumn stars, these mandarin oranges looked beautiful.<sup>42</sup>

Machiko's narration is frequently repetitious in this manner. It belies an anxiety of subjectivity, as if Machiko must constantly take account of the material world around her or else risk getting lost.

Yet the narrative repetition also makes legible the plasticity of subjectivity in *Dainana kankai hōkō*. According to Catherine Malabou, "Repetition is plastic, it gives form to what it destroys. We have to think of a form created by destruction, the form of a new person, which is not the transcendental subject, but what undermines it, as the threat of its explosion."<sup>43</sup> Machiko's plasticity, through which she strives to form a new person, leads her to the botanical realm. The repetitions throughout the novella demonstrate how Machiko pays close attention to her environment. She displays a form of intense noticing that Michael Marder aligns with plant life:

When I linger with plants, in thoughtful and physical proximity, I try to pay attention to their singular mode of attention. I notice, first, that plants do not attend to an *object* or *group of objects*. Their attention is inseparable from their life and growth. From a magnificent sequoia to a blade of grass, a plant attends to the physical elements, precisely, because the elements are not objects and cannot be objectified. Only then, in such nonobjectification, are the elements and life itself respected in their proper being. Therefore, human attention convoked and directed toward life must strive, strange as this may sound, to be similarly nonobjectifying.<sup>44</sup>

Through her close attention to the physical world, Machiko strives to be "nonobjectifying" in her narration. Her repetitious language, however, gets in the way. There is a tension between her repeated naming of objects (both animate and inanimate) and her desire to find a poetic language that can accommodate the nonobjectifying realm of the seventh sense. This tension leads to defamiliarization, but ultimately finds resolution in silence. As characters in *Dainana kankai hōkō* come to occupy the new subjectivity of becoming botanical, they turn to silence. Machiko is unable to write poetry of the seventh sense; Ichisuke's patients who have, through involution, arrived at a moss-like psychology, are likewise silent. For Ichisuke, this form of multiple subjectivity is a split psychology.

Early in the novella, Sangorō mentions a book Ichisuke has asked him to purchase at the Maruzen bookstore, called "Doppel-something."<sup>45</sup> According to Kyoko Selden and Alisa Freedman, this fragment of a title "hints at" the trope of the doppelgänger, demonstrating Osaki's "interest in the motif of doubles and doppelgängers—as thematized by the likes of Edgar Allen Poe and the Surrealists—as a screen upon which to project unconscious anxieties."<sup>46</sup> Ichisuke's interest in doppelgängers stems from his anxieties concerning subjectivity and identity. The doppelgänger, as a literal *repetition* of a self, plays into the anxieties I have been discussing,

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<sup>42</sup> OMZ p. 14. In order to capture the repetition of this paragraph, I have attempted in my translation to use the words "mandarin orange" for every time Osaki uses it. While it sounds repetitious in English, the effect is even more noticeable in the Japanese.

<sup>43</sup> "Post-Trauma" p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> *Through Vegetal Being* p. 158.

<sup>45</sup> OMZ p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Wandering* p. 223.

which are present at the level of form in *Dainana kankai hōkō*, with its repetition of names, sentence topics, and self-reflexive pronouns.<sup>47</sup>

An anxiety over identity runs throughout the small house in *Dainana kankai hōkō*. Machiko and her male relatives all repeat her each other's names (often their full names) time and again, long after the narrative has made clear both who is being discussed and who they are in relation to each other. For instance, in a letter Sangorō sends to Machiko, the former uses the full names of all three Ono siblings: "It is lonely being a student preparing for entrance exams. It's even lonelier being a student who has taken the entrance exams once only to have to take them again. Both Ono Ichisuke and Ono Nisuke have likely forgotten this feeling. Only you, Ono Machiko, can likely understand."<sup>48</sup>

The formality of full names seems to keep everyone within the house (as well as the readers) at a distance. The familiarity of familial relations is lost to the objective clarity of repeated naming. The formality of Sangorō not only referring to his cousin (with whom he shares a certain level of romantic feelings) by her full name, but also of referring to her brothers by their full names is made even odder by the text's preceding sentences. Machiko remarks on the name plates hanging outside the house as she arrives for the first time: "The house, enclosed within a hedge, was a single-story structure, old to the extent that the three name plates hung on the entrance looked conspicuously bright. Of the three name plates, which read Ono Ichisuke, Ono Nisuke, and Goda Sangorō, only the first two were printed, with Sangorō's written in thick handwriting on cardboard."<sup>49</sup> Within the space of a few sentences, the text introduces the full names of the characters twice over, in a gesture unnecessary for both Machiko and the reader. This use of full names occurs throughout the text, making it both extremely clear who is being referred to, and extremely unclear why they are being referred to in such a manner. Family members speak to each other as if they are strangers to one another, and the narration introduces characters time and again as if they were strangers to the reader.

The focus on naming extends to self-naming as well.<sup>50</sup> The pronoun "I" is used to a conspicuous degree throughout *Dainana kankai hōkō*, although Osaki never brackets it the way she does in her discussion of *Evolution* in *Eiga mansō*. If in *Eiga mansō* the "I" was prone to fly off, (as Osaki writes of watching the film, "my mind (*kokoro*) leaves the earth's surface"), for most of *Dainana kankai hōkō* she makes an effort to ground the "I" within the space of the house, firmly attached to the character to whom it belongs. The frequent assertion of the subject position is conspicuous. The Japanese language permits the omission of the grammatical subject if it is clear from context who or what is occupying its role. This is especially true of the first-person pronoun, which is commonly dropped. Yet in *Dainana kankai hōkō*, characters use the first-person pronoun repeatedly, simultaneously giving rise to a grammatical clarity and also a sense of social defamiliarization.

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<sup>47</sup> The doppelgänger was also a figure Osaki evoked in her dedicatory poem to William Sharp/Fiona Macleod, as discussed earlier.

<sup>48</sup> OMZ p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Machiko expresses reservations about the grandiose associations bound up in her own name, which sounds strikingly similar to the famous 9<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet Ono no Komachi, famous for her love poetry and incomparable beauty. Machiko remarks how she must re-name herself once she masters writing poetry of the seventh sense: "There is likely no one who would imagine from this name a skinny girl with red hair. So I thought when this bulky notebook becomes full of poetry, I will need to think of a name closer either to my poetry, or to myself" (OMZ p. 12).

It is through the repeated use of “I” that *Dainana kankai hōkō* serves to question just what an “I” is within the uprooting of colonial modernity. By repeatedly asserting the subject position “I,” Machiko and her relatives attempt to root themselves, but end up even more displaced. For example, within a representative two-page cross section of a long conversation between Ichisuke and Nisuke that stretches over many pages, the male first person pronoun “*boku*” is used a surprisingly numerous seventeen times.<sup>51</sup> The exchange is jarring, and feels unnaturally assertive. These repetitions serve to destabilize any sense of a unified subjectivity precisely through their anxious attempts to *solidify* subjectivity.

The effect resembles the phenomenon of semantic satiation, in which a word is repeated over and over until its meaning is lost to its sound. The repetitions occasion a defamiliarization, as theorized by Victor Shklovsky. Lawrence Crawford argues that within Shklovsky’s theory of defamiliarization, “‘real’ perception” is precluded in part by Shklovsky’s “always, as if compulsively, referring to real experience in terms of empty, dead, and automatized repetition and recognition.”<sup>52</sup> By repeatedly drawing attention to the self, *Dainana kankai hōkō* makes the “I” appear strangely out of sync with the narrative and somehow unreal. Just as the repeated use of the word “mandarin orange” in the passage quoted above reads as a kind of excess that renders them strange, so too does the use of “I” become excessive to the point of feeling unreal.

As Ichisuke and Nisuke repeatedly foreground their subject positions through the first person pronoun, they discuss a dream that shatters the notion of a unified subjectivity. Nisuke mentions a dream of becoming the moss on his desk, which prompts Ichisuke to ask: “tell me about Ono Nisuke’s psychology when Ono Nisuke dreams of becoming moss without exaggeration or abridgement.”<sup>53</sup> I will return to the content of this conversation later, as it bears on the becoming botanical through involution at the heart of *Dainana kankai hōkō*. Beyond the philosophical implications of this discussion, however, the formal use of Nisuke’s name by his brother twice in rapid succession again participates in both a defamiliarization and a rigid fixation of subjectivity. The overuse of “I” in a conversation about a dream of becoming another self (moss) reflects an anxiety that is met with a firm locating of the human subject: namely, Ono Nisuke in the present, in the house, and in conversation with his brother. Nisuke tries to stress that the “I” speaking is the real “I,” but following Shklovsky, any sense of the real is lost to the repetition.

In response to the anxiety over subjectivity that runs throughout *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Machiko will finally turn to the botanical realm of moss as an alternative to the circular, repetitious clarity that structures the everyday of her narration. For all of the clarity of *Dainana kankai hōkō*, we do not get a sense from Machiko’s narration exactly what kind of moss Nisuke is studying. Mosses, after all, do not have personal names. Machiko does, however, make clear that the mosses are abundant: “In my eyes, the wetland of moss atop the desk spread out with the vastness of a forest.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> OMZ p. 44-45.

<sup>52</sup> Crawford 218.

<sup>53</sup> OMZ p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> OMZS p.34. As Kimmerer points out, mosses, unlike flowers or trees, usually lack common names in English, and are either referred to by their species name or by their scientific Latin name. See Kimmerer p. 2. Japanese does have a few common names for different mosses (such as *tamagoke* and *hanagoke*), however Osaki does not use any of these names. In his essay on moss in *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Arakawa Tomotsugu attempts to determine just what kind of moss Osaki is writing about in the novella. Based on Machiko’s quote here, he determines they are likely *tamagoke* (*Bartramia pomiformis*). See Arakawa p. 80.

Machiko discovers a different world in this mysterious and vast moss-covered landscape. Before comparing the mosses to a forest, Machiko slips into this hazy world while watching Nisuke at work:

On the verge of falling asleep, I breathed heavily. I stayed awake for a short while by breathing air in through my nose, and then I breathed in again. While doing this, I inhabited a singular world of mist (*kiri no yō na hitotsu no sekai*). There, my senses worked independently of each other, then merged into one, and then went astray again. My faculties continued incoherently on like this. Nisuke had just finished eagerly rubbing the top of the moss with a cotton swab, when his apron became hazy like mist, and transformed into clouds of various shapes that I had seen before.<sup>55</sup>

The world that opens up to Machiko as she watches Nisuke work is indistinct and incoherent. It is anything but the repetitious world of Machiko's usual narration. It is the "seventh sense," a decidedly unclear subjectivity that Machiko describes as "a mental world shrouded in extensive fog."<sup>56</sup> Machiko seeks a new becoming in this realm in part to escape a lingering threat of violence.

### **The Love Lives of Moss in the Time of Colonial Modernity**

The violence of colonial modernity serves as important, yet often neglected background for *Dainana kankai hōkō*. Taking Osaki's moss seriously opens a window onto the historical moment from which *Dainana kankai hōkō* emerged. The novella's portrayal of scientific research on plants (as unscientific as it may appear) is tied to the colonial violence of its time. Nisuke's research on moss is entangled in the history of Japan's colonization of the Korean peninsula. Part of Nisuke's research on the love lives of moss concerns the effects of fertilization. Much to the chagrin of his family members, Nisuke tries different types and temperatures of fertilizer on his mosses to see if one will cause them to fall in love quickly.

This research intersects with Osaki's own life, and Japan's colonial occupation of Korea. Osaki's brother Shirō was an agricultural researcher who was deployed to colonial Korea and participated in the creation of governmental policies surrounding fertilizer use on the Korean peninsula. In December of 1930, six months after Osaki watched *Evolution* and only three months before the publication of *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Shirō published an article titled *Hiryō no jukyū to kono torishimari* (*Supply and Demand of Fertilizer and its Management*) in a magazine titled *Chosen* published by the colonial government-general of Korea.<sup>57</sup>

Agriculture and colonialism are deeply entangled in the history of Japanese modernity.<sup>58</sup> The uprooting experienced in Japan's colonies was of a different magnitude than the one experienced by the "exhausted spirits" (to use Kobayashi's term) occupying the metropole. Their deterritorialization was often a result of violence. Agricultural reforms on the Korean peninsula initiated by the Japanese colonial government displaced farmers, and denied them access to the

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<sup>55</sup> OMZ p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> OMZ p. 25.

<sup>57</sup> See Kawasaki p. 85-89

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Samuel Pao-San Ho's *Agricultural Transformation Under Colonialism: The Case of Taiwan*.

fertilizers that were necessary for their livelihoods.<sup>59</sup> The restrictions on agriculture resulted in violence. In the same year Shirō wrote of fertilizer management, local farmers battled with police in Gangwon Province of colonial Korea over access to fertilizer and other necessities. Four people were killed and 26 were injured.<sup>60</sup> This violence forms a backdrop to Osaki's fiction.

To be sure, Osaki's work mentions nothing outright about Japan's colonies nor of Japan's wartime efforts elsewhere. Yet a violent undercurrent runs throughout *Dainana kankai hōkō*. At various points Sangorō throws Machiko out a window and cuts her hair against her will. While the violence portrayed in the novella is not commensurate with the real-world violence experienced in Japan's colonies, it does take on an uncanny hue of colonial domination when read against Osaki's connection to colonial Korea. To what extent can we read the forced cutting of Machiko's hair as an echo of forced assimilation? As Sangorō ignores Machiko's tears and cuts her hair into a short bob, Machiko relates the violation she feels to that of being stripped naked: "My neck was suddenly cold, the unmistakable feeling of having my naked body fully exposed."<sup>61</sup>

Subjected to such violence, Machiko seeks to transcend the microcosm of the house she shares with her brothers and cousins by finding a new form of subjectivity within the "seventh sense," that elusive state of being I have aligned with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming. She does this in alliance with moss. In my reading of *Dainana kankai hōkō*, moss is an ontological alternative. It is a form of life already multiple that flourishes *without roots*.<sup>62</sup> *Dainana kankai hōkō* occasions this alliance with moss through its discussion of evolutionary thought.

## The Inbetween of Science and Poetry

It is Sangorō that first introduces the concept of love between mosses. He explains to Machiko: "I will probably be up all night tonight. I was ordered to ladle two pots worth of fertilizer on Nisuke's moss, and tonight they started falling in love (*koi o hajimetanda*)."<sup>63</sup> Although Sangorō admits "the love life of moss is a strange thing (*koke no ren'ai tte, hen na mono da ne*)," he tells Machiko that he finds Nisuke's writings on moss interesting, and claims "the love lives of plants are all the more illuminating of humans (*shokubutsu no ren'ai ga kaette ningen o keihatsu shite kureru yo*)."<sup>64</sup>

Nisuke's research engages directly with early theories of evolution that circulated in Japan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Oka Asajirō, author of a best-selling treatise on evolution published in 1904 titled *Shinkaron kōwa (Discourse on Evolution)*, included in his 1916

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<sup>59</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki writes, "(Policies) of land registration, taxation and agricultural reorganization pushed many marginal farmers off their land. Landless farmers in many cases joined the gathering flow of migrants who crossed the border to Japan or Manchuria, but others who remained in Korea attempted to sustain their livelihoods by retreating into increasingly inaccessible mountain areas to take up fire-field farming" p. 235.

<sup>60</sup> Morris-Suzuki p. 234.

<sup>61</sup> OMZ p. 31.

<sup>62</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, "Moss plants almost never occur singly, but in colonies packed as dense as an August cornfield. The nearness of others with shoots and leaves intertwined creates a porous network of leaf and space which holds water like a sponge" p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> OMZ p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> OMZ p. 37.



*Seibutsugaku kōwa (Discourse on Biology)* a chapter entitled, simply, “Love (*Ren'ai*).”<sup>65</sup> For Oka, “love” was an operative concept within the scientific study of biology. He begins the chapter:

There are various methods for sperm and egg to meet, and for this reason breeding animals are equipped with a variety of organs, as I explained in the previous chapter. However, the mere arrangement of equipment has no effect in and of itself. There must also be an extremely strong instinct that derives no satisfaction if this equipment is not put to use. In this is the root of what is called love in our world.<sup>66</sup>

Oka extends his concept of love beyond animals to include plants and even cells: “As all animals and plants carry out sexual reproduction, there is necessarily a strong love between each egg and sperm cell.”<sup>67</sup> Oka uses the term “love” to name an instinctual drive that leads both animals and plants to reproduce. While one could claim Oka’s use of the word “love” engages in anthropomorphism, it is also possible to claim he accomplishes the opposite; by relegating the concept of “love” to an instinctual drive at the cellular level, Oka minimizes the differences between human, plant, and animal. Through “love,” Oka arrives at a notion of a “bare life,” to borrow Agamben’s term, shared between species. This notion denotes a vital drive that reinforced Oka’s writing on evolution.<sup>68</sup>

In its positing of love between mosses, *Dainana kankai hōkō* is very much of its time.<sup>69</sup> Osaki’s invocation of “love” fits squarely within the scientific framework Oka outlines in *Seibutsugaku kōwa*. Although Osaki makes no explicit mention of Oka’s work in her writing, his influential theories informed the scientific milieu in which Osaki wrote. As Arakawa Tomotsugu claims, “We can likely think that in (Osaki’s time), the concept of ‘love between mosses’ was less out place then it is in contemporary times, and had permeated the society of the time.”<sup>70</sup>

Osaki saw in science, and scientific writing in particular, a creative element in which to revel throughout the Machiko Cycle. In *Chikashitsu anton no hitoya (A Night in Anton’s Basement, 1932)*, Osaki writes a list of scientific books authored by one of the story’s characters:

*The Condition of Appetite in Goats During the Period in which Paulownia Blossoms are in Full Bloom; The Vitality of the Chameleon; the Relationship Between Monkeys and Dreams; Mammoth, Human, Amoeba; An Analysis of Film-Emitting Animality; On Whether A Jar of Tadpoles On a Night in which Fragrant Olive Bloomed Out of Season Caused One’s Heart to Change*<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Arakawa p. 85.

<sup>66</sup> Oka p. 443. Translations mine throughout.

<sup>67</sup> Oka p. 447.

<sup>68</sup> Agamben distinguishes between two terms for “life” in *Homo Sacer*, *zoë* and *bios*, the former being a mode of “bare life” or biological life separate from the political/cultural lived-life of *bios*. Oka moves the lived experience of love from the realm of *bios* and places it within the bare life of *zoë*.

<sup>69</sup> Current research on the moss reproduction paints a far more complicated picture than is portrayed in Osaki’s work. See Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Gathering Moss – A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, in particular her chapter “Back to Pond,” which outlines the rather improbable lengths mosses must go to in order to reproduce.

<sup>70</sup> Arakawa p. 86. Translation mine.

<sup>71</sup> OMZ p. 198.

This odd list of titles contains many reoccurring motifs in Osaki's work, including paulownia blossoms and fragrant olive trees. Within Osaki's literary universe, these are things worthy of scientific contemplation.

Osaki envisioned a common ground for science and literature, as if this space could facilitate the new becoming she sought in alignment with the botanical realm. A common theme that runs throughout Osaki's oeuvre, and especially within the Machiko Cycle, is the overlap and tension between scientific writing and poetry. In *Hokō* (*A Walk*, 1931) and *Chikashitsu anton no hitoya*, this drama is played out between the poet Tsuchida Kyūsaku (who falls in love with Machiko) and his zoologist relative Matsuki. Matsuki is disturbed by the scientific inaccuracies written into Kyūsaku's poems, such as Kyūsaku's claim that 'birds are white.' Matsuki knows objectively that there are, in fact, black birds as well. Machiko comes to meet both men in *Hokō* when her grandmother asks her to deliver a jar of tadpoles to their house. Matsuki's reasoning for the request is as follows, "I have the idea that when Kyūsaku goes to write a poem about tadpoles and sees the real thing, he will be unable to write poetry."<sup>72</sup> His prediction turns out to be accurate, and the story ends with Kyūsaku's frustration at the scientific interference with his poetic practice.

Yet in *Chikashitsu anton no hitoya*, Kyūsaku learns to see the poetry in Matsuki's scientific writings. Kyūsaku takes the above mentioned "*On Whether A Jar of Tadpoles On a Night in which Fragrant Olive Bloomed Out of Season Caused One's Heart to Change*" and reconfigures it as a poem:

Out of Season  
A Night in which Fragrant Olive Bloomed  
A jar of tadpoles  
Did it cause one's heart to change?<sup>73</sup>

Kyūsaku then remarks: "When I read this work's title, I mistook the Zoologist Matsuki for a lyric poet."<sup>74</sup> Machiko makes a similar remark in *Dainana kankai hōkō*. After secretly borrowing Nisuke's research notes, she comments on their poetic qualities:

I had read the notes for two of Nisuke's essays. One about his research on radishes called *On the Utilization of the Soil at the foot of Wasteland Mountain*, which fascinated me because it read as if it were Nisuke's lyrical poetry, and *Changes in the Love Between Plants in Based on the Temperature of Fertilizer* (his research on moss), which had secretly become my favorite thing to read.<sup>75</sup>

Osaki includes sections of Nisuke's writing in the narrative, and it is written in the characteristic mix of Chinese characters and *katakana* that marks it as a scientific text. In other words, Nisuke's scientific writing does not *look* at all like poetry. But Machiko does not have to reformat the text to read it as such (as was the case with Kyūsaku). For Machiko, there is a poetic affect to scientific writing that exceeds formal considerations.

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<sup>72</sup> OMZ p. 107.

<sup>73</sup> OMZ p. 199.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> OMZ p. 37.

Evolutionary theory holds poetic possibilities in Osaki's work. Gregory Golley writes of the poetics of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859): "If it is the 'privilege of poetry to conjoin the rational and the magical,' as Norma Field has said, then Darwin's theory of evolution must be appreciated in part as a poetic achievement."<sup>76</sup> There is indeed a historical connection between poetry and evolutionary theory. Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802)—grandfather to Charles—was a poet in addition to a physician and scientist.<sup>77</sup> In 1791, Darwin published a collection of poetry, titled *The Botanic Garden*. Comprised of two extended poems, the work is a combination of science and poetry, and outlines the Linnaean system of taxonomy in rhyming couplets.<sup>78</sup> One of the poems is titled *The Loves of the Plants*. Its second stanza reads:

From giant Oaks, that wave their branches dark,  
To the dwarf Moss, that clings upon their bark,  
What Beaux and Beauties crowd the gaudy groves,  
And woo and win their vegetable Loves.<sup>79</sup>

Thus from the outset of evolutionary thought, mosses fell in love within a realm somewhere between science and poetry.<sup>80</sup>

### Osaki's Utopian Evolution

In *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Osaki develops her own poetic iteration of evolutionary thought that brings humans and plants together. This inclusiveness belies a utopian idealism that resisted the ideology of Social Darwinism, which had been popular in Japan since the Meiji period. Social Darwinism fueled the rhetoric surrounding Japan's colonial project and increasing social stratification up into the interwar period through its focus on competition and the rhetoric of the "survival of the fittest."<sup>81</sup> However, Golley argues that Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* stands outside the hierarchical ideology of Social Darwinism, and offers a radical ontological repositioning of the human vis-a-vis the nonhuman, including plants. Golley writes,

Early on, Darwin evinced a profound awareness of the importance of his own relativizing perspective, his departure from logic of absolute hierarchies... Darwin could not have envisioned the vast network of organic relations so central to his theory of evolution

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<sup>76</sup> Golley p. 223.

<sup>77</sup> Richardson p. 113.

<sup>78</sup> Robert L. Chamberlin characterizes it as "a fascinating albeit deadly melange of late eighteenth-century scientific theory (among whose promulgators Darwin ranks very high), occult and mythological characters..., several thousand metrically unexceptional heroic couplets, as many "glittering cold, and transitory" images as there are verses and a running explication by *exempla* of Carl Linnaeus' contribution to botanic theory" p. 834.

<sup>79</sup> *The Botanic Garden Part II*, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Erasmus's work influenced his grandson's theory of evolution, yet differed from it in key ways. Alan Richardson contrasts Erasmus Darwin's take on evolution with Charles's thusly, while quoting from Erasmus's 1794 text *Zoononia*: "Erasmus Darwin did not advance an altogether 'mindless' or 'mechanical' theory of evolution: he saw evolution guided by a 'spirit of animation,' a vital and apparently purposive force found to varying degrees in all living beings" p. 113. This "purposive force" resembles the vital force behind Oka's figuration of "love" in living things.

<sup>81</sup> See Douglas Howland, "Society Reified: Herbert Spencer and Political Theory in Early Meiji Japan," p. 81.

without first accepting bees and other nonhumans as fully vested members of the assembly...<sup>82</sup>

Osaki's vision of evolution likewise turned toward the inclusive side of evolutionary theory that Golley finds in Darwin, rather than the exclusionary ideology of Social Darwinism.

Osaki's utopian vision of evolution comes close to the feminist defense of Darwin offered by Elizabeth Grosz. Grosz's account of evolutionary theory holds the potential that Osaki sought in alliance with the alterity of plant life: "What Darwin's work makes clear is that what has occurred to an individual in the operations of a milieu or environment... is the force or impetus that propels that individual to processes... of self-transformation."<sup>83</sup>

Becoming botanical is a self-transformation, and in *Dainana kankai hōkō*, it is propelled by evolutionary thinking. The extreme attention Machiko pays to her environment leads her to recognize her place within the web of evolutionary change, and opens up a potential for future change. Grosz continues,

Darwin presents... the elements of an account of the place of futurity, the direction forward as the opening up, diversification, or bifurcation of the latencies of the present, which provide a kind of ballast for the induction of a future different but not detached from the past or present. The future emerges from the interplay of a repetition of cultural/biological factors, and the emergence of new conditions of survival.<sup>84</sup>

With Grosz's figuration of evolution in mind, we can see that the repetitions that run throughout *Dainana kankai hōkō* are part of the impetus for Machiko's desire for change. But *Dainana kankai hōkō* does not present Machiko's attempt at a botanical becoming as forward motion in evolutionary time. Rather, the novella posits a sense of futurity in the backwards pull of involution.

As formal language and repetition increasingly defamiliarize the bonds between Machiko and her family, Osaki's utopian evolutionary schema opens the door to familial recognition between humans and plants. It is Ichisuke who introduces evolution into the fold of *Dainana kankai hōkō*. Toward the beginning of the long conversation with Nisuke mentioned above, he offers the following appraisal of Nisuke's research on love between mosses:

Seeing that humans fall in love, there is no reason moss cannot fall in love. You could say that human love is an inheritance from moss. This perspective is certainly not wrong. The theory of evolution probably imagines moss to be a very distant ancestor of humans. It's just like that. We can likely see evidence of this when humans are on the verge of waking from a nap and they suddenly find themselves returning to the mind of moss. It's a strange psychology, like clinging to a damp and humid bog, your body unable to move. This is evidence that the disposition of moss has been inherited by humans to this very day. It is only in the world of dreams that humans can return to this psychology of their ancestors from several tens-of-thousands of years ago.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Golley p. 260.

<sup>83</sup> Grosz p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> Grosz p. 43.

<sup>85</sup> OMZ p. 43-44.

In Ichisuke's explanation, Nisuke's research into the love lives of moss demonstrates that human emotions themselves are inherited from vegetal ancestors. Stretching back to the psychological state of moss, human subjectivity moves into the deep time of evolution. It is here that Osaki finds the plasticity of subjectivity, as the human becomes, to return to Malabou's claim, an "open structure in which the plural regimes of transmission of memory and inheritance intersect."

Curiously, where at first Ichisuke claims this vegetal psychology is only available to humans in dreams, he later, within the same conversation, discusses a patient recently admitted to his hospital who exhibits this very psychological state. He tells Nisuke, "That patient is silent towards me, the split (*bunretsu*) she possesses is completely of a concealed nature. This is certainly inherited from the disposition of moss in ancient times."<sup>86</sup> Ichisuke notes how, like moss, these patients look for a place to root: "Those humans that have inherited a moss-like disposition have a craving of wanting to put down roots in one place."<sup>87</sup> Ichisuke understands the connection between the uprooting of modernity and becoming botanical, even as he pathologizes this becoming as a mental disorder.

In reply to Ichisuke, Nisuke posits a certain amount of agency in the patient's psychological state, aligning it with the concept of involution. He replies,

It's no problem. She performed a species-reversal (*shugaeri*). I don't know much about animals and humans performing species-reversal, but somewhere, once, wasn't there a human born with a tail? When doctors looked into it, it was definitely a fox's tail. They said it was a case of a human going against the course of evolution ... In addition to humans species-reversing back to foxes, it's also not a problem for human psychology to return to that of moss."<sup>88</sup>

Nisuke is rather nonchalant about *shugaeri*. For Ichisuke, however, *shugaeri* is a psychological disorder, a rupture of subjectivity through silence and withdrawal. It is the patient's lack of language that registers a moss-like disposition. It is also this lack of language that qualifies this psychological state as an illness. Ichisuke continues, "For me it is a problem. Why? Really think about it: The lead doctor enters the patient's room and she does not laugh or get angry. I lose all self-confidence."<sup>89</sup> Language, it seems, is at the heart of normal human subjectivity for Ichisuke. Silence, however, is at the heart of becoming botanical.

### Silence in the Realm of the Seventh Sense

Involution opens up a new form of subjectivity, which is embodied in the moss-like psychology of Ichisuke's patients. The extent to which the characters in *Dainana kankai hōkō* embrace this new form of subjectivity differs in accordance with their respective fields of study. While Nisuke's research on moss allows him to see a degree of agency in *shugaeri*, only Machiko is able to glimpse the full potential of becoming botanical. It is Machiko that gives name to the seventh sense, and comes to see it in the small world of moss on Nisuke's desk. Yet it is also Machiko that fails repeatedly to capture it in poetry.

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<sup>86</sup> OMZ p. 49.

<sup>87</sup> OMZ p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> OMZ p. 49.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

When Machiko does glimpse the realm of the seventh sense, it momentarily offers her a way into a botanical becoming. In one scene, Machiko brings her brothers boiled chestnuts that have arrived from their grandmother. Nisuke is hard at work on his moss research, studying the pollen that serves as a telltale sign that his moss has indeed fallen in love. After bits of a chestnut fall from Nisuke's mouth onto a notebook, Machiko notices the striking resemblance between the moss pollen and the chestnut powder:

Without thinking, I craned my neck and looked at the surface of the notebook. Then I knew. The moss pollen and the chestnut bits, they were the exact same color! And they had the same shape! And so I felt as if I had gained a vague but remarkable piece of knowledge—the poetic realm I was searching for, wasn't it this small world of powder? Moss flowers and the insides of chestnuts, now, scattered atop the notebook. Beside this are the tips of tweezers, the thin roots of moss, and the shadow of the perfume bottle under the electric light turned into a single beam of yellow light, stretching toward the cotton swab.

However, this singular still-life I had seen atop the notebook was destroyed by Nisuke in a moment, as he gathered the moss up in a hurry and brushed away the chestnut bits from the notebook.<sup>90</sup>

The excitement registered in Machiko's narration here, with its uncharacteristic use of exclamation marks, is a moment of exuberance and possibility. This scene that unfolds on top of Nisuke's notebook brings Machiko into an assemblage—an alliance of disparate modes of being that come together to form something greater than the sum of their parts.<sup>91</sup> Machiko's recognition that the chewed bits of chestnut are indistinguishable from the moss allows her to glimpse into the poetic realm of the seventh sense. The small world of moss and powder opens up to Machiko, and for a moment she becomes anew, embracing her plasticity.

In her poetic/scientific account of mosses, Robin Wall Kimmerer extols the virtues of smallness for mosses: "Mosses take possession of spaces from which other plants are excluded by their size. Their ways of being are a celebration of smallness. They succeed by matching unique properties of their form to the physical laws of interaction between earth and air. In being small, limitation is their strength."<sup>92</sup> Machiko, who has been ignored, violated, and consistently made small by her male relatives, seems to arrive at a momentary recognition of smallness as a form of strength.

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<sup>90</sup> OMZ p. 74.

<sup>91</sup> Monnet reads this scene through the language of cinematic montage: "If a montage may be said to be found here at all, it is an overwhelmingly visual one, evoking not so much a painting but rather an assemblage consisting of the golden yellow pictorial composition of the moss pollen and the tiny bits of chestnut on Nisuke's notebook, the tweezers for picking up moss specimens, the applicator and the perfume bottle. All in all, this is a wonderful Duchampian readymade that may be regarded as a montage on account of the fact that the identity and function" p. 71. In Hamano Sachi's 1998 partial filmic adaptation of the work, titled *Dainana kankai hōkō—Osaki Midori o sagashite (Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense: In Search of Osaki Midori)*, this scene superimposes an image of the moss over Midori's face, with a white haze clouding the scene. In other words, the film makes clear it is the alliance of Midori and the moss that leads to the "seventh sense," and largely ignores the other objects written into the scene in the novella.

<sup>92</sup> Kimmerer p. 20.

The similarity between moss and chestnuts occasions an intense noticing, and this astute attention is a way into becoming botanical. Michael Marder writes of the attention plants pay to their environment, and offers this attention as a criterion by which to reassess the ontology of plant life. He posits a vegetal psychology similar to the one explored in *Dainana kankai hōkō*. Marder claims attention is inextricably linked to memory, and thus a certain type of intelligence:

Attention cannot be entirely isolated from other characteristics of intelligent and deliberate behavior, and especially from memory and anticipation. Following the insights of the phenomenology of time consciousness, experience is a continuum of retention, attention and protention, irradiating from the present back into the organism's past and future. The inclusion of attention in this uninterrupted chain testifies to its dialectical nature, combining the opposites of fixity and movement, freedom and determinateness, rapid reaction and lingering with whatever one attends to.<sup>93</sup>

Marder's sketch of vegetal attention characterizes Machiko well, not only in the scene I have been discussing, but throughout the novella. It is Machiko's extreme attention to her environment that, when registered discursively as narration, becomes the repetitious language discussed above.

Yet in this brief moment of epiphany occasioned by resemblance, Machiko's attention registers its own vegetal nature. As a multiple subject (both moss and human), Machiko momentarily transcends, in Marder's words, "the opposites of fixity and movement, freedom and determinateness, rapid reaction and lingering with whatever one attends to." This is the realm of the seventh sense. The moment of becoming ends quickly, however. Her brother, who remains oblivious to the insight Machiko has gained, sweeps the possibility of becoming botanical away in an instant.

After the fact, Machiko is unable to render this insight into language. Her attempts to write poetry from this newfound perspective fail. She instead composes a "love poem full of sadness." The poem laments not only her loss of a new botanical self, but also the trauma of her hair being cut and her complicated relationship with Sangorō. Presented as a single line, the poem reads: "Although my grandmother sent me *binanzakura* flower, I can no longer put it in my hair. The kiss I received on my neck while my hair was being curled was, ah, lonely like the autumn wind."<sup>94</sup> Machiko's poem, which is the only one Osaki includes in the text, laments the loss of subjective agency at the hands of her male family members. Invoking the image of the *binanzakura* flower, Machiko's words register the loss of a potential botanical becoming. Her modern haircut, which is a product of bodily violation, can no longer support the flower.

Just as Ichisuke's patient finds no words within the involution back to a moss-like psychology, so too does language fail Machiko in recounting the new mode of subjectivity she glimpses among the moss. Silence, it seems, is integral to becoming botanical.<sup>95</sup> Machiko may express frustration at her inability to create poetry from her experience with the seventh sense, but for Osaki, silence was an ideal.<sup>96</sup> A creative involution to a moss-like psychology finds its voice in silence.

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<sup>93</sup> Marder p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> OMZ p. 75.

<sup>95</sup> Silence will become an important factor of Haniya Yutaka's metaphysical existentialism taken up in Chapter 3.

<sup>96</sup> Throughout *Eiga mansō*, Osaki expresses a deep nostalgia for silent film.

Luce Irigaray finds in silence an ethical means to approach alterity: “Silence is crucial for a being-with, without domination or subjection. It is the first dwelling for coexisting in difference.”<sup>97</sup> The moss-like psychology of *Dainana kankai* is a being-with, a coexisting of humans and plants within the same subject position. Machiko’s failure of language is in fact no failure at all. Rather, it is an opening-up, a “being-with.” It is a recognition of a subject position that is multiple.

Machiko’s embrace of difference leads to silence. Yet it is visual similarity that brings Machiko to the seventh sense (once she pays attention to the small world of moss and powder), and it is evolutionary similarity that permits the involution back to a moss-like psychology. As such, the mode of becoming that Osaki writes into *Dainana kankai hōkō* plays with degrees of similarity and difference.<sup>98</sup> And it is this push-and-pull between similarity and difference that informs another writer who developed a vernacular mode of evolutionary thought in the early Shōwa period. Like Osaki, Imanishi Kinji found in his own version of evolution a means to open up to a deeper history and transcend his contemporary moment, and to restructure a sense of self threatened by the violence of the present.

That Imanishi was to arrive at a new mode of subjectivity similar to the one envisioned by Osaki is striking. He did so outside of the context of Japanese literary modernism, which embraced the ruptures of modernity toward creative ends. Imanishi’s work, however, was informed by scientific theories that gained traction around the time he was writing. That both literary and scientific writing in the early Shōwa period looked toward new forms of subjectivity within the botanical realm casts these supposed distinct genres as an inbetween. If read together, the works of Osaki and Imanishi form a block of becoming of their own. Within this block of becoming “literature” and “scientific writing” are, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, effaced and augmented.

### **Imanishi’s Rhizomatic Family of Resemblance and Difference**

The second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, five years after Osaki Midori left Tōkyō and two years after she retired from writing. The turbulent history that informed Osaki’s work became increasing volatile as the Shōwa era progressed. Acutely aware of this turbulence was a young biologist with an interest in budding notions of ecology named Imanishi Kinji. Imanishi would go on to become Japan’s foremost primatologist, but in 1940 he feared his life might be cut short by war.

Spurred on by this fear, Imanishi composed his seminal work on evolutionary similarity and difference, *Seibutsu no sekai* (*The World of Living Things*). Imanishi found a creative voice in science, and believed he could enunciate a new form of subjectivity through his own

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<sup>97</sup> Irigaray p. 50.

<sup>98</sup> In the closing section of *Dainana kankai hōkō*, the issue of resemblance comes to the forefront again. While visiting Ichisuke’s hospital (in the only scene in the novella to take place outside the home Machiko shares with her brothers and cousin), a colleague of Ichisuke is struck by the resemblance Machiko bears to a certain red-haired European poet. He gives her a book with the poet’s photo for Machiko to look at. As she does, her subjectivity is once again uprooted: “It was too quiet, so I stopped eating the salted rice crackers and ate the sweet bean bun, and took my time looking at the photo. Then, finally, I lost any distinction between the photograph and myself. It was a mental state in which my heart moved into the photo, and the heart of the photo entered within me” (OMZ p. 93). Although the poet goes unnamed in the novella, Hamano’s film adaptation shows a caption under the photograph that reads: Fiona Macleod.



vernacular take on evolution. From the text's outset, Imanishi makes it clear that *Seibutsu no sekai* is not a work of objective science, but rather a subjective form of self-expression: "I did not write this small book with a scientific treatise or study in mind... I wanted to write a self-portrait."<sup>99</sup> The impetus for this self-portrait came from Imanishi's fear of being drafted to fight in China: "Since the beginning of this most recent incident, I felt I may be called at anytime to serve my country... I at least wanted to leave, in some form, a trace that a biologist such as I lived in a corner of this country. So I had to work fast before time ran out. To accomplish this objective, I thought I had no other means than to write a self-portrait."<sup>100</sup> Read as a self-portrait, *Seibutsu no sekai* presents the modern Japanese subject as a radical multiplicity.

*Seibutsu no sekai* perpetually strives toward a new becoming. The opening lines of the first chapter, titled "Similarity and Difference," bring all living things together into one block of becoming: "Our world is composed of a variety of things. One should think of it as a motley family of many things forming one."<sup>101</sup> For Imanishi, notions of the familial permeate the self-portrait he constructs. Like Osaki, Imanishi found in evolutionary thought a capacious frame for familial recognition. His work posits a shared ancestry between humans, animals, and plants in an attempt to transcend the violence of Japan's interwar period.

Imanishi never explicitly uses the term "evolution" (*shinka*) in *Seibutsu no sekai*. His version of evolutionary thought strays from Darwinian evolution, and does away with any notion of "survival of the fittest" that came to inform Social Darwinism, as discussed above. Imanishi favored the metaphor of the earth as a giant ship, one that formed from the same originary material as its passengers:

Regarding the process of growth of the earth itself, one part became the material for the ship, and then became the ship. What was left became the passengers aboard the ship. These did not differentiate without purpose. The boat became the boat for the passengers to ride, and the passengers became the passengers in order to ride the boat. After all, we cannot think of a ship without passengers, or passengers without a ship... In that sense, inanimate things and animate things, as well as animals and plants, originally were all one thing—we must recognize the fundamental relationship that exists between them all.<sup>102</sup>

Stretching back into deep time, Imanishi posits a unity of all matter. All things, including plants, are deeply connected within his cosmology. The differentiation of this original whole developed in cooperation (as a boat needs passengers and passengers need a boat) rather than in conflict. For Imanishi, all living things are, to use Osaki's term, "fellow travelers" on this boat.

Imanishi's evolution develops without the hierarchical structure of a family tree. Rather, it is "rhizomatic," in the language of Deleuze and Guattari. In rejecting the linear, hierarchical "tracing" of the tree-model, Deleuze and Guattari favor the creative "mapping" qualities of the rhizome. The rhizome is messy and uneven. It leads somewhere new and ventures into uncharted territory. They write, "The rhizome is altogether different, *a map and not a tracing*... The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of the wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome. What

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<sup>99</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p.3. Translations mine throughout.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 8.

distinguishes the map from the tracing it that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real.”<sup>103</sup>

Formally, *Seibutsu no sekai* reads like a map trying to plot itself as it makes sudden turns, leaving behind vast stretches of ground already covered. Imanishi’s long sentences wind, heading in directions that can leave the reader somewhat lost. Grammatical subjects come and go, and change multiple times within single sentences. Perhaps this is due to the duress under which Imanishi wrote his self-portrait. It is difficult to follow his reasoning at times, as if Imanishi is working through his evolutionary theory as he writes it. In contrast to *Dainana kankai hōkō*’s painstaking attempts to situate the reader in diegetic space, *Seibutsu no sekai* spreads out rhizomatically, with little concern for a traceable line of logic. Though not quite poetry, there is a lyrical quality to the text. Perhaps this is to be expected from a self-portrait. It feels strangely more experimental than the already quite experimental fiction of Osaki Midori.

Yet similar to Osaki’s work, the fractured mapping of Imanishi’s evolutionary thought leads to botanical becomings. Within his rhizomatic evolutionary schema, Imanishi diminishes the ontological distance between humans and plants. Yet he still maintains important differences. Through his play with similarity and difference, Imanishi questions whether or not plants possess consciousness:

If I affirm that because humans possess consciousness, so too must plants—as humans are living things just like the rest, and I must recognize in all living things the same properties as exist in humans—this would go against what I have also stressed: that the various things of the world also have differences... But as originally everything developed from the same one source, there must be similarities between things as well.<sup>104</sup>

In denying plants a human-like consciousness, Imanishi’s thinking looks to respect the alterity of plant life by rejecting a one-to-one recognition of similarity with humans. In other words, just because humans and plants share a familial relation as passengers on the same evolutionary boat (what Imanishi calls an “affinity”), this does not mean an anthropocentric understanding of plant life is viable.

Imanishi posits that humans, plants, and animals all have their own respective, embedded worlds, none of which exist in a hierarchy. He writes in language that strongly echoes Osaki’s writing on the love life of mosses:

In writing, in this book, expressions such as “the society of living things” and “the love between living things,” or words such as “art,” which seem to be propriety words exclusive to humans—while I have borrowed these terms without concern, there is nothing for humans to feel upset or dejected about. I believe the establishment of such an interpretation does not raise living things to the level of humans nor does it lower humans to the level of living things. In speaking of society, just as humans, animals, and plants all have their differences, it is natural that humans have their own society, animals have their own society, and plants have their own society.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* p. 12. Italics in original.

<sup>104</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 14-15.

<sup>105</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 22.

Here we see Imanishi's theory of similarity and difference in action. As living things, humans, animals, and plants are all alike in having a "society." Yet Imanishi makes clear this is not mere anthropomorphism. His thinking does not imply a hierarchy (nor the dismantling of a hierarchy), but rather posits, through difference, separate milieus for these modes of being. All living things are alike in that they have "societies," but this does not mean all societies are themselves alike. As he develops this thought, Imanishi brings humans and plants together in conversation, and eventually arrives at a place not far from the "moss-like disposition" of Osaki's human characters in *Dainana kankai hōkō*.

### Milieus of Becoming and Plant-Thinking

Imanishi would cling to his concept of different "societies" for different forms of living things. In his 1976 book *Shinka to wa nani ka (What is Evolution?)*, which is a far more structurally coherent text of popular science than *Seibutsu no sekai*, Imanishi writes at length of how his concept of *seibutsu no shakai* ("societies of living things") sets his theory of evolution apart from Darwin.<sup>106</sup> The recognition of separate milieus for separate species demonstrates Imanishi's budding interest in the study of ecology, and the embeddedness of living things in their environment. In Chapter 4 of *Seibutsu no sekai*, titled "On Society," Imanishi elaborates on the connection between *seibutsu no shakai*, their environment, and subjectivity. He begins the chapter:

One cannot give a full account of the relationship between living things even if one were to discuss it in a variety of ways. But, in the end, I think by introducing the concept of environment, the independence and subjectivity (*shutaisei*) of living things will become clear... There exists within living things an environmental quality, and there exists within the environment a quality of living things. They are not separate, they developed from the same unified origin, and they are subject to the same system of organization.<sup>107</sup>

Here we find Imanishi's account of subjectivity. It is bound to the environment in so far as the living thing is inseparable from its environment. Living things are, to return to Bates' term, open systems, susceptible to change from a perceived outside. Yet Imanishi makes clear that he is not advocating an environmentally deterministic view on subjectivity (human or otherwise). He insists that just as living things cannot fully change their environment, so too is the environment incapable of fully controlling living things.

Imanishi's hesitance to make definitive statements about both human and non-human living things stems from his belief in separate societies or milieus for animals and plants. He questions whether knowing an animal or plant through its environment truly gives an account of its life: "We could accept (such an explanation) as the attitude of an objective-minded scientist; however, such a translation based on environment—can we really say this expresses the real conditions of the material living thing (*gutaiteki na seibutsu no sono mama no sugata*)?"<sup>108</sup> For

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<sup>106</sup> Significantly, Imanishi writes about having to adapt his theories of what constitutes organic and inorganic environments for species following the arbitrariness of the designation of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as the border between North and South Korea following the Korean War. See. *Shinka to wa nani ka* p. 165.

<sup>107</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 76.

<sup>108</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 77.

Imanishi, even ecological thinking fails to fully capture both the bare life (*zoë*) that ties living things together and also the lived-life (*bios*) that accretes as societies distinct to each form of being. Even though humans, non-human animals, and plants may all share environments, their experiences of these environments differ. According to Imanishi's reasoning, objective science can only illuminate the lived experience of non-humans to a small degree.

In granting living things their own unique milieus, Imanishi was tapping into the scientific zeitgeist of his time. Around the time Imanishi wrote *Seibutsu no sekai*, research on the milieus of insects was finding traction in Europe. Imanishi's work bares comparison to that of the work of Karl von Frisch (1886-1982), who experimented with bees, or of Jakob von Uexküll (1864-1944), who developed the term "umwelt" to describe the phenomenological milieu of living things, with a focus on insects. Media theorist Jussi Parikka invokes the language of becoming as he characterizes von Frisch's research:

The hive, then, extends itself as part of the environment through the social probings that individual bees enact where the intelligence of the interaction is not located in any one bee, or even a collective of bees as a stable unit, but in the "in-between" space of becoming: bees relating to the mattering milieu, which becomes articulated as a continuum to the social behavior of the insect community. This community is not based on representational content, then, but on distributed organization of the society of nonhuman actors.<sup>109</sup>

The hive, as a milieu, is a society unto itself, and contains something, in its becoming, that exceeds the language of conventional subjectivity (a "community not based on representational content"). As Imanishi argues, it is in the inbetween of living things and their environment that subjectivity resides.

What makes Imanishi's text revolutionary was that he extended this notion of society/milieu to plant life. Imanishi embraces the lateral nature of his rhizomatic evolutionary schema and grants botanical beings subjective realms of their own. Imanishi's reasoning is as follows: all living things derive, through a non-competitive evolution, from the same source, and so if humans experience their environment subjectively, so too must plants. Imanishi then goes a step further, and grants individuated subjective experiences for different plants, including tall trees, shrubs, and mosses: "Even if we say there is a climate for plant life, there are tall trees, shrubs, and mosses on the ground, and each has its own climate that denotes its environment, and as plants have their own climates so too must animals have their own."<sup>110</sup>

Where von Uexküll and von Frisch's work attempts to give a phenomenological account of the non-representational subjectivity of insects (what Imanishi would call a "translation based on environment") and end up with seemingly alien worlds, Imanishi, like Osaki, errs on the side of silence. He does not attempt to give an account of what the lived experience of non-human animals or plants must feel like. Rather, he presents the idea of separate milieus and lets them stand in their alterity. He does, however, look to the physical reactions of plants to their environments in order to posit a similarity between humans and plants:

The evaporation of water through the pores in plants' leaves is not the same as humans sweating; however I want to stress that because plants open and close their pores based

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<sup>109</sup> Parikka p. 129.

<sup>110</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 79

on the conditions of the physical world (*gaikai*) means that plants perceive or recognize the physical world. It does not matter if this is not connected to the development of a brain or the functioning of consciousness that accompanies it. To explain this, I have presented here how, even with us humans, regulation of body temperature is not a function of consciousness. We can therefore call this a plant-like disposition (*shokubutsuteki seishitsu*) within us.<sup>111</sup>

Here Imanishi engages with phytopomorphism. In this move he further minimizes the ontological distance between humans and plants. For Imanishi, the very regulation of body heat is a “plant-like disposition” in humans.

In language striking similar to the “moss-like disposition” (*sentairui no seijō*) explored in Osaki’s *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Imanishi presages contemporary work on so-called “plant thinking” that looks to re-contextualize how humans understand how plants “think,” without resorting to an anthropocentric concept of consciousness. Michael Marder explores this concept in his 2013 essay “What is Plant-Thinking?” Marder writes:

Does the existential character of human pre-reflective intentionality set it apart from that of plants? Not if we go a little further in the direction of phenomenological anti-humanism by contending that non-human existences also have their corresponding intentionalities, in some cases intersecting with or underlying the non-conscious compartment of other living bodies. And so the intentionality of plants, similar to the pre-reflective compartment of the human, is seamlessly connected to its spatial, physical milieu, so much so that the abstraction of both from the environmental context, wherein they are embedded, risks irreparably disturbing and losing sight of them qua intentionalities.

Imanishi reached Marder’s conclusions some seventy years prior in *Seibutsu no sekai*. It does not matter to Imanishi whether or not plants have consciousness; what matters is the “intentionality” of which Marder writes. As Imanishi and Marder both claim, the intentionality of plants that drives them to open their pores for moisture or turn toward the sun is indeed similar to the (in Marder’s words) “pre-reflective compartment of the human,” or what Imanishi recognized in the unconscious body heat regulation of humans.

Once again there is a curious play between similarity and difference. Imanishi’s “plant-thinking” embraces the non-hierarchical similarities between plants and humans. It claims that humans exhibit plant-like attributes, and not the other way around. Yet Imanishi also embraces the absolute difference in milieus. Where the insect-phenomenology of von Firsch and von Uexküll portrayed insect milieus as alien worlds, Imanishi’s approach to plant milieus makes legible the alien within humans by highlighting how human subjectivity is always in part botanical. For Osaki, moss-like disposition required a creative involution; for Imanishi, evolution provided *all* humans with a plant-like disposition, whether they strive for it or not.

*Seibutsu no sekai* is a mapping that extends in a variety of directions. It sees all living things as a family in evolutionary deep time. It likewise argues living things have differing subjective experiences in separate milieus. It also registers itself as a self-portrait. Taken together, these attributes coalesce as a record of a subjectivity that sees itself within a vast

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<sup>111</sup> *Seibutsu no sekai* p. 80.

complex of similarity and difference, where diversity of subjective experience leads to shared traits between humans and plants.

Had Imanishi also attended a screening of Max Fleischer's 1925 film *Evolution* (the subject of the fifth installment of Osaki's column on cinema *Eiga mansō*), his experience would likely have been quite different from Osaki's. Seeing moss on the movie screen, Osaki recounts how she became moss. Imanishi would probably not have become moss in that moment. His "I" in brackets would have already been moss-like. Yet one can imagine Osaki and Imanishi leaving the theater together as fellow travelers, walking in silence.

## Botanical Rebirth

Both Osaki and Imanishi yearned for change within the violence of the prewar era. Opening up to the world of plant life allowed them to reconfigure subjectivity and give rise to new becomings. They recognized the plasticity of subjectivity in the face of an everyday eaten away by a slowly unfolding catastrophe. Their works form an overlap across genres and resist the exclusionary impulses of Social Darwinism, embracing an inclusive notion of family through evolutionary thought. In the inbetween of literature and science, both writers attempted to forge something new, and to transcend the limits of both modern subjectivity and genre.

Critics have treated both *Dainana kankai hōkō* and *Seibutsu no sekai* as exceptional and out of step with their times and respective genres.<sup>112</sup> Yet both writers were very much both of their time and also ahead of their time. In the early Shōwa period, they responded to the times by crafting vernacular theories of evolution as a means of self-transformation (to use Grosz's term). The act of writing occasioned a kind of rebirth for Osaki and Imanishi. In becoming botanical, their works have indeed transcended the Shōwa period. Osaki's writing would be rediscovered in the 1960s and go on to influence the next generation of writers, as well as film and media scholars. *Seibutsu no sekai* would be rediscovered as an early example of ecological thinking.

Both Imanishi and Osaki outlived the turbulence of the early Shōwa era. Imanishi was not drafted to fight on the front lines (as he had feared), and went on to become one of the leading primatologists in Japan, focusing on their social structures.<sup>113</sup> He would continue to write until his death, with *Seibutsu no sekai* making up only a small fraction of his 14 volume collected works.<sup>114</sup> Imanishi became a dedicated alpinist, and according to Takasaki Hiroyuki, "left a legacy of climbs in the glacier-covered Himalayas in Asia and Ruwenzoris in Africa, as well as 1552 peaks in Japan."<sup>115</sup> In other words, Imanishi flourished after the war, and although he was to largely leave the botanical world behind in his writings, the insights that he mapped into

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<sup>112</sup> For example, Mure Yōko writes of Osaki, "I was astonished such a writer as this had lived in Japan," (p. 7). Takasaki Hiroyuki expresses a similar astonishment over *Seibutsu no sekai*: "It is unbelievable that this book was written before we witnessed our blue planet from space" (*A Japanese View of Nature*, p. xi).

<sup>113</sup> It remains somewhat unclear to what extent Imanishi participated in Japan's wartime efforts. According to biographer Ishihara Hajime, he did not participate in the war. See Ishihara p. 12. Yet according to Nakao Katsumi, Imanishi did participate in a "scholarly expedition" to Daxinganling, on the Manchurian-Russian border in the early 1940s. Imanishi provided this research to the Kwantung Army (the arm of the Imperial Japanese Army responsible for the formation of colonial Manchuria) after returning to Japan, and likewise was asked to turn it over to the American Occupation after Japan's defeat. See Nakao p. 192. Imanishi's work, regardless of his intention, was indeed swept up in the violence of the Shōwa period.

<sup>114</sup> *A Japanese View of Nature* p. xi.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

*Seibutsu no sekai* would continue to influence his work until his death in 1992. Imanishi would cling to his near-utopian vernacular theory of evolution, which has now earned the designation of “Imanishian evolution.”<sup>116</sup>

As mentioned above, Osaki retired from writing in 1937, and lived out the rest of her life in solitude. In a short 1973 essay on Osaki, Hanada Kiyoteru characterizes her life in a somber tone:

It is said the female author, who suffers from a nervous disorder, was, at her family’s urging, forced to return to her native Tottori. After moving from hospital to hospital, last year she shut herself away in a room in her sister’s home, spending her afternoons working diligently on small projects at home, and her nights absorbed in the novels of Shishi Bunroku and Kita Morio. This is not a romantic end to the life of a genius.<sup>117</sup>

Hanada writes from a place of deep respect for Osaki. One can feel his sadness as he imagines Osaki locked away, against her will, with nothing but a few novels to read.

Yet it might be possible to reframe Osaki’s retirement from writing and her quiet final years as its own form of becoming. To what extent is Hanada playing out the role of Ichisuke, pathologizing Osaki’s silence as a fracture, as a deviation from what “should” befall a genius? The last lines of Osaki’s 1929 short story *Mokusei (Fragrant Olive Tree)* reads: “I am destitute moss that has begun to wither.”<sup>118</sup> Did Osaki, in this short, sad sentence, predict her own eventual retreat from the world? Did she imagine a foreclosure of botanical becomings before she even wrote *Dainana kankai hōkō*?

If we pay closer attention to the botanical realm, we can see even in this most dire of sentences potential for something wholly new in alliance with plant life. Arakawa Tomotsugu writes, “Usually, dried up moss has the image of something transient and broken. When moss dries out, it becomes frizzled. However, if given water, within moments it will suck it up and come back to life.”<sup>119</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer puts it this way: “most mosses are immune to death by drying. For them, desiccation is simply a temporary interruption in life.”<sup>120</sup>

Osaki passed away in 1971. Nearly 30 years later, Hamano Sachi would interweave Osaki’s life story with the narrative of *Dainana kankai hōkō* in her film *Dainana kankai hōkō – Osaki Midori o sagashite (Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense: In Search of Osaki Midori)*. This portrait of Osaki unfolds like a rebirth. While the narrative of *Dainana kankai hōkō* progresses linearly, the biographical portions of the film move backwards in time, presenting Osaki’s death first and ending with a young Osaki surrounded by friends overlooking the ocean from Tottori’s vast sand dunes. As the on-screen Machiko lingers over the small world of moss on Ichisuke’s desk, yearning to become botanical, the filmic “Osaki” springs back to life, like a withered moss given water. As the screen goes dark and the film fades into silence as Osaki looks out over the water, one can imagine the reverse flow of time continuing on, until “Osaki” becomes a chameleon; becomes moss; becomes a slice of glacier; becomes smoke; becomes a star; becomes gas.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> OMZ p. 530.

<sup>118</sup> OMZ p. 159.

<sup>119</sup> Arakawa p. 12.

<sup>120</sup> Kimmerer p. 37.

## Chapter Two.

### Plant Metamorphosis and Colonial Memory: The Entangled Histories of Abe Kōbō, The Bonin Islands, and Botanical Science

“Has a plant its history?”

-Kliment Timiryazev, *The Life of the Plant*.

“Plants are free, but the human body is not free. To speak of the relationship between the model and artwork, plants are unpredictable and the human body is a foregone conclusion.”

-Abe Kōbō, *Nikutai to shokubutsu*

## Introduction

On April 6, 1949, poet, novelist, and future playwright Abe Kōbō (1924-1933) wrote a letter to fellow novelist and literary critic Haniya Yutaka (1909-1997).<sup>1</sup> At the time, the two writers were members of a literary circle known as the *Yoru no Kai* (Night Group), which was founded the previous year by literary critic Hanada Kiyoteru (1909-1974) and visual artist Okamoto Tarō (1911-1996).<sup>2</sup> The group also counted among its members novelist Noma Hiroshi (1915-1991), poet Sekine Hiroshi (1920-1994), and film director Teshigahara Hiroshi (1927-2001).<sup>3</sup> The goal of the *Yoru no Kai* was to develop an alternative art form to Socialist Realism by combining Marxist ideals with surrealist experimentation.<sup>4</sup>

In the letter to Haniya, Abe apologizes for his delayed correspondence, and mentions that he would like to consult with Haniya about an upcoming *Yoru no Kai* lecture. Abe explains that

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<sup>1</sup> Haniya's novel *Shirei* is the subject of the following chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Okamoto Tarō was a preeminent visual artist of the Japanese postwar, working in painting, pottery, and sculpture. Okamoto lived in Paris as a young man in the late 1920s. In Paris, he counted among his contemporaries André Breton, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, and Man Ray. Okamoto stayed in Europe until 1940. After returning to Japan, Okamoto was drafted by the imperial army and spent time as a prisoner of war in China. Okamoto's most famous work, *Taiyō no Tō* (*Tower of the Sun*) is a 70-meter tall tower that served as the symbol for the contentious Expo '70 held in Osaka. Inside the tower is an installation called *Seimei no Ki* (*Tree of Life*), which visual depicts the course of evolution.

<sup>3</sup> Noma Hiroshi was a prominent writer of fiction in the postwar era. His novella *Kurai e* (*Dark Pictures*, 1946) grapples with the reality of Japan's defeat in the Second World War, and questions how its protagonists adapt to the postwar moment while carrying the weight of such violent memories as imprisonment. His novel *Shinkū chitai* (*Zone of Emptiness*, 1952) is a critical take on the Japanese imperial army. Noma had been drafted to fight in the Philippines and China, but was eventually imprisoned between 1943-1944 in a Japanese military prison for his involvement in the socialist movement. Sekine Hiroshi was an active member of the Japanese Communist Party in the postwar, and wrote poetry, novels, and reportage in addition to art and social criticism. Sekine was an editor (along with Noma) of the influential socialist poetry magazine *Rettō* (*Archipelago*). Included among his poetry collections is 1953's *E no shukudai* (*Picture Homework*), which paired Sekine's poems with illustrations by Teshigahara Hiroshi. Teshigahara was a prominent filmmaker most famous for the films in which he collaborated with Abe. The two made four films together in the 1960s based on Abe's writing: *Otohihana* (*Pitfall*, 1962), *Suna no onna* (*Woman of the Dunes*, 1964), *Tanin no kao* (*The Face of Another*, 1966), and *Moetsukita chizu* (*The Man without a Map*, 1968). Teshigahara was also the son of Teshigahara Sōfū (1099-1079), who founded the Sōgetsu school of ikebana flower arranging. Teshigahara Hiroshi was himself also a practitioner of ikebana in the avant garde Sōgetsu style.

<sup>4</sup> Key p. 10.



his wife and frequent collaborator, visual artist Abe Machiko (1926-1993), had recently become ill, and this has prevented more frequent correspondence. At the end of the short letter, Abe mentions a short story he was working on at the time: “I am currently writing a strange (*kimyō*) story called *Dendorokakariya* (*Dendrocacalia*), in which a human becomes a plant.”<sup>5</sup>

Abe would publish *Dendorokakariya* four months later in the literary magazine *Hyōgen* (*Expressions*), and then revise and republish the “strange story” three years later, in 1952. As Abe mentions in his letter to Haniya, *Dendrokakariya* is a story of plant metamorphosis, in which a man named Common becomes a dendrocacalia tree. Abe uses plant metamorphosis as an allegorical model to explore colonial memory in the Japanese postwar. Informed by scientific research that exposed the previously hidden notion of life in plants, the narrative critiques the disavowal of colonial violence. It simultaneously critiques the utopian idealism of an Anarcho-Marxist subjectivity that was closely associated with the botanical science among Abe’s contemporaries.

The type of botanical becoming written into the narrative of *Dendorokakariya* differs from the examples explored in the previous chapter. In the works of Osaki Midori and Imanishi Kinji discussed in Chapter 1, becoming botanical was an attempt to construct a nearly utopian vision of the future amidst the violence of early Shōwa era. Their engagements with the botanical world opened up subjectivity beyond the confines of human temporality and into the long durée of plant life and evolutionary deep time. The plasticity they found in the botanical world provided a model for moving beyond their contemporary moment.

Anarcho-Marxist thinkers like Hanada Kiyoteru and Haniya Yutaka, who served as Abe’s contemporaries in the *Yoru no Kai* and the Japanese Communist Party, shared these utopian impulses. They too envisioned a new form of revolutionary subjectivity informed by their engagements with plant life. In Haniya’s epic novel *Shirei*, which I discuss in the following chapter, the figuration of the forest plays a vital role in the construction of a subject position that bridges the rupture of Japan’s defeat in war, while also bridging the rupture between life and death. Hanada likewise believed in the potential of plant life to help usher in political, artistic, and social change. In a 1949 essay titled *Dōbutsu – shokubutsu - kōbutsu* (*Animal – Plant – Mineral*), written in response to literary critic Ōi Hirosuke and concerning writer Sakaguchi Angō, Hanada posits a connection between a literary concern for the nonhuman (including plants) and the coming of revolution:

The popularity of erotic art predicts again and again the approach of revolution, just like the flight of the petrel that announces the coming of a storm. But that is not necessarily because decedent signs of the times appear within those works. It is because in the eyes of revolutionary writers, the human spirit and the body are carefully distinguished. The human body is perceived as animal, as vegetal, as mineral, and written about in an emotionless, ruthless manner without the slightest bit of sentimentality. In short, Mr. Ōi, it is as if pigs, cacti, machines and the like can feel love just like humans.<sup>6</sup>

For Hanada, understanding the human body as nonhuman (animal, vegetal, or mineral) was a sign of approaching revolution. In language similar to Osaki Midori in *Dainana kankai hōkō*, Hanada argues that cacti can fall in love just like humans. Hanada and Osaki shared a utopian belief in the potential for botanical becomings to usher in something new.

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<sup>5</sup> *Abe Kōbō Zenshū* (AKZ), Vol. 30, p. 13. Translations mine throughout.

<sup>6</sup> Hanada p. 425.

Given the popularity of evolutionary thought and natural science (particularly from Russia) in Marxist/Anarchist circles in Japan, Hanada's interest in the nonhuman as a figure of revolutionary writing was likely informed by a type of scientific writing that Abe includes in the narrative of *Dendorokakariya*. In the novella, the work of Russian botanist Kliment Timiryazev (1843-1920) plays a fundamental role in Abe's allegorical configuration of the disavowal of colonial memory. Timiryazev was first and foremost introduced into Japan as a Marxist thinker, albeit one that looked to the natural sciences for inspiration.<sup>7</sup>

Timiryazev's *The Life of the Plant* (first published in Japan in 1934, and referenced directly in the narrative of *Dendorokakariya*) helped usher in a new understanding of plant life.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, Hanada believed *Dendorokakariya* ushered in a new style of representing plant life in literature. Hanada argues in a 1973 essay titled *Burāmusu wa osuki? (Do You Like Brahms?)* that *Dendorokakariya* marked a new attitude toward the plant life. Hanada draws a line between Abe's depiction of plant life in *Dendorokakariya* and Osaki's treatment of moss in *Dainana kankai hōkō* (which I discuss at length in the previous chapter). For Hanada, these works featured "plants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>9</sup> Considering the relationship between Abe's plants in *Dendorokakariya* and the dark history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century leading up to the postwar moment (in which the story was written), Hanada's comment speaks not only to the revolutionary potential of 20<sup>th</sup> century plants but also to the violence witnessed by the same 20<sup>th</sup> century plants.

As Abe Kōbō links the figure of the dendrocalia plant to colonial violence, the botanical becoming he writes into *Dendorokakariya* is ultimately dystopian. In *Dendorokakariya*, the ontological ambiguity between human and plant ultimately leads to dehumanization—a negative post-humanism occasioned by the botanical world. *Dendorokakariya* suggests that there is, in fact, no means to transcend one's contemporary moment, despite what his fellow *Yoru no Kai* members may have believed. Through the enduring allegorical trope of plant metamorphosis, Abe turned to plants not to move beyond the lingering violence of the postwar moment, but rather to bring such violence to light.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The first of Timiryazev's texts to appear in Japanese translation was published in 1931 in a collection titled *Marukusushūgi tetsugaku no gendankai (The Present Stage of Marxist Philosophy)*. Included in this volume is a conversation between Timiryazev and Marxist philosopher Abram Moiseevich Deborin that took place in 1929. The two discuss natural science alongside the writings of Marx and Engels. In 1947, an article titled "*Kakumei to kagakusha – Timiryazefu shōden*" ("Revolutionary and Scientist – A Short Biography of Timiryazev") was published by the JCP in their magazine *Kagaku to gijutsu (Science and Technology)*. As the title suggests, the article offers a biographical sketch of Timiryazev's life, highlighting his major works and influence on contemporary Soviet scientists. It also recounts Timiryazev's interest in Marxism and his relationship with Vladimir Lenin. It features an extended speech Timiryazev purportedly gave to a nurse that Lenin had hired to treat Timiryazev in the days before his death. In this likely apocryphal speech, Timiryazev sings the praises of Lenin, and expresses how happy he is to have lived in the same age as Lenin and bear witness to Lenin's wonderful work. Alongside this clearly propagandistic exultation of Leninism is, however, a fairly accurate summation of Timiryazev's take on Darwinian Evolution, and the new theory of vitality expounded in his writing (see Terada). Although the article frequently discusses Timiryazev's work with plants, it curiously never mentions *The Life of the Plant* by name, despite its place as the first full translation of Timiryazev's scientific work published in Japan.

<sup>8</sup> In his discussion of plants within the Foucauldian concept of biopower, Jeffrey T. Nealon outlines a systemic shift in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Foucault recognized as a change from the study of natural science to that of biology. This shift entailed "a mutation of the dominant epistemic procedures—from a representational discourse that maps external similitude and resemblance, to the emergence of a speculative discourse that takes as its object hidden internal processes" (Nealon, p. 7) I align the work of Timiryazev with this shift in scientific knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> OMZ p. 524-525.

<sup>10</sup> *Dendrocalia* sits within a continuum of modern Japanese texts that use plant metamorphosis in the service of allegory. Published 20 years before Abe's *Dendorokakariya*, Satō Hauro's novella *Nonsharan no kiroku (A Record*

As historians and cultural critics such as Sebastian Conrad and Karatani Kōjin have argued, Japanese rhetoric surrounding the relationship between colonial expansion and wartime violence has been (and largely continues to be) shrouded in disavowal.<sup>11</sup> Taking inspiration from contemporaneous botanical science that exposed a previously hidden notion of life in plants, in *Dendorokakariya* Abe exposes the living memories of Japanese colonialism that he feared were increasingly hidden in the postwar moment. In *Dendorokakariya*, Abe resists the postwar tendency toward disavowal of colonial violence, and confronts the history of Japanese colonialism through the motif of becoming botanical. *Dendorokakariya* positions becoming botanical as a means, to paraphrase Donna Haraway, of staying with the trouble of the Japanese postwar. Abe used the trope of metamorphosis (a reoccurring staple of his oeuvre) to explore the trouble bound up in the uncertainty of colonial memory.

### Becoming Botanical as Colonial Allegory

*Dendorokakariya* is an allegorical tale that warns of the disavowal of colonial memory. Japan's colonial project was deeply tied to the botanical world through the extraction of natural resources, as Japan's history of colonial forestry throughout Asia demonstrates.<sup>12</sup> Abe's *Dendorokakariya* makes clear this link between Japan's colonial history and plant life, as its protagonist becomes a *dendrocacalia crepidifolia*, a tree endemic to the island of Hahajima of the Bonin or Ogasawara Islands, which lay about 1000 kilometers south of Tōkyō. Japan has a

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of *Nonchalant*, 1929) envisions a dystopian cityscape in which the masses are forced to dwell underground, while the upper classes live in high-rises stretching into the sky. Members of the lower class are given an opportunity to move vertically up the social strata by literally becoming botanical—lower class humans are turned into plants made to adorn the apartments of the wealthy high-rise dwellers. Through such metamorphosis, Satō constructs not only a critique of burgeoning class identity, but also engages in kind of speculative phenomenology not unlike Abe in *Dendorokakariya*. *Nonsharan no kiroku* explores what it *feels* like to be a plant. From the plant's point of view, Satō is able to isolate that which forms the basis of human subjectivity. For Satō, these are the very qualities that are lost through the plasticity of becoming botanical. In *Tatazumu hito* (*Standing Person*, 1974), which was published 25 years after the original release of *Dendorokakariya*, science fiction writer and critic Tsutsui Yasutaka constructs a world in which animals—cats, dogs, and humans—become “vegetized” and turned into trees that adorn public spaces. Within the politically repressive society of the story, the anonymity of plant life serves as a punishment to both political dissidents and a deterrent to those that would speak out against those in power. There is a clear allegorical concern over censorship and freedom of speech in *Tatazumu hito*; Tsutsui has struggled with controversy in his career, often portraying himself as the victim of a politically correct society that represses individual forms of expression. These three stories—*Nonsharan no kiroku*, *Dendorokakariya*, and *Tatazumu hito*—form a constellation of dystopian botanical becomings.

<sup>11</sup> Conrad has argued in reference to Karatani Kōjin's discussion of Japan's postwar disavowal of wartime aggression in Korea and China (a phenomenon Karatani linked to the “de-Asianization” rhetoric of Fukuzawa Yukichi's 1885 *Datsu-A ron*): “In the field of memory, this led to partial amnesia about Japan's expansionist past. Japanese victimization of other Asian nations and the history of Japanese violence on the Asian mainland remained largely undiscussed. The war appeared, in the first place, as a conflict between Japan and the USA... In Japanese discourse, 'Asia' disappeared in a historiographical vacuum.” See Conrad p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Tessa Morris-Suzuki's “The Nature of Empire: Forest Ecology, Colonialism and Survival Politics in Japan's Imperial Order” (2013). As *Dendorokakariya* demonstrates through its allegorical use of plant life, there often exists a figurative connection between the rhetoric of colonialism and the botanical world as well in addition to the historical reality of natural resource extraction. As Christy Wampole demonstrates, post-colonial identity politics often invoke botanical metaphors such as “uprooting, transplanting, and vegetal invasion” (Wampole p. 5). This metaphor is present at the level of the Japanese language, as the Japanese word for colonization, *shokumin*, is a translation of the Dutch *volkplanting*, or people planting.

long and complex colonial history with the Bonin Islands, stretching back to the early modern Edo Period and continuing to the present day.<sup>13</sup> After serving as a base for military operations during the Second World War, the islands fell under the control of the American military until 1968, when they were officially returned to Japanese ownership.

In the story, a man named Common (*Komon* in Japanese) undergoes several metamorphoses into a dendrocacalia.<sup>14</sup> As the story opens, Common suddenly feels as if he is turning into a plant one day while walking and absentmindedly kicking a stone.<sup>15</sup> He feels the strong pull of gravity and everything suddenly becomes dark. Within the darkness, however, he sees his own face “as if reflected in a train window.”<sup>16</sup> The feeling is momentary, and passes without incident. For the first half of the narrative, he is unclear what is happening, and struggles with the discomfort and near horror of bodily disintegration. He learns to turn his face back outward, and thus resist metamorphosis. Common recognizes his becoming botanical as a kind of “illness.”<sup>17</sup>

A year goes by without Common experiencing a plant metamorphosis, until one day he receives a mysterious letter from someone identified only as “K.” The letter asks Common to come to a café the following day. Common goes, believing the letter to be from a now-forgotten ex-girlfriend. Common undergoes another partial transformation while waiting for K at the café. During this metamorphosis, Common’s senses become heightened, and he loses a clear sense of time. The anxiety of this experience causes him to leave the café, whereupon he finds himself among the city’s bombed-out buildings (*yakeato*). Common finally accepts his new existence as a plant. At this point, however, the director of a botanical garden that serves as the story’s antagonist appears and remarks on the rarity of coming across the dendrocacalia plant in the *naichi*, a term meaning “interior land,” and thus the metropole of the Japanese mainland, as opposed to the *gaichi*, meaning “exterior land,” and thus the overseas territories of Japan’s colonies. The classification of the plant as a dendrocacalia (a *gaichi* plant from the colonies) marks a turning point in the narrative, and sets up Abe’s allegorical play with notions of the interior and exterior.

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapman.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout his career, Abe frequently used initials, such as “K” in this story, in lieu of actual character names. The use of the name Common (*komon*) is unusual. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* states that *komon* was listed in the 1914 edition of the *Gairaigo jiten* (or dictionary of foreign words) with its English meaning of “usual (*futsū no*) or shared (*kyōyū no*).” It is possible that Abe’s use of the name was yet another means of creating a character devoid of any real identifying name. However, given the story’s concern with scientific naming and Linnaean classification, it seems likely that Abe means to layer the scientific convention of referring to the non-Linnaean name of an organism as its “common name.” Understood this way, it makes Common’s metamorphosis into a dendrocacalia more pronounced, as he moves from a common name (literally) into the scientific name used as the title of the novella.

<sup>15</sup> My discussion of *Dendorokakariya* is drawn primarily from the 1952 version of the novella. There are differences between this later version and the original 1949 version. Although the general outline of the plot remains the same between the 1949 and 1952 versions, the 1949 version is longer, and features an opening section of direct address to the reader that is excised in the revised version of 1952. The identity of the narrating voice is less stable in the earlier version, and there is a greater sense of ambiguity over the roles certain characters play in the narrative. See Toba for a thorough explanation of the differences between the two versions. The shorter 1952 version is more cohesive, and eliminates some of these ambiguities. Formally, the 1952 version reads with an ease that at times feels at odds with the fantastic quality of the narrative. While the 1949 version bears a traces of Abe’s earlier formal experimentation, Mutsuko Motoyama argues that the style of *Dendorokakariya* is drastically more straightforward than any Abe’s previous work, claiming: “Words are no longer symbolic and do not suggest ideas other than their usual meanings” (Motoyama p. 309.)

<sup>16</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 350.

<sup>17</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 351.

Abe uses the interior/exterior dichotomy in multiple registers throughout *Dendorokakariya*.<sup>18</sup> The scientific work Abe cites in *Dendorokakariya* (Russian botanist Kliment Timiryazev's *The Life of the Plant*) destabilizes the boundaries between human and plant by stating that humans and plants have no qualitative differences. Building from this claim, Abe works to destabilize the boundaries between the supposed binaries of *naichi* and *gaichi*. As Common becomes a tree uprooted from its native land, firm distinctions between *naichi* and *gaichi* begin to dissolve, just as the distinctions between human and plant dissolve through metamorphosis.

In order to explore the tension between the colonial markers of the internal *naichi* and of the external *gaichi*, Abe focuses on a dichotomy between the protagonist's interior subjectivity and the external world. Informed by the writing of Timiryazev that illuminated the interior world of plants and theorized a form of plant subjectivity, Abe builds a bridge between the *naichi/gaichi* divide and the subjective interiority/exteriority divide through a botanical becoming. As Common turns into a dendrocacalia among the *yakeato* ruins of war, he feels as if "the whole of the exterior world was becoming himself."<sup>19</sup>

Through the figure of this flowering plant that is endemic to the colonial space of the Bonin Islands, *Dendorokakariya* suggests the external *gaichi* is not something that exists outside of postwar subjectivity (as disavowal suggests), but rather that colonial history is alive within the postwar subject. The existence of the dendrocacalia plant in the interior space of the *naichi* embodies this reality. For this reason, it becomes, for the director of a botanical garden that serves as the narrative's antagonist, an object that must be captured and carefully controlled.

At the end of the narrative, the director of the botanical garden locks the dendrocacalia (and the colonial memory it embodies) away in a government-protected greenhouse, where its existence becomes static. The final image of *Dendorokakariya* is of the director laughing uncontrollably as he places a name card which bears the scientific name of the plant on the now fully metamorphosed Common. Within Abe's allegorical configuration, the greenhouse is the site of disavowal. It puts memories aside, where they can be controlled and categorized by the state. It is a liminal space within the interior of the Japanese mainland where botanical specimens of the Japanese colonial exterior are forever marked as such.

## Of Interiors and Exteriors

Abe was interested in the conceptual tension between notions of interior and exterior from early on in his career. In an untitled and posthumously published essay written in 1943, Abe writes, "Until now, if I did not divide everything into 'inside' and 'outside,' I was unsatisfied. Of course, dividing everything into 'inside' and 'outside' is something that could no doubt continue on forever. But there was something extremely important that I was forgetting. If you really think about it, aren't things we usually call 'interior' all just imaginings that come from the 'exterior?'"<sup>20</sup> This uncertainty over where the exterior ends and the interior begins is likewise legible in much of Abe's later work, including in *Dendorokakariya*. Abe's concern over the boundaries between interior and exterior throughout *Dendorokakariya* link his philosophical

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<sup>18</sup> My reading of the motif of interior/exterior in *Dendorokakariya* is informed by Toba Kōji's chapter "'Henbō' to riarizumu ronsō – 'Dendorokakariya' 1949" in *Undōtai – Abe Kōbō*.

<sup>19</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 356.

<sup>20</sup> AKZ Vol. 1, p. 88.

musings on interior subjectivity and exteriority with the political rhetoric of *naichi* and *gaichi* in Japan's immediate postwar period. It is through plant metamorphosis that Abe ties the philosophical and the political together in order to craft an allegorical critique of the negotiation of wartime memory.

The introduction of overtly political themes into Abe's work caused critics, including his friend Haniya Yutaka, to position *Dendorokakariya* as a transitional text for Abe.<sup>21</sup> They have argued the story marked a change from Abe's existential and formally experimental early work such as his debut novel *Owarishi michi no shirube ni* (*For the Signpost at the End of the Road*, 1948) to the more absurdist and Marxist themes found in his 1951 Akutagawa Prize-winning novella *Kabe – S. Karuma shi no hanzai* (*The Wall – The Crime of S. Karma*). The period in which *Dendorokakariya* was written was the most politically active period of Abe's career; in 1950, he would officially join the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), and would remain a member until 1962, when he was expelled for alleged disloyalty.<sup>22</sup>

Although *Dendorokakariya* is positioned as the beginning of his embrace of Marxist thought, the seeds of Abe's eventual discontent with Anarcho-Marxist ideology can be glimpsed in *Dendorokakariya* through Abe's phenomenological engagement with the botanical world. Given Abe's membership in the *Yoru no Kai* and JCP around the time of his writing and rewriting *Dendorokakariya*, it is likely that Abe was introduced to the plant research of Timiryazev (who he quotes in *Dendorokakariya*) within a politically charged context. Writers of natural science, including Ilya Mechnikov, Peter Kropotkin, Charles Darwin, and Jean-Henri Fabre, heavily influenced anarchist thought in Japan.<sup>23</sup> As Sho Konishi argues, natural science offered Japanese Anarchist and Marxist thinkers "scientific evidence from the biological world for a modern anarchist temporality and subjectivity."<sup>24</sup> The writing of the influential Anarchist thinker Peter Kropotkin describes this subjectivity as plant-like. He envisioned a subjectivity that was more of "an agglomeration, a colony of millions of separate individuals than a personality one and indivisible."<sup>25</sup>

In *Dendorokakariya*, Abe ultimately critiques the utopian idealism of an anarchist subjectivity informed by the botanical world. He does so by engaging directly with a speculative phenomenological account of what a botanical-anarchist subjectivity (like the one Kropotkin proposed) would look and feel like, only to collapse the idealism of such subjectivity under the weight of colonial history. Abe counters the claims that a utopian transcendence was possible in becoming botanical by giving plants their history, to paraphrase Timiryazev.<sup>26</sup> The history of the dendrocacalia plant in postwar Japan was one of colonial violence. This chapter maps how Abe's *Dendorokakariya* is thoroughly entangled with the history of the colonial history of the dendrocacalia plant, as well the history of the very notion of "life" in plants.

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<sup>21</sup> Toba p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> Motoyama p. 320.

<sup>23</sup> Konishi p. 297. Fabre wrote extensively about plant life, although this work was not translated into Japanese until the publication of his *Histoire de la Buche Récits sur la Vie des Plants* as *Shokubutsuki* in 1984. As Konishi explains, it was Fabre's writing on insects that provided another instance of scientific research of nonhuman life that was to influence Anarchist thought in Japan. His *Souvenirs entomologiques* (translated into Japanese as *Konchūki* in 1917) remains a popular science text in Japan (including for children), although it was originally embraced as an Anarchist text. In several of Abe's later works, such as 1962's *Suno no onna* (*Woman in the Dunes*) and 1982's *Hakobune sakuramaru* (*The Ark Sakura*), insects become central figures of environmentally-attuned narratives that discuss societal isolation.

<sup>24</sup> Konishi p. 298.

<sup>25</sup> *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal*

<sup>26</sup> See Timiryazev p. 347.

## Utopian Idealism in Botanical-Anarchist Subjectivity

Abe Kōbō's personal history is inseparable from Japan's colonial history. Born in Tōkyō and raised in colonial Manchuria (known at the time as Manchukuo or Manshūkoku), Abe relocated to the Japanese mainland in 1946. During his prolific career as a writer, he wrote several stories set in the colonial space of the *gaichi*, including *Owarishi michi*, his 1952 short story *Ueta hifu* (*The Starving Skin*), and his 1957 *Kemonotachi wa kokyō o mezasu* (*Beasts Head for Home*). *Dendorokakariya*, however, grapples with Japan's colonial project within the interior *naichi* of the Japanese mainland.

Just as Abe's concern with coloniality makes scattered appearances throughout his oeuvre, so too does his interest in vegetal life. While his best known work, 1962's *Suna no onna* (*Woman of the Dunes*), explores the relationship between the material world and human subjectivity in a sand-filled atmosphere devoid of plant life, several other works take up botanical life in order to question the status of the human subject. His 1957 short story *Namari no tamago* (*Lead Egg*) portrays a speculative future in which humans have become more plantlike, with green skin and extremely long life spans. His 1975 play *Midori iro no sutokkingu* (*Green Stockings*) features an experiment in which a human is turned into an herbivore and thus comes to subsist only on vegetation. Abe would even revisit plant metamorphosis late in his career with 1991's *Kangarū nōto* (*Kangaroo Notebook*), in which the protagonist begins to spout radishes through his skin.

In a 1952 essay written about the advent of avant-garde *ikebana* (or flower-arranging), Abe paraphrases Jean-Paul Sartre's comments on Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti (who was a contemporary of Abe's fellow *Yoru no Kai* member Okamoto Tarō): "Plants are free, but the human body is not free. To speak of the relationship between the model and artwork, plants are unpredictable (*gūzen*) and the human body is a foregone conclusion (*hitsuzen*)."<sup>27</sup> Abe found freedom in taking plants as a model to shed light the disavowal of colonial violence in *Dendorokakariya*, as the fantastic qualities of plant metamorphosis likely helped the story navigate the Occupation censorship that was still a lingering reality for Japanese writers in 1949.

The Anarcho-Marxist thinkers Abe came into contact with around the time he wrote *Dendorokakariya* likewise found a notion of freedom in the botanical world.<sup>28</sup> They envisioned a new form of political subjectivity that took cues from the insights into evolution gained through plant research. Scientific interest in the study of plant life was an important part of what Sho Konishi has called Japan's Anarchist Modernity. In particular, the work of the Russian Anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) helped Japanese Anarcho-Marxists forge links between a revolutionary subjectivity and plant life. Well-known writer and Anarchist Arishima Takeo (1878-1923) visited Kropotkin in Russia in 1906, where they discussed the ideas of Kropotkin's

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<sup>27</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 192.

<sup>28</sup> Hanada Kiyoteru joined the JCP in 1949, a year prior to Abe's joining, and a year after the formation of the artistic group he shared with Abe and Haniya Yutaka, the *Yoru no Kai*. Both Hanada and Haniya were strong proponents of Marxist and Anarchist thought, and are included in the *Nihon anakizumu undō jinmei jiten* (*Biographical Lexicon of the Japanese Anarchist Movement*, 2004). Haniya has claimed that his "upper body was Anarchist" and his "lower body was Marxist" (See *Anakizumu to kakumei genri* in *Haniya Yutaka Zenshū* Vol. 14, p. 316). Although Abe is not included in this lexicon, he was almost certainly exposed to both Anarchist and Marxist writings through his close association with both Hanada and Haniya at this time, as well as during his time in the JCP.

classic text *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*.<sup>29</sup> Kropotkin's concept of mutual aid posits that within the paradigm of evolution the fittest species survive through cooperation rather than competition.<sup>30</sup> For Anarcho-Marxist thinkers in Japan, Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid provided an alternative to the competitive impulses of Social Darwinism.<sup>31</sup>

In 1927, a partial translation of *Mutual Aid* was published in Japan by Hakuyōsha.<sup>32</sup> Comprised of the first two chapters of the full text, the Japanese translation bears the title *The Lives of Animals and Plants (Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu)*.<sup>33</sup> *Mutual Aid* is a utopian text, and develops a utopian form of subjectivity informed by the botanical world.<sup>34</sup> Abe critiques the idealism of such subjectivity in *Dendorokakariya*. The political subjectivity Kropotkin proposed through his close engagement with the natural world was free of national ties—what Konishi calls “nonstate.” At end the of *Dendorokakariya*, the fully-plant Common finds himself (along with other humans-turned-plant) surrounded by national flags, suggesting even plants are subject to national boundaries and state control.

The utopian qualities of Kropotkin's political subjectivity resembles the new modes of subjectivity Osaki Midori and Imanishi Kinji found through their own engagements with evolutionary thought. Like Osaki and Imanishi, Kropotkin wrote of a multiple subjectivity informed by the botanical realm:

(When) a physiologist speaks now of the life of a plant or of an animal, he sees rather an agglomeration, a colony of millions of separate individuals than a personality one and

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<sup>29</sup> Konishi p. 238. Anarchist Ōsugi Sakae (who founded Japan's first Esperanto school) translated *Mutual Aid* into Japanese in 1917, having previously translated Darwin's *Origin of the Species* three years prior in 1914. Ōsugi would go on to translate Jean-Henri Fabre's *Souvenirs entomologiques* in 1922 (see Konishi p. 318).

<sup>30</sup> Konishi p. 232. Kropotkin clearly opposes competition in *Mutual Aid*, and argues that it is in fact unnatural to compete: “Don't compete! — competition is always injurious to the species, and you have plenty of resources to avoid it!” That is the *tendency* of nature, not always realized in full, but always present. That is the watchword which comes to us from the bush, the forest, the river, the ocean. “Therefore combine — practise mutual aid! That is the surest means for giving to each and to all the greatest safety, the best guarantee of existence and progress, bodily, intellectual, and moral.” That is what Nature teaches us; and that is what all those animals which have attained the highest position in their respective classes have done” (*Mutual Aid* p. 62. Quotation marks and italics in the original.)

<sup>31</sup> In 1948, the JCP-published monthly magazine *Kagaku to gijutsu (Science and Technology)* published an article accredited to Meguro Jiro titled “*Soveto seibutsugaku no tenbō*” (“The Prospects of Soviet Biology”). The article highlights Soviet research related to phytocoenosis, or the study of the entire group of plants occupying a certain habitat. Meguro discusses Soviet scientists' insights into competition and cooperation among plants, arguing that plants exhibit a cooperative notion of “mutual aid”: “Within a single habitat of plants there exist between them complicated relationships. From one perspective, there is a cruel war going on between plants of separate or the even the same species. They fight in search of light, water, and nutrition. However, if we change our perspective, this is also mutual aid. The trees overhead and the grasses, as they create shade, protect the weak, smaller plants from the effects of the sun” (Meguro p. 13-14). Meguro goes on to discuss Timiryazev, crediting him as the reason for Russian's place as the “second motherland of Darwinian theory.”

<sup>32</sup> The essays that comprise *Mutual Aid* were originally published during the 1890s in the British literary magazine *The Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>33</sup> Thus Timiryazev's *The Life of the Plant* was not the first text in Japan to use the language of “life” in reference to the botanical realm, nor even the first Russian text to do so.

<sup>34</sup> Kropotkin, however, took issue with the use of the word “utopian.” For Kropotkin, labeling Anarchism as utopian served to dismiss it as an impossibility rather than an inevitable outcome of evolution. In *Modern Science and Anarchism*, he writes, “it would not be far to describe (a society of equals) as a *Utopia*, because the word “Utopia” in our current language conveys the idea of something that *cannot* be realized... (It) cannot be applied to a conception of society which is based, as Anarchism is, on an analysis of *tendencies of an evolution that is already going on in society*, and on *inductions* therefrom as to the future...” (p. 46, italics in the original).



indivisible. He speaks of a federation of digestive, sensual, nervous organs, all very intimately connected with one another, each feeling the consequence of the well-being or indisposition of each, but each living its own life... The individual is quite a world of federations, a whole universe in himself.<sup>35</sup>

As he embraces the multiplicity of vegetal being, Kropotkin develops a notion of an anarchist-botanical subjectivity. This subjectivity is individual yet part of a larger federation. It is both free and yet connected to something larger than itself. In *Dendorokakariya*, Abe builds the narrative to reach a point where the protagonist begins to experience something closely resembling this botanical-anarchist subjectivity, but ends up critiquing the imagined utopian possibilities of said subjectivity by highlighting the entanglements of plant life and the violence of Japanese colonialism.

### Greening Week and Phyto-Phenomenology

Abe engages with the ideals of a botanical-anarchist subjectivity by narrating what a plant-like subjectivity would actually feel like. Throughout *Dendorokakariya*, Abe engages in a speculative phenomenological account of the experience of becoming botanical.<sup>36</sup> I refer to this exercise as phyto-phenomenology, with the Greek prefix phyto referring to plants. In his experimentation with phyto-phenomenology, Abe demonstrates an acute understanding of plant life. He takes up the figuration of a utopian botanical-anarchist subjectivity espoused by thinkers like Kropotkin and carries it through to its logical (and literal) end-point. *Dendorokakariya* explores what it would feel like to embody the kind of utopian subjectivity that Kropotkin called “a federation of digestive, sensual, nervous organs, all very intimately connected with one another, each feeling the consequence of the well-being or indisposition of each, but each living its own life.” Abe does this to ultimately critique the idealism bound up in such a figuration.

While the plant metamorphosis in *Dendorokakariya* is strange, to use Abe’s word, the experiential account of Common’s metamorphosis aligns with scientific theories of plant life. For example, as Common inspects the interior of the café and the exterior world outside the window while resisting becoming botanical and waiting for K to arrive, the narrator remarks how Common’s vision has become altered: “It was as if everything looked big, as if under a

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<sup>35</sup> *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Ideal*

<sup>36</sup> Abe’s phyto-phenomenology resonates with contemporary thinkers aligned with the overlapping philosophical camps of New Materialism, Speculative Realism, and Object Oriented Ontology (OOO). While each of these camps differ in certain regards, they share an interest in the possibilities and limitations inherent in a phenomenological approach to nonhumans. Graham Harman, who is representative of the Speculative Realist school, claims objects are “withdrawn” and thus ultimately unknowable in their true state. What can be known through phenomenology is a “sensual object,” which is a product of contact between one and the true object, but not actually the object itself. Harman writes, “For my interaction with the tree is a direct *contact*, not a vicarious *relation*, and can never become the latter. The relation at issue is between the real me and the *real* tree. After all, my perception of a tree is not an object in its own right, but only becomes one through retrospective analysis in a psychological or phenomenological act” (Harman p. 211). Jane Bennett (representative of the New Materialist camp), critiques Harman’s claims, arguing for a vitality in so-called “inanimate” objects understood through Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblage. I take Bennett’s witting up in the following chapter in my reading of Haniya Yutaka’s *Shirei*. For a concise accounting of the differences between these schools of thought, see Richard Grusin’s introduction to *The Nonhuman Turn* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

magnifying glass.”<sup>37</sup> Common’s heightened vision settles on and intensifies the facial features of nearby patrons at the café. The results are grotesque: “The faces of customers occupying the space around him stood out strangely: moles on the sides of their noses, warts under their ears, half-gold teeth, long nose hair.”<sup>38</sup>

Theories of plant vision have circulated in scientific communities at least since 1905, when Austrian botanist Gottlieb Haberlandt proposed the cells of a plant’s epidermal layer act like convex lenses, giving plants a visual capacity. Francis Darwin (son of Charles) became a proponent of this theory, and wrote of it extensively. In 1908, British botanist Harold Wager published photographs produced using the epidermal cells of various plants.<sup>39</sup> Common’s sensitivity to light and uncomfortable visual experience seems to capture some of the peculiarities of this proposed “plant vision.” The list of heightened grotesque facial features registered by Common’s plant vision suggests a plant-like subjectivity would not be ideal, but rather uncomfortable and disorienting.

As Common struggles with his newly altered vision, an unknown man enters the café. The man stares at Common, at which point Common’s neck unhinges. His head falls forward, his eyes suddenly meeting his chest. Common realizes he is once again becoming a plant, and as he struggles to regain his composure, he notices a banner hanging on a sign outside promoting *Ryokka shūkan* or “Greening Week.” This is a reference to a program officially started in 1934 and resumed in 1947 (after having been suspended for several years between 1944 and 1946), in which Japanese citizens participated in rehabilitating the war-torn natural environment by planting trees.<sup>40</sup>

Greening Week was directly tied to the imperial house, and featured an official ceremony conducted by the crown prince.<sup>41</sup> The slogan for the 1947 campaign was “Repair the ruined land of our country with peaceful green” (“*Areta kokudo o heiwa na midori de*”).<sup>42</sup> The type of rhetoric that linked peace and rehabilitation to plant life persisted as Greening Week continued into the postwar era. The stated objective of the 1950 campaign was “To extend Tree-Planting Greening Week to the whole country, in order to rehabilitate a peaceful Japan that is beautifully green and full of culture.”<sup>43</sup>

Abe’s critique of the idealism of Greening Week is connected to his critique of the idealism of Anarcho-Marxist thought. The rhetoric of Greening Week echoes the language Kropotkin used to express his vision of a new anarchist subjectivity informed by the botanical

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<sup>37</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 352.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Mancuso p. 49.

<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.rinya.maff.go.jp/kanto/ibaraki/greening/index.html>

<sup>41</sup> “*Kokushi rokka suishin undō*” p. 1. The relationship between the Japanese imperial house and the botanical realm runs deep, on both symbolic and material levels. A strong symbolic relationship exists between imperial power and plants; the imperial seal depicts a chrysanthemum flower, and the lyrics of the Japanese national anthem, *Kimi ga yo*, wishes for an imperial reign that lasts until pebbles become boulders covered in moss. Beginning in the Meiji era, the imperial house was largely financed through the creation of the *goryōrin* (imperial forest), which restricted large stretches of forestland in both the *naichi* of the Japanese mainland and the *gaichi* of Japan’s colonies to imperial use. See Conrad Totman’s *Japan’s Imperial Forest Goryōrin, 1889-1945* (Brill, 2007) for a thorough history of this material relationship between the imperial house and the botanical world. Furthermore, both the Shōwa and Heisei emperors engaged in botanical research, a fact that contributed to the modern image of the imperial house in the postwar.

<sup>42</sup> See [http://www.green.or.jp/news/news-other/o\\_fukyu\\_entry\\_273/](http://www.green.or.jp/news/news-other/o_fukyu_entry_273/)

<sup>43</sup> “*Kokushi rokka suishin undō*” p. 1. The original Japanese reads: 緑美しく、文化の香り高い、平和な日本を再建する為「植樹緑化運動」を全国に展開する。

world. Greening Week proposed a cooperative notion of subjectivity; it encouraged individuals to think themselves as part of a larger network comprised of humans and nonhumans alike. Greening Week's rhetoric resonates with Kropotkin's vision of "continued endeavours—as a struggle against adverse circumstances—for such a development of individuals, races, species, and societies, as would result in the greatest possible fullness, variety, and intensity of life."<sup>44</sup> The rehabilitation of the war-torn natural world was one such endeavor.

Upon seeing the banner for Greening Week, Common's body begins to dissolve, as his internal organs "squeeze out to the exterior of his body."<sup>45</sup> *Dendorokakariya* continues its exploration of phyto-phenomenology as a means of critique as Common begins another metamorphosis into a plant. Once again, Abe portrays botanical subjectivity in a negative light. Common's subjectivity becomes decentralized through plant metamorphosis.<sup>46</sup> His hands become leaves. He loses a sense of time, and as he regains consciousness as he realizes it is already thirty minutes past the time K was supposed to have arrived.<sup>47</sup>

*Dendorokakariya* imagines what the time of plants would feel like to the human subject.<sup>48</sup> As Common sits anxiously waiting for K to arrive, he resists the pull of plant metamorphosis, and he feels time speed up. As Common progressively becomes botanical,

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<sup>44</sup> *Mutual Aid* p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 354.

<sup>46</sup> Stefano Mancuso explains how plant life functions through decentralization: "plants distribute over their entire body the function that animals concentrate in specific organs. Decentralization is the key... (Plants) breathe with their whole body, see with their whole body, feel with their whole body..." (Mancuso 37).

<sup>47</sup> The passage of time in *Dendorokakariya* is another example of Abe's phyto-phenomenology. In both versions of the story, the narrative foregrounds the season of spring. In the 1949 version, the season is mentioned at the start of the direct address that begins the story. It reads: "Go ahead and kick a stone while walking down the street. What are you thinking about? Go ahead, say it. Where are you? I can tell you the season. It's spring. That spot where the stone rolled on the edge of the path—a dark, damp clump of soil. Green. Something... something is growing, right? Why, it's within you (*Iya, kimi no kokoro ni da yo*). Isn't there something like a plant growing within you?" (AKZ Vol. 2, p. 234). *Dendorokakariya* attempts to approximate the time of plants through a tactile awareness of spring. The narrative's mention of "a dark, damp clump of soil" offers a phyto-phenomenological account of how plants experience the seasonal time of spring. According to Mancuso, plants have an acute sense of touch: "In the plant world, the sense of touch is closely related to the sense of hearing and makes use of small sensory organs called mechanosensitive channels, found in small numbers everywhere on the plant but with greatest frequency on the epidermal cells, the cells that are in direct contact with the external environment (*Brilliant Green* p. 67)." Mancuso goes on to posit that plants in fact possess a unique sense unavailable to humans that helps find moisture: "a plant is capable of precisely measuring a soil's humidity and identifying sources of water even at a great distance (*Brilliant Green* p. 77)." According to Mancuso, this watery sense is one of fifteen senses that exist within the botanical realm but are unavailable to humans.

<sup>48</sup> Plant time is remarkably slower than human time. In tune with the seasons and the natural diurnal cycle of sunrise and sunset, plants experience a much slower form of temporality than humans are accustomed to. It is only through time-lapse cinematography that human perception is able to grasp the slow unfolding that is the movement of plants. Plant movement was the object of time-lapse cinema from its earliest days; in 1896 German botanist Wilhelm Friedrich Philipp Pfeffer developed a method of time-lapse cinematography that first demonstrated how plants move (*The Revolutionary Genius of Plants* p. 21). In 1910, F. Percy Smith would release his influential time-lapse film *The Birth of the Flower*, which makes a series of flowers opening their buds legible within human time. For this legibility to occur, plant time must be sped up to match human time. Common experiences what might be understood as the opposite of time-lapse cinematography. As he becomes botanical, human clock time gives way to plant time. Everything slows down within the embodied time Common experiences. Like a plant, any of Common's small movements (looking out the window, for example) likely take a long duration of human clock time. A moment of plant time (such the opening up a flower bud) could take several human hours. For Common, the world within the café rushes by at an entirely different temporality. In the time it takes for him to unfurl the leaves that had been his fingers, around half of an hour passes, and he realizes he can no longer meet K.

human clock time becomes dry and elusive: “Gradually, as it fell in rhythm with the beating of his anxious heart, the ticking of the wall clock hanging overhead appeared to speed up. Time felt like sand falling through the spaces in-between his fingers.”<sup>49</sup> Common will recognize, once he realizes the meeting time with K has already passed during the span of his metamorphosis, that his perception of time has changed with his becoming botanical. Once again his experience of botanical subjectivity is not utopian. It is not, in Kropotkin’s words, a multiple subjectivity in which subjects are “all very intimately connected with one another, each feeling the consequence of the well-being or indisposition of each.” On the contrary, becoming botanical disconnects Common from others around him. His plant vision makes them appear grotesque. His plant time makes him miss the time of his appointment with K. Caught between two temporalities, Common anxiously runs out of the café.

### **Becoming Oneself, Otherwise and The Foreclosure of Vegetal Plasticity**

Leaving the café, Common enters the crowds on the street and hears the following announcement somewhere in the distance: “It is currently Greening Week. To all passersby: let us love trees. Plants provide harmony for our hearts that are in ruins. Plants make our neighborhoods clean and beautiful...”<sup>50</sup> Common then comes upon destroyed buildings, or *yakeato*—the literal ruins of the city leftover from war, and the very material ruins Greening Week looks to move beyond. Among the remains of war, Common once again commences becoming botanical. The loss of distinction between interior and exterior is made explicit during this transformation among the *yakeato* ruins: “He had a sense that this time he was clearly becoming a plant. Or rather, he felt the whole of the exterior world was becoming himself, and a tube-like part that had been himself up until this point but was no longer himself was becoming a plant. Yet he felt no need to resist. Wasn't it just as the advertisement had said? ‘Our hearts that are in ruins...’”<sup>51</sup>

Greening Week posits a utopian scenario in which the ravaged internal spirits of a nation are healed by repairing the ruined external world with “peaceful green.” Common’s sudden embrace of the Greening Week rhetoric momentarily portrays *Dendorokakariya*’s botanical becoming as similarly utopian, as it looks toward vegetal plasticity to forge a new subjectivity. Up until this point in the narrative, Common has resisted the pull of becoming botanical. As *Dendorokakariya* highlighted the uncomfortable phenomenological experience of plant subjectivity, it likewise resisted the pull of the utopian rhetoric bound up in what I have called a botanical-anarchist subjectivity, as it was espoused by Anarchist thinkers and Abe’s contemporaries in the *Yoru no Kai* and the JCP. This moment in the narrative, however,

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<sup>49</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 353. *Dendorokakariya* pays close attention to environmental moisture, as in the opening lines of the 1952 version: “This is the story of Common becoming a dendrocacia. One day, Common absent-mindedly kicked a stone on the edge of the road. The beginning of spring, the path was darkened by moisture” (AKZ Vol. 3, p. 350.) Later on in the narrative, as Common waits for K at the café, and as he is experiencing plant vision, he looks out the window remarks on the lack of moisture, presenting the scene in surreal and near-horrific language: “The busy asphalt street near the station for the national railway line was already dry and white. Even the mixed shadows floated up dry and white. Bicycles lined up and raced by, breaking up the dried-up shadows into small pieces and setting them afloat” (AKZ Vol. 3, 352).

<sup>50</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 355.

<sup>51</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 356.

Common lets go of such resistance. Suddenly, botanical subjectivity *does* hold potential for transcendence.

In this moment of the narrative, Common embraces plant metamorphosis as his subjectivity dissolves into the exterior world. It is here (and only here) that we find the potential for plasticity in *Dendorokakariya*. As he feels himself “clearly becoming a plant” among the wreckage of past bomb raids, Common too admits to having a “heart in ruins.” In the dissolution of a firm boundary between interior and exterior, Common feels the *yakeato* enter within him, and glimpses how plant life can grow up through the remains of war: “It was as if the kind of rust that can only be seen in the *yakeato* had bled into him. A light pink color was blotted on the chimneys that remained and stood like pillars among the ruins, resembling a map. Even still, in the spaces between the crumbling, disordered slate and bricks, it seemed as if weeds were growing.”<sup>52</sup>

Common understands that plant metamorphosis is his chance, to paraphrase Michael Marder, to become himself, otherwise.<sup>53</sup> Through plant metamorphosis, Common becomes, if only for a moment, a different, radically other version of himself. For a moment he becomes a vegetal version that attempts to grow from and yet beyond the (literal) wreckage of the Japanese postwar. This was a vision held by thinkers like Hanada who were invested in Anarcho-Marxist politics.

As Common surrenders to his becoming botanical, *Dendorokakariya* momentarily reads as a harbinger of the kind of revolutionary potential Hanada saw in plants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While not explicitly Anarchist or Marxist in tone, the language Abe uses to describe Common’s new subjectivity shares the utopian leanings of Anarchist thinkers like Kropotkin. As Common feels like “the whole of the exterior world... becoming himself,” his sense of subjectivity is expanded far beyond regionally and temporally specific notions of national subjectivity.<sup>54</sup> For a brief moment, Common becomes, as Kropotkin envisioned, “quite a world of federations, a universe in himself.”

The new form of subjectivity opened up in Common’s botanical becoming is suddenly legible in the very narrative form of *Dendorokakariya*. As Common embraces plant metamorphosis in an attempt to move beyond a collective “heart in ruins,” the otherwise straightforward language of the novella gives way to poetry. Offset from the rest of the narrative, *Dendorokakariya* presents the following poem:

Were it only to pass through the transience of this life  
Why not? Among the others within the faintly dark green  
Carving a rippled shape in the green leaves  
Must I not be a laurel tree?  
.....<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> In this moment, as Common feels as if the “the whole of the exterior world was becoming himself,” Abe develops a phyto-phenomenological notion of becoming botanical that bears close resemblance to Marder’s concept of “vegetal being.” “Plants are together with what they attend to, and their being is a being-together with air, moisture, soil, warmth, and sunlight. In their attention to the elements, they become themselves... When I linger with plants, I find myself thus in a communion with everything they are and live with. I am together with myself differently as well; I become myself, otherwise” (Irigaray and Marder p. 158).

<sup>54</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 356.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Ellipses in original.

The text is unclear about from where this poetry emerges, as it follows the final line of ellipses with a vague attribution: “Such poetry might have occurred to Common.”<sup>56</sup> The insertion of this poetic take on becoming botanical, which is not explicitly ascribed to Common yet seems to pass through him nevertheless, embodies a formal plasticity in the narrative that points toward the subjective plasticity Common experiences in this moment of metamorphosis.<sup>57</sup>

For a moment, Common seeks shelter from the violence of the postwar in the space of the botanical realm, as it provides a site of plasticity through which to reconfigure subjectivity. Common feels the comfort of becoming botanical: “I have decided to be reduced to a single plant, right here. Once determined, becoming a plant is pleasant feeling. Why not become a plant?”<sup>58</sup> Common comes to understand the safe space that the botanical world provides. It is a space that, according to Marder, “provide(s) us with a very peculiar shelter where the traditional distinction between interiority and exteriority no longer applies.”<sup>59</sup>

This utopian moment does not last for long, however. A voice rings out in surprise, identifying and interpolating Common for the first time as a dendrocacia, using the scientific name for the plant. A man that we will come to recognize as the director of a botanical garden approaches the transformed Common and pulls out a “naval knife” (“*kaigun no naifu*”). The man remarks: “How rare to be able to collect a dendrocacia in the Japanese mainland (*naichi*)!”<sup>60</sup>

With this act of scientific classification, the director of the botanical garden forecloses the possibility of Common’s finding plasticity in the vegetal world. The recognition of the dendrocacia and its position within the Japanese colonial nexus shatters the utopian possibilities bound up in becoming botanical. The use of the plant’s scientific name draws attention to the complicity of scientific botanical research in Japan’s colonial project. Likewise, the explicit use of the term *naichi* (which denotes a strict division between an interior and an exterior within a colonial logic) just as Common embraces the loss of distinction between his own interior subjectivity and the exterior world (“he felt the whole of the exterior world was becoming himself, and a tube-like part that had been himself up until this point but was no longer himself was becoming a plant”) shatters the utopian idealism of transcendence.

Once this occurs, the peculiar shelter of vegetal subjectivity no longer provides any comfort. Instead, Common is confronted with the reality of violence as distinctions between interior and exterior dissolve. The interior subjective space that opens up in plant metamorphosis forces Common to reckon with the repressed wartime memories harbored within, just as he is forced to reckon with his own face staring back at him.

Standing among the bombed out remains of the city, with a military knife in hand, the botanical garden director prevents Common’s attempts at moving beyond the historical realities of postwar Japan. The dendrocacia plant is not a “peaceful green;” it is a plant endemic to the Bonin Islands, and thus a reminder of Japan’s external *gaichi*. It is a physical reality bearing witness to lands exterior to the Japanese mainland that had now, in the immediate postwar, either regained sovereignty (such as Korea) or found themselves in a state of political limbo at the hands of the US Occupation (such as the Ryūkyū Islands or Okinawa and the Bonin Islands as well).

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> At is as if, in becoming botanical, Common suddenly becomes a medium through which poetry passes through. Such plant media is the subject of the following chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Irigaray and Marder p. 120.

<sup>60</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 357.

The botanical garden director's recognition of the dendrocacalia in the *naichi* mainland marks a turning point in the narrative. The remainder of the of the story finds Common trying to evade and ultimately kill the director (with the military knife), while the director likewise attempts to convince Common to come live within the space of the botanical garden. He assures Common he will be safe in the garden, as it receives "government protection" ("*seifu no hoshō*").<sup>61</sup>

Through the figure of the dendrocacalia, and the artificial environment of the government-protected botanical garden, Abe presents an allegorical diagnosis of Japan's negotiation of wartime memory. Within this tale of plant metamorphosis is a critique of the "greening" or beautification of such memory. Within Abe's allegorical figuration, governmental authority safely and securely tends to such living memories, keeping them manicured and carefully categorized. They are out of time, suspended in artificial animation.

*Dendorokakariya* asks postwar Japanese readers to confront the disappearance that is the postwar ideology of disavowal. Disavowal is legible in the figure of the greenhouse, as for Abe, stasis equaled nonexistence. As Richard Calichman argues, "For Abe... anything that exists must be essentially temporal, and this means that it stands continually exposed to the coming of other times and other spaces in order to be at all."<sup>62</sup> If things must be temporal and mobile within Abe's literary universe in order to exist, than the living memories embodied in/as the dendrocacalia trapped in the greenhouse effectively cease to be.

The dendrocacalia that once was Common is carefully arranged in a collection that bears name plates and national flags. It has been categorized and assigned a place within the logic of the nation state. Once his metamorphosis into the dendrocacalia is complete, there is no potential for further change. There is no hope for plasticity. The dendrocacalia is preserved within what we might call specimen time.<sup>63</sup> Within the greenhouse, there is no space for, in Timiryazev's words, a notion of "organic Nature as a vast whole which is ever changing and transforming itself." The greenhouse denies the plant its place in a living, changing history.

## Endemic Species, Endemic Histories

As *Dendorokakariya* closes on the image of the dendrocacalia plant locked away in the greenhouse, it warns of the erasure of the complex colonial history of the Bonin Islands. The tale of an endemic species uprooted from the islands and pursued in the *naichi* mainland echoes the experience of the human inhabitants of the Bonin Islands, who were similarly uprooted to the potentially dangerous space of the *naichi*. The narrative aligns the unsettled demarcation of

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<sup>61</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 362.

<sup>62</sup> Calichman p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Plants from the Bonin Islands still live at Koishikawa Botanical Gardens to this day and serve as a living reminder of Japan's colonial legacy. According to their official website, the Koishikawa Gardens have been gathering and conducting research on the flora of the Bonin Islands since the early Meiji Period. It states that since 2004, the gardens have been working in cooperation with the governmental offices of Ogasawara (under the direction of the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries) to protect and propagate endangered endemic plant species of the Bonin Islands. Within a world and climate in flux, in which the endemic species of the Bonin Islands are increasingly endangered, the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens (with support from the Japanese government) strive to preserve the flora of Ogasawara for research purposes. See Matsushita and *Shokubutsu tayōsei no hozen*.

Common's interiority and the external world with the unsettled push and pull between interior and exterior that formed this colonial history (in which the islanders held *naichi* legal status while at times being visibly marked as either exterior colonial subjects or, even more dangerously, foreign enemies).

What colonial memories are entangled in the dendrocacalia plant? The plant goes by the name *wadannoki* in Japanese, yet Abe does not use this name in the story, and refers to it only by the first part of its Latin name within Linnaean taxonomy (binominal nomenclature). The full name of the plant within Linnaean taxonomy is *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia* Nakai. The name Nakai refers to influential botanist Nakai Takenoshin (1882–1952), who I discuss at length below. The use of a proper name at the end of a Latin species name indicates that the named individual (in this case Nakai) was the first to publish a description of said species.

The use of the plant's Latin name in *Dendorokakariya* adds a scientific air to the narrative. Abe held a degree in medicine from Tōkyō Imperial University, and while he never practiced medicine, a familiarity with scientific terminology can be found throughout his oeuvre. *Dendorokakariya* is unique, however, for its use of botanical terminology. The straightforwardness of Abe's style in *Dendorokakariya* speaks to both his interest at the time in spreading literature to the masses (as evidenced in his involvement with *Yoru no Kai* and his work organizing among factory workers) and to the influence of scientific literature on the narrative. It performs the perceived objectivity of language inherent in scientific naming, while simultaneously narrating the violent consequences of such naming.<sup>64</sup> The use of the Latin name for the plant speaks to the milieu in which the dendrocacalia was taken up as a scientific object of study in Japan.

In 1936, The Botanical Society of Japan published a series of articles that ran throughout several issues of their *Shokubutsugaku zasshi* that categorized the flora of the Bonin Islands. The articles were published entirely in Latin, save for a few passages in English. The dendrocacalia is featured in the fifth installment of this series.<sup>65</sup> The plant stands about 3 meters in height, with a trunk reaching up to 5-6 cm in diameter.<sup>66</sup> It is a member of the Asteraceae family of flowering plants, which includes asters, daisies, sunflowers, and chrysanthemums. Within this large family of flowering plants, the dendrocacalia is unique. Endemic to the island of Hahajima, it grows only around Chibusayama, the mountain which stands as the highest point of the island.<sup>67</sup> It is for this reason that the director of the botanical garden in *Dendorokakariya* is so surprised to find the plant in the *naichi* of the Japanese mainland.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mutsuko Motoyama recounts that Abe had been living in a boarding house next to factory workers' quarters at the time he was awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 1951. See Motoyama p. 314.

<sup>65</sup> See Tsuyama.

<sup>66</sup> Ono p. 99.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> The Bonin Islands are a rich source of endemic species, a fact that has continued to draw the attention of biologists. Just as the many endemic species of the Galapagos Islands helped Charles Darwin develop his theory of evolution, so too have the endemic flora of the Bonin Islands contributed to continuing scientific research. The unique ecosystems of the islands have earned them the status of UNESCO World Heritage site, and scholarly interest continues to grow as endemic species on the islands face increasing threats from non-native species and climate change. A wealth of scientific information regarding management of the islands' ecosystems are available on the website for the Ogasawara Islands Nature Information Center: <http://ogasawara-info.jp/> See, for example, the *Sekai shizen isan Ogasawarasho kanri keikau* published in 2018. Also, see *Restoring the Oceanic Island Ecosystem Impact and Management of Invasive Alien Species in the Bonin Islands* (ed. Kazuto Kawakami and Isamu Okochi, 2010).



Endemic species such as the dendrocacalia are something of a puzzle. According to Itō Motomi, a researcher of plant evolution and biodiversity at Tōkyō University, the origins of the dendrocacalia are mysterious: “From what kind of ancestors did (the dendrocacalia) evolve? In truth, we still cannot answer this question. We do not find a plant that closely resembles the dendrocacalia within the Asteraceae family.”<sup>69</sup>

For the Bonin Islands, the issue of unclear ancestry extends beyond the botanical realm, and participates in the tension between internal and external (*naichi* and *gaichi*) that Abe stages throughout *Dendorokakariya*. By the time Japan officially claimed the islands as colonial property in 1876, the Bonin Islands had already been a contested site for decades.<sup>70</sup> Both Britain and Japan believed the islands to be rightfully theirs, and Commodore Matthew Perry famously made a visit to the islands a month prior to landing on the Japanese mainland.<sup>71</sup>

This contested history led to a diverse population of human inhabitants on the islands. Records of the first Bonin Islanders to enter the Japanese family registration system (*jinsin koseki*), which was established by the Meiji government in the 1870s, demonstrates this reality; of the initial five islanders that registered, one was British, one was Spanish, and the remaining three were Pacific Islanders.<sup>72</sup> By 1882, the entire population of the islands was entered into the family registry, making the Bonin Islanders legal subjects of Japan.<sup>73</sup> As historian David Chapman explains, the islands were unique among Japan’s colonies in this regard:

(Because) the Ogasawara Islands were part of the emerging nation earlier than colonies such as the Korean peninsula and Taiwan, the “foreign” inhabitants were placed in the same registry as other Japanese much like the populations of the Ryūkyū Islands. In contrast, the colonial territories of Korea and Taiwan had special colonial registers (*gaichi koseki*) that were administered by colonial offices and abolished after the end of the war.<sup>74</sup>

Thus according to their family registries, the inhabitants of the Bonin Islands belonged not to the colonial space of the *gaichi*, but rather the *naichi* metropole, even if they had been born in Britain or Spain.<sup>75</sup>

The ambiguity over the status of Bonin Islanders took on a potentially violent nature in 1944, as the Japanese government ordered the forced evacuation of the islands. As close to 7,000 residents “returned” to the *naichi* mainland that had not been their home, they faced a situation similar to the one Abe allegorically narrates in *Dendorokakariya*. The Bonin Islanders were often greeted with suspicion and threats of violence in the *naichi*. As Chapman recounts: “with some members of this group having blond hair and blue or green eyes, the Bonin Islanders were often questioned about their origin and most times their interrogators were unaware of the existence of the Ogasawara Islands much less the small community of descendants of original foreign

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<sup>69</sup> Itō p.24.

<sup>70</sup> See Chapman for an account of this history.

<sup>71</sup> Chapman p. 37.

<sup>72</sup> Chapman p. 92.

<sup>73</sup> Chapman p. 105.

<sup>74</sup> Chapman p. 104.

<sup>75</sup> Abe’s own family registry was situated in Hokkaidō—another colonial acquisition that does not map neatly onto the *naichi/gaichi* schematic.

settlers.”<sup>76</sup> The persistent and menacing attempts by the director of the botanical garden to capture Common echoes this history of colonial violence.<sup>77</sup>

When islanders were allowed to return to their former home in 1946, they found it in ruins. US bombing raids had leveled much of the island of Chichijima, decimating buildings as well as plant life.<sup>78</sup> Eventually the islands were returned to Japanese sovereignty in 1968, and remain official Japanese territory to this day.

### **Kliment Timiryazev and the “Limit Beyond which a Subject Becomes an Object”**

In *Dendorokakariya*, Abe positions the dendrocacalia plant at the intersection of competing regimes of knowledge. After Common’s encounter in the bombed-out ruins with the head of the botanical garden (the moment I read as a turning point in the narrative in which Abe momentarily embraces but ultimately rejects the potential for plasticity), Common visits the library to research plant metamorphosis. There, he begins reading about Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and as well as Greek mythology, although he recognizes this as an “unscientific” (“*hikagakuteki*”) way to begin searching for an explanation for something “actually occurring” in his body.

Through his reading of Dante and Greek mythology, Common develops a folkloric/religious explanation for his plant metamorphosis. Within the *Divine Comedy*, the middle circle of the seventh layer of Hell is populated by those guilty of the sin of suicide, whereupon they are turned into trees and become food for the mythical half-human/half-bird harpies. Common embraces this unscientific explanation, and concludes: “Without knowing it, I guess I must have already committed suicide.”<sup>79</sup>

Common decides he must kill the head of the botanical garden. When they meet again, Common explains how he has been reading Dante and Greek mythology and accuses the employee of being a harpy. The employee condemns mythology and offers a scientific explanation in its place:

Isn’t Greek mythology a little unscientific, Mr. Dendrocacalia? It does more harm than good. Do you want to hear something more interesting? Have you read Timiryazev’s *The Life of the Plant*? This is what it says: there is no qualitative difference between plants and animals. There is only a quantitative difference. In other words, plants and animals are scientifically the same.<sup>80</sup>

Kliment Timiryazev was a highly influential botanist in his native Russia. He was a contemporary of Charles Darwin, and an adamant supporter of Darwin’s theory of evolution.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Chapman p. 140.

<sup>77</sup> When Japan surrendered to the United States the following year, in 1945, the status of the islanders was further complicated. The Bonin Islands fell under the control of the US military, and the islanders became wards of the United States, while maintaining, on paper, Japanese citizenship. See Chapman p. 200.

<sup>78</sup> Chapman p. 159.

<sup>79</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 359.

<sup>80</sup> AKZ Vol. 3, p. 362.

<sup>81</sup> Timiryazev wrote an account of visiting Darwin in England, when Darwin was working with his son Francis on their study of the botanical world entitled *The Power of Movement in Plants*. While Darwin’s text influenced plant biology in Europe and the United States, it would not be translated into Japanese until 1987 (Watanabe Jin’s 1987

His influential *The Life of the Plant*, originally published in Russia in 1878, participated in a revolutionary new approach to the study of plant life. *The Life of the Plant*, by its very title, grants a notion of “life” to the botanical realm. It views plants as subjects living their own lives, rather than mere objects of study.<sup>82</sup> In his review published of the first printing of the Japanese translation of Timiryazev’s text in 1934, Nakajima Seinosuke contrasts *The Life of the Plant* to the many popular books on plant science that can be found in “any used book store in Japan for around 30 - 40 *sen*.”<sup>83</sup> Nakajima suggests that Timiryazev’s text should serve as the basis for a new approach to the writing of popular science.<sup>84</sup>

In his preface to the 1947 edition of *The Life of the Plant*, translator Ishii Tomoyuki echoes this review: “Popular books and general introductions devoted to the study of plants are extremely common both abroad and in Japan. However, I do not know whether another general introduction exists that is as unique and as excellent as Timiryazev’s *The Life of the Plant*.”<sup>85</sup> What Ishii finds particularly rare in *The Life of the Plant* is Timiryazev’s scientific engagement with a mysterious energy within plants that Ishii aligns with Vitalism.

As the antagonist of *Dendorokakariya* claims, Timiryazev’s work looks to diminish the ontological distance between plants and animals. The director of the botanical garden’s claim that “there is no qualitative difference between plants and animals” can indeed be found in the ninth chapter of *The Life of the Plant*. Drawing from scientific research, Timiryazev investigates whether plants in fact exhibit characteristics that have been previously been ascribed only to animals. These characteristics include movement, nutrition, respiration, stimulation, and finally, consciousness.

Although he admits the question of consciousness comes up against the limits of experimental inquiry and is thus scientifically unknowable, in each other case he demonstrates that plants do in fact possess the same characteristics and internal processes as animals. Having reached this conclusion, he writes, “It follows that the difference between plants and animals is not qualitative, but only quantitative. The same processes take place in both kingdoms, but some of them predominate in the one and some in the other.”<sup>86</sup> For Timiryazev, plants live *lives* in very much the same way as animals.

Abe’s inclusion of Timiryazev’s *The Life of the Plant* in *Dendorokakariya* serves two purposes. Firstly, Timiryazev offers a scientific justification for the ontological ambiguity between humans and plants that Abe narrates as plant metamorphosis. The inclusion of Timiryazev suggests there is something more to the botanical becoming in *Dendorokakariya* than mere surrealist play. It adds scientific depth to a story Abe called “strange” in his letter to Haniya, and asks that the strangeness of the story not overshadow the seriousness of its allegorical qualities. Secondly, the inclusion of Timiryazev in *Dendorokakariya* directly

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translation, published by Morikita, was the first Japanese edition.). Timiryazev’s *The Life of the Plant*, on the other hand, was initially translated into Japanese in 1934, and went through three printings in the following thirteen years.

<sup>82</sup> Timiryazev characterizes this shift in scientific approach as a war: “It is notorious that there have been two schools working in the province of natural science, two parties engaged in warfare. The extremists of the one school saw in living Nature nothing but a collection, a kind of museum, of immutable living things, cast in definite fixed forms. According to them the work of the student of natural science resolved itself into an endeavour to make a general catalogue of those forms, label them and arrange them in a collection. The other school looked upon organic Nature as a vast whole which is ever changing and transforming itself. Today the organic world is different from what it was yesterday, and tomorrow will be different from what it is today” (*Life of the Plant* p. 70).

<sup>83</sup> Nakajima p. 915.

<sup>84</sup> Nakajima p. 918.

<sup>85</sup> *Shokubutsu no seikatsu* p. 1. Translation mine.

<sup>86</sup> *The Life of the Plant* p. 340.

participates in the allegorical pull of the narrative, as Abe uses Timiryazev's exposure of the previous hidden world of plant life as a figure through which to expose the disavowal of Japan's colonial history.

Timiryazev's *The Life of the Plant* participates in a metamorphosis of scientific epistemology. The uniqueness of Timiryazev's research breaks with the history of natural science as Michel Foucault characterizes it in *The Order of Things*. Foucault tracks the epistemic shift in the move away from natural science into the study of biology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Foucault, "The naturalist is the man concerned with the structure of the visible world and its denomination according to characters. Not with life."<sup>87</sup> Timiryazev was very much concerned with rethinking what "life" meant in relation to the world of plants. For this reason, he looked within the previously hidden depths of the botanical realm.

A movement inwards, from the exterior world of the visible and into the interior world of life, marked a new era of science. The exposure of a concept of life in living beings came to inform biological study, and inspired Abe's allegorical tale of plant metamorphosis. Foucault argues, "it is understandable how the notion of life could become indispensable to the ordering of natural beings... it was essential to be able to apprehend in the depths of the body the relations that link superficial organs to those whose existence and hidden forms perform the essential functions..."<sup>88</sup> Foucault grants a realm of interior depth and life to plants as well.<sup>89</sup>

*The Life of the Plant* is representative of a sea change in scientific knowledge. It grants the botanical world a notion of life. It exposes the previously hidden, internal forces of plants, granting them movement, and potentially consciousness. Having moved beyond the objective realm of the visible, Timiryazev asks: "Where is the limit beyond which an object becomes a subject?"<sup>90</sup> Common's botanical becoming in *Dendorokakariya* posits a similar question. Confronted with the hidden, internally repressed memories of colonial violence, the narrative questions how one becomes a subject of one's own history, rather than an object within it. It grapples with the possibility of such subjectivity within the context of a colonial history continuing into the Japanese postwar period.

The relegation of the dendrocacalia plant to the government-controlled greenhouse in *Dendorokakariya* looks to deny the plant (and the colonial memories it embodies) a notion of life, and a notion of history. The greenhouse renders the plant and its memories static specimens to be manipulated by the state. Abe takes the movement inward into the depths of plant life that Foucault recognized in scientific works like Timiryazev's *The Life of the Plant* and makes it clear that to deny plants a notion of life is to deny them a history. If, as the director of the botanical garden quotes from *The Life of the Plant*, "there is no qualitative difference between plants and animals," then such denial applies equally to the humans and nonhuman plants of the colonial *gaichi*. Denied a notion of life and history, they are no longer colonial subjects, and become colonial objects.

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<sup>87</sup> Foucault 161.

<sup>88</sup> Foucault p. 228.

<sup>89</sup> Foucault writes, "it had already proved possible to observe in the vegetable kingdom that it is not flowers and fruits—the most easily visible parts of the plant—that are the significant elements, but the embryonic organization and such organs as the cotyledon." Foucault p. 229.

<sup>90</sup> *The Life of the Plant* p. 337.

## On Staying with the Trouble in Postwar Japan

The director of the botanical garden praises Timiryazev, and calls plants “the new gods” and “the hope of the present.”<sup>91</sup> Yet the director fundamentally misunderstands the implications of the interior space Timiryazev’s research opens up. He tells Common, “A plant is purity (*junsui*) itself—that word so full of pathos that has been expunged from everyday usage...”<sup>92</sup> For the head of the botanical garden, plant metamorphosis, like Greening Week, is a means of moving forward. It covers the ugly, messy, devastated remains of colonial subjectivity with a pure, peaceful green. In the process, colonial memory is objectified, locked away in a hothouse that is kept under key by the government. Unlike Timiryazev’s plants, the botanical becomings trapped in the garden are deprived of life. They exist in the limbo of the visible world, suspended in animation and full of hidden truths.

While the antagonist of *Dendorokakariya* misunderstands the potential for revelation inherent in *The Life of the Plant*, it seems clear that Abe himself was well aware of the implications of Timiryazev’s work. Abe took Timiryazev’s insight into the hidden, internal life of plants as the basis for his own exploration of a colonial legacy slipping into the hidden world of disavowal. He rejected the potential for transcendence offered in the process of metamorphosis—a potential embraced by other writers in the *Yoru no Kai*, the National Greening Promotion Committee, and, diegetically, by the director of the botanical garden.

Instead, Abe mobilized the movement inward occasioned through plant metamorphosis in order to “stay with the trouble,” to borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway. In her text of the same name, Haraway writes, “In urgent times, many of us are tempted to address trouble in terms of making an imagined future safe, of stopping something from happening in the future, or clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generation.”<sup>93</sup> This is the purpose of Greening Week and the botanical garden in *Dendorokakariya*: to make an imagined future safe for future generations through carefully controlled rehabilitation.

*Dendorokakariya* rejects such a future. Instead, it embodies Haraway’s figuration of being present: “Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as moral critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of planes, times, matters, meanings.”<sup>94</sup> The memories embodied as plants in the government-controlled greenhouse are deprived a subject position as “unfinished configurations.” They are overdetermined. As the director of botanical garden laughs uncontrollably while pinning a nametag on the dendrocacalia that was once Common, the plant’s meaning is imposed upon it.

In *The Life of the Plant*, Timiryazev calls the act of metamorphosis “the expression in space of what has taken place in time.”<sup>95</sup> Abe’s plant metamorphosis in *Dendorokakariya* expresses, in the space of a relatively few number of pages, the horror of the long colonial history of the Bonin Islands. Abe’s botanical becoming opens space for reflection on this history, and warns of the dangers of the beautification of ugly truths. It struggles to be truly present in the

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<sup>91</sup> AKZ Vol. 3 p. 362. The director also says “plants are an analogy for schizophrenia.” This statement strongly resonates with the work of Osaki Midori, as discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>92</sup> AKZ Vol. 3 p. 363.

<sup>93</sup> *Staying with the Trouble* p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *The Life of the Plant* p. 72.

urgent times of the postwar moment, to stand among the ruins of war as a moral subject of a colonial empire. The “moral critters” of which Haraway writes include the plants living their lives in the entwined configurations of space once rendered *naichi* and *gaichi*.

### The Imperial Lives of Plants

Abe’s *Dendorokakariya* positions the dendrocacalia plant as a living witness of colonial history. It introduces the concept of a plant having a life through the work of Timiryazev, only to allegorically deny this notion of life as a metaphor for the denial of colonial history. Yet the very notion of “the lives of plants” (*shokubutsu no seikatsu*) in modern Japan has its own history that extends beyond the revolutionary texts of Kropotkin and Timiryazev, and sits directly within Japan’s wartime imperial project.

Beginning in 1939, Shinchōsha published the multi-volume educational series *Shin Nihon shōnen shōjo bunko* (*New Collection for Japanese Boys and Girls*). The intended audience for this series was children, and included such nationalistic titles as *Aikoku monogatari* (*Stories of Patriotism*), *Kokoro o kiyoku suru hanashi* (*Stories to Purify One’s Spirit*), and *Kuni no mamori* (*Defending the Country*). As these titles demonstrate, the aim of this series was to mold children into proper imperial subjects.

Yet the series also included less-obviously propagandistic volumes on literature (including Chinese and Western literature, in addition to Japanese), as well as volumes on agriculture and natural science. The seventh volume, published in 1940, is titled *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu* (*The Lives of Animals and Plants*)—the same title used for the translation of Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid*, and essentially the same title as Timiryazev’s *The Life of the Plant* (*Shokubutsu no seikatsu*). In using the title of Timiryazev’s text within an allegorical tale of Japanese colonialism, Abe entangles the utopian notions bound up in Timiryazev and Kropotkin’s texts to the propagandistic wartime text that shares the same name.

*Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu* is divided in two sections, with the first half discussing animals, and the second half taking up the botanical world. The second half, titled *Shokubutsu no seikatsu* (the same title of the translation of Timiryazev’s *The Life of the Plant*), is attributed to Honda Masaji (1897-1984). Honda was a prominent prewar botanist who went on to assist the Shōwa Emperor in botanical research after the war.<sup>96</sup> Botanical research was a key element to rehabilitating the image of the formerly militaristic emperor in the postwar, just as it was a key component to the interwar colonial project.<sup>97</sup>

The introduction to the *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu* volume grants “lives” to both nonhuman animals and plants. In a playful tone pitched at the young reader, it attempts to arouse curiosity in the natural world:

Each of these innumerable animals and plants are carrying on with their lives as they please. The bees flying outside your window, the monkeys in the deep mountains—they each have their own lives. The wild grasses on the roadside, the giant trees on the

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<sup>96</sup> With Honda’s help, the Shōwa Emperor published a series of studies on the plants of Nasu and the Izu Peninsula between 1962 and 1985. See Kageyama.

<sup>97</sup> The Shōwa Emperor’s successor, the Heisei Emperor, likewise shared a scientific interest in plant life, as demonstrated in an article he wrote for *Nature* magazine in 2007 entitled “Linnaeus and taxonomy in Japan.”

mountain peaks that reach toward the heavens—they each have their own lives. Isn't it fun getting to know about the lives of these animals and plants?<sup>98</sup>

For the writers of *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu*, there is a logical progression that leads from the enjoyment of studying the lives of animals and plants to a nationalistic devotion to the Japanese Empire.

*Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu* functions within an ideology that naturalizes, through science and biophilia, Japan's prewar nationalism.<sup>99</sup> A love for the Japanese nation is as natural as a childlike love for animals and plants. Yet as much as this ideology attempts to tie nationalism to a scientific study of the material world, it nonetheless resorts to the language of the immaterial. The introduction relegates the love for animals, plants, friend, and ultimately the nation, to the realm of the spirit (*kokoro*).

The separation of the material and the spirit in *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu* does not foreshadow the coming of revolution, as Hanada Kiyoteru believed. Instead, it uses the supposed objectivity of science to justify the subjective experience of nationalism. This ideology speaks to the claim director of the botanical garden makes in *Dendorokakariya*: “A plant is purity (*junsui*) itself—that word so full of pathos that has been expunged from everyday usage...”<sup>100</sup> The implication of the director's comment is that the concept of purity was expunged from everyday use in the postwar because of its ties to wartime rhetoric. *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu*'s use of the language of “spirit” is similarly bound up in this rhetoric. The text claims that a pure spirit that loves nature will develop into a proper national subject that loves the Japanese empire.

Like Timiryazev, Honda discusses the hidden, internal processes of plants. Unlike Timiryazev, however, he posits that an interest in the interior world of plant life helps condition the spiritual interior of the human subject: “Those who are capable of loving grasses and trees are always extremely happy and are able to possess beautiful spirits (*kokoro*).”<sup>101</sup> As the text's introduction lays out for the (young) reader, a beautiful spirit is one that will naturally love its country.<sup>102</sup> This is rhetoric that finds its way into *Dendorokakariya* through Abe's inclusion of

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<sup>98</sup> Terao p. 2. Translation mine throughout.

<sup>99</sup> The introduction claims: “It has been said from long ago that there is not an evil person among those that love animals and plants. What does this mean? It means that those who love animals and plants have spirits that become honest (*sunao*) and straightforward (*massugu*). It means they have warm spirits. A spirit that loves the animals and plants closely connected to human life develops into a spirit that loves its friends and the people around it. Furthermore, it develops into a spirit that loves its country” (Terao p. 2)

<sup>100</sup> AKZ Vol. 3 p. 363.

<sup>101</sup> Terao p. 186.

<sup>102</sup> Written within the colonial modernity of the early Shōwa era, such a claim carries heavy ideological weight. The language of Honda's *Shokubutsu no seikatsu* resembles the rhetoric of *airin shisō* (Forest-Love Ideology), a pre- and interwar phenomenon that Tessa Morris-Suzuki calls “an intriguing mixture of ecological science and nationalist romanticism, which brought together elements from myth, literature, aesthetics and cutting-edge botanical knowledge...” (Morris-Suzuki p. 230). Like the introduction to *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu*, the rhetoric of *airin shisō* posited a natural link between the love of plant life and the love of the nation. The purported logic of this link between forest-love and national love is exemplified in the opening lines of a short catalogue that the Japanese Bureau of Forestry published for the 1910 Japanese-British Exhibition in London: “Along the western shore of the Pacific, there lies a group of numerous islands stretched in a serpent like form covered with rich verdant growths over two thirds of the area of the land. These verdant growths are none other than the forests of the Empire of Japan. The wholesome effects produced upon the land and the people by these forests are both striking and remarkable. The Japanese by nature love their forests and derive enjoyment from the prosperous and luxuriant growths of the same. The burning patriotism and the refined aesthetic ideas of the Japanese are in a large measure the outcome of the

Greening Week into the narrative. The nearly sinister feel of Greening Week within the narrative of *Dendorokakariya* as it lures Common into metamorphosis grows out of the historical legacy of the entanglements of botanical life and imperial nationalism as seen in a text like *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu*. In invoking the name “*Shokubutsu no seikatsu*” (“*The Life of the Plant*”), *Dendorokakariya* presents the complicated history of becoming botanical in the Japanese postwar. The same concept (the notion of life in plants) that inspired a transcendent vision of subjectivity among Anarcho-Marxists also helped justify the very interwar violence that thinkers in the *Yoru no Kai* looked to move beyond.

Beyond the introduction, *Dōbutsu to shokubutsu no seikatsu* engages seriously with contemporaneous scientific knowledge. In the *Shokubutsu no seikatsu* half of the text, Honda presents easily accessible scientific information concerning plant life. Honda discusses the biology of root structures and growth in plants, and goes on to demonstrate a keen awareness of ecology in a section entitled “*Hana to mushi no kyōdō seikatsu*” (“*The Communal Lives Flowers and Insects*”).

The logic of this section comes close to Kropotkin’s figuration of mutual aid. Such resonance reminds us that the study of plant life equally inspired nationalist and anarchists alike, and helps clarify why Abe critiques in *Dendorokakariya* the utopian botanical-anarchist subjectivity proposed by Anarchists such as Kropotkin. Although it makes no mention of Timiryazev by name, Honda’s *Shokubutsu no seikatsu*’s discussion of plant movement (in the chapter “*Ha no ugoki*” or “*The Movement of Leaves*”) and evolutionary biology marks the text as a part of the same systemic shift in the study of natural science as Timiryazev’s text of the same name.

The entanglements of plant research and Japan’s colonial project are clearly legible in Honda’s *Shokubutsu no seikatsu*. In the opening section, Honda mentions the colonial space of the *gaichi* as a site for the study of botanical life:

The most miraculous (*fushigi*) thing is the life (*seimei*) of the seed. The life of a seed is generally short. When one conducts germination experiments, many die within a year’s time, or else they usually die within three to four years. However, the seed of the lotus is astonishing. A few years ago a scholar replanted several four-to-five-hundred year old lotus seeds that had been dug up from the peat soil of Manchukuo. After a few years, they all produced splendid spouts.<sup>103</sup>

Honda’s mention of the imperial puppet state of Manchukuo (Manshūkoku or Manchuria)—the *gaichi* space in which Abe Kōbō was raised—illustrates how colonial space was not only a

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influence exerted upon the minds of the people by these forests” (*Forestry* p. 1). As this text argues, the rhetoric of *airin shisō* echoes the claims made in Honda’s *Sokubutsu no seikatsu*; loving plant life existed on a continuum that naturally concluded in the kind of national love that found expression as “burning patriotism.” The imperial government of Japan saw in the Japanese-British Exhibition a chance to legitimize its colonial project, and the rhetoric of *airin shisō* helped serve this end by supposedly demonstrating the improvement of the natural conditions of colonial *gaichi* spaces, which were characterized as having been “primitive” prior to Japanese intervention (See Hotta-Lister p. 84). Proper love of and care for the botanical world equaled a form of progress that justified the expansion of the Japanese Empire. By 1910, the Bonin Islands had already been part of the numerous islands of the Empire of Japan for several decades.

<sup>103</sup> Terao p. 182.



source of resource extraction but also a site for botanical research.<sup>104</sup> Honda's use of this colonial name among a discussion of plant life makes the history of Japanese imperialism forever inscribed within the pages of his *Shokubutsu no seikatsu*. Abe's use of the name *Shokubutsu no seikatsu* ends up doing the same within the pages of *Dendorokakariya*.

### On the (Scientific) Name

In addition to his engagement with the concept of "life" in the botanical world, Abe's decision to use the Linnaean Latin name "dendrocacalia" for the *wadannoki* makes the colonial history of botanical classification forever inscribed within *Dendorokakariya*. As mentioned above, the full name for the *wadannoki* in binominal nomenclature is *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia* Nakai, with the last name referring to botanist Nakai Takenoshin. Although Abe's text never attaches Nakai's name to the name dendrocacalia within the narrative, scientific literature on the dendrocacalia gives Nakai credit for having been the first researcher to publish a description of the plant. Tsuyama Takashi's 1936 article in *Shokubutsugaku zasshi* (which was written in Latin) claims that Nakai first published a description of the plant in 1928, and includes Nakai's name in the official scientific name of the dendrocacalia.<sup>105</sup>

Nakai was a central figure of botanical research in Japan during colonial modernity. He was the foremost scholar of plant life in Japan's *gaichi*. Nakai published numerous studies of Korean flora, from which he hoped to craft a new method of classification for vegetal life beyond the Japanese Empire. As Jung Lee explains, Nakai's work on developing a universal classification system for plant life is inseparable from the history of Japan's colonial project: "In conjunction with (colonial) expansion, the Japanese botanical establishment consciously chose an imperial path in modernizing Japanese botany. Nakai's systematics, based on Korean plants, was a product of an imperial strategy that secured a Japanese 'centre of calculation' through specimens collected from expanding Japanese colonial peripheries."<sup>106</sup>

The act of classification and naming once again bares traces of colonial legacy. The unique classification system Nakai developed grew out of his relationship to the specimens he studied in the metropole, and not from plants living in their natural habitats. As Lee explains, Nakai only ever made short trips to the Korean peninsula, and relied on specimens sent to the Japanese *naichi* from naturalists in the *gaichi*.<sup>107</sup> He studied and named these plants at Tōkyō Imperial University (the same university where Abe studied medicine). Tōkyō Imperial University was Japan's only university to have founded a botany department between the years of 1877 and 1918.<sup>108</sup> It was (and remains) the home of the Koishiwaka Botanical Gardens. In the 1952 version of *Dendorokakariya*, the antagonist of the narrative signs a letter to Common as "Director of the K Botanical Gardens." It has been speculated that the letter "K" refers to the Koishikawa Gardens. Inspired by European colonial precedent, the first director of Koishikawa, Matsumura Jinzō (1856-1928), acquired specimens from colonial *gaichi* to exhibit within the gardens.<sup>109</sup> The allegorical image written into the fictional world of *Dendorokakariya* of the

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<sup>104</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, this Osaki Midori's brother was engaged in agriculture research in colonial Korea.

<sup>105</sup> Tsuyama p. 129.

<sup>106</sup> Lee p. 663.

<sup>107</sup> Lee p. 676.

<sup>108</sup> Lee 665.

<sup>109</sup> Lee 667.

dendrocacalia plant ending up in a greenhouse of a botanical garden could well have been drawn from Abe's own encounter with a real dendrocacalia at the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens—a living specimen suspended in time that held historical memory within, should one choose to probe the depths of its interior.

As the director of the botanical garden in *Dendorokakariya* pins a nametag to a metamorphosed Common bearing the Latin name *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia*, he relegates Common's botanical becoming to the realm of colonial specimen, just as the historical figures that worked in the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens had done to the actual plants collected from colonial space during Japan's colonial modernity. Although the botanical garden director in the fictional world of *Dendorokakariya* claims that finding a *gaichi* plant in the *naichi* is a rarity, within the real world of botanical research, it is not so rare at all. This is especially true of plants like the dendrocacalia that bear the colonial marker that is the name Nakai. As botanical research continues to use the name Nakai as part of the *wadannoki*'s scientific name, the life of the dendrocacalia will continue to be tied to its place within Japanese colonial history.<sup>110</sup> Japan's colonial legacy is legible in the very names given to plants such as the dendrocacalia. As such, it continues to be a plant of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> The web site for the Koishikawa Botanical Gardens does not classify the dendrocacalia, nor any of the other endemic species of the Bonin Islands by their Latin names. It classifies the plant by its Japanese name: *wadannoki* (See *Shokubutsu tayōsei no hozen*). This designation participates in its own form of colonial disavowal. The use of the Japanese name effectively hides the plant's colonial history by removing Nakai's name. Plaques for the various plants within the garden itself, however, still bear Latin classifications.

<sup>111</sup> Abe's own name has become synonymous with the dendrocacalia. The very botanical garden that may have inspired his dystopian take on the entangled histories of 20<sup>th</sup> century plant life and Japanese colonialism now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, uses Abe's name as a point of reference for visitors. The name Abe Kōbō sits alongside a bright green and yellow photograph of the *wadannoki* on the website for the Koishiwaka Botanical Gardens. The text that accompanies the photograph of the plant reads: "Thought to have evolved from a grass-like ancestor in Ogasawara into a tree. Appears in an Abe Kōbō novella with the technical name *Dendrocacalia*" (translation mine, see *Shokubutsu tayōsei no hozen*). Abe himself has become botanical, and has likewise become thoroughly entangled in the history of the dendrocacalia. Abe's name enters into the narrative of colonial history that he feared, in the postwar, was slipping into the darkness of disavowal.

## Chapter Three.

### Plant Media and the Search for Dead Spirits: Haniya Yutaka, Hashimoto Ken, and Itō Seikō

“Plants are individual mediums that secure the connections between humans and their environments. They are mirrors that help humans navigate life and spiritual growth.”

-Takemura Shinichi, *Uchūju*

“Being alone and not alone is what I felt very distinctly in the fog that enveloped me, the trees, and perhaps another human being. Did I get in touch with something of the background for existence that allows those who exist to be themselves and to be with others?”

-Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being*

### Introduction

Within the vernacular cosmologies of novelist and literary critic Haniya Yutaka (1909-1997), parascientist and popular writer Hashimoto Ken (1924-2007), and novelist and rapper Itō Seikō (1961- ), humans and plants co-mingle in spiritually inflected botanical becomings. The texts of these three writers theorize botanical becomings (a term I use drawing from Deleuze and Guattari to mark a new form of multiple subjectivity that is opened up in the alliance between humans and plant life) through their formulations of plant media.<sup>1</sup> By media, I mean the term as developed by John Durham Peters, in which media are “ensembles of natural element and human craft.”<sup>2</sup> As Peters argues, the term media “was connected to nature long before it was connected to technology... *Medium* has always meant an element, environment, or vehicle in the middle of things.”<sup>3</sup>

The botanical becomings written into the works of Haniya, Itō, and Hashimoto are media in the sense that they are natural elements that serve as a vehicle in the middle of the world of the living and the world of the dead.<sup>4</sup> They perform the role of spiritual mediums that open human subjectivity up to new dimensions. This chapter shifts from the scientifically informed botanical becomings of Osaki Midori, Imanishi Kinji, and Abe Kōbō examined in the previous chapters to texts written within this esoteric space of cosmology and parascience. It examines the work of these three figures (Haniya, Hashimoto, and Itō) as botanically minded texts that sought to rethink human subjectivity and identity somewhere between life and death within the world of plants.

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<sup>1</sup> In order to theorize the botanical realm as a medium that facilitates this co-mingling, I draw from a diverse group of sources that all share an interest in plants beyond the natural sciences, including the work of architect and writer Takizawa Kenji (1927-2013) and Takemura Shinichi (1959- ). Their works engage with supposed traditional Japanese spirituality in relation to trees. Takizawa’s figuration of the mysterious vital force known as “*ke*” informs my reading of Haniya Yutaka’s novel *Shirei*. I borrow the very notion of “tree media,” as well as its connection to the concept of the holon, from Takemura’s philosophical treatise *Uchūju* (*Cosmic Tree*).

<sup>2</sup> Peters p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Peters p. 46. Italics in the original.

<sup>4</sup> Becomings occupy a position in the middle of things; according to Deleuze and Guattari, becomings themselves are an “inbetween” (*A Thousand Plateaus* p. 24).

Prominent postwar novelist and critic Haniya Yutaka's multi-volume novel *Shirei* (*Dead Spirits*, written between 1946 and 1995) explores a wide range of existential and metaphysical questions in the aftermath of Japan's defeat in World War II. The figuration of the forest plays a vital role in the construction of a subjectivity that bridges the rupture of Japan's defeat in *Shirei*. One of the novel's central concerns is the status of a haunted subjectivity in the immediate postwar moment. It asks how subjectivity continues after both personal loss (of friends and family members) and national loss (of war). The novel questions whether or not there is a form of plasticity available to the fractured subjects of Japan's immediate postwar that could serve as a bridge between a traumatic past and a potential future. It looks for answers to these questions within the forest.

The forests of *Shirei* are home to plant media. *Shirei*'s trees mediate between the novel's protagonist Miwa Yoshi and the ghostly remains of war that haunt the novel just below the surface. This ghostly affect manifests as "*kehai*," a term repeated throughout *Shirei* that connotes a vague sense of "presence" or "trace" in the forest. The plant media of trees put Miwa Yoshi in touch with this presence occasioned by loss, and offer a non-verbal means to work through the violence of the Japanese postwar.

Electrical engineer and popular science writer Hashimoto Ken's popular writings on plant communication looked to give a voice to plant life while also arguing plants are a medium through which the dead can communicate with the living. Hashimoto conducted numerous experiments with cacti, attaching them to polygraph machines and, allegedly, learning to how to both speak and sing with them. Hashimoto's parascience speaks to the crisis of subjectivity in language witnessed in *Shirei* (a novel in which aphasia, or the inability to speak, is a reoccurring motif). In teaching cacti to speak through polygraph machines, Hashimoto attempted to overcome the ontological ambiguity Haniya embraces in *Shirei*, eroding the *kehai* or "presence" of a more-than-human subjectivity glimpsed in the forests and turning instead to demonstrable evidence of an individuated subject position within plant media itself.

Hashimoto aligned the spiritual medium of plants with the electronic medium of radio.<sup>5</sup> He believed plants were an integral component for a spirit radio (*reikai rajio*) that would be able to communicate with the dead, as outlined in his parascientific text *Yojigensekai no shinpi* (*Mysteries of the Fourth Dimensional World*, 1966). The image of a botanical radio that can communicate with the dead was subsequently taken up as the premise of rapper, writer, and plant enthusiast Itō Seikō's 2013 novel *Sōzō rajio* (*Imagination Radio*).

Released two years after the March 11, 2011 Great East Tōhoku earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, *Sōzō rajio* is an imaginative reflection on loss that looks to bridge the gap between the living and the dead. It presents a

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<sup>5</sup> As Jeffrey Sconce demonstrates in *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (2000), there is a long history to the belief in electronic media's ability to communicate with supernatural realms. Sconce posits a form of "presence" within such media: "Although the exact form that 'presence' is imagined to take may vary greatly from medium to medium over the past 150 years, a consistent representational strategy spans these popular perceptions of electronic media. Grounded in the larger and more long-standing metaphysics of electricity, fantastic conceptions of media presence ranging from television to virtual reality have often evoked a series of interrelated metaphors of 'flow,' suggesting analogies between electricity, consciousness, and information that enable fantastic forms of electronic transmutation, substitution, and exchange" (Sconce p. 7). Hashimoto's interest in such electronic presence speaks to Sconce's figuration of haunted media. But so do, I argue, Itō's imaginary radio (which functions without electricity) and Haniya's forest media (which functions without radio yet emits sound similar to radio static). They too occasion a presence and "flow" between the human realm and realms beyond, not through electricity, but through plant media.

fantastical scenario in which survivors of the March 11<sup>th</sup> disaster can make contact with the victims through the medium of a spirit radio hosted by a deceased DJ named Ark from the top of a giant cedar tree.

Haunted but not overcome by past traumas, each of these writers imagined making contact with the dead and did so with the help of the botanical realm. While the nature of such contact differed between each text, each found in plant media a source of possibility and a site of plasticity. While formally their works range dramatically from a multi-volume philosophical tome (Haniya), to popular yet questionable parascience (Hashimoto), to a popular novel (Itō), the three figures at the heart of this chapter saw plants as a gateway to something new and wholly other that exists beyond the visible realm of life. The trees and cacti that populate their writings are mediums that open up a channel to this new dimension where loss and presence coexist.

### **Dead Spirits and Fractured Subjectivities in *Shirei***

Haniya's epic multi-volume novel *Shirei* is haunted by a polyvalent sense of loss. At times the loss is concrete and personal, such as the loss of family and friends. At times it is abstract, such as the loss of certainty in a belief in absolute truth. Japan's loss in war hangs over the novel like a specter; it is not discussed outright, but it haunts the characters of the novel as they try to understand what it means to have survived into the postwar. Loss of language afflicts several characters throughout the narrative, and speaks to the complicated status of language in the postwar landscape of Japanese literature.<sup>6</sup> These differing registers of loss overlap and contribute to the somber tone of the novel. The trauma of war is legible in this somber tone. Protagonist Miwa Yoshi struggles to process this trauma during long, existential walks through the forested parks of Tōkyō, surrounded by a mysterious aura that encircles the trees.

Technically an unfinished novel, *Shirei* is a work of staggering length. It spanned nine volumes by the time of Haniya's death in 1997. The first four volumes were published in the literary magazine Haniya helped establish called *Kindai bungaku* (*Modern Literature*) beginning in the immediate postwar moment of 1946. Haniya continued to write new chapters periodically for the rest of his life.<sup>7</sup>

The text unfolds largely through extended philosophical conversations, along with limited narration, in order to tease out the histories of a complicated web of characters: Miwa Yoshi and

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<sup>6</sup> *Shirei* was published amid discussions of the wartime culpability of Japanese writers. The editors of *Kindai bungaku* also published a journal entitled *Bungaku jihyō* (*Literary Signpost*), the most popular feature of which, according to James Dorsey, "was a regular column called 'Literary Prosecution' (*bungaku kensatsu*), in which the editors and a host of others took literary figures to task for reactionary wartime writings" (Dorsey 98). In postwar Japan, language could be dangerous, and what one said in the past rang into the present with a newfound, threatening clarity.

<sup>7</sup> Almost twenty years passed between the publications of the initial run of 4 volumes and the fifth volume, which was published in 1975 in the magazine *Gunzō*. The remaining volumes, all published in *Gunzō*, saw several years between publications: volume 6 in 1981, volume 7 in 1984, volume 8 in 1986, and volume seven in 1995. The long durée of *Shirei*'s composition makes its periodization challenging. What would it mean to call a work like *Shirei*, the final volume of which was written in the Heisei Era (1989-2019), a "postwar novel?" To be sure, the temporal complications bound up in taking *Shirei* as a singular text are part of its project. The passage of time is central to the narrative, as the first volume begins with the image of a massive clock tower ringing out. For the purposes of this chapter, I stick close to the original four volumes of *Shirei*, and read them within the context of the immediate postwar moment. When I do draw from later volumes, I try to account for the passage of time between the original volumes and the later additions.

his formerly imprisoned activist brother, Takashi; Miwa Yoshi's fiancé and her mother; Yoshi's student friend Kurokawa; the vociferous and argumentative Kubi Takeo; the aphasia-ridden former prisoner Yaba Tetsugo; a pair of hospitalized mentally ill sisters named "God" and "Nighty-Night;" the philosophical doctor Kishi, who is in charge of the mental hospital where many of the characters find themselves.<sup>8</sup>

The main characters of *Shirei* are all variously fractured. The narrative begins in a world where the war has already ended but the damage lingers on. In the opening scene, Miwa Yoshi visits his friend Yaba Testugo in the mental hospital. Yaba has developed aphasia after an incident with the warden of the prison in which he was being held. Yaba's loss of language, introduced at the start of this loquacious novel, sets up a significant motif. His silence speaks to the inability of language to adequately address the confusion of the postwar moment. The narrative never makes clear the origins of Yaba's aphasia: "It is said that that misfortunate mental patient suddenly showed signs of mental illness within the suburban jail; these signs stemmed from unclear origins."<sup>9</sup> Miwa Yoshi will be told several different stories concerning Yaba's treatment in jail. Ultimately, there are no definitive words that explain the trauma Yaba underwent as a political prisoner.

Yoshi's brother Takashi (who also is on parole from prison) is also a resident of this hospital. Takashi is bedridden with "an unfortunate mental illness" (*fukō na seishinbyō*).<sup>10</sup> Although not confined to the hospital, Miwa Yoshi himself also exhibits signs of a fractured subjectivity, as language fails him as well. Throughout *Shirei*, Yoshi experiences excruciating emotional anguish as he attempts and fails (most often within the woods) to declare the statement "I am I" ("*Ore wa ore da*"). In an existentially unstable state, he looks throughout the narrative to reconfigure a subjectivity beyond words. In order to accomplish this, he attempts to become botanical within an assemblage comprised of tree media.

The tone of *Shirei* is contemplative and mournful, and distills the trauma Haniya experienced in the interwar period. There is dreamlike and haunting quality to the work, legible in the poetic gloss that opens the novel:

Wandering in the space between ill will and the abyss  
Like the cosmos  
Those dead spirits that whisper<sup>11</sup>

These ambiguous yet suggestive lines set the stage for the ghostly affect that will inhabit the text from within its dark forests. These lines raise the question of just who the whispering dead spirits are. Are the dead spirits of the work's title the souls lost to the years of Japan's long war? Or are they rather the survivors we meet as characters in *Shirei*—those confused and broken subjects struggling to make sense of their place in the postwar?

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<sup>8</sup> The narrative will ultimately reveal that Miwa Yoshi, Miwa Takashi, Kubi, and Yaba are in fact biological brothers. While "God" ("*Kamisama*") and "Nighty-Night" ("*Nenne*") are not Miwa Yoshi's siblings, their presence in the mental hospital helps flesh out the psychological trauma of the postwar that Haniya foregrounds in *Shirei*.

<sup>9</sup> *Shirei I* p. 12. Translations mine throughout.

<sup>10</sup> There are parallels between Haniya's use of the mental hospital, mental illness, and aphasia as a means to reimagine human subjectivity and the work of Osaki Midori, as described in Chapter One. In both cases, the fracturing of subjectivity registered in mental illness opens possibilities for a new form of subjectivity. Both writers turn to the botanical world as a model. For Osaki, this new subjectivity was found through an engagement with the science of evolutionary thought. Haniya, however, approaches the botanical realm with a more metaphysical lens.

<sup>11</sup> *Shirei I* p. 11.

Like the characters of *Shirei*, Haniya too struggled with what he described as a “fractured” (“*bunretsu*”) disposition. He grew up amidst a backdrop of violence, through the turbulent history of pre- and interwar Japan, and lived a turbulent life. Haniya was born and spent the first part of his life in colonial Taiwan. Haniya claims that growing up in colonial space lead to a fractured subjectivity:

You could say that the structure of my thinking is fractured (*bunretsukei*).<sup>12</sup> This fractured form of thinking began with my childhood in Taiwan. Generally speaking, I remember feeling uncomfortable in my existence there. People’s fathers, my parents’ friends, they would physically attack the Taiwanese people. And they were Japanese, just like me. In other words, I was friends with these attackers. So, in remembering the discomfort in all of that, I now realize it was the beginning of a certain fracturing.<sup>13</sup>

Haniya, like the figures explored in the previous chapters of this dissertation, speaks of his experience living in Japan’s colonial modernity through the language of “*bunretsu*” (“fracture” or “splitting”). He carried the uncomfortable feeling of split subjectivity that he experienced living in the colonial *gaichi* as a child into his adulthood, where it informed the trauma-laden characters of *Shirei*.

Haniya relocated to the Tōkyō metropole in 1923, and eventually enrolled in the Nihon Daigaku preparatory school, where he was exposed to Marxist and Anarchist thought that would later influence his critical writing. In 1930, he was expelled for poor attendance, and began working for an office associated with the *Zenō Zenkoku Kaigi*, the communist faction of the prewar agrarian movement.<sup>14</sup> The following year he joined the Japanese Communist Party, and was arrested for his political beliefs in 1932.<sup>15</sup>

After the failed coup attempt known as the May 15<sup>th</sup> incident, in which members of the Imperial Navy assassinated the prime minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, treatment of political prisoners in Japan worsened, and Haniya spent over a year and a half in jail.<sup>16</sup> In prison, he would suffer from recurring bouts of tuberculosis. Haniya would ultimately perform *tenkō*—the process by which leftists were forced to renounce their ideological beliefs and pledge allegiance to the imperial throne. According to Haniya, the *tenkō* statement he submitted read: “Within the our solar system, the earth will be the first to collapse. The imperial system will collapse before this, but it will last for quite a while.”<sup>17</sup> With this metaphysically tongue-in-cheek statement, Haniya was released from prison.

## Presence in the Forest: On *Kehai*

*Shirei*’s vivid descriptions of ominous dark forests are infused with the lingering trauma and horror of Japan’s interwar period. A haunting affect pervades the botanical world throughout

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<sup>12</sup> The term Haniya uses, *bunretsukei*, contains the same word (*bunretsu*) that Osaki Midori uses throughout *Dainana kankai hōkō* to discuss “split psychology.” See chapter one for my discussion of the generative possibilities of such a split in Osaki’s work, and its connection to the botanical world.

<sup>13</sup> *Mugen no sō no moto ni* p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> See Wakukawa for a 1946 account of the different factions associated with the agrarian movement.

<sup>15</sup> *Nihon anakizumu undō jinmei jiten* p. 516.

<sup>16</sup> Tajiri p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Mugen no sō no moto ni* p. 195.

the novel. While *Shirei* is set in the urban space of Tōkyō, Haniya has described the parks of the city as dark, mysterious, and primordial places. In an interview with journalist Tachibana Takashi (1940- ), Haniya recalls the parks of Tōkyō as he encountered them when he moved to the metropole in the early Shōwa era as mysterious, forested spaces:

I moved to the Tōkyō neighborhood of Kichijōji in 1934. At that time, Inokashira Park was a dense forest of cedar trees... In order to walk on the solid path through the park, one had to enter into the cedar forest. As you walked, it was cedar trees the whole time... You would suddenly start trembling... You'd get the feeling something was passing behind you.<sup>18</sup>

Haniya's experiences walking through the cedars of Inokashira Park and feeling the mysterious presence of something behind him almost certainly informed his figurations of forested parks in *Shirei*.

In volume one of the novel, Miwa Yoshi takes a late night walk with his friend Kurokawa Kenkichi through a heavily forested park that resembles Haniya's memories of Inokashira Park:

The wind seemed to pick up, as the tips of the leaves of the trees of the park (which was home to many broadleaf trees) started rustling fiercely. It wasn't the cold wind of winter, it was an unnerving (*shinkeiteki na*) reverberation, an irritating sound that seemed piercing. They could hear behind them the intermittent quiet sounds of a spring bubbling. They passed through the long, dark tree-lined path of the park.<sup>19</sup>

As Miwa Yoshi and Kurokawa continue their walk, they pass through numerous forested areas. These areas are full of dark trees that create a piercing reverberation in the wind. They are haunting spaces that Miwa Yoshi finds "unnerving." They envelop him in a manner that feels both sinister and yet oddly welcoming.

Moments after coming across the corpse of a dead cat in the forested park, Miwa Yoshi feels himself as part of an assemblage within the forest. Assemblages are forms of becoming in which individual entities become part of something larger than themselves, giving rise to something new that is more than the sum of its parts.<sup>20</sup> The forest becomes an assemblage of sounds, trees, and wind, along with Miwa Yoshi and his walking companion Kurokawa:

Gaps between the trees gradually appeared. The damp atmosphere coiled around the skin of the trees. It was the fragrant scent of night. Within the dark stand of trees, the sound of their feet as they stepped reverberated as if chips of the trees were gently being torn off. The howling wind continued to shake the treetops. The atmosphere cooled. From the direction of a lotus pond where a trembling haze appeared to be rising, the sound of something jumping up to the water's surface could be heard.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Mugen no sō no moto ni* p. 111-112.

<sup>19</sup> *Shirei I* p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> According to New Materialist theorist Jane Bennett, an assemblage creates something new, or "emergent," that is more than the mere sum of its parts: "Assemblages are not governed by any central head... The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen... is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone" (Bennett p. 24).

<sup>21</sup> *Shirei I* p. 30.



Like the trees in the passage above, Miwa and Kurokawa are surrounded by a damp atmosphere, in which something seems to always be bubbling up to the surface, born of movement and sound. The forest becomes a world unto itself, in a manner reminiscent of Kathleen Stewart's figuration of atmospheric attunement: "What affects us—the sentience of a situation—is also a dwelling, a worlding born from an atmospheric attunement."<sup>22</sup>

Throughout *Shirei*, Miwa Yoshi is attuned to the atmosphere of the forest.<sup>23</sup> Since his childhood, he has felt a presence in the forest. This presence is haunting and threatening. It renders Miwa speechless:

In his childhood, at such times as when Miwa would play alone at the edge of the forest, he would suddenly become frightened. He had a feeling as if, from somewhere in the still silence of the forest, an indistinct rumble was occurring. Or rather, it welled up suddenly from the lonely environment unhindered. It was a presence that seemed to be hunting him down. A presence that seemed impossible to escape, no matter how hard he tried to run away, crying. Was this merely a fear borne of youth, when one's delicate spirit is easy to wound? He was without a doubt a melancholy youth who preferred only playing alone on hills spotted with the remains of yellowed, withered grass, and open spaces in which lumber was left behind. And so, no matter how much he was comforted, he was unable to explain a thing about that presence that pressed down around him.<sup>24</sup>

The narrative goes on to name this phenomenon in the forest, in which Miwa senses the existence of something ghostly perusing him, as *kehai* (presence).

Haniya's use of the word *kehai* in *Shirei* is often in reference to Miwa's sense that someone, or something, is standing behind him, hidden just out of reach, both there and not there. Toward the end of his walk with Kurokawa, Miwa begins to feel the *kehai* presence of someone standing among the trees (just as Haniya himself had felt walking through Inokashira Park): "He began to have the feeling that in the dark stand of trees—the center of which was difficult to see—there was someone standing. The space around him that moved in tandem with him felt like a grey wall that he was propping up while it also propped him up, or like an expanding, endless mist. It was a portent that he had secretly named 'cosmic presence' (*uchūteki na keihai*)."<sup>25</sup>

Haniya uses the figure of *kehai* to mark the ineffable, haunting atmosphere of the forest that Miwa Yoshi is able to attune to through tree media. The word *kehai* appears after the novel's first mention of a forest, which occurs in a temporal flashback recounting protagonist Miwa Yoshi and his friend Yaba Testsugo walking back from high school to their dormitory. When "approaching the edge of a park where trees with yellowed leaves grew thickly," they encounter a young girl pulling a dog's ear, causing it to cry in a way that "reminds one of the extreme suffering of a battered human being."<sup>26</sup>

Yaba steps in to end the dog's suffering, pulling the young girl's ears in turn. In response to Yaba's response, a bystander cries out, "She's mentally ill," and calls Yaba a "bastard," to

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<sup>22</sup> Stewart p. 449.

<sup>23</sup> In borrowing Stewart's term "attunement," I look to connect the forest medium to the medium of radio. Miwa Yoshi attunes to the forest in a manner similar to the way a listener "tunes in" to a radio broadcast. See also Timothy Morton's discussion of attunement to material objects in *Hyperobjects*.

<sup>24</sup> *Shirei I* p. 108-109.

<sup>25</sup> *Shirei I* p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> *Shirei I* p. 15.

which Yaba replies, “I am Yaba Testugo.”<sup>27</sup> At this moment, all action in the forested park comes to a halt, except for a mysterious presence that emerges: “In an instant, a silent presence (*kehai*) came over.”<sup>28</sup> With the violence of the scene now over, the wordless atmosphere of *kehai* seems to have emerged as a cosmic presence.<sup>29</sup> The dead spirits of the work’s title whisper within this forested presence.

## Tree Media

The notion of *kehai* is botanical. As architect and critic Takizawa Kenji argues, there is a direct connection between the presence of the mysterious force of *kehai* and trees.<sup>30</sup> It has been postulated that the words share a linguistic origin: in Japanese, the word tree is a homonym for the first character of the compound word *kehai*, namely the vital force of *ki/ke* (the word tree is also read as both *ki* and *ke* under differing circumstances).<sup>31</sup> Miwa Yoshi experiences the ghostly

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<sup>27</sup> *Shirei* I p. 16. Although at the diegetic start of the novel Yaba is suffering from aphasia, in this flashback he is able to declare his subjectivity in a manner that will elude Miwa Yoshi throughout the narrative. Yaba’s decisive action in this flashback—ending the suffering of the unfortunate dog—seems to give him a determination and confidence that the characters of *Shirei* lack in the narrative present of the novel.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Haniya approaches allegory in this scene. *Shirei* rarely discusses war in detail, but the cruelty and absurdity of this scene reverberates with the trauma of the postwar moment, and echoes Haniya’s childhood memories of Taiwanese colonial subjects being physically attacked by Japanese colonizers. That the first mention of *kehai* arises in the aftermath of this violent scene lends weight to a reading of the ghostly presence of *kehai* as being connected to the dead spirits of war.

<sup>30</sup> In his book entitled *Ki to ke to ki (Trees, “ki,” and “ke,”* 1993), Takizawa explores the relationship between the Japanese word for tree (*ki*) and the words “*ki*” and “*ke*.” The first character of the word *kehai* is read “*ki*” on its own, but can also be read as “*ke*” in certain configurations. It is a cosmic word; it names a vital energy that flows through both the natural world and the human spirit. The *Nihon kokugo daijiten* offers three translations for the term: 1) a natural phenomenon that flows and changings. Also, the substance that gives rise to that natural phenomenon; 2) Used in reference to life, spirit, and the workings of the mind (*kokoro*). It is thought that these are connected to the *ki* of nature; 3) In an exchange: Presence. Mood. It is sometimes known as *qi* in English, from the Mandarin Chinese reading of the character. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *qi* as: “The circulating physical life-force whose existence and properties are the basis of much Chinese philosophy and medicine; the material principle postulated by certain Chinese philosophers.” Takizawa differentiates between the subtle shades of meaning between the character as *ki* and as *ke*, arguing the former (*ki*) relates to breath and life energy, while the later (*ke*) possess a dark, menacing quality as well. The haunting presence Miwa Yoshi is attuned to in the forest stems from the vital force of *ke*. For Takizawa, the haunting presence of *ke* is connected to the spirits of the dead (*shirei*): “‘*Ke*’ is a word that expresses an unidentifiable substance, one effervescent and ungraspable. Moreover, ‘*ke*’ is the ‘*ke*’ of ‘*kami no ke*’ (‘curse of the gods’), it is connected to the spirit (*rei*), and can bring about curses. These curses stem from the spirits of the dead (*shirei*), but phenomenologically, they are the violent forces of an unpredictable nature...” (Takizawa p. 96. Translations mine throughout).

<sup>31</sup> Takizawa explains this connection: “Trees... naturally signify the earth below, but they also possess the capability to extract the life energy (*ki*) from this dark world of dead spirits (*shirei*) that we know as the earth, and bring it up to the bright world known as the heavens. In the same way the character *rai* (‘to come’) ties together the past, present, and future, the word ‘tree’ possess a mobility that ties together earth, life energy (*ki*), and the heavens... We can imagine there was once a connection between the terms ‘vital energy’ (‘*ki*’) and ‘tree’ (‘*ki*’). This is because trees are living things. But above all other living things, they are religious pillars, they are made into statues of human beings, and are connected to the gods... (A)bove all else, they were a spiritual support to the people of the past” (Takizawa p. 97).

presence of *kehai* in the forest because of the strong connection believed to exist between trees and the realm beyond the living.<sup>32</sup>

Trees have a long history in Japan as spiritual objects that occupy the middle position of media between humans and the supernatural realm. In Shinto belief and practice, trees are sacred as *yorishiro*, which are material objects such as trees or stones that are said to house the spirits of Shinto ideology, known as *kami*. Sacred trees are known as *shinboku*, and are marked as sacred with ropes called *shimenawa* that encircle their trunks. The spiritual essence of trees can also be found in the concept of *hashira*, which are sacred pillars used in shrine architecture. In each case, trees are media that mediate between the human world and the spiritual realm.

Although much contemporary research on Japanese religion (including Japanese Buddhism and Shintoism) has questioned and critiqued the origins of such beliefs in the sacredness of nature as *somoku jōbutsu* (the ability of plants to gain Buddhist enlightenment) and *shinboku*, there is nevertheless a long history of spiritual ideology in Japan that has deemed the botanical world (and trees in particular) sacred.<sup>33</sup> As Aike P. Rots reminds us, however, “the term ‘sacred’ should not be seen as the equivalent of ‘religious.’”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Takizawa describes a phenomenological account of *kehai* that strongly echoes Miwa’s childhood experience of being “hunted down” by a feeling of *kehai* in the forest: “The omen of terror born from the darkness is the drifting of ‘ke’ in the vicinity... As (Japan)’s environment was not one in which one could see far distances, rather than the terror coming from across the sky, it was a situation much closer to the body. In the small environment enclosed within forests, the terror was likely comprehensible as something pressing down upon the body, a feeling like a god’s curse or the spirit of someone dead was just behind you” (Takizawa 101).

<sup>33</sup> See Fabio Rambelli’s chapter “The Cultural Imagination of Trees and the Environment” in *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism* for a discussion of the entangled histories of *somoku jōbutsu*, Shinto ideology, and land preservation. Rambelli argues that in Japan *somoku jōbutsu* was less a religious belief than a strategy deployed to protect land around Buddhist temples. Aike P. Rots likewise problematizes the notion of an indigenous, pure Shintoism that can be equated with nature worship. He writes, “although the notion that there is some sort of connection between kami and natural phenomena (mountains, rivers, rocks and trees) has long been taken for granted in descriptions of Shinto, not until recently has the relation between ‘nature’, kami and ‘Shinto’ been subject to more serious theoretical and ideological reflection. In particular, the extension of ‘nature’ to ‘the environment’, and the explicit association of Shinto with environmental issues, is of fairly recent date. Although such ideas were first expressed in the 1970s, they did not gain much attention and popularity until well into the 1990s. Today, by contrast, ‘nature’ and ‘environmental issues’ have become standard tropes in written introductions to Shinto – books, websites, tourist pamphlets and so on – and become a core component of many contemporary Shinto self-definitions. Reflecting the spread of the religious environmentalist paradigm worldwide, Shinto has been redefined as an ancient tradition of nature worship that contains valuable cultural and ideological resources for establishing sustainable relationships between humans and nature. This understanding of Shinto has now become so firmly established that it may be considered a new paradigm in its own right” (Rots p. 210-212). Hiroshi Omura acknowledges the historical reality of sacred trees in Japan, but rejects claims to a uniquely Japanese form of Shinto animism bound up in nature worship: According to Hiroshi Omura, “In Japan more than 15 tree species are related to the Shinto and Buddhist religions. Some large old trees in which gods are said to exist are located in shrines or temples. These religious uses of special trees, to summon the gods and identify sacred areas, are also found in other countries. It is important to understand that these uses are common rather than distinct to Japan. Shinto shrines have managed their sacred forests for many centuries. Because such forests and large trees have preserved a solemn atmosphere and also conserved parts of the natural environment, they should continue to be protected and conserved as natural monuments” (Omura p. 182).

<sup>34</sup> Rots p. 57. *Shirei* is certainly not a religious text, although it is undeniably a spiritual one. The novel does not invoke religious imagery such as *yorishio* or *hashira*, nor does it speak in Shinto terms of *kami* residing in the trees. Given the close relationship between State Shinto ideology and Japanese imperialism, writing of such things in the postwar would have been antithetical to Haniya’s Anarcho-Marxist beliefs, and could have aligned Haniya with those writers who ended up on the list of authors culpable of wartime propaganda. See Walter A. Skya’s *Japan’s Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shinto Ultrationalism* for an account of how Shintoism was mobilized during interwar Japan. Haniya was actively engaged in discussions of what made Japanese writers culpable in the war

*Shirei* is Haniya's attempt in the postwar to reclaim the natural world as a site of spiritual connection outside the fascistic confines of State Shinto ideology that helped justify Japan's wartime colonial expansion. The trees of *Shirei* are not figures of Shinto animism, although they borrow some of Shinto's spiritual affect. Rather, they are media that occasion a "sense of vital interconnectivity."<sup>35</sup>

Tree media connect Miwa Yoshi to the dead spirits of the work's title via the supernatural, cosmic presence of *kehai*. Trees are media in *Shirei* in the sense that they are, in Peters' words, "enabling environments that provide habitats for diverse forms of life."<sup>36</sup> Forests become the enabling environment where Miwa Yoshi becomes botanical as he strives towards a new form of subjectivity that expands beyond the confines of his body into the ghostly atmosphere that surrounds him. The forest is a medium in *Shirei* in the manner described by environmental philosopher and media theorist Takemura Shinichi: "Not 'a forest' as a gathering of mere trees, but a forest as a singular moving body (*undōttai*), in which the 'singular' is simultaneously 'many.' A forest in which things that come to exist and things that are made to exist dissolve into one in time and in space. Trees exist... as a singular matrix in which various forms of life spontaneously come to be."<sup>37</sup>

Miwa Yoshi experiences the forest as a matrix in this way. For Miwa, the forest is a medium that transmits a ghostly presence:

At night, Miwa Yoshi would open his window and gaze out on the dimly lit park. The elm trees drew dark shadows, and he could see their leaves fluttering noisily in the wind. There was no one to be seen within the park. Suddenly, he would have the feeling that he could hear the sound of hoarse coughing behind him. It seemed like cough uttered unconsciously by an indistinct body (*kasuka na butsutai*) that was about the same height as himself. While controlling his impulse to abruptly turn around, he stood still and listened closely. He could hear what sounded like the reverberation of wings rubbing together, from insects he couldn't see that were hidden in the cracks of the pillars, along with the creaking of the floorboard joints. When he slowly turned around to look, of course... there was a lonely void in which not a single shape could be found.<sup>38</sup>

Staring out into the darkness of the matrix of the forest medium, Miwa Yoshi experiences the presence of something just behind him—something ghostly. He is attuned to a presence that is both there and not there, and lingers on through a reverberating *kehai* that resembles the empty presence of radio static:

A reverberation that spread forth like a shadow did not disappear into the void. Covering his ears, he weaved his way through the faint buzzing that quietly murmured like a small stream, and before long a certain groaning could be heard. It was, to be sure, a groan that couldn't sustain itself. It was a presence (*kehai*) of a certain condition (*shisei*) in which every moment was meshed together—every moment in which his sense of self piled upon

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effort. See "Responsibility of writers: a roundtable discussion" in *The Politics and Literature Debate in Postwar Japanese Criticism, 1945-52* (ed. Atsuko Ueda et al).

<sup>35</sup> Peters p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> Peters p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Takemura p. 44. Translation mine.

<sup>38</sup> *Shirei I* p. 110.

another sense of self, where he wanted to cry out a certain phrase but was unable to. It was a frightening groan that brought with it an unpleasant expression, one that formed the strange scowl of gnawing down on oneself while trying to say the words “I am....”<sup>39</sup>

Within the matrix of tree media, Miwa experiences, to paraphrase Takemura, the singular as many; moments are meshed together, differing selves are piled atop one another.

As they open a channel to the botanical presence of *kehai*, the forests of *Shirei* become a place of potential for a plasticity that Catherine Malabou envisions as a site of somewhere new and something other.<sup>40</sup> As she claims of the subject undergoing the radical changes of destructive plasticity: “We return nowhere. Between life and death we become other to ourselves.”<sup>41</sup> In the aftermath of Japan’s loss in war, *Shirei*’s Miwa Yoshi responds to the existential dread of having nowhere to return by yearning to become something new, something “other.” He seeks this otherness in the forest. Drawn into an assemblage with tree media, he finds himself becoming botanical somewhere, in Malabou’s words, “between life and death.”

### ***Kyotai* and Assemblage**

Trees facilitate an exchange between Miwa Yoshi and the world of the dead, but they offer no concrete language from which to name this new (botanical) subjectivity—they are, to invoke Marshall McLuhan’s famous formulation, a medium, not a message. The closest Miwa can come to naming his new subjectivity is the term “*kyotai*” or “empty body”—an empty signifier that names its own falsehood.<sup>42</sup> Miwa Yoshi coins the term *kyotai* in response to his repeated inability to speak the words “I am I.” This loss of language occurs within the botanical realm of *kehai*, most often during the long walks through the woods that Miwa takes at various points of the novel.

In volume two, Yoshi sets out late at night to wander alone. The narrative is characteristically metaphysical, and offers the following aside to frame Yoshi’s walk: “In the wandering of the intoxicated self within vast space, a cosmic consciousness eventually arises.”<sup>43</sup> Miwa Yoshi’s walks are cosmic; they put him in touch with a vastness much larger than the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Malabou writes of the newness of destructive plasticity in the language of multiple subjectivity: “As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognizable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbors nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation... A new being comes into the world for a second time, out of a deep cut that opens in a biography” (*Ontology of the Accident* p. 2).

<sup>41</sup> *Ontology of the Accident* p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> The *kyo* of *kyotai* has many meanings, including a hollow or a void. In spite of clear connections to Buddhist cosmology, the word is Haniya’s, and is, I argue, a metaphysical rejection of wartime political ideology. The body was central to the ideology of Imperial Japan, both in the material form of its subjects and in the abstract form of the National Body, or *kokutai*. See Noriko Horiguchi’s *Women Adrift: The Literature of Japan’s Imperial Body* and Yoshikuni Igarashi’s *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. While postwar writers like Tamura Taijirō rediscovered the sensuality of the body, Haniya registers the falsehood of the body, pointing instead to the interconnectedness of human beings and nature. In this way, the “false body,” a term infused with the ghostly affect that permeates *Shirei*, challenges conventional notions of life and matter, within the forest that is as close to Miwa as is his own material body.

<sup>43</sup> *Shirei I* p. 107. The Japanese reads: “*Yoeru mi o kōdai na kūkan e samayowasumono ni, yagate uchū no ishiki ga ishiki sareyō.*”

confines of his skin. He ruminates: “He was within a kind of mysterious rustling of the night, one he would find difficult to explain. It was not simply loneliness. There was a singular space, so to speak, along with him, one which moved in tandem with him.”<sup>44</sup>

Drawn up into this cosmic consciousness opened up by tree media, Miwa Yoshi feels the boundaries of his subjectivity dissolve. He begins to become botanical as a part of the forest. He becomes part of something much larger than himself, which makes him feel as his own individuated sense of self is shrinking:

While the radius that moved in tandem with him (that radius that was in fact himself) gradually narrowed, the end point of this contraction seemed like a dot that was too small for the eye to see. It was like the pointed end of a funnel that seemed to have been pricked by a needle. Thinking about the self that followed along to this pointed end, he felt an infinite sadness. It was as if he were forever being moved by an invisible soft wind. And with that small dot that was like the end of a needle, he transformed into an infinitesimal particle. At that moment, he wanted to shout from the bottom of his heart.<sup>45</sup>

As Miwa Yoshi feels himself simultaneously expanding (to the natural world around him) and contracting (to an infinitesimal sense of self), he feels the need to declare himself an individuated subject. From the bottom of his heart, he desires to reclaim his subjectivity through a spoken declaration:

There was only one thing that Miwa Yoshi—who had become that singular existence of the infinitesimal—wanted to shout from the bottom of his heart as if it were bursting forth. Who was it that was able to say such a thing so clearly, as it poured forth from their heart? That one thing—even the objects around him that were all suppressing their laughter, even they would most likely not be able to say it without some kind of grimace. It was, namely, the singular phrase: “I am I.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Shirei I* p. 107-108.

<sup>45</sup> *Shirei I* p. 108.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* Haniya later explored the image of the infinitesimal particle and its relationship to a sense of identity in the introductory poem that opens the *Mokutekisha* section of *Kokū (Empty Space, 1960)*:

“Where am I.

And wherever it is that I am

That “I am I”

stating that clearly

only I can do so.

When a philosopher

pictures an atom

falling through the space of eternity

exactly like the equation of one equals one

a simple model just like me

it is that

certainly, that was imagined.

But wait however

Tasting and knowing the agony

that I am I

other than me

there is no one...”

(*Kokū* p. 175, Translation mine)

Miwa Yoshi is ultimately unable to speak this singular phrase. Something prevents him from completing the self-declaration: “It was undoubtedly foolish, generally speaking, but once he began to mutter the words ‘I am,’ he was unable to continue muttering the final word ‘I.’”<sup>47</sup> Miwa Yoshi’s subjectivity lingers half-spoken in the forest, fractured at the level of the sentence.

Miwa Yoshi’s inability to stabilize his subjectivity is an emergent property of the assemblage he forms with the space of the natural world that surrounds him. *Shirei* registers, in the passage quoted earlier, a notion of assemblage in Miwa Yoshi’s notion of a “singular space, so to speak, along with him, one which moved in tandem with him.” As Miwa becomes a part of the forest matrix, he forms a holonic relationship with the botanical realm: it becomes a part of him and he of it.<sup>48</sup> He loses a sense of self and agency as he enters into this assemblage with the natural world around him. As Jane Bennett claims, “Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine the trajectory or impact of the group.”<sup>49</sup>

As Miwa Yoshi enters into an assemblage with the tree media around him, he reconfigures himself through the language of metamorphosis:

Those thin, supple tree tops I can see dimly outside the window, the tips of those trees gently rocking themselves in the gentle wind I am unable to see, Ah!, the wind and the trees, isn’t it so that the nature I gaze into every night is constantly conducting itself in this manner, ultimately giving forth a singular, strong expression? Ah, isn’t that it? The metamorphosis of existence from the beginning of time up until the very end— from magnesium to sodium to helium, that power of repeated, beautiful metamorphoses, isn’t that the secret, simple power that moves the cosmos? That’s it. Grr! I am—a dæmon!<sup>50</sup>

As Miwa Yoshi experiences himself as a part of nature (as he is drawn into an assemblage with it), he feels unnatural. He feels like a daemon. Yet through the unnatural coming together of assemblage, something new emerges; in *Shirei*, it is the assemblage of human-and-forest that precipitates into a botanical becoming. This becoming is the false-body *kyotai* that Miwa Yoshi feels as a part the forest.

The novel introduces the term *kyotai* via a conversation between Miwa Yoshi and a doctor at the mental institution named Kishi. The two discuss Miwa Yoshi’s lack of interest in living. After Kishi warns Miwa that such feelings are akin to suicide, Miwa corrects him by

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<sup>47</sup> *Shirei I* p. 110.

<sup>48</sup> As Miwa Yoshi registers the loss of individuated subjectivity as both an expansion toward cosmic consciousness and a contracting of subjectivity to an infinitesimal point, he becomes both more and less of himself. He becomes a holon—something that is both a part and a whole unto itself. I borrow the term holon from Arthur Koestler, who proposes the idea in *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967). Koestler invokes the image of Janus, the Roman god with two faces in order to demonstrate how something can be both part and whole: “the face turned towards the subordinate levels (of a branching tree of hierarchy) is that of a self-contained whole; the face turned upward towards the apex, that of a dependent part” (Koestler p. 48). With this image in mind, Koestler remarks on the inability of language to capture the complexity of feeling both part and whole: “But there is no satisfactory word in our vocabulary to refer to these Janus-faced entities... It seems preferable to coin a new term to designate these nodes on the hierarchic tree which behave partly as wholes or wholly as parts, according to the way you look at them. The term I would propose is ‘holon,’ from the Greek *holos* = whole, with the suffix *on*, which as in a *proton* or *neutron*, suggests a particle or part” (Ibid).

<sup>49</sup> Bennett p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> *Shirei I* p. 112.

explaining that what he is in fact seeking is not death, but rather the state of *kyotai*. Kishi thinks again of death: “Hmm, well... You want to become a ghost... Why, somehow we’ve certainly entered into a strange conversation befitting a mental institution.”<sup>51</sup> Dr. Kishi asks Miwa Yoshi if he believes in God. When Yoshi replies in the negative, Kishi asks, “And yet... you wish for *kyotai*... Isn’t that itself a form of divinity? Of course, your subject here is very complicated, and I recognize it is a form of contradiction...”<sup>52</sup> Miwa Yoshi interrupts: “Right, it is contradiction itself.”<sup>53</sup>

For Miwa Yoshi, *kyotai* does not equal literal death. Rather, it represents a kind of rebirth. *Kyotai* is a type of botanical becoming that embraces the seeming contradiction of yearning for rebirth within the realm of dead spirits. The figure of *kyotai* is Miwa Yoshi’s cosmological means of forging a new subjectivity within the forest. For Miwa, *kyotai* is an embrace of the haunting presence of *kehai* that reverberates through tree media.

### Hashimoto Ken and *The Secret Life of Plants*

Haniya Yutaka’s figurations of *kyotai* and *kehai* stand in for language amidst the loss-laden narrative of *Shirei*. *Kyotai* is Miwa’s name for a botanical subjectivity that cannot be captured by the phrase “I am I.” *Kehai* is a form of wordless communication that puts the characters of *Shirei* in touch with dead spirits within the forest-human assemblage of *kyotai*. In this figuration, trees are the medium through which *kehai* passes.

Yet Haniya also questioned whether humans could engage in some form of direct communication with plants themselves. In his 1992 conversation with Tachibana Takashi, Haniya participates in a speculative account of human/plant communication. He recounts a story he has heard concerning plants’ response to vibrations, suggesting plants do communicate via sound, and not necessarily language:

They say there is a difference between flowers that have been told to “Bloom into beautiful flowers!” and flowers that have not been told that. They say that the ones that have been spoken to do bloom into beautiful flowers. The first people to realize this said that the reason wild flowers grow and bloom so well near airports is due to the vibrations of the airplanes.... That if you play them Mozart and Beethoven, that they prefer Mozart. That trees also respond to vibrations. They say Endō Shūsaku says things to his plants like that: “Bloom into beautiful flowers!”<sup>54</sup> This is just a guess, but perhaps in reality, trees do respond to vibrations.<sup>55</sup>

Haniya goes on to claim that humans are essentially “anthropocentric” (*ningen chūshin shugi*), and have thus not yet conducted ample research on whether or not sound elicits responses from plants. He claims that: “NHK does a lot of programs about growing flowers.”<sup>56</sup> They grow

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<sup>51</sup> *Shirei I* p. 48

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Ellipses in the original.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996) was a Christian novelist most famous for 1966 novel *Chinmoku* (*Silence*).

<sup>55</sup> *Mugen no sō no moto ni* p. 114-115.

<sup>56</sup> NHK stands for *Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai*. It is the national broadcasting corporation of Japan.



flowers, but they are not yet doing anything about the effects of sound on plants. But perhaps there are some effects... Without conducting actual experiments, we'll never know."<sup>57</sup>

Tachibana claims that there are experiments being conducted in greenhouses that consist of playing Mozart's music for plants. He reports that he has heard that plants prefer soft music (*karui kyoku*).<sup>58</sup> Then, as if suddenly realizing the esoteric and slightly bizarre nature of their conversation, Tachibana returns to the mystical world of *Shirei*: "All of these things—*kehai*, spirits, the existence of objectively real objects from the other side that are invisible to the eye, the concept of *kyotai* which comes up again and again in *Shirei*, the existence of things that have not yet come to be—they belong to another dimension, don't they?"<sup>59</sup>

Tachibana recognizes the ways in which Haniya's *Shirei* borders on theories of the paranormal. Their conversation naturally flows from Haniya's experience of *kehai* in Inokashira Park to the parascience of experimenting with plant communication. Tachibana's claim that the botanical figures of *kehai* and *kyotai* "belong to another dimension" demonstrates how the forests of *Shirei* are plant media; the forest functions, to borrow Peters' language, as a "vehicle in the middle of things." According to Tachibana, within the narrative of *Shirei*, the forest is a vehicle in the middle of two different dimensions.

Tachibana and Haniya's discussion of the parascience of *Shirei* entangles the novel within the same pseudo-scientific milieu from which the writing of Hashimoto Ken emerged. In recollecting stories of experiments conducting on plants involving classical music, it is likely that Tachibana and Haniya were discussing the experiments described in the best-selling (and highly controversial) study of plant parascience that introduced Hashimoto Ken to the world stage: Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird's *The Secret Life of Plants* (1973).<sup>60</sup> *The Secret Life of Plants* was translated into Japanese as *Shokubutsu no shinpi seikatsu* in 1987, only five years before Haniya and Tachibana's conversation.

Chapter ten of *The Secret Life of Plants*, titled "The Harmonic Life of Plants," discusses at length the history of sound experimentation on plants, and mentions how "airport-level noise"

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<sup>57</sup> *Mugen no sō no moto ni* p. 115.

<sup>58</sup> *Mugen no sō no moto ni* p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> In the opening lines of his 2013 essay for the *New Yorker* entitled "The Intelligent Plant," Michael Pollan summarizes the impact and controversy of the work: "In 1973, a book claiming that plants were sentient beings that feel emotions, prefer classical music to rock and roll, and can respond to the unspoken thoughts of humans hundreds of miles away landed on the *New York Times* best-seller list for non-fiction. 'The Secret Life of Plants,' by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, presented a beguiling mashup of legitimate plant science, quack experiments, and mystical nature worship that captured the public imagination at a time when New Age thinking was seeping into the mainstream." Pollan explains how the popularity of *The Secret Life of Plants* has had an adverse effect on plant research for decades: "Much of the science in 'The Secret Life of Plants' has been discredited. But the book had made its mark on the culture. Americans began talking to their plants and playing Mozart for them, and no doubt many still do. This might seem harmless enough; there will probably always be a strain of romanticism running through our thinking about plants... But in the view of many plant scientists 'The Secret Life of Plants' has done lasting damage to their field. According to Daniel Chamovitz, an Israeli biologist who is the author of the recent book 'What a Plant Knows,' Tompkins and Bird 'stymied important research on plant behavior as scientists became wary of any studies that hinted at parallels between animal senses and plant senses.' Others contend that 'The Secret Life of Plants' led to 'self-censorship' among researchers seeking to explore the 'possible homologies between neurobiology and phytobiology'; that is, the possibility that plants are much more intelligent and much more like us than most people think—capable of cognition, communication, information processing, computation, learning, and memory."

has been used to “awaken seeds.”<sup>61</sup> It further discusses a series of experiments in which cucurbit gourds were exposed to either rock music or classical music, and responded differently to each. As Haniya and Tachibana claimed, the plants reportedly preferred the softer music.<sup>62</sup>

The experiments of Hashimoto Ken appear in the third chapter of *The Secret Life of Plants*, titled “Plants That Open Doors.” The chapter discusses experiments that use electricity to communicate with plants. It focuses on researchers who took inspiration from the controversial work of Cleve Backster (1924-2013). Backster worked for the United States Central Intelligence Agency, and used his experience with polygraph machines (or “lie-detectors”) to test the limits of what he called “primary perception,” or the belief in “biocommunication with plants, living foods, and human cells,” to borrow the title of Backster’s book.<sup>63</sup> Backster claimed communication with plants was indeed possible through the medium of the polygraph machine.<sup>64</sup>

Hashimoto and Haniya were inverses of one another. Haniya wrote of tree media as a conduit to the ineffable spiritual presence of *kehai*. He did so through the challenging medium of a multi-volume novel that was full of philosophical musings and literary allusions.<sup>65</sup> Hashimoto, on the other hand, wrote of plant media as a direct means of speaking with plants and dead spirits, and did so through accessible popular science and television appearances. Hashimoto became something of a media sensation as he and his wife appeared frequently on Japanese television to demonstrate their ability to speak with plants.<sup>66</sup> Yet both Haniya and Hashimoto

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<sup>61</sup> Tompkins p. 152. Although Haniya and Tachibana never mention *The Secret Life of Plants* by name, their discussion of airport noise and plants’ preference of classical music could easily have been directly drawn from this chapter of the text.

<sup>62</sup> *The Secret Life of Plants* claims “those (gourds) exposed to Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European scores grew toward the transistor radio... The other squashes grew away from the rock broadcasts and even tried to climb the slippery walls of their glass cage” (Tompkins p. 155).

<sup>63</sup> See Backster, *Primary Perception: Biocommunication with plants, living foods, and human cells* (2003).

<sup>64</sup> According to Pollan, Backster’s work has not been able to be reproduced by other scientists: “Backster and his collaborators went on to hook up polygraph machines to dozens of plants, including lettuces, onions, oranges, and bananas. He claimed that plants reacted to the thoughts (good or ill) of humans in close proximity and, in the case of humans familiar to them, over a great distance. In one experiment designed to test plant memory, Backster found that a plant that had witnessed the murder (by stomping) of another plant could pick out the killer from a lineup of six suspects, registering a surge of electrical activity when the murderer was brought before it. Backster’s plants also displayed a strong aversion to interspecies violence. Some had a stressful response when an egg was cracked in their presence, or when live shrimp were dropped into boiling water, an experiment that Backster wrote up for the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, in 1968. In the ensuing years, several legitimate plant scientists tried to reproduce the “Backster effect” without success.”

<sup>65</sup> At various points, *Shirei* directly references literary and philosophical works such as Lao Tzu’s *Dao de jing* and Algernon Charles Swinburne’s poem “A Ballad of François Villion, Prince of All Ballad-Makers.”

<sup>66</sup> Footage of the Hashimotos and their talking cacti (in which they attempt to teach a cactus the Japanese alphabet) can be seen in Walon Green’s 1979 documentary film *The Secret Life of Plants*, which is based on the text of the same name by Tompkins and Bird. The film was released to mainstream audiences by Paramount Pictures, and featured a soundtrack by Stevie Wonder, but has since fallen somewhat into oblivion. It is currently out of print. In addition, in 2017 Elise Florenty and Marcel Türkowsky released their film *Conversation with a Cactus*, which reflects on Hashimoto’s research through non-narrative visual experimentation. The artists’ statement in the official press release for the film reads: “*Conversation with a Cactus* is an exploration of self and other, myth and history, truth and false, seen through a cosmology of signs and stories that reveal the different ways in which the Hashimoto experiment was received. The film retraces the utopia the experiment generated, and the way it was perverted by the Japanese media. With a defiance of the division between documentary and fiction, the experiment becomes itself object of the film’s incapacity to demystify the Hashimoto legend. Eventually something else is more important than the question of whether Hashimoto’s findings are valid, whether plants are therefore able to sense, speak or think: the concept of a possible other speech, a post human perspective on the world that the figure of the witness-bearing plant embodies. Articulated through the non-linear narrative of the dream or day-dream that breaks up with the Idea

were interested in the liminal status of the botanical realm as a site of potentiality. Both figures sought the reconfiguration of human subjectivity through becoming botanical.

Also like Haniya, Hashimoto's becoming botanical was a response to trauma of Japan's interwar period. According to the autobiographical account posted on the website for the *Nihon Chokagakukai* (Japanese Parascience Association), Hashimoto was drawn to science as a young man as an expression of his fervent nationalism for the Japanese military empire:

It was said that in war, victory or defeat was decided by the quality and quantity of scientific weapons. However, the leaders of Japan at that time said things like "We will definitely win because the Japanese people have an unsurpassed spiritual strength (*seishinryoku*)" and "Japan is the land of the gods (*shinkoku*), so a divine wind (*kamikaze*) will blow." I disagreed with their thinking, and committed myself to expend all my energy so that Japan would win the war. I had always wanted to become an inventor if possible, so I thought I would invent a new weapon for Japan.<sup>67</sup>

Hashimoto's nationalist desire to invent weapons of war brought him to Tōkyō Imperial University in 1945 to study science (the same university where Abe Kōbō studied medicine). His dreams of aiding the war effort, however, quickly evaporated: "A divine wind did not blow, and in the end Japan was defeated. Japan was unable to develop a new weapon, but the United States developed the atomic bomb. I thus lost my life's purpose."<sup>68</sup>

Like Haniya, Hashimoto looked for a way to reconnect to the metaphysical realm in the wake of Japan's defeat in war. In the aftermath of Japan's surrender to the United States, Hashimoto's belief in the existence of a divine force did not diminish, but rather found a home in parascience. He writes of his confusion and ultimate conviction in the scientific relationship with the spiritual: "Do gods still exist even though a divine wind did not blow, and Japan lost the war? I, who loved science and wanted to become a scientist, kept on believing in the existence of gods."<sup>69</sup> After being introduced to Taniguchi Masaharu's spiritually inflected science text *Seimei no jissō* (*Truth of Life*, 1937), Hashimoto found a new purpose, and devoted himself to the scientific study of the spiritual/paranormal realm in an age when new religions flourished with the postwar loosening of restrictions on religious practice.<sup>70</sup>

Through his engagements with parascience, Hashimoto looked to reconfigure human subjectivity within the realm of the paranormal. In 1966, he published an account of parascientific research titled *Yojigensekai no shinpi* (*Mysteries of the Fourth Dimensional World*). The work became a best seller, and was in its eighteenth printing by the time Tompkins and Bird wrote *The Secret Life of Plants*.<sup>71</sup> The text is a hodgepodge of supernatural discussions that draw equally from scientific evidence and spiritual speculation. Chapter titles include such

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of Progress (and its monstrous creations: concentration camps, atomic bomb...), the film particularly tackles notions of displacement interweaving multiple human and nonhuman subjectivities in a non hierarchical way."

<sup>67</sup> *Aruhuakoiru wo hatsumei suru made*. Translations mine throughout.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Taniguchi Masaharu (1893-1985) was a writer and religious leader. Taniguchi founded the *Seichō no Ie* ("House of Growth") religious movement, one of the most popular Japanese "new religions." He was former member of *Ōmotokyō* (Great Origin), a Japanese new religion that drew from syncretic Shinto practices. See Peter B. Clarke's *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (2006) and *Japanese New Religions in Global Perspective* (ed. Clarke, 2000) for detailed information on Japanese New Religions.

<sup>71</sup> Tompkins p. 44.

wide-ranging topics as “Animals Have Precognition,” “A Telepathic Phenomenon Anyone Can Experiment With,” and “Does the Spirit World Exist?”

For Hashimoto, the paranormal realm was a place of dead spirits. Like Haniya Yutaka before him and Itō Seikō after him, Hashimoto imagined making contact with these spirits. Unlike Haniya, who embraced the rumbling noise of *kehai* and tree media as a connection to the spirit world in and of themselves, Hashimoto desired a form of clarity in language in his communications with the spirits of the dead. In the fourth section of *Yojigensekai no shinpi*, titled “*Kindai butsurigaku ni chōsen suru*” (“Challenging Modern Biology”), Hashimoto offers an account of haunted media, to borrow Jeffrey Sconce’s term.

In a section titled “Is a Spirit Radio Possible?”, Hashimoto explains how late in his life, Thomas Edison conducted research on spirit radios. Although Edison was unable to ultimately to make contact with the spirit realm via radio, Hashimoto suggests that recent technological developments could make the competition of a spirit radio possible. The issue, argues Hashimoto, is overcoming the signal-to-noise ratio and determining where exactly the message emerges from the medium.<sup>72</sup> It would take his discovery of Cleve Backster’s work on plants and polygraphs for Hashimoto to theorize that plants could be the medium through which a spirit radio was possible.

## Talking Cacti and Spirit Radios

After learning of Cleve Backster’s “discovery” of plant communication, Hashimoto began experimenting with botanical subjects, and became a proponent of plant intelligence. With the help of his wife, Hashimoto began attaching cacti to polygraph machines in order to teach them how to speak and sing. Hashimoto would go on to author numerous books about communicating with plant life, including *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* (*How to Talk with Plants*, 1995) and *Shokubutsu ni wa kokoro ga aru* (*Plants Have Minds*, 1997).

Although these texts share *Shirei*’s interest in the otherworldly status of the botanic realm, they posit the opposite scenario of the wordless subjectivity of *kyotai* that Miwa Yoshi finds within the forest. In *Shirei*, Haniya turned to the liminal presence of *kehai* as a means to rethink human subjectivity as more botanical. Hashimoto, on the other hand, attempted to rethink botanical subjectivity as more human, and claimed that direct communication via language is possible between humans and plants. As *Shokubutsu ni wa kokoro ga aru* assures readers, “You too can talk with plants!”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Hashimoto writes of Project Ozma, which was the first modern SETI (Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) program. Founded in 1960, Project Ozma searched radio waves for alien communications beyond the planet Earth. Hashimoto recounts the failure of Project Ozma, but suggests perhaps it could be used to search for dead spirits: “(Project Ozma) failed at finding radio messages from the cosmos. But couldn’t it be used to receive radio waves from the spirit world (*reikai*)?” (*Yojigensekai no shinpi* p. 141). Hashimoto then offers an example of a “working spirit radio,” and presents a detailed diagram of the mechanism. In this strange assemblage, a human spiritual medium (*reibai*) sits in a stand-alone cabinet, covered by a dark curtain. A small wooden box that hides a microphone inside of it is placed near the cabinet. The microphone is run through an amplifier and into a speaker (*Yojigensekai no shinpi* p. 142). The spirit radio Hashimoto demonstrates in *Yojigensekai no shinpi* is thus not a radio at all, but rather the amplification of the human medium.

<sup>73</sup> *Shokubutsu ni wa kokoro ga aru* p. 147. Hashimoto explains his method of plant communication: “I have claimed that ‘plants too have minds,’ and have attached polygraphs to cacti. When I have called out to these cacti, ‘Cactus-san, Cactus-san, if you do have a mind, please move the needle of the polygraph machine,’ the needle of the polygraph has made large movements” (*Utau saboten*, p. 42).

Hashimoto's experiments with plants look to overcome the type of haunting, voiceless presence that Miwa Yoshi experiences among the botanical realm throughout *Shirei*. As *The Secret of Life of Plants* portrays Hashimoto's experiments, the polygraph machine gives a voice to plants: "Transformed and amplified by Dr. Hashimoto's electronic equipment, the sound produced by the plant was like the high-pitched hum of very-high-voltage wires heard from a distance, except that it was more like a song, the rhythm and tone being varied and pleasant, at times even warm and almost jolly."<sup>74</sup> Through the use of the polygraph machine, Hashimoto claims he has proven the ability of plants to understand human language, and respond in return.

This is a far cry from Miwa Yoshi's experience of "feeling as if, from somewhere in the still silence of the forest, an indistinct rumble was occurring... It was a presence that seemed to be hunting him down. A presence that seemed impossible to escape, no matter how hard he tried to run away, crying."<sup>75</sup> Hashimoto's parascience turns the liminal, haunting rumbles of *kehai* into an accessible language that is "warm and almost jolly."

In a 1971 article published in *Seishin Kagaku (Mental Science)* entitled "*Utau saboten*" ("*Singing Cacti*"), Hashimoto explains that his ultimate goal with plant research is to invent a spirit radio, not unlike the one that would serve as the premise of Itō's *Sōzō rajio* some forty years later. Where Itō's spirit radio functions as a medium that brings together the living and dead in the aftermath of the national/natural catastrophe of the March 11, 2011 Tōhoku triple disaster, Hashimoto imagines his spirit radio as a more personal medium between deceased family members: "I want to create a mechanical apparatus that can communicate with one's deceased grandparents—a 'spirit radio' (*reikai rajio*)."<sup>76</sup>

Hashimoto believed plants could serve as the missing piece to this spirit radio. Despite fervently claiming throughout his career that plants have minds, in his figuration of the spirit radio Hashimoto refers to plants as machine-like, effectively denying them the kind of subjectivity he posits elsewhere:

Radios have wave detectors. A wave detector is an apparatus that converts radio waves into voice currents. Standard radios use germanium diodes, transistors, vacuum tubes, and the like... What kind of apparatus exists to change spirit waves (*reiha*) into an electricity in order to receive them? I am conducting various experiments, but I have not been able to find a spirit wave transducer... Minerals have proven complicated, but it seems living beings could work. Not higher living beings like humans, but rather simple beings. Plants more so than animals, or bacteria—beings that are closer to machines.<sup>77</sup>

Hashimoto's parascience renders the liminal accessible. In positing the possibility of a spirit radio, Hashimoto upholds an evolutionary hierarchy that places humans above other living beings.<sup>78</sup> Unlike the other figures under consideration in this dissertation (including Osaki Midori, Imanishi Kinji, and Abe Kōbō), Hashimoto (in this moment of his oeuvre) clings to a firm ontological distinction between humans and plants.

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<sup>74</sup> Tompkins p. 43.

<sup>75</sup> *Shirei I* p. 108.

<sup>76</sup> *Utau saboten* p. 42.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> It is this interpretation of evolutionary thought that both Osaki Midori and Imanishi Kinji rejected in their works, as explored in chapter one.

Even though plants can speak, sing, and make contact with the dead, they are, according to Hashimoto's logic here, nonetheless at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder. Drawn into an assemblage with humans, dead spirits, and electric apparatuses, plants seemingly trade their "secret lives" for the role of machines. They become specimens, in the manner discussed in the previous chapter on Abe Kōbō's *Dendorokakariya*. As objects of experimentation, Hashimoto's cacti are paradoxically stripped of the very voice his experiments originally sought to find. Instead, they become only a channel for the voice of dead spirits. They become pure medium, devoid of any *kehai* or presence of their own.

### Tree Spirits, Telepathy, and the Realm of the Unconscious

Although his parascientific experiments rendered plants such as cacti mechanical, Hashimoto was nevertheless well aware of the spiritual significance of trees in particular. In *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō*, Hashimoto includes a chapter entitled "*Anata wa 'ki no tama' o shinjimasuka?*" ("Do You Believe in 'Tree Spirits?']"). Hashimoto begins this short chapter discussing the contemporary rift between modern science and ancient Japanese spiritual beliefs: "Those of us living in an age of (supposed) scientism often reject things from the ancient past as 'unscientific.'"<sup>79</sup> Hashimoto offers the example of faith healers praying for the health of the ill in ancient times. When such scenes appear in modern cinema and television dramas, Hashimoto claims, viewers feel a sense of pity for the lack of scientific knowledge available to people of the past.<sup>80</sup>

Hashimoto discusses the tradition of *ushi no koku mairi*, in which a "deeply jealous woman" visits a Shinto shrine around two o'clock in the morning and nails a straw doll meant to represent their rival in love into a *shinboku* (sacred tree).<sup>81</sup> Hashimoto explains the purpose of this ritual was to enact a curse upon the woman's rival, ultimately resulting in their death.<sup>82</sup> This tradition, Hashimoto argues, cannot be dismissed as mere superstition. In language similar to Haniya's figuration of *kehai* in *Shirei*, and of Miwa Yoshi's feeling of a "presence that pressed down around him" in the forest, Hashimoto describes a menacing, spiritual atmosphere that surrounds the type of sacred trees that were used in the *ushi no koku mairi* ritual:

*Shinboku* are without exception very old trees. Most likely, from long ago, humans have felt the presence of tree spirits (*ki no tama*) in very old trees. For example, even when people today stand in front of giant trees that are a thousand years old, they likely feel that particular atmosphere that floats through the air around them. They feel a sense of intimidation that is somewhat spiritual (*seishinteki*). It is a feeling that does not exist around thin, young trees.<sup>83</sup>

Hashimoto recognizes the presence of *kehai*, and its connection to trees, although he does not use the term. In this short chapter, he embraces the alterity of trees, an alterity Michael Marder describes as "a window unto the unfamiliar realm of nature that is oblivious to classifications,

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<sup>79</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 132. Parenthetical in the original.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 133.

boundaries, or principles.”<sup>84</sup> Hashimoto argues that it is because the unfamiliar realm of ancient trees gives off an intimidating atmosphere that humans have come to hold *shinboku* in awe, and enshrine them as sacred.<sup>85</sup>

Hashimoto argues that the ritual of *ushi no koku mairi* actually involved a form of direct communication between the human participating in the ritual and the *shinboku*: “Human scorn is directed into the trunk of the *shinboku* as the nail is driven in. In a manner of speaking, an intense telepathy is cast (toward the *shinboku*).”<sup>86</sup> In stating that a telepathic form of communication is possible between humans and trees, Hashimoto returns a notion of subjectivity to the botanical realm that he denied within the assemblage of his spirit radio. The tree, it seems, is not only a medium, but is also privy to the message.<sup>87</sup>

Hashimoto wrote elsewhere about the possibility of communicating with plants via telepathy. In a chapter from *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* titled “*Shokubutsu no kotoba wa, ‘terepashii’ kamoshiremasen*” (“Plant’s Words Might be Telepathic”), Hashimoto reframes telepathy in terms of Freudian and Jungian conceptions of the unconscious. The unconscious, Hashimoto explains, is like a vast ocean, in which humans float like islands. Like the various islands of Japan, he explains, humans are all connected deep down in the unconscious ocean: “The three dimensional world that we see with our eyes in the here and now is what lies above the ocean’s surface. Below the ocean’s surface lies the fourth dimension, and even deeper lies the fifth dimension... The ocean’s surface is the threshold of consciousness.”<sup>88</sup>

Through his discussion of telepathy, Hashimoto arrives at a concept of “cosmic consciousness” or “*uchū ishiki*,” a term Haniya located within the forests of *Shirei*.<sup>89</sup> Telepathy, Hashimoto argues, takes place within the realm of the unconscious, as represented metaphorically by the figure of the deep ocean:

We can say that above the ocean’s surface is the material world, below it is the world of the spirit (*kokoro*). Accordingly, all paranormal phenomenon such as telepathy occur below the surface... This world of the consciousness below the ocean’s surface is incredibly powerful and large. I think of it as wide, and I think that we could even call it “cosmic consciousness” (“*uchū ishiki*”).

Both plants and humans, according to Hashimoto, participate in the cosmic consciousness of the unconscious. Because of this, he claims that it is only natural that humans can communicate with plants via telepathy. Hashimoto uses the strange logic of parascience to argue that paranormal phenomenon such as telepathy is not, in fact, strange at all: “If we think accordingly that plants

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<sup>84</sup> Irigary and Marder p. 151.

<sup>85</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 133.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Hashimoto was a fervent believer in the possibility of telepathy, or communication between two parties that does not use the conventional five senses. For Hashimoto, the parascience of telepathy functions in a manner similar to the imaginary radio of Itō’s *Sōzō rajio*. In *Yojigensekai no shinpi*, Hashimoto discusses telepathy in terms of radio waves: “What are thought waves? I must begin by defining this term. Here is a provisional definition: In the transmission of thoughts, something like a radio wave emerges from the brain, is circulated into the atmosphere, and arrives at the brain of another person” (*Yojigensekai no shinpi* p. 62.)

<sup>88</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 98. Within Hashimoto’s figuration of humans as islands floating on the unconscious ocean, humans become holons. They are worlds wholes unto themselves, yet also merely pieces of a larger (and deeper) whole that is the unconscious.

<sup>89</sup> *Shirei I* p. 107. Haniya writes, “In the wandering of the intoxicated self within vast space, a cosmic consciousness eventually arises.”

also naturally have the capacity for telepathy, then our correspondences with plants are not particularly strange.”<sup>90</sup>

However, when it comes to telepathic communication with trees in particular, Hashimoto *does* find plant telepathy somewhat strange. Despite his firm belief in telepathy and plant consciousness, the idea of tree telepathy (a concept he introduces in “*Anata wa ‘ki no tamashi’ o shinjimasuka?*”) becomes somewhat suspect: “Up to now, I have seen many instances of plants having miraculous (*fushigi na*) abilities, but I imagine that even for a tree (telepathic communication) is an abnormal situation. This type of abnormal situation—a paranormal phenomenon unthinkable to the average human—was likely quite rare.”<sup>91</sup>

Within a text that purports to explain a step-by-step method to communicate with plants, Hashimoto loses certainty when it comes to trees. His sudden hesitation speaks to the cosmological aura that forests have held over the human imagination. He glimpsed in *shinboku* something otherworldly that seemed to resist clear language and defy scientific objectivity. His firm conviction in the possibility of communication with plants being “not particularly strange” give way to the relativity of being able to merely “imagine” the possibility of telepathy as “quite rare.” Although the “somewhat spiritual” presence that Hashimoto found in the atmosphere of ancient trees seems like an ideal object of parascientific study (from which Hashimoto proposed humans could expand their consciousness), he only explores its possibilities within the space of a few pages.<sup>92</sup>

Hashimoto, like Haniya, believed in the plasticity of human subjectivity. Unlike Haniya, however, Hashimoto did not posit that the wordless atmosphere of trees held potential for this kind of plasticity. Although he devoted his career to the search for expanded consciousness, most often in direct communication with the botanical realm, something in the mysterious atmosphere of trees kept Hashimoto from probing their depths for new subjective potentialities. He did not attach polygraph machines to trees. He did not attempt to teach trees the Japanese language, as he did with cacti. Bound up in the figure of the thousand-year-old tree was an “intimidating” force that stood in opposition of the friendly image of a singing cactus.

In his discussion of *shinboku*, Hashimoto does not relegate trees to pure medium the way he does with cacti. Trees are not blank slates in the form of specimens. Rather, as Takemura Shinichi argues, they are full of history: “When we say, in one breath, a *thousand-year-old tree*, it does not connote a tree that has continued to live without change for a thousand years as a singular self. The expression should be read as signifying a multiple ‘narrative’ in which various histories are interwoven, and as an incessantly reorganizing self.”<sup>93</sup> Trees, with their immensely long life spans and persistently adaptive nature, experience the world in a longer *durée* than humans.<sup>94</sup> Trees are, in the words of Stefano Mancuso, not individuals, but rather “real colonies, consisting of reiterated architectural units...”<sup>95</sup> A tree, in other words, is a multiplicity.

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<sup>90</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 98.

<sup>91</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 134.

<sup>92</sup> The chapter “*Anata wa ‘ki no rei’ o shinjimasuka?*” from 1995’s *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* is repeated, verbatim in 1997’s *Shokubutsu ni wa kokoro ga aru*, albeit with a new title: “*Shinboku wa, naze tōbareru no ka?*” (“Why do we revere *shinboku*?”).

<sup>93</sup> Takemura p. 47.

<sup>94</sup> The long *durée* of trees in relation to the unfolding of human history can be glimpsed in the phenomenon of “Witness Trees.” Witness Trees are those long-living trees that have survived through key moments in American history, including the American Civil War. In 2006, the National Park Service of the United States of America developed the Witness Tree Protection Program, in order to create “a lasting record of the story a tree has to tell.” As Mike Yessis claims, “Confirmed witness trees are precious. They survived trauma, and then dodged disease and



As multiplicities, trees come up against the limits of even parascientific inquiry. As an “incessantly reorganizing self,” the *shinboku* is too plastic to serve as scientific object in the manner that Hashimoto sought.<sup>96</sup> Hashimoto ultimately turns to the psychoanalytic language of projection to explain the paranormal otherness of *shinboku*: “In psychology, there is rule that states, ‘what you fear manifests itself.’ Just like a movie where the things burnt into the film appear on the screen, the world of the unconscious eventually gets projected onto the three-dimensional world of ours.”<sup>97</sup> For Hashimoto, the fear that permeates the forest is a fear of the unknown and of the unknowable. It is the fear of an unstable narrative that keeps rewriting itself. It is, in other words, the fear of the plasticity bound up in becoming botanical.

## Itō Seikō and Botanical Life

The *kehai* presence of dead spirits that circulates the forests throughout Haniya’s *Shirei* is not merely a projection of fear, as Hashimoto might claim. Haniya saw it is an indeterminate presence that holds open space for destructive plasticity in the wake of unprecedented trauma. Over sixty years after Haniya began writing *Shirei*, Itō Seikō likewise embraced the mysterious realm of the forest as a means to explore the figure of trauma, and found a form of hope rather than fear within the cosmological presence of tree media. Itō’s 2013 novel *Sōzō rajio* searches for plasticity in the botanical realm in response to the haunting losses occasioned by the March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 triple disaster.

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storms and whatever else humans and nature have hurled at them for dozens or even hundreds of years” (Yessis). The trees written into *Shirei* and *Sōzō rajio* are themselves witness trees, as within each narrative they have borne witness, respectively, to the trauma of World War II and the Tōhoku Triple Disaster.

<sup>95</sup> *The Revolutionary Genius of Plants* p. 177.

<sup>96</sup> Cacti, for Hashimoto, were far more familiar. Novelist and cacti enthusiast Ryūtanji Yū (1901-1992) agreed with Hashimoto. In his 1983 examination of cacti titled *Shaboten gensō (Cacti Illusions)*, Ryūtanji argues that cacti make better specimens for scientific research than trees. He speaks specifically of the type of experiments Hashimoto conducted with cacti, in which polygraph machines are attached to cacti to facilitate communication. Ryūtanji writes of seeing examples of this type of experiment on television, although he does not state outright that it was Hashimoto who conducted the experiment. The television demonstrations inspired Ryūtanji to conduct his own experiments with cacti and polygraphs. Ryūtanji argues cacti make for the ideal specimens because they are mere “blisters” that fill up with gas like balloons, unlike trees and grasses that are fibrous. This, Ryūtanji argues, makes them more conductive to electricity. Like Hashimoto, he believed they made the perfect plant mediums. In his conclusion to the text, Ryūtanji offers an evolutionary explanation for the connection between humans and cacti that permits direct communication: “Mammals, which appeared at the end of the evolutionary development of all living things, and in particular humans, who occupy the shining seat at the very end of that evolution, will, for here on out, become rivals with cacti, which appeared as the newest type of vegetation in the last step of plant evolution. When it comes to the question of which is stronger in survival, humans or cacti, we can say at least this much: Humans and cacti appeared on the earth at roughly the same time” (Ryūtanji p. 206). Ryūtanji does not offer any scientific evidence to back his claim that humans and cacti evolved around the same time. Dating the evolutionary origins of cacti has proven difficult due to a lack of fossilized remains. See “Contemporaneous and recent radiations of the world’s major succulent plant lineages” by Mónica Arakaki et al in PNAS May 17, 2011 108 (20) 8379-8384. This article claims: “Our analyses provide strong evidence that although the cactus lineage is of moderate age, most of the extant diversity in this group was generated by significant radiations occurring throughout the mid to late Miocene and into the Pliocene.” It has likewise been argued that the first Hominins also appeared in the Miocene. See: <http://humanorigins.si.edu/research/age-humans-evolutionary-perspectives-anthropocene>

<sup>97</sup> *Shokubutsu to ohanashisuru hō* p. 134. In Hashimoto’s explanation for the mysterious aura of *shinboku* is an anthropocentrism that posits that the fearful atmosphere that surrounds forests (the dark presence of *kehai*) is merely a projection of human fear.

Itō Seikō has had a diverse career leading up to his botanical becoming. He began his career as a rapper in the late 1980s, and published his first novel, *Nō raifu kingu* (*No-Life King*), in 1988. Since the 1980s, Itō has continued writing both fiction and nonfiction and creating music, while also contributing to Japanese television and radio. Upon its release, *Sōzō rajio* was Itō's first novel in over fifteen years.

In 1999, Itō published *Botanikaru raifu – shokubutsu seikatsu* (*Botanical Life*), which brought together Itō's ruminations on the plants he cared for on the balcony of his Tōkyō apartment over the span of several years.<sup>98</sup> The non-fictional work was a success, and was subsequently made into a television drama, cementing Itō's reputation as a committed plant enthusiast.<sup>99</sup>

In *Botanikaru raifu*, Itō writes of the botanical presence of *kehai*, likening it to the sound of crickets:

The wind has become warm since around the end of April. A presence (*kehai*) that I find difficult to describe permeates the space among the plants that I cannot determine are either alive or dead. It is a subtle (*bimyō*) presence, but it is also blatant. It is difficult to identify which plants are giving it off. The plants emit this presence (*kehai*) throughout the veranda like a chirping cricket hidden from sight.<sup>100</sup>

Much like Miwa Yoshi in *Shirei*, the subtle presence of *kehai* renders Itō speechless in *Botanikaru raifu*: “I nearly lose all words in front of these green beings (*midoritachi*) that possess a short but tremendous life force (*ikioi*).”<sup>101</sup> Itō envisions this green life force as both destructive and regenerative:

In other words, plants are a singular life form that emerge from planetary systems. They adopt a curious green substance (*kimyō na midori iro no butsushitsu*) from the exterior world (*gaibu*), and silently wait for something. Like the previously mentioned presence (*kehai*), I don't know what this “something” is. It is a “something” that is threatening, yet also desirable. I have the feeling that perhaps that “something” is the destruction of all life on earth (*chikyūnai seimei no zetsubō*). From that day forward, the cosmic substance (*uchūteki butsushitsu*) called “green” that exists within each of us will cover the earth. At times I am shocked that I, too, am wishing for this day along with the plants.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> In a short 1999 article written for the magazine *Bungei shunjū* entitled *Berandā seikatsu* (*Veranda Life*), Itō likens the botanical space of the roadside veranda to an anarchist utopia: “(With roadside verandas), there is no concept of private ownership in which a fence partitions off private space. The selfish, capitalistic desires found in a ‘garden’ are non-existent there. The road becomes a kind of primeval communistic utopia. A world unfolds in which one’s hobbies are self-assertive: ‘I enjoy this, so you will too!’ Isn’t this a pleasant type of anarchy?” (*Berandā seikatsu* p. 88, translation mine).

<sup>99</sup> In 2015, Itō took part in a roundtable discussion with poet and essayist Itō Hiromi (1955- ) and novelist and essayist Hoshino Tomoyuki (1965- ) which was published in the magazine *Subaru* under the title: “We are ‘Botanical’ Writers” (“*Warewa, ‘shokubutsukei’ sakka*”).

<sup>100</sup> *Botanikaru raifu* p. 98. Translations mine throughout.

<sup>101</sup> *Botanikaru raifu* p. 100.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* Itō's language here aligns with the figurations of destruction and regeneration within the logic of disturbance ecology, as discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation in relation to the films of Yanagimachi Mitsuo and Kawase Naomi.

Itō's daily encounters with plants on his veranda give way to this complex philosophical take on the both relationship between plant and human life, and the relationship between life and death themselves. Itō views plants as both singular and multiple, infused with a “green” essence or life force that exists within human subjectivity as well, ready to emerge and cover the globe in “the destruction of all life on earth.” Written in 1997 (two years after the final volume of *Shirei* was published, and the year of Haniya's death), this passage from *Botanikaru raifu* anticipates the coming of creative destruction. Read in the hindsight of the Tōhoku triple disaster, it eerily presages the stakes of Itō's *Sōzō rajio*. The figuration of a “cosmic substance called ‘green’ that exists within us all” covering the globe finds a home in *Sōzō rajio*'s tree media as it broadcasts out into the ether of a nation traumatized by mass death and destruction.<sup>103</sup>

*Sōzō rajio* reads like the curious offspring of Haniya's *Shirei* and the writings of Hashimoto Ken. Like *Shirei*, *Sōzō rajio*'s characters become botanical within assemblages with the forest. They look to move beyond the trauma of loss by becoming botanical. Like Hashimoto's parascience, the botanical assemblages of *Sōzō rajio* become plant media in the form of a spirit radio that can communicate with the dead.

The majority of the *Sōzō rajio* is told via direct address in the manner of a radio broadcast, through the voice of a (deceased) DJ named Ark. DJ Ark broadcasts from atop a giant cedar tree.<sup>104</sup> Miraculously, DJ Ark's broadcast reaches out to both the living and the dead in the aftermath of the Tōhoku triple disaster. From the top of this tree, the deceased DJ Ark gives a voice to those who have recently lost their own.<sup>105</sup> He engages in on-air conversations with both living and deceased “callers,” several of whom recount their traumatic experiences.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> According to the National Police Agency of Japan, the death toll of the March 11, 2011 Tōhoku triple disaster was 15,897. See: [https://www.npa.go.jp/news/other/earthquake2011/pdf/higaijokyo\\_e.pdf](https://www.npa.go.jp/news/other/earthquake2011/pdf/higaijokyo_e.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> The *sugi* tree, or Japanese cedar, is often believed to be a sacred species within Shinto ideology. See Rots p. 293 and Omura p. 181.

<sup>105</sup> In *Sōzō rajio*, the catastrophic spectacle of the Tōhoku triple disaster is recounted through fuzzy memories. At one point in the novel, a listener of DJ Ark's broadcast sends a form of supernatural email that narrates seeing a man in a red jacket being swept up in the giant wave of the tsunami. While the listener recounts her own experience of being inundated by the wave, she writes of seeing the man in the red jacket (whom she believes to be DJ Ark) being washed up onto a hillside populated with cedar trees. The man, she remembers, became caught on one of the cedar trees while being pushed to and fro by the rushing water. While the details are foggy, it is clear to DJ Ark that he is engaged in a cosmic exchange that defies the laws of science. DJ Ark has only a foggy recollection of the event the listener has described, but recognizes he is wearing a red jacket and is indeed sitting on the top of a cedar tree. As DJ Ark ponders the status of his own existence (he has yet to realize he is also dead), he reflects on the height of the cedar tree upon which he sits: “The only memory I have—that bodily feeling of being lifted up... was that me being swallowed by the wave? First of all, there is no way this cedar tree is six meters tall. I think it's at least twice that height. Did the wave reach that high?” (*Sōzō rajio* p. 41, Translations mine throughout). In truth, the tsunami on March 11, 2011 did reach over six meters. According to the Japanese Meteorological Agency, the highest point of the tsunami in Fukushima Prefecture reached +9.3m. See: [https://www.data.jma.go.jp/svd/eqev/data/bulletin/tsunami\\_e.html](https://www.data.jma.go.jp/svd/eqev/data/bulletin/tsunami_e.html)

<sup>106</sup> As *Sōzō rajio* shifts perspective in the second chapter to a man called “S,” who volunteers in tsunami-ravaged Fukushima Prefecture, the narrative begins to question the mechanism by which DJ Ark conducts his otherworldly spirit radio broadcasts. While S rides in a car returning to Tōkyō from Fukushima with other volunteers, the leader of the volunteer group questions the plausibility of DJ Ark's speaking with the dead. The group leader finds the phenomenon of DJ Ark's spirit radio to be antithetical to scientific reality: “Corpses don't talk. Isn't such a thing just unscientific sentimentalism?” (*Sōzō rajio* 63). What the group leader fails to realize is that it is not the corpse of DJ Ark (nor the corpses of any of his callers) that broadcasts out over the imagination radio. Rather, it is the dead spirits of those who lost their lives in the March 11<sup>th</sup> tsunami that find a voice through the spirit radio being broadcast from the giant cedar tree. Corpses belong to the material world of science, while spirits find a home in the

*Sōzō rajio* mobilizes the spiritual affect of trees by drawing an explicit connection between the cedar tree upon which DJ Ark sits and purported ancient spiritual beliefs. In an exchange with an elderly listener named Ōba Kiichi, DJ Ark is reminded of the spiritual significance of the cedar tree, and the deep connection between dead spirits and the natural world:

I have heard that from time immemorial spirits (*tamashi*) have floated up to the top of trees. Spirits crawl the earth. It is quite right that snakes entangle the roots. That's because it's not just humans that pass on from this realm. Since the arrival of Buddhism... we Japanese feel... the spirits of those who have passed have not only gone off to the far away Pure Land. They have surely merged (*dōka shite*) with trees and boulders... They are closely watching over the living. That is enough. The other side is right there.<sup>107</sup>

Within the spiritual logic of *Sōzō rajio*, DJ Ark's dead spirit finds its natural place atop the cedar tree. As Ōba claims, dead spirits have merged with trees in Japan since time immemorial. *Sōzō rajio* imagines giving a voice to these dead spirits. Just as Itō experienced the ineffable presence of *kehai* as akin to the sound of crickets on his veranda in *Botanikaru raifu*, the *kehai* presence of dead spirits emanate from the tree media of *Sōzō rajio* as the sound of radio. The cedar tree that forms an assemblage with the dead spirit of DJ Ark is a spiritual medium that *Sōzō rajio* incorporates into the medium of radio.

### **Futurity and Forests as the “Never More of the Always Already”**

The botanical radio broadcast is DJ Ark's attempt to help the traumatized subjects of Japan's largest modern natural disaster cope with loss. Like Haniya in *Shirei*, Itō saw in the botanical world a means of change in the face of trauma. *Sōzō rajio* locates a resilience in the world of plants that it attempts to grant, through becoming botanical, to the survivors of the Tōhoku triple disaster. It is a resilience in plasticity that DJ Ark explains as he tells the story of naming his son Sōsuke (the first character of which means “grass”): “It's a name that borrowed the botanical word ‘grass’ with the hope that, as he grew, he would be vibrant and be able to bend in the wind, however it may blow.”<sup>108</sup>

*Sōzō rajio* is populated with characters struggling to bend in the metaphorical wind of a post-3/11 Japan. The novel's dead spirits and traumatized survivors struggle to move forward.<sup>109</sup> To return to the words of Christopher Dole et al. (quoted in the first chapter of this dissertation): “Catastrophes also seem to command a monopoly over every imaginable future, such that the idea of a future catastrophe has become a real force in the ordering of lives and worlds in the present.”<sup>110</sup> The resilient, ever-changing tree and the supple blade of grass bending in the wind present a new form of subjectivity that responds to the pervasive fear of future catastrophe. As

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immaterial world of parascience. In both *Sōzō rajio* and the writing of Hashimoto Ken, these two realms (as well as the realms of the living and the dead) are bridged by the haunted medium of radio.

<sup>107</sup> *Sōzō rajio* p. 101-102. Ellipses in the original.

<sup>108</sup> *Sōzo rajio* p. 33.

<sup>109</sup> The novel's conclusion finds DJ Ark effectively “moving on” to another other realm and leaving the spirit radio behind.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Catherine Malabou claims, “the post-traumatized subject disconnects the structure of the always already. The post-traumatized subject is the never more of the always already.” The post-traumatized subject is, in other words, like the “incessantly reorganizing self” that Takemura Shinichi finds in trees.

Both Itō Seikō and Haniya Yutaka understood that constant change was necessary to weather the storms of their respective historical moments. For both writers, the botanical world presented a new direction through which to navigate the pervasive backdrop of catastrophe that structures both *Shirei* and *Sōzō rajio*. Plant media provided a channel through which to be in touch with the past yet still craft a vision of the future.

The dead spirits that haunt *Shirei* and *Sōzō rajio* are not specters of a history that has been foreclosed, nor one that will necessarily repeat. The fourth and penultimate chapter of *Sōzō rajio* is narrated from the perspective of S, a Fukushima volunteer who served as the focus of the novel’s second chapter as well. Chapter four consists entirely of a conversation between S and a woman with whom he has been engaged in a romantic relationship. Over the course of their conversation, it becomes clear that the woman has died in the disasters of March 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>111</sup>

S discusses the important role the spirits of the dead play in constructing a future-oriented national subjectivity: “All we can do is remake this country together with the dead. Who are we that we continue to put a lid on the situation as if nothing happened? What will happen to this country?”<sup>112</sup> S then looks back over Japanese history, finding in the past not a repetition of the “always already,” but rather the potential for “remaking:”

At the time of the Tōkyō air raids... and at the time when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and the time it was dropped on Nagasaki, and all the times of all the other many disasters, did we not move forward hand in hand with the dead? Yet, at some point, this country stopped being able to hold hands with the dead. Why is this?... I think it’s because we stopped listening to their voices.<sup>113</sup>

The assemblage of DJ Ark and the cedar tree restores the ability for the living to hear the voices of the dead. Tree media open a channel for the living S to tell his deceased loved one: “As two, we are one. I, who am alive, will forever think of you as I live out my life. And you, who have died, still exist within the words that I, who am alive, cry out. You think through me. And so together we build a future.”<sup>114</sup> In the aftermath of the Tōhoku triple disaster, S imagines a new

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<sup>111</sup> While it is unclear exactly how the two are communicating with each other, they spend a long portion of their conversation discussing DJ Ark and the phenomenon of the spirit radio. They likewise discuss a blog that mentions a story from Croatia of blue spirits appearing at the top trees. The woman also gives an account of a dream she has had in which she becomes a bird and sees a man atop a large cedar tree. This image links to the end of the novel, as DJ Ark speaks of seeing a bird in the tree with him, just before he ends his broadcast with a song that S requests at the end of chapter four: Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song.” Although the lyrics are not included in the novel, “Redemption Song” features the following line that could well be speaking of notions of futurity in relation to the triple disaster of March 11<sup>th</sup>: “Have no fear for atomic energy/ ‘cause none of them can stop the time.”

<sup>112</sup> *Sōzō rajio* p. 132.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> *Sōzō rajio* p. 138. In her chapter entitled “*Shinsaigo bungaku no hyōzairon*” (“A Hauntology of Post-Disaster Literature”), Kimura Saeko compares the presence of the dead in *Sōzō rajio* (and in particular this scene) with traditional Nō theater: “Within the history of Japanese literature, a world view that posits that the dead exist along with the living exists in a genealogy that connects to the *yōkyoku* songs of Nō theater” (Kimura p. 173, translation mine). Kimura’s chapter articulates, through the language of Jacques Derrida, how the “out of joint” temporality of death connects the past, present, and future through the figure of the dead.

subjectivity in which the living and the dead are “two, as one.” He imagines subjectivity itself as medium, in which the dead “think through” the living.

### ***Shirei* and the Uncertainty of Futurity**

The ninth and final volume of *Shirei* (published in 1995) presents a murkier vision of the future than *Sōzō rajio*. As is the case for the majority of the text, chapter nine, which is entitled “*Kyotairon – daiuchū no yume*” (“Treatise on *Kyotai* – A Cosmic Dream”), unfolds largely through conversation. The principle characters of the text all gather at a birthday celebration for Mrs. Tsuda, the mother of Miwa Yoshi’s fiancé Yasuko. The characters sit around a large table and discuss many of the philosophical concerns the text raised in its previous eight volumes over the span of nearly half a decade.

During the long conversation that structures the chapter, Miwa Yoshi and Yasuko discuss Miwa’s philosophical difficulty in recognizing himself as an individuated subject. Miwa tells Yasuko, “The impression I am given is that throughout the history of existence thinking that ‘I, am, I’ is a singular trap meant to keep one existing.”<sup>115</sup> In the final moments of the narrative, Miwa Yoshi is able to declare that “I am I,” albeit in a fractured form separated by commas. He concludes that the belief in such unified subjectivity is merely a “trap” set to keep one living—a subjective trap set in the name of futurity.

Yasuko counters by mentioning a previous conversation the two shared with their friend Kurokawa in chapter eight:

But, but... as Kurokawa clearly asserted in regards to your dark thoughts—about you, Yoshi, you who have remained silent up until now—he said “There is a ‘self’ that is ‘first of its kind in the universe’ (*uchū hajimete*”), one that has not existed within your existence up until this point, nor in your existence from here on out as Miwa Yoshi. A creation that is entirely new and completely terrifying.”<sup>116</sup>

In this exchange, Yasuko offers Miwa Yoshi the promise of plasticity, of a future as a subject “disconnected (from) the structure of the always already,” to return to Malabou’s language. She offers the promise of subjectivity that is “the first of its kind in the universe.”

Staring ahead into the darkness, Miwa characteristically loses his ability to speak, and replies that he can “say no more” (“*Hoka ni, tsutaeraremasen!*”).<sup>117</sup> As the novel once again returns to silence, the botanical presence of *kehai*, and the figuration of tree media emerges:

Afterwards, the reverberation of those short, blunt words were drown out by a murmuring that unexpectedly arose above the long, narrow table. It was, so to speak, a deep, deep, deep murmuring (*sasayaki*) that was difficult to hear, a murmuring that leaked out in a never-ending welcome from large, old floorboards of firm, woody substance in secret small rooms. It was like the reverberation (*hibiki*) of a secret and profound arboreal

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<sup>115</sup> *Shirei III* p. 232.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

symphony (*mokushitsu kōkyōkyoku*) that plays on and on from distant and dim ancient forests.<sup>118</sup>

As language fails Miwa Yoshi once again, the deep, cosmological reverberation of *kehai* returns. Like the cedar tree of *Sōzō rajio*, the ancient forest medium of *Shirei* broadcasts an unending musical score. Yet unlike the final song broadcast over the imagination radio in *Sōzō rajio* (Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song”), the “arboreal symphony” that hangs in the air of the final chapter of *Shirei* does not offer a clear promise of a future.<sup>119</sup> It does not offer redemption. Rather, it remains in an infinite loop of indeterminacy, “forever welcoming” but “difficult to hear.”<sup>120</sup>

### Botanical Subjectivity as Media All the Way Down

In a short 1986 essay written for the inaugural issue of *Henkyō (Frontier)* titled “Echo” (*Kodama*), Haniya returns to the forest and revisits its connection to subjectivity. Written forty years after the initial publication of the first volume of *Shirei*, Haniya continues to circle the ineffable space that surrounds trees. In the process, he becomes botanical by becoming tree media himself. In “Echo,” the forest begins to reverberate deep within human subjectivity: “Something dwells deep in the dark forest within my heart. When I cry out, ‘I am I,’ all that comes back is the cruel, never-ending reverberation of ‘You are still not you.’”<sup>121</sup>

Haniya calls this reverberation a “mysterious (*fushiga na*) echo (*kodama*) that eternally negates from deep in the dark forest within in my heart.”<sup>122</sup> With a dark forest deep inside his heart, Haniya is denied an individuated subjectivity, and becomes a tree medium through which a never-ending echo (a word which literally translates from the Japanese *kodama* as “tree spirit”) reverberates on and on, forever reminding him that he is other to himself.

As Haniya writes of his own subjectivity becoming tree media, he highlights the way one medium can be an environment for yet another medium to emerge. As John Durham Peters explains, “we can regard media as enabling environments that provide habitats for diverse forms of life, including other media.”<sup>123</sup> The medium of writing is the enabling environment that provides a habitat for figurations of plant media.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Of the relationship between plasticity and redemption, Catherine Malabou writes of the myth of Daphne, who transforms into a tree to escape the advances of Phoebus: “The formation of a new individual is precisely this explosion of form that frees up a way out and allows the resurgence of an alterity that the pursuer cannot assimilate... Transformation is a form of redemption, a strange salvation, but salvation all the same. By contrast, the flight identity forged by destructive plasticity flees itself first and foremost; it knows no salvation or redemption and is there for no one, especially not for the self. It has no body of bark, no armor, no branches. In retaining the same skin, it is forever unrecognizable” (*Ontology of the Accident* p. 12).

<sup>120</sup> As Takemura Shinichi claims, the musical assemblage of the forest does not permit individuated subjectivity: “In a forest that performs the orchestral music of convergence—in which various times are condensed and form a cross section like a complex stratum of earth—each tree, each individual entity is essentially unable to maintain a self-contained identity” (Takemura p. 43). In *Shirei*, Miwa Yoshi is one such individual entity that becomes a part of the larger whole of the forest symphony. The tree media of ancient forests offers a murmuring, wordless alternative to a subjectivity “trapped” by the “always already” realm of the phrase “I am I.”

<sup>121</sup> *Haniya Yutaka Zenshū* Vol. 11, p. 55.

<sup>122</sup> *Haniya Yutaka Zenshū* Vol. 11, p. 56.

<sup>123</sup> Peters p. 3. The following chapter of this dissertation turns to the filmic medium, and maps how cinema serves as an enabling environment for botanical becomings.

## Writers as Mediums

Like Haniya's essay "Echo," *Sōzō rajio* suggests writers themselves are mediums. During the long van ride from Fukushima to Tōkyō that takes up the entirety of the second chapter of Itō's novel, a group of Fukushima volunteers discuss the role of spiritual mediums in communicating with the dead, and recount an experience of witnessing spiritual mediums at a memorial ceremony held at the Hiroshima Peace Park.

S, who suffers from hearing problems, laments that he is unable to hear the mysterious spirit radiobroadcast (i.e. DJ Ark's imaginary radio) that he has heard about, and is thus unable to hear the words of the dead. S, who is a writer by trade, discusses the status of writing with his fellow volunteer Kimura. Kimura discusses writers in relation to spiritual mediums:

I don't understand much about writers, but I think that they are those that hear voices in their hearts (*kokoro*) and give expression to them as words. It's not that they talk to them directly like spiritual mediums, but they turn the voices into words later on. And yet, S-san, how can I put it? Isn't it that you can't hear those words, no matter how hard you listen? Those words—the ones that the living think are, for some, the words that the dead most want to speak.<sup>124</sup>

Although Kimura does not see writers as spiritual mediums that speak directly to dead spirits, he nonetheless views writers as channels through which the words of the dead (the words that "the dead most want to speak") emerge.

While within the narrative of *Sōzō rajio* S is unable to hear these voices, it is possible that, in becoming botanical, Haniya, Hashimoto, and Itō were able to do so. As they embraced trees and cacti as media, perhaps these writers themselves became a type of media through which the *kehai* presence of dead spirits found a voice. If so, then they were no longer bound to a singular subjectivity that could declare "I am I." Instead, they, like Miwa Yoshi, embraced the space in between the "I am..." and the "I," leaving it open as a channel for something new. In the space of that medium, they brought forth, in words, the haunting reverberation that emerges in the space between trees, as *Shirei* describes it: "The faint reverberation of trees rubbing up against each other from deep within a dark forest somewhere far, far away."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Sōzō rajio* p. 71.

<sup>125</sup> *Shirei III* p. 234.



## Chapter Four.

### Disturbance Ecology: Visions of Fire and Regeneration in the Eco-Films of Yanagimachi Mitsuo and Kawase Naomi

“Why do we focus always  
on the destruction  
and not the regeneration?  
We reach for tales  
assuring us of immortality,  
yet we refuse to read

the life right in front of us.”  
-Jeff Fearnside, “New Channel”

“The forest grows on the past and into the future.”  
-Bill Yake, “Forests and People”

#### Introduction

Yanagimachi Mitsuo’s (1945- ) 1985 film *Himatsuri (Fire Festival)* opens with an image of fire and then moves into the forest. Flames burn against a black backdrop as the film’s opening credits run, for nearly three minutes, accompanied by a ghostly score composed by Takemitsu Tōru (1930-1996), famous for his numerous film scores and theoretical writings on music. In these opening moments, droning tones of low-end brass instruments are punctuated by swells of shrill flutes that give way to a quiet undercurrent of marimba. The flames these sounds accompany are almost certainly from the torches used in the ritual fire festival of the film’s title. The Fire Festival (which is held annually in the city of Shingū on the heavily forested and spiritually rich Kii Peninsula in Wakayama Prefecture and goes by the name *Otōmatsuri*, or Lantern Festival) is a ritual of purification performed to welcome the coming of spring. Within the cosmology of the festival, fire leads to new growth.

As the image of the lanterns and the music fade out in *Himatsuri*’s opening scene, a sound that resembles the crackling of fire emerges from the dark screen. After a brief moment, the screen brightens to reveal that the sound is not coming from the flames we have been watching, but rather from the felling of a giant cedar tree. The burning of fire and the clearing of the forest align in this brief moment, linking the regenerative properties of fire to the practice of forest management.

Kawase Naomi’s (1969- ) 2018 film *Vision* echoes *Himatsuri*’s entanglement of forests, destruction by fire, and rebirth.<sup>1</sup> The film opens with the image of a hunter shooting at a deer

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “entanglement” in the spirit of writers like Karen Barad and Timothy Morton, who turn to the scientific theory of “quantum entanglement” to better understand the ways in which humans are co-constituted by the material world. Quantum entanglement refers to the phenomena in which two or more subatomic particles can only be known in relation to the other—an interdependence or what Barad calls “intra-action” (Barad p. 248). I argue that humans are thoroughly entangled within ecosystems, and that there exists a kind of intra-action between humans and the forests in the films I discuss in this chapter.

running through the trees, and quickly transitions to a character cutting down a giant cypress tree with a chainsaw. In *Vision*'s climax, the forest in which this character lives and works is set ablaze. The fire heals the unhealthy forest and clears the way for new growth. The forest fire becomes an image of regeneration.

Like the other works examined in this dissertation, *Himatsuri* and *Vision* turn to the botanical world in an attempt to explore the plasticity of nature and of human subjectivity itself. Yanagimachi and Kawase's "eco-films" reveal the intimate relationship between human subjectivity and the botanical world by staging botanical becomings through destructive plasticity in the disturbance of fire and the regrowth it allows. They do so through the figure of the *somabito*—a traditional name for the foresters that have lived and worked in rural Japan, stretching back as far as the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> *Himatsuri* and *Vision* are ecological films that develop, through *somabito* characters, a notion of subjectivity that extends into the botanical realm of the forest, and is renewed with the renewal of the forest ecosystem.

Both films grapple with the decline of Japanese rural forestry communities, and feature *somabito* that strive for regeneration (ecological, economic, and spiritual). The *somabito* come to recognize the generative possibilities inherent in fire's destructive nature and realize that their own future depends on the long-term health of the forest ecosystem. In the act of embracing this mode of ecological thinking—in which humans see themselves as part of the forest—the *somabito* characters of these films become botanical. They learn to think like the forest, and act in the best interest of the forest—even when such actions result in their own deaths.

The forests in the films of Yanagimachi and Kawase are entanglements of humans and nonhumans—assemblages that become more than the sum of their parts. The films I discuss in this chapter understand that human livelihoods (in particular the *somabito* livelihood) depend on multispecies (human and botanical) relationships. Both *Himatsuri* and *Vision* express a yearning for the resurgence of the forestry communities of rural Japan. They likewise express a yearning for a renewal of the forest ecosystem itself, and the relationships between humans and nonhumans that constitute said ecosystem. In what follows, I explore the possibilities of renewal (both economic and ecological) through the figure of forest fire within the rubric of "disturbance ecology," which posits that disturbances such as fire are an essential part of the health of an ecosystem. In the eco-films of Yanagimachi and Kawase, becoming botanical takes the form of disturbance ecology—a new subjectivity is wrought in the destruction of fire within the forest.

Multispecies anthropologist Anna Tsing describes the importance of disturbances in facilitating what she calls the resurgence of ecosystems:

Disturbances, human and otherwise, knock out multispecies assemblages—yet livable ecologies come back. After a forest fire, seedlings sprout in the ashes, and, with time, another forest may grow up in the burn. The regrowing forest is an example of what I am calling *resurgence*. The cross-species relations that make forests possible are renewed in the regrowing forest. Resurgence is the work of many organisms, negotiating across differences, to forge assemblages of multispecies livability in the midst of disturbance. Humans cannot continue their livelihoods without it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The *Nihonkokugo daijiten* lists the first occurrence of term (in its variant form of *somaudo*) in the *Tonyōshū*, a text dating to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century/early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>3</sup> Tsing p. 52. Italics in the original.

*Himatsuri* and *Vision* demonstrate how disturbance and destruction help sculpt and maintain both the material ecology of the forest and a botanical subjectivity that sees itself as a part of the forest. They show how disturbance ecology and the notion of destructive plasticity are linked: as the ecosystem is destroyed and reconfigured, so is subjectivity as it becomes botanical. Just as the *somabito* sculpts the forest with his axe or chainsaw, the films of Yanagimachi and Kawase use the image of destruction by fire to carve out a notion of the future for the fading horizon of the *somabito* and the multispecies assemblage that is the forest.<sup>4</sup>

Both *Himatsuri* and *Vision* stage the plasticity of disturbance ecology via a spiritual relationship to the forest that is inscribed into the settings of each film. They each make legible a spiritual presence that permeates the forest, and demonstrate that disturbance ecology can be applied equally to the material, economic, and spiritual ecologies of the forest.<sup>5</sup> The spiritual presence of the forest is made visible in both films in part through cinematography that creates what I call a cinematic-botanical subjectivity. As the camera floats between the trees of the forest and the human foresters, Yanagimachi and Kawase's films portray forests as multispecies assemblages that give equal weight to the subjectivity of both. Read against the long religious history of the film's settings (the Kii Peninsula in *Himatsuri* and the Yoshino region of Nara Prefecture in *Vision*), the free-floating subjective position sculpted by each film's cinematography takes on an all-seeing perspective inhabited by the *kami* or local gods that move amongst the trees.

In both films, a spiritual presence participates in the enacting of disturbance ecology. The relationship between *Himatsuri*'s protagonist, Tatsuo, and the forests of his native Kii Peninsula is informed by ancient spiritual/mythological beliefs and cultural practices such as hunting. As a character out of time (a *somabito* who finds his way of life no longer viable), Tatsuo becomes botanical as he listens to the wishes of the forest and attempts to renew the forest community through a ritual of fire. Kawase's *Vision* likewise realizes, with the help of characters that embody the spiritual presence of the forest, the logic of disturbance ecology and finds that new growth comes from destruction in its fiery climax.

*Himatsuri* and *Vision* understand that disturbance renews the "cross-species relations that make forests possible," yet they arrive at this conclusion in dramatically different ways. *Himatsuri* reaches the conclusion that destruction is necessary for resurgence through its fiercely masculine protagonist Tatsuo, a character so egoistic and vulgar that contemporary critics were largely unable to recognize the ecological logic he embodies, and subsequently dismissed Tatsuo as a "pigheaded reactionary" and the film overall as "not ecological."<sup>6</sup> *Vision*, on the other hand, reaches the logic of disturbance ecology through the very elimination of the human ego. Unlike *Himatsuri*, it does not cling to the notion of a unique, individuated character that ultimately must sacrifice himself for the greater good of the forest ecosystem. Rather, *Vision* destabilizes the notion of ego. It takes the ecological logic of disturbance ecology and applies it not just to forest

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<sup>4</sup> As Catherine Malabou explains, destruction can be generative: "No one thinks spontaneously about a plastic art of destruction. Yet destruction too is formative. A smashed-up face is still a face, a stump a limb, a traumatized psyche remains a psyche. Destruction has its own sculpting tools" (*The Ontology of the Accident* p. 4).

<sup>5</sup> The botanical subjectivity and spiritual presence on display in both films illuminate an ecological logic limned in Felix Guattari's "three ecologies." Guattari posits that a cultural ecology and mental ecology exist alongside the material ecology of the natural world, and that all three ecologies influence one another. In other words, the spiritual ecologies of *Himatsuri* and *Vision* bear heavily on the economic and material realities of the forest. Both films draw from religious cosmologies that find renewal in the act of destruction by fire and apply this logic to the *somabito* livelihood and the health of the forest itself.

<sup>6</sup> See Sharp "Fire Festival" and Stein p. 68, respectively.

ecosystems and the *somabito* community, but imagines that the destruction of fire can usher in a future in which all of humanity undergoes an evolutionary change resulting in the destruction of the human ego. It suggests that anyone can become botanical by adopting the subjectivity of the *somabito* and embrace the generative potentiality of destructive plasticity.

Both films embrace death (albeit in different forms) as the best hope for a transformational leap into a wholly new horizon for Japan's rural logging communities, as well as, in the case of *Vision*, a new horizon for all of humanity. In this way, the films of Yanagimachi and Kawase imagine a future informed by destructive plasticity that is botanical: a future that adapts to the changes brought on by disturbance and, hopefully, flourishes in its aftermath.

### ***Himatsuri's Otherworldly Atmosphere***

*Himatsuri* was Yanagimachi Mitsuo's fourth feature-length film.<sup>7</sup> Its screenplay was written by Akutagawa Prize winning novelist and influential literary and cultural critic Nakagami Kenji (1946-1992).<sup>8</sup> Although Yanagimachi had previously adapted one of Nakagami's novellas into a film, *Himatsuri* marked Nakagami's first foray into screenwriting.<sup>9</sup> *Himatsuri* was released in 1985 to worldwide acclaim. It was selected for both the Cannes Film Festival and the 23<sup>rd</sup> New York Film Festival, and was well received in both cases.<sup>10</sup> With both this international recognition and the pull of Nakagami's attachment to the project, the film sold around seven thousand advance tickets in Japan.<sup>11</sup>

*Himatsuri* is set in the small village of Nigishima, on the Kii Peninsula in the Kumano region of Mie Prefecture (also known by its historical name as Kishū). Situated on the southeast coast of Japan's main island of Honshū, Nigishima is home to lush mountainous forests that

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<sup>7</sup> Yanagimachi began his career as a director with the 1976 film *Goddo spiido yū! BLACK EMPEROR (God Speed You! Black Emperor)*, a 16mm documentary film that follows a *bōsōzoku* motorcycle gang. His second and first feature film was a 1979 adaptation of Nakagami Kenji's tense and violent novella *Jūkyūsai no chizu (A 19-Year-Old's Map)*. In 1982, he released *Saraba itoshiki daichi (Farewell to the Beloved Land)*, a harrowing tale of a violent drug addict set against the pastoral beauty of Yanagimachi's native Ibaraki Prefecture. The film (for which Yanagimachi wrote the screenplay himself) was screened at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Berlin International Film Festival.

<sup>8</sup> Nakagami Kenji was a highly prolific and influential writer in the Japanese postwar period. Nakagami's fiction embraced the culture of Japan's *burakumin* outcaste group, of which he self-identified as a member. Through this lens of marginalization, Nakagami explored controversial elements of Japanese culture, history, and language, and became one of Japan's most important critical voices in the later Shōwa era. His works abound with the type of masculine violence and sexual energy displayed throughout *Himatsuri*. His writings also pay close attention to the botanical world, in particular the forested realm of the Kii Peninsula (in which *Himatsuri* was filmed). See Anne McKnight's *Nakagami, Japan: Buraku and the Writing of Ethnicity* for a thorough examination of Nakagami's work.

<sup>9</sup> The screenplay for *Himatsuri* is collected in volume 8 of the Nakagami Kenji Zenshu (NKZ), along with the novelization Nakagami adapted after he completed the screenplay.

<sup>10</sup> In a 1986 article in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Don Ranvaud writes that *Himatsuri* and Itami Jūzō's *Osōshiki (The Funeral)* "could be seen as the real surprises of Cannes, 1985" (Ranvaud p. 187). A review of *Himatsuri* published in *Film Comment* on the occasion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> New York Film Festival reads: "This fascinating film is about the destruction of the symbiotic relationship between man and nature, which was one of the supports of (Yanagimachi's) country's culture" (Stein p. 68).

<sup>11</sup> *Jinbutsu nihonrettō* p.195.

supported the film's protagonist Tatsuo (Kitaōji Kinya) and his family since time immemorial.<sup>12</sup> Tatsuo's home sits within a region of rich historical, mythological, and religious significance. *Himatsuri* attempts to make visible the otherworldly aura of Kumano—an aura in which the renewal of subjectivity occasioned in becoming botanical finds inspiration in spiritual belief. This forested landscape of *Himatsuri* is an entanglement of humans, nonhumans, and spiritual entities. It is a place in which “the mythologies of the past *inhabit* the present.”<sup>13</sup> Characters in the film frequently discuss the *Yama no kami*—the “mountain goddess” that resides in the forest and with whom Tatsuo is shown to have a singular relationship.<sup>14</sup>

Kumano is home to many important religious sites, including the *Kumano sanzan* or Three Mountains of Kumano, a term which refers to the three shrines considered most sacred in Kumano: Hongū, Nachi, and Shingū (the last of which is home to the fire festival of the film's title). It is also the birthplace of Shūgendō, a form of Buddhist asceticism that is intimately tied to the mountains and waters of the region.<sup>15</sup> This spiritual history infuses the landscape of Kumano, and plays a central role in *Himatsuri*'s narrative, and the film's eventual embrace of disturbance ecology.

The spiritual landscape of Kumano holds a religious and political significance that is inseparable from images of death, fire, and rebirth (in other words, images of destructive plasticity), and stretches back to Japan's earliest extent histories. According to the *Nihon shoki*, an official mytho-history completed in 720 AD, the Hana no Iwa Shrine in Kumano marks the spot where Izanami (a deity who, along with her male counterpart Izanagi, gave birth to both the islands of Japan and the myriad gods) was entombed after dying while giving birth to the deity of fire.<sup>16</sup> The Kii Peninsula is likewise home to the mythological site in which Japan's first emperor ascended the land, a belief that plays directly into *Himatsuri*'s narrative, as the villagers of Nigishima attempt to rebrand their town as a potential site for tourism.

The rich confluence of history and spirituality has made Kumano a popular pilgrimage destination for centuries. D. Max Moerman explains how the rich tapestry of religious and political history present in Kumano has resulted in the region's otherworldly aura:

(Kumano's) pantheon consisted of principal deities of Japanese myth (*kami*) and the buddhas and bodhisattvas of East Asian Mahāyāna. It was a place where native and Buddhist cosmologies, one locative and the other utopian, converged. The mountains of Kumano contained a multiplicity of other worlds: the homelands of an ancestral past and the celestial paradises of Buddhist rebirth.<sup>17</sup>

Yanagimachi Mitsuo has spoken of *Himatsuri*'s setting as just such a place of otherworldliness and claims to have experienced the mystical atmosphere of Kumano firsthand. In a promotional interview for *Himatsuri* with Yanagimachi, anthropologist Komatsu Kazuhiko

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<sup>12</sup> The Kii Peninsula was also Nakagami Kenji's birthplace, and a frequent setting for his work. Nakagami had previously explored the complex intersections of history and mythology present in the Kii Peninsula in his 1977 book *Kishū: Ki no kuni, ne no kuni monogatari (Ki Province: the Tale of the Land of Trees and the Land of Roots)*.

<sup>13</sup> Cornyetz p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> The presence of the *Yama no kami* is signaled both visually and aurally. Particular moments of branches waving in the wind (which I discuss below) seem to be the *kami* manifesting itself through the medium of trees. See the previous chapter of this dissertation for a discussion of tree media.

<sup>15</sup> Moerman p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Moerman p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> Moerman p. 1.

characterizes the Kumano region to Yanagimachi as a space “made up of an otherworldly atmosphere (*takai to iu kūkan*).”<sup>18</sup> In response, Yanagimachi offers his own impressions of the otherworldly aura he witnessed in *Himatsuri*’s filming location, where ancient sacred sites (including the purported burial site of Izanami discussed above) can be found among modern housing developments:

Along the highway that runs along the Kumano sea, there is a shrine that is said to be the oldest in all of Japan, called the Hana no Iwaya Shrine, just sitting right in the middle of a row of modern houses... A place like this exists on the side of a highway, and the Kamikura Shrine, where the film’s fire festival takes place, exists right there on a mountainside where you can look down and see the cityscape of Shingū. There were times where I would look out from my hotel window after it had rained and everything would be enveloped in fog. Yet for some reason, the fog would be whirling around the small shrine that sits above the large boulder at Kamikura Shrine. It would do so only around the shrine. I would only catch a quick glimpse of it doing so, but it surely felt like the world of traditional ink landscape paintings.<sup>19</sup>

Yanagimachi explains how the spiritual atmosphere of the Kumano area (which he experienced firsthand watching the fog swirl around a sacred site) gave the land a supernatural quality that made the past feel present:

I went time and again into the mountains of Kishū to hunt for locations... I went all over the place. And while I wouldn't go so far as to say these were unique experiences, I encountered enough phenomena along the way that I can imagine that kind of world: one in which the present world and the other world (*takai*) coexist. It is a world that closely resembles the primitive society of long ago.<sup>20</sup>

The Kii Peninsula is place where this spiritual aura is entwined with the material and economic ecologies of the region. The supernatural aura of Kumano depends on the natural ecosystems of the region’s vast forests and bodies of water. The environmental history of the region bears on its spiritual legacy; the long environmental history of forest management is intertwined with the mythological/religious history of the region, as the Hongū Shrine (one of the three major shrines of Kumano) enshrines the deity *Kestumiko no ōkami*, a god connected to the forested mountains and the forestry industry of the area more broadly.<sup>21</sup> The Kii Peninsula is famous for its old-growth cedar (*sugi*) and cypress (*hinoki*) forests, although ecologists and historians remind us that these forests are far from primeval. According to entomologist Gotō Shin, the cedar forests of Kumano are both a natural legacy of the region and a product of Japan’s postwar “*ryokka*” or “greening” efforts to rehabilitate the war-torn landscape.<sup>22</sup> Environmental historian Conrad Totman claims that human management and planning of the region’s forests can be traced back much earlier, to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Yamaguchi p. 59.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Yamaguchi p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> Moerman p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> See Gotō p. 217. See chapter 2 of this dissertation for a discussion of postwar *ryokka* movements.

<sup>23</sup> “Plantation Forestry in Early Modern Japan: Economic Aspects of its Emergence” p. 38. Totman’s view of the *sugi* and *hinoki* forests of the Kii Peninsula as plantations can allow us to consider the films of Yanagimachi and

As an exploration of the failing forestry industry in the Kumano region, the film lingers in the forests, giving long stretches of screen time to the tree-filled landscape—a landscape that has historically existed in the flux of human management. As *somabito* sculpted the forests of Kumano for generations (managing death and renewal in the forest ecosystem), they likewise sculpted a subjectivity through destructive plasticity—they became botanical. With a rich religious history informing the forested setting of *Himatsuri*, a spiritual atmosphere saturates the film and informs its staging of disturbance ecology. As a land so closely associated with death and rebirth (within both native and Buddhist cosmologies), Kumano makes for an ideal setting to imagine the possibilities of renewal by fire. It is within this otherworldly atmosphere that the film’s protagonist Tatsuo searches for these possibilities of renewal, and becomes botanical in the process.

## Forests of Conflict

*Himatsuri* portrays the Kumano region of the Kii Peninsula as an ecosystem in dire need of regeneration. Like many rural communities in postwar Japan, Nigishima suffered from depopulation and economic depression. *Himatsuri* narrates the collapse of a local forestry economy in the wake of an increasingly globalized circulation of natural resources during

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Kawase within the emerging critical rubric of the “Plantationocene,” a term proposed as a corrective to the more common “Anthropocene” or “Capitalocene” as a means of diagnosing and giving a name to the current geologic epoch. The term has become a site of critical attention and discussion; from January 2019 to May 2020, the University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for the Humanities has organized a seminar entitled “Interrogating the Plantationocene.” The term emerged from a conversation between Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Anna Tsing, and Nils Bubandt, published as “Anthropologists Are Talking – About Capitalism, Ecology, and Apocalypse” in *Ethos*. Latour offers the following description of the term: “The ‘Plantationocene’ is therefore for me a more productive concept than the ‘Capitalocene’, as coined by Moore and others, even though it was at some point a nice alternative to the Anthropocene. Plantationocene is productive because it refers to a certain, historically specific, way of appropriating the land, namely an appropriation of land as if land was not there. The Plantationocene is a historical ‘desoilization’ of the Earth” (p. 591). Donna Haraway, in turn, calls the term “Plantationocene” the name for “the devastating transformation of diverse kinds of human-tended farms, pastures, and forests into extractive and enclosed plantations, relying on slave labor and other forms of exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor” (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” p. 162). What happens if we consider Japan’s plantation forests as a part of the “Plantationocene?” How does the work of the *somabito* fit within Haraway’s view of “exploited, alienated, and usually spatially transported labor”? Anna Tsing writes in “A Threat to Holocene Resurgence is a Threat to Livability” of the negative impact timber plantation have had on Japan’s forests and the communities that have depended on them. In particular the move from multi-species forests to heavily controlled plantation forests has severed a long-standing, mutually beneficial relationship between foresters and farmers; Tsing writes: “Such transformations bring us to modern farming’s efforts to disengage with forest resurgence” (p. 57). According to the (now defunct) non-profit organization Japan For Sustainability, around 40% of Japan’s forests (which in total cover nearly 70% of the country’s landmass) are plantation forests (see [https://www.japanfs.org/en/news/archives/news\\_id027771.html](https://www.japanfs.org/en/news/archives/news_id027771.html)). Ecologists have, in recent decades, attempted to advocate for a return to multi-species forests in Japan. Well-known ecologist Miyawaki Akira, for example, has devised a method (known as the Miyawaki Method) or restoring forests through the reintroduction of native broadleaf trees. In 2018, the Japanese Forestry Investigation Committee published a collected volume entitled *Mori no runesansu – senkusha kara mirai e no hasshin (Forest Renaissance – Forerunner’s Transmissions to the Future)*. The first chapter of the text (titled *Kōyōju runesansu de, mura • machi o ikasu, or Revive Villages and Towns with a Broadleaf Tree Renaissance*) likewise calls for an end to plantation forestry through the reintroduction of broadleaf trees, and proposes this change can bring about the kind of resurgence in rural Japan for which *Himatsuri* and the films of Kawase Naomi yearn. With this in mind, it is possible to read the fiery disturbances of these films as an attempt to end to the plantation system, if not an end to the “Plantationocene” at large.

Japan's post-war economic recovery. Tatsuo's family roots run deep in Kumano; his mother claims their family has lived in the village of Nigishima "since the age of the gods."<sup>24</sup> Tatsuo is portrayed as someone unwilling to embrace a certain kind of change, as he resists a proposed development that threatens the equilibrium of the forest ecosystem of Nigishima. The type of change Tatsuo seeks is through disturbance ecology—a regeneration borne of generative destruction.

The village of Nigishima, on the other hand, sought change through a non-generative form of economic development. As both the lumber and fishing economies became unsustainable in this remote area, Nigishima looked to reinvent itself through increased commerce. *Himatsuri* features several flashbacks to 1959 that demonstrate the optimism the village experienced with the completion of the Kisei Honsen Railway Line that connected Mie Prefecture and Wakayama Prefecture along the Kii Peninsula. The enthusiasm and hope for the future witnessed in these flashbacks contrasts sharply with the village's diegetic present roughly 20 years later. The railway has not solved the region's economic woes. As *Himatsuri* opens, the village has decided to rebrand itself as a tourist destination.<sup>25</sup> The focus of this revitalization is the proposed aquatic park that would commemorate the ascent of Japan's legendary first ruler, the Emperor Jimmu, and effectively end the traditional livelihoods of the village.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> NKZ Vol. 8, p. 573.

<sup>25</sup> Japan's traditional economies built around forestry suffered in the postwar period as Japan began importing more of its timber from abroad. As Peter Dauvergne writes in his 1997 account of Japan's exploitative forestry practices in Southeast Asia, entitled *Shadows in the Forest: Japan and the Politics of Timber in Southeast Asia*: "All countries cast ecological shadows. But Japan's is perhaps the world's largest. This is in part because of limited Japanese natural resources and rapid economic growth since World War II... Japan's sixteen general trading companies have triggered widespread environmental degradation in resource-rich countries" (Dauvergne 5-6). Much of this degradation has come from the importation of tropical timber from Southeast Asia, to the extent that, in 1997, Dauvergne claimed, "Japan has been the world's largest tropical timber importer since the 1960s" (2). When trees became scarce in one Southeast Asian country, Japan turned to another, contributing to mass deforestation in the region at large. As Japan's growing demand for timber resources were increasingly met by this importation of foreign wood, its own domestic forest industry declined. According to a 1980 report supervised by the Japanese Forestry Agency, both demand and supply of domestic wood declined substantially throughout the 1970s, and timber prices fluctuated accordingly: "The trend of timber prices, under the influence of business activity and the changing demand scene, shows wide price fluctuations in cycles of four to five years. Especially during the autumn and winter of 1972, timber prices influenced by increased housing construction demand, alleviation of the tight money situation, timber export regulation by the U.S., and the forecast demand, rose rapidly and constituted a serious social problem. Then with the upsurge in oil prices in 1973, combined with the anticipated oil shortage for transportation of logs to the important consumer areas, and the shortage of oil arising from speculative purchases, the once stabilized timber prices climbed again" (*Forestry and the Forestry Industry in Japan* p. 50-51). As John Knight explains, the decline of forestry contributed to mass rural depopulation: "For the most part, rural Japan evokes a picture of decline. In this century of urbanization, a largely rural nation has become a predominantly urban one. The postwar period brought dramatic change with many rural settlements being abandoned altogether and just as many brought to the verge of demographic extinction... The local economy (of a Wakayama village) could not generate the jobs needed to persuade young people to stay behind, offering only occupations in forestry and farming and manual labor such as construction work. Even these industries were in decline. Forestry suffered from depressed lumber prices as a result of the great increase in imported wood since the 1960s" (Knight p.634-635). As both Knight and Jennifer Robertson explain, villages that suffered from depopulation due to declining industries such as forestry often turned to tourism in an attempt to revitalize their economies. See Robertson's *Native and Newcomer: Making and Remaking a Japanese City* (1991). In *Himatsuri*, the village of Nigishima follows this trajectory, hoping the proposed aquatic park will serve as a tourist attraction that will help rebuild the local economy.

<sup>26</sup> Both of Japan's early mytho-histories, the *Kojiki* (711) and *Nihonshoki* (720), recount the migration of Emperor Jimmu from the island of Kyūshū to the land of Yamato (the setting for Kawase's *Vision*). It is said that during his migration, Emperor Jimmu landed on the east side of the Kii Peninsula, and visited Kumano. See *Kojiki* p. 163.



The core conflict of *Himatsuri* stems from the tension between those who work in the forested mountains and those who fish in the open ocean over this proposed development.<sup>27</sup> In addition to its location at the base of lush forested mountains, the village of Nigishima is also situated on a vast ocean expanse that supports the village's fishing industry.<sup>28</sup> Nigishima's forest people (the *somabito*) and its ocean people are at odds over the village's prospects for the future. The fishing community embraces the idea of the aquatic park, while Tatsuo opposes the development and the changes it will bring to the forest ecosystem and the profession of the *somabito*—changes that will not lead to regeneration.

Members of the local community (along with developers from the city) pressure Tatsuo to sell his family home, as Tatsuo's land sits within the proposed site for development. Tatsuo's family is the last holdout; as the local land broker explains to Tatsuo's wife and mother, if they refuse to sell, the plans for the aquatic park must be abandoned. Tatsuo's mother is begrudgingly open to the idea of selling the land, and is tasked with convincing him to change his mind. In the film's final scenes, Tatsuo visits the neighboring town of Shingū to participate in the annual *Otōmatsuri* (the fire festival of the film's title). Believing that he is doing what is best for the continued survival of the forest, he becomes botanical and returns home to murder his entire family (including his mother, wife, and two children) before turning the gun on himself.<sup>29</sup> Through this murder-suicide, Tatsuo brings the ritual fire of the Fire Festival home, and introduces a disturbance akin to a forest fire into the ecosystem of Nigishima in order to, in Anna Tsing's words, renew the "cross-species relations that make forests possible." In the process, he takes on the role of a martyr, sacrificing himself for the greater good of the ecosystem. His actions open up the potential for a future made possible by his own fiery death.

### Botanical Subjectivity in *Himatsuri*

Through a ritualistic fire that leads to Tatsuo's death and opens space for the continued life of the forest, *Himatsuri* tells an ecological tale of becoming botanical through disturbance ecology. As a *somabito* that understand his role as an integral part of the forest ecosystem, Tatsuo comes to see his own death as no different from those of the trees he cuts down. Just as certain trees must be cut in order to maintain the health of the forest, so too must Tatsuo and his family die in order to prolong the life of the forest. Through his death, Tatsuo appears to put his human needs aside and does what is best for the future of the forest.

As he acts on behalf of the forest throughout the film, Tatsuo embodies what I call a "botanical subjectivity:" he experiences the world not as a human separate from the forests in which he works, but rather as an intimate part of a greater matrix or assemblage of the forest. There is a curious tension at play in *Himatsuri*, however, as Tatsuo is the *only* member of the

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<sup>27</sup> Nakagami Kenji claims that this division was not as pronounced in his screenplay, and that Yanagimachi made the decision to portray the foresters and those engaged in fishing in binary opposition. See Yamaguchi p. 53.

<sup>28</sup> In a 1985 interview published in *Eiga jōhō*, Yanagimachi describes his impressions of Nigishima: "It's a broad and quiet place, surrounded by the open ocean. Behind it are the mountains, in front the ocean. The railway comes out of a long tunnel, and the instant you see the ocean and the mountains, you enter back into another tunnel. In only the space of about one kilometer, there's this little village standing on its own" ("*85nen no kitaisaku 'Himatsuri' o kansei saseta Yanahimachi Mitsuo kantoku ni kiku*" p. 52, translation mine).

<sup>29</sup> Nakagami took inspiration for the murder-suicide conclusion to *Himatsuri* from an actual event that occurred in the Kumano region in 1980. See Moriyasu Toshihisa's "*Nakagami Kenji 'Himatsuri' – eiga kara shōsetsu e*" for information on the incident and its influence on Nakagami's screenplay and novelization of *Himatsuri*.

*somabito* foresting community shown to have this ecological knowledge. While the film goes to great lengths to show how Tatsuo sees himself as part of something bigger than himself, it ends up highlighting the uniqueness of Tatsuo's character. Ultimately, *Himatsuri* carves out an *egoistic* botanical subjectivity available only to Tatsuo, and not to the other *somabito* characters in the film. This is why *Himatsuri*'s enactment of disturbance ecology takes the form of Tatsuo's suicide; he believes, egoistically, that he must become a martyr and that his death can become the very disturbance that leads to regeneration of the greater ecosystem.

The botanical subjectivity that leads Tatsuo to believe that he alone can renew the forest is legible in the opening moments of the film, as cinematographer Tamura Masaki's camera moves from the vast expanse of the forest to the individual perspective of Tatsuo, and then back out again, inhabiting the space of the trees.<sup>30</sup> *Himatsuri*'s cinematography presents the forest as a multiplicity, full of both human and nonhuman life. Yanagimachi claims several scenes of the film demonstrate the perspective of the trees themselves.<sup>31</sup> Tamura's cinematography suggests a flowing subjectivity that moves through the assemblage of trees and humans. As the opening credits fade out, a high-angle wide shot of a cedar grove (in which a group of foresters are diminished and barely visible) appears and changes to a shot of a cedar falling directly toward the camera, its angle moving downward with the movement of the falling tree. This is followed by a low angle shot showing the group of foresters at work. From here the camera returns to a wide expanse of trees, with several distant mountains visible in the background.

Tatsuo emerges and partially fills the foreground, along with his younger friend and coworker Ryōta. A cedar begins to fall directly toward the two men (and the camera). Tatsuo calmly warns Ryōta to move out of the way and then casually walks out of frame. As the two return to the frame and begin trimming the newly fallen tree of its branches, the camera pans up, looking back out over the forested mountains in the distance. The camera moves from the high tree tops into the world of the foresters, and further down to the perspective of Tatsuo, only to return to where it started among the tall trees, bringing together different scales of the forest, both human and nonhuman.

The forest, we see, is populated not only by the massive cedars but also the men cutting them down. Tamura's cinematography highlights the relationship between the *somabito* and the trees to which they tend. The forest becomes a matrix or assemblage, constituted by the interactions of botanical and human life. The film portrays the work of the *somabito* as a natural and necessary cross-species relation that maintains the ecological health of the forest.

Yet it is Tatsuo and his unique botanical subjectivity that serves as the crux through which the film develops its ecological vision of forest health. He is repeatedly shown as having intimate knowledge of the forest that eludes everyone else. He alone knows when trees will fall, and when rain will stop. He alone knows what will please and what will anger the *Yama no kami* (Goddess or Spirit of the Mountain) that presides over the forest assemblage, and who often shares with Tatsuo the same free-floating subject position crafted by the film's cinematography.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tamura Masaki (1939-2018) began his career working with documentary filmmaker Ogawa Shinsuke, whose renowned Sanrizuka series chronicles the impact of the construction of Narita International Airport on the farming communities of the area, and the ensuing protests against the development. Tamura went on to work with many of Japan's best-known directors, including Itami Jūzō, Kurosawa Kiyoshi, and Aoyama Shinji. Tamura provided the cinematography for Kawase Naomi's *Moe no suzaku*, which I also briefly discuss in this chapter.

<sup>31</sup> Yamaguchi p. 70.

<sup>32</sup> The *Yama no kami* is female, and Tatsuo repeated calls the spiritual presence "his girlfriend," and exposes his naked body to the Goddess in order to please her. Author and founder of reforestation NPO *Donguri no Kai* (Acorn

Tatsuo experiences himself as a part of the forest (both economically and spiritually), and *thinks* as a part of the forest. In one scene, Tamura's camera pans from a medium angle over a darkened forest grove, where we see Tatsuo and his crew standing on ladders hacking away branches through the gaps between trees. The axe blades hitting wood is the only sound we hear. The camera pulls up toward the forest canopy, and light streams in between the branches. Ryōta calls out for Tatsuo, shattering the relative silence. Suddenly it is revealed (in an apparent temporal jump) that the two men stand on opposite sides of a gorge, their lewd conversation echoing back and forth over the expanse of the gorge.

The scene is stunningly verdant; the men speak with an exuberance that carries over the mountain, as if they are overcome by the life teeming around them.<sup>33</sup> Ryōta informs Tatsuo that he has caught something in his hunting trap. As the men run over to see Ryōta's handy work, they discover he has used a scared tree to make the snare. The camera has moved in close, and the screen is filled with only the men and the trap. As the men begin to panic, Tatsuo tells them not to worry. He reminds them that "*Yama no kamisan, ore no kanojō ja*" ("The mountain goddess is my girlfriend"). He then squeezes the blood out of the dead bird that has been caught in the trap, and smears the blood up his arm. *Himatsuri* here suggests that a sense of order or equilibrium has been restored by Tatsuo's ritualistic embrace of death; the cedar tree directly behind Tatsuo suddenly begins to rustle, as if in agreement with Tatsuo's actions. The tree and Tatsuo come together in this moment—a botanical subjectivity flows between them and alerts viewers to the fact that they are partners in the maintaining the proper balance of the forest. The film suggests that it is Tatsuo alone who understands disturbance ecology and grasps how to manage death and destruction in within the forest.

Throughout *Himatsuri*, Tatsuo is shown to have a unique insight into a kind of ecological system that includes humans, nonhuman animals and plants, as well as the spiritual beings that inhabit the mountains and sea. This forest thinking affords him an intimate ecological knowledge of what the forest needs in order to renew itself. At the end of the film, Tatsuo reaches a spiritual/ecological epiphany as a part of the forest matrix as he realizes the need for destruction to open up space for "resurgence," to return to Tsing's term. The form of destruction he enacts is ritual, informed by the Fire Festival held at the Shingū Shrine.

Tatsuo's epiphany in the film's conclusion is that the ritual nature of the Fire Festival performs the kind of renewal that Tatsuo envisions for the material nature of the forest through disturbance ecology. The final scene of the film opens with the silence of the forest, the only sound to be heard emerging from Tatsuo's axe as it strikes a giant cedar and echoes across the forested expanse. After a few trees fall, the film cuts away to a scenic shot of the forest reflected in water. The ghostly soundtrack of Takemitsu Tōru's score now becomes audible. The high-

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Club) Inamoto Tadashi writes, in his 1997 book *Ki no koe (The Voice of the Trees)*, that for *somabito*, the mountain god is always female: "Woodcutting is a dangerous job, so they always offer prayers to the mountain god when entering the mountain. This '*Yamagamisan*' is female. Since the woodcutter would always come into contact with the female god in the mountains, it was believed their physical appearance as men had to be perfect. All woodcutters would regularly bathe thoroughly, and trim their beards... They engaged with the forest in the same way they would a woman they loved" (Inamoto p. 98). In a scene early in the film, Tatsuo and his crew wear cologne in order to please the mountain goddess.

<sup>33</sup> The sexual nature of Tatsuo and Ryōta's conversation here at first feels at odds with the serene landscape in which they inhabit. Yet as the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that the overt sexuality of the film also belongs to the ecological nexus from which the nonhuman landscape emerges. Sex is deeply intertwined with the film's eco-spirituality (as in the "sex scene" between Tatsuo and the *Yama no kami*, which I discuss below).

pitched swells of flute come and go against a low rumble, just as they did in the opening moments of the film.

We then see the group of *somabito* looking up, commenting on the coming rain. The otherworldliness of the music overlaps with the dark atmosphere visible in the rain clouds that come to fill the screen. A thick mist descends on the mountains in a manner similar to the phenomenon Yanagimachi experienced while staying in Kumano (as described above). The *somabito* decide to descend the mountain in anticipation of the approaching weather. Ryōta continues to work, and the sound of his chainsaw becomes masked by Takemitsu's increasingly ominous soundtrack. Suddenly the atmosphere becomes palpable; the mysterious spiritual aura that has clung to the forest throughout the film suddenly materializes as a heavy rain that floods the land. The rain's near-deafening sound erupts over Takemitsu's score and covers over all other noises. The heavy rain drenches fallen trees and the *somabito* alike—everything within the forest matrix comes together through this atmospheric phenomenon.

And yet, once again, Tatsuo is singled out as having a unique insight into the significance of this event and its implications for the ecology of the forest. Tatsuo and Ryōta climb down the mountain together, but Tatsuo stops suddenly at the base of a massive tree. Ryōta pleads with Tatsuo to keep going, but Tatsuo brushes him off, stating that the rain will soon stop. He leans back on the tree and confidently declares "*Yama no koto wa ore ga shittoru*" ("I know the mountain").<sup>34</sup> Tatsuo (in his egoistic role as protector) holds Ryōta in an embrace for a brief spell to keep him warm, until Ryōta decides to leave Tatsuo and head down the mountain alone.<sup>35</sup> Once Ryōta leaves, Tatsuo faces the massive tree, spreads his arms wide, and embraces it with his whole body. Takemitsu's score reemerges, signaling the presence of the *Yama no kami*.<sup>36</sup> A close up of Tatsuo's hands shows him slapping and groping the tree in a manner equally violent and sexual.<sup>37</sup> The camera pulls back into a wide angle that diminishes Tatsuo at the bottom of the massive cedar. As he continues to pound his body against the tree, the rain suddenly stops.

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<sup>34</sup> NKZ p. 583.

<sup>35</sup> Throughout the film, the *somabito* share a homosocial bond that brims with both violent and sexual energy. They talk openly about sex, and engage in physical contact through wrestling and the like. The bond between Tatsuo and Ryōta is particularly close. It is clear throughout that Ryōta idolizes Tatsuo, admiring his sexual prowess. Ryōta begins having sex with Tatsuo's childhood sweetheart/current sexual partner Kimiko, and, in one scene, adopts Tatsuo's characteristic way of walking while visiting Kimiko. The tenderness Tatsuo shows Ryōta in the scene in the rain, however (as he embraces him in silence and holds Ryōta's face against his chest) seems too much for Ryōta to bear. It is as if, in the lack of wildness or violent affect, Ryōta is no longer able to share affection with Tatsuo. Or perhaps the fear of the coming storm that sends him running. In either case, it is clear that Ryōta does not understand the mountain (or the *Yama no kami*) in the same way Tatsuo does, and that this understanding bears on the homosocial (and potentially sexual) energy that flows between them.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher I. Lehrich writes of Takemitsu's music in the scene: "The hauntingly beautiful washes of not-quite-tonal music, the limpid high bells— all stand in stark contrast to Tatsuo's savage, animalistic ways and give no warning of impending violence. The music is maximally obtrusive, utterly dominant. Framed by ordinary "noise," the music demarcates a sacred space and time seemingly divorced from the ordinary world" (Lehrich p. 230). Although he recognizes Takemitsu's score as creating this spiritual affect, Lehrich is ultimately unsure of its meaning: "If the stark contrast between absence and obtrusive presence marks the music powerfully, it is not at all clear how to interpret it. Two possibilities appear: first, the music might indicate a manifestation of the goddess herself... (S)econd, the music might manifest the interiority of the perceiving character, Tatsuo" (ibid). It is my contention that these two perspectives are not actually separate, and represent the same cinematic-botanical subjectivity that is shared within the becoming botanical of the *somabito*.

<sup>37</sup> Yanagimachi has characterized this scene as Tatsuo having sex with the *Yama no kami*. See Yamanaka p. 52. The summary of the film included in the promotional brochure for the film describes Tatsuo's actions as "*aibu*," a kind of loving caress that has romantic, if not sexual, overtones. Nakagami's screenplay is less overt: "Tatsuo raises both hands and clings to the tree as the rain falls on his face" (NKZ p. 584). Yet Tatsuo's repeated gendering of the *Yama*

Tatsuo's ecological epiphany linking the spiritual renewal of the Fire Festival and the material renewal of the forest ecosystem through disturbance ecology occurs as the rain ceases. A forceful wind blows from the foreground of the frame into the background where Tatsuo stands embracing the tree. Tatsuo walks through the trees blowing about violently in the wind, and watches as one tree breaks and falls into the front of the frame.<sup>38</sup> The camera now moves behind Tatsuo, who stares at the fallen tree for a moment before declaring "*Wakatta*" ("I understand"). Something important has passed between the forest and Tatsuo, and his egoistic botanical subjectivity is encapsulated in this statement—he understands what the forest needs him to do, but no one else (including the viewers) have access to this knowledge until the final moments of the film.

In this scene, Tatsuo alone understands the wishes of the *Yama no kami* and the greater forest assemblage, and begins to think like the forest. He becomes botanical, and shares a subjectivity with the forest and the spiritual presence that inhabits it, a subjectivity that *Himatsuri* has been sculpting throughout the film. Tatsuo finally understands the threat that the development of the aquatic park brings to the ecological balance of the forest, and what the forest wants him to do in response. He now understands something about the relationship between destruction and resurgence, between death and futurity—a relationship inscribed into the land of Kumano that stretches back to the fiery death of Izanami while giving birth. At the forest's behest, Tatsuo taps into the spiritual legacy of the land and attends the *Otōmatsuri*, where he partakes in the ceremonial ritual of renewal by fire. He then returns home and commits murder-suicide as the *Yama no kami* watches over approvingly.<sup>39</sup> In the final moments of his own life, Tatsuo becomes botanical through death within the logic of disturbance ecology—like a forest fire wildly burning through the forest only to open space for new growth, Tatsuo uses the regenerative properties of destruction to create space for a potential future for the forests of Nigishima.

### The Three Ecologies of *Himatsuri*

In scenes of ritual enactment such as the ones described above, in which Tatsuo smears the blood of a dead bird up his arm in order to appease the Mountain Goddess, or later sexually communes with a large tree before killing his family and himself, Tatsuo's botanical subjectivity exudes a sense of egoistic excess and wildness. As he becomes botanical, he becomes untamed and closer to nature in a manner that speaks both to a certain closeness to natural rhythms of the

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*no kami*, along with his repeated conversations about having sex with while standing up, seem to point to this scene as a kind of sex scene between Tatsuo and the *Yama no kami*. If we understand this scene as a kind of sexual communion between the two, then the cedar tree becomes a complicated point of contact between Tatsuo and the *Yama no kami*; it is clearly a phallic symbol that seems to belong to Tatsuo as he stands holding it, yet it is also a manifestation of the (female) *Yama no kami*, or a medium through which she is made material. As a point of convergence within a shared subjectivity, the tree belongs to both of them within the pseudo-sexual act of communion in the forest.

<sup>38</sup> *Himatsuri*'s promotional brochure describes the efforts of the production team in realizing this scene. The scene was shot within the forest, but the "rain" was produced using a fire hose attached to a pump that connected to a nearby stream. The "wind" was created with both a large industrial fan and a helicopter that flew above the tree canopy. See *Himatsuri* Promotional Brochure.

<sup>39</sup> In an interview with Ueno Chizuko, Nakagami Kenji posits that the high-angle shot used in the film's climax represents "the point of view of the goddess (*kami no shiten*)," (Yamaguchi p. 27).

forest and to an ignorance of the supposed harmony in those rhythms.<sup>40</sup> The other villagers largely misunderstand Tatsuo's actions and the botanical subjectivity and ecological awareness from which they stem. He frequently draws the ire of fellow villagers who view him as a lewd, violent, and repulsive character. He violates religious taboos by swimming and having sex in sacred waters off the coast of Nigishima. It is rumored that Tatsuo likewise dumps oil in the ocean to kill the fish in protest of the fishing community's support of the aquatic center development. Yet Tatsuo's actions are not wrong within the logic of his egoistic botanical subjectivity. As the sole character who understands the wishes of the forest and the *Yama no kami* that resides throughout it, his actions take on a ritual nature—the apparent polluting of the ocean is yet another form of disturbance ecology meant to ensure a future for the village through destruction.

Tatsuo is shown throughout the film killing nonhuman animals and plants, and at times inflicting pain on living beings with an almost sadistic glee. Tatsuo hunts and kills nonhuman animals seemingly for pleasure (including protected species such as monkeys). Yet within the ecological logic of the film (which stems from disturbance ecology), these moments are also ritualistic and potentially generative. In one particularly brutal scene, Tatsuo shows off his hunting dogs (all of the local Kishū-inu breed) to a group of land brokers. He lets the dogs loose on a fenced-in wild boar. For roughly a minute-and-a-half, the film focuses on the dogs attacking the boar violently, inflicting blood wounds on both the boar and themselves. Tatsuo watches approvingly, and explains that this was how the village used to hunt boars, long ago. Now, he explains, people find it merciless. As Tatsuo continues this ancient, seemingly cruel practice, and subjects both the land bankers (and by extension the film's viewers) to a prolonged demonstration of animal cruelty, he demonstrates the complicated ecological picture Nakagami and Yanagimachi have written into *Himatsuri*.<sup>41</sup>

By embracing the productive qualities of destruction found in disturbance ecology, Tatsuo's actions (and *Himatsuri* as a whole) are not environmentalist in the traditional sense of the term. By traditional environmentalism, I mean a pacifist ideology of conservation and protection of a reified natural world that exists in opposition to human interaction and management, similar to the characterization Timothy Morton gives in *Ecology without Nature*:

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<sup>40</sup> Yanagimachi has described Tatsuo as “someone fated for excess, the kind of person that falls into schizophrenia as they unwind (*chotto neji o hazusu to seishinbunretsubyō ni natchau yō na hito*). Because he is this kind of person, he has many excessive relationships: one with his day and age, one with society, with people, and in the film, one with nature” (“85nen no kitaisaku ‘Himatsuri’ o kansei sasete Yanahimachi Mitsuo kantoku ni kiku” p. 53). It is this excessive quality of Tatsuo, particularly in his relationship to nature, that reads as “wild.” It is worth noting that once again the language of schizophrenia has entered the conversation in relation to the botanical realm, as it has in previous chapters. As Yanagimachi situates Tatsuo's botanical subjectivity within the realm of mental illness, he joins Osaki Midori (who explored the relationship between a moss-like subjectivity arrived at through reverse evolution and “split psychology” in her *Dainana kankai hōkō*, which I discuss in Chapter 1), Abe Kōbō (who writes in his tale of plant metamorphosis *Dendorokakariya* that “plants are an analogy for schizophrenia,” which I discuss in Chapter 2), and Haniya Yutaka (whose *Shirei* is partially set in a mental hospital and deals directly with psychological illness, as I discuss in Chapter 3) in invoking the language of abnormal psychology in a figuration of becoming botanical.

<sup>41</sup> The scene, perhaps even more than the film's final images of Tatsuo's dead family, produces a horrifying affect in its depiction of real violence against nonhuman life that is difficult to square with any claims to ecological awareness. Yet it is specifically this kind of destruction that is at the heart of *Himatsuri*'s configuration of ecological regeneration. As truly difficult as the scene is to watch, it opens a window onto a complex system of relationships (human and dog, dog and boar, etc.) that cannot easily be called fully “natural” or fully “social,” but rather exists within a matrix comprised of Guattari's three ecologies: material, social, and mental.

Environmentalism is a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings. Those responses could be scientific, activist, or artistic, or a mixture of all three. Environmentalists try to preserve areas of wilderness or "outstanding natural beauty." They struggle against pollution, including the risks of nuclear technologies and weaponry. They fight for animal rights and vegetarianism in campaigns against hunting and scientific or commercial experimentation on animals.<sup>42</sup>

This form of environmentalism is echoed in Peter C. van Wyck's characterization of so-called "deep ecology," which he argues "succumbs to a singular and idealized conception of the human, a conception that closes off the possibility of heterogeneous subjectivities by representing humans as a single ecological category."<sup>43</sup> Tatsuo's botanical subjectivity (in which he experiences himself as a part of the forest and not separate from it) places him outside of van Wyck's idealized conception of the human, and outside Morton's image of the environmentalist fighting for animal rights.

As a *somabito* tasked with the management of the forest (a profession founded on the generative capacity of disturbance), Tatsuo embodies a different kind of ecological thinking. He is shown again and again to be different from the other human characters of the film, which leads to his frequent fights with other villagers. They do not have access to the spiritually informed ecological logic that Tatsuo embodies. The villagers question how Tatsuo can be against the development of the aquatic park—a development that would drastically change Nigishima's ecosystem and the livelihood of the *somabito*—while simultaneously displaying an excessive enjoyment of hunting. They likewise cannot reconcile Tatsuo's concern for the ecological effects of the development with his rumored polluting of the water with oil at the proposed site of development (which leads to the death of many fish).

Critics of the film have questioned Tatsuo's intentions as well. Jasper Sharp, for example, views Tatsuo as a "complex yet unsympathetic central character" and a "pigheaded reactionary" that is "unable to articulate exactly why he is against the development other than a Luddite's unwillingness to change."<sup>44</sup> Sharp finds the film's relationship to environmentalism ambivalent, claiming that "Yanagimachi's thematic concern seems to be no more or no less environmental than it is sociological."<sup>45</sup> Elliot Stein's review of the film after the 23<sup>rd</sup> New York Film Festival plainly states: "Yanagimachi's concerns are not ecological."<sup>46</sup> Don Ranvaud similarly claims Tatsuo kills "for no apparent reason," only to then offer the following, more nuanced reading of Tatsuo's motivation and its connection to the natural world:

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<sup>42</sup> Morton p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> van Wyck p. 2. van Wyck is specifically critiquing the philosophy and legacy of deep ecology as developed by Norwegian environmental philosopher Arne Næss (1912-2009), which privileges a natural world untouched by human management. Yet van Wyck's characterization of deep ecology speaks to a larger trend in environmental thinking that ends up placing humans and the natural world in separate spheres, which is precisely the kind of binary thinking Guattari resists in *The Three Ecologies*.

<sup>44</sup> Sharp "Fire Festival". While Sharp claims Tatsuo himself does not understand his own resistance to the development of the aquatic park, he grants the natural world of the film a certain agency in helping Tatsuo reach the conclusion that he must kill himself: "With the subsequent killing spree invoked by Tatsuo's tree-hugging communion with the gods in the final reel, stunningly invoked against a windswept backdrop of rustling trees and driving rain, Yanagimachi seems to be suggesting that man is more shaped by his environment than vice versa" (ibid).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Stein p. 68.

Comparable to a fishing net in its structure, where one narrative knot may be arrived at eventually by following what appears to be a divergent thread at every turn, the film deals with rare efficacy with the question of religion, the importance and relevance of many different conventions, the relation between man and nature and the tendency towards self-destruction-in-contradiction and madness portrayed in varying degrees by all the younger Japanese film-makers.<sup>47</sup>

As Tatsuo hunts protected monkeys, trains dogs to kill feral boars, and fells ancient trees, he stands outside of a classical environmentalist paradigm of conservation. Yet contrary to Elliot Stein's claim, Tatsuo's behavior is thoroughly *ecological* in its enacting of disturbance ecology, and its recognition of a multifaceted ecological framework that aligns with Félix Guattari's notion of ecosophy, as outlined in his *The Three Ecologies*. Guattari advocates for a complex understanding of ecology that resists a clear, classical separation of humans and the natural world (such as the one found in van Wyck's characterization of environmentalism), and instead calls for a new understanding of ecology in which the material/environmental, social (including economic), and mental (including spiritual) worlds are thoroughly entangled.<sup>48</sup>

Within the cosmology of *Himatsuri*, and within Guattari's three ecologies, Tatsuo's embrace of death and destruction is both ritualistic and ecological, and brings him closer to the spiritual or cultural ecology of the forest assemblage. As the scene in which Tatsuo, in an effort to appease the Mountain Goddess, smears the blood of a bird caught in a trap made of sacred wood demonstrates, death is not separate from the ecological constitution of forest. Death is both ritualistic and material, a necessary component of the forest nexus and the logic of disturbance ecology that cyclically renews the forest ecosystem. As a *somabito* who spends his life working as a part of the forest, felling and killing ancient trees in order to maintain the health of the forest ecosystem, Tatsuo implicitly understands the interconnections between the material, social, and mental ecologies, and understands how death is a vital element to the maintenance of all three.

### **Botanical Misfits, or The Fading Horizon of the *Somabito***

At the same time, it is the embrace of disturbance ecology that causes Tatsuo to be treated as a remnant of the past in *Himatsuri*. There is no space for Tatsuo and his botanical subjectivity (in which all three ecologies reside) in the proposed future of Nigishima; as the village attempts to move forward with the construction of the aquatic park, it looks to reinvent itself as a tourist destination, effectively leaving the traditional livelihoods of fishing and forestry behind. Tatsuo may be a part of the forest, but the forest is losing its importance to the village of Nigishima as the village looks for renewal through economic development rather than in the cyclical process of disturbance ecology.

The tension between the village's vision of the future and Tatsuo's embodiment of an older, now largely incomprehensible (to his fellow villagers) way of inhabiting the world is at the

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<sup>47</sup> Ranvaud p. 188.

<sup>48</sup> Guattari argues that, "Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture" and in language that speaks to the kind of botanical subjectivity that Tatsuo embodies throughout the film, he claims that: "Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists. Ecology in my sense questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations, whose sweeping progress cannot be guaranteed to continue as it has for the past decade" (*The Three Ecologies* p. 43 & 52 respectively).



heart of *Himatsuri*'s tale of becoming botanical. For the creators of the film, Tatsuo is representative of the mythological era that resides within the otherworldly space of Kumano. Screenwriter Nakagami Kenji sees Tatsuo as directly linked to Japan's earliest extent mythology. In a conversation with feminist critic Ueno Chizuko, Nakagami likens Tatsuo (at Ueno's suggestion) to the mythical figure of Susanoo, brother of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu within traditional Japanese mythology. Like Amaterasu, Susanoo is believed to have a direct connection to the land of Kumano. And like Tatsuo, Susanoo is a wild and excessive figure closely linked to death—and birth. In the mythological telling, Susanoo is exiled to the underworld by his divine father (and legendary creator of the islands of Japan) Izanagi for not taking proper care of the land to which he was entrusted, and causes Amaterasu to hide herself away in a cave after his violent and impure behavior results in the killing of a heavenly maiden.<sup>49</sup> According to the *Nihon shoki*, Susanoo dwelt on Mount Kumano before eventually passing on to a realm known as *Ne no kuni*, a name for the world of the dead meaning literally “the land of the root.”

Nakagami sees *Himatsuri* as “the tale of the final Susanoo—the one that leads into destruction.”<sup>50</sup> It is in this penchant for destruction that Tatsuo demonstrates his awareness of disturbance ecology and becomes fully botanical—in the end, he chooses to die in order to allow the forest to live. Yanagimachi Mitsuo echoes Nakagami's eco-mythologizing, claiming that, with *Himatsuri*, he wanted to explore a world in which the separation of humans and nature had not yet occurred: “I wanted to go back to the Jōmon Period (a pre-agriculture, pre-historic time, c. 7000 B.C. - 300 B.C)... and incorporate that period of mythology into contemporary life in a very concrete way. Back then human beings and animals were not separated, but were harmonic and fused.”<sup>51</sup>

Tatsuo's botanical subjectivity is fused in this way—he is not separate from the forest and its spiritual presence, but is rather an integral part of it. According to film critic Ogi Masahiro (1925-1988), Yanagimachi's mythical imagining of Jōmon era harmony between humans and nonhumans belongs a world not fully domesticated, and thus linked to the past:

When a certain botanist told me that “the English word ‘domestication’ cannot be rendered into Japanese,” I was shocked. Of course, one can find a matching idiom in an English-to-Japanese dictionary, such as *kainarashi* (tamed) or *junchi* (acclimatization). But, the botanist said, the substance of the concept (of domestication) cannot be found in Japan. This claim was something of a hyperbole. But I had occasion to think about it, and I had a thought that stood out—Encyclopedia Britannica concisely summarizes the concept of domestication as “a process of genetic reorganization in which wild animals and plants are cultivated to live within a household (*kateikeisei shiteyuku*), for human benefit.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Kojiki* p. 73 -80.

<sup>50</sup> Yamaguchi p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Nolletti Jr. p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> *Himatsuri* Promotional Pamphlet. Translation mine throughout. Ogi's use of the term once again brings *Himatsuri* into logic of the “Plantationocene.” The figure of Tatsuo as an “undomesticated” forester that works within the plantation forests of Kumano seems to complicate the concept of Plantationocene. Donna Haraway has claimed “it is more efficient in the logic of the plantation system to exterminate the local labour and bring in labour from elsewhere. The plantation system depends on the relocation of the generative units: plants, animals, microbes, people. The systematic practice of relocation for extraction is necessary to the plantation system” (“Anthropologists Are Talking – About the Anthropocene” p. 557). How can we begin to understand the labor of the *somabito* (who, in

The thought that stood out to Ogi after reading this definition was that the Japanese are a “misfit” people that never fully made the historical transformation from a hunter/gatherer existence to that of an agriculture-based existence. He claims this helps explain the contradiction of a people that “openly destroy nature and yet worship natural objects.”<sup>53</sup> As discussed above, this is precisely the difficulty Tatsuo’s fellow villagers (and certain critics of the film) have in understanding Tatsuo’s penchant for hunting coupled with his desire to protect the ecological balance of Nigishima’s forests.

For Ogi, Tatsuo represents a plant or animal that is only partially domesticated. Tatsuo operates from this botanical place of non-domestication—deeply connected to the logic of the forest and not fully at home in a human world separate from the forest. Tatsuo’s embodiment of the non-domesticated makes him, in Ogi’s estimation, a “misfit” that cannot function in his contemporaneous day and age: “While I watched Yanagimachi Mitsuo’s *Himatsuri*, I entered an odd state of exaltation. I thought, ‘This is it.’ This was my hypothetical Japanese misfit, that fundamental contradiction between ‘gatherer’ and ‘cultivator.’”<sup>54</sup>

Tatsuo’s practice of forestry contributes to this misfit subjectivity. As a *somabito*, Tatsuo does not fit in the changing world of Nigishima. Inamoto Tadashi writes of the *somabito* as a kind of living relic of the past: “The *somabito* is a woodcutter of a former age. Not the kind of woodcutter that would go to the foot of the mountain alone and cut down one of two trees, but rather a group of professional woodcutters that enter deep into the mountains together and cut down many large trees.”<sup>55</sup> In their adherence to the traditional profession of forest management (and their adherence to its sometimes brutal ecological logic that results in the death of nonhumans), the *somabito* are misfits.

As the global timber industry became increasingly mechanized and reliant on international trading networks and transportation, *somabito* such as Tatsuo have remained invested in local relationships to the forest, including spiritual and ritualistic relationships. They have continued to adhere to local knowledge of ecology, even when such knowledge appears superstitious. Inamoto recounts how the *somabito* follow a series of accepted precepts that range from superstitious practices like “not using a needle in the morning before leaving for work” to practical safety measures such as “always yelling as a tree falls” and “never sitting down while resting on the job.”<sup>56</sup> Tatsuo and his crew likewise fear the divine repercussions of having cut down a scared tree; to appease the *Yama no kami*, Tatsuo forces his friend and coworker Ryōta to expose his genitals to the mountain goddess.

Ultimately, Tatsuo is a misfit due to his ecological understanding—one that incorporates ritualistic and ancient spiritual beliefs closely connected to the forest assemblage. Although the logic of disturbance ecology staged in *Himatsuri* is deeply rooted in the religious traditions of the Kumano region, the film grants only Tatsuo with an insight into the relationship between ecology and spirituality. He is thus portrayed as someone out of time—a remnant of a past ecological logic in which material, economic, and spiritual ecologies are fused. The paradoxical result of Tatsuo’s embodiment of this ecological way of being (his botanical subjectivity) is that

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the case of Tatsuo, believes himself to be extremely local to the forests of Nigishima) within the figuration of the Plantationocene? See Footnote 23 above.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. As a *somabito* that hunts, Tatsuo engages in both gathering and cultivating.

<sup>55</sup> Inamoto p. 94.

<sup>56</sup> Inamoto p. 96.

the more he comes to see himself as a part of the forest, the more he stands out as a singular, egoistic character in the film. His final action likewise comes across as egoistic; Tatsuo *himself* becomes the disturbance in the forest ecosystem. His suicide becomes the ritualistic fire meant to bring renewal.

### Fire and Futurity in the Forest

Tatsuo's spiritual/ecological epiphany within the forest (in the scene described above where Tatsuo tells the forest he understands its wishes) leads him to participate in the *Otōmatsuri* fire festival, and bring the ritualistic enactment of disturbance ecology home. The fire festival plays a brief yet important role in the vision of the future that *Himatsuri* presents and serves as the basis for regeneration through disturbance. Images of the fire festival do not appear until the final fifteen minutes of the film, and only constitute approximately five minutes of the film's running time. Yet the festival provides Tatsuo with an answer of how to renew a forest ecosystem (which is comprised of the relationships between the trees and humans that maintain them) that is no longer viable. The fire festival, with its spiritual renewal through burning, provides Tatsuo with a paradigm that opens the possibility of a future for the forest in the face of development. The fire festival introduces the potential for plasticity—through the destruction of fire, the forest assemblage can change, regrow, and become anew in Tatsuo's absence.

The *Otōmatsuri* is an ancient ritual held in Shingū, Wakayama Prefecture every year on the sixth day of February.<sup>57</sup> As the film demonstrates, the ritual is exclusively for male participants. A large group of men (all wearing white) share a sacred flame, passing the fire between wooden torches. The men ascend the 538 stone stairs of Kamikura Jinja, and eventually enter into a sacred building on top of the mountain. Shut inside, the men must endure the painful smoke and fire until the doors are opened, at which point they descend the stairs.<sup>58</sup> The fire festival welcomes the New Year, and carries with it the significance of “*hi no kōshin*,” a “fire renewal.”<sup>59</sup>

*Himatsuri* links the regenerative properties of fire as seen in the fire festival to Tatsuo's murder-suicide. From a botanical perspective, fire can be an important element of a healthy ecosystem, leading to not only to spiritual renewal within a mental ecology (to return to the language of Guattari's three ecologies), but to physical regrowth and reconstitution within a material ecology of the forest.<sup>60</sup> Fire can lead to regeneration, and to a notion of futurity

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<sup>57</sup> The *Kumano nendaiki* (*Chronicles of Kumano*, ~16<sup>th</sup> century) locates the origin of the ritual to the reign of Emperor Bidatsu (572-585). See *Yama no matsuri to geinō* p. 181.

<sup>58</sup> See *Yama no matsuri to geinō* for a full account of the ritual.

<sup>59</sup> *Yama no matsuri to geinō* p. 181.

<sup>60</sup> As Sara E. Jensen and Guy R. McPherson remind us, “Fire has been a part of nearly all the world's ecosystems for millennia. It plays a crucial and irreplaceable role in the ecosystems that support all life, but it understandably provokes fear in humans. Fire is both inevitable and ubiquitous” (Jensen, p. 2). Ecologically speaking, fire can be beneficial, as Nathaniel Brodie et al explain: “We now recognize that repeated disturbances, such as periodic wildfire, are critical influences on ecosystem development, patterns of forest age-classes across the landscape, and species evolution” (Brodie et al, p. 122). Certain plants, called pyrophytes, have evolved to tolerate and even thrive as they come into contact with fire. Certain trees, for example, have evolved to develop thick bark that prevents fire from damaging the living tissues within the tree. In addition, certain trees produce “serotinous” cones that only open and spread their seeds when they reach a high enough temperature through fire. See Mullen for more examples of how plants adapt to the natural patterns (or “fire regimes”) of forest ecosystems.

predicated upon the destruction of the present. This connection is reinforced and performed in the *Otōmatsuri* fire festival as it leaves the old year behind and welcomes the new.

As Tatsuo comes to think like the forest through his communion with the *Yama no kami* and his participation in the fire festival, he gains an ecological understanding of this relationship between destruction and regeneration. In Tatsuo/*Yama no kami*'s forest thinking, Tatsuo and his family must burn in order for the forest (and thus the village of Nigishima) to live.<sup>61</sup> Like an old, dying tree blocking the sun from the forest floor, Tatsuo realizes that it is only in his absence that something new can grow. Tatsuo enacts destructive power of ritual when he kills his mother, wife, children, and himself.<sup>62</sup> As the last remaining dissenter to the plans for the aquatic park development (which is itself a form of non-regenerative ecological violence), Tatsuo decides there is no hope of a future that could include himself and his family.

The act of Tatsuo killing himself is an extreme form of botanical becoming. Botanical becomings, as I have been discussing them throughout this dissertation, take place in the loss of an individuated self as it forms an alliance with the botanical world in the service of sculpting something new. Tatsuo's death, which is meant to give new life to the greater forest, is perhaps the most drastic version of this figuration of becoming botanical; Tatsuo's death becomes a part of the fabric of the greater forest ecosystem. Nakagami Kenji speaks of Tatsuo's murder-suicide in a manner that reinforces the botanical nature of the act. In his conversation with Ueno Chizuko, Nakagami claims that Tatsuo's death resembles the logic of bamboo: "In a manner of speaking, its an image similar to bamboo. After bamboo go to seed, they completely dry up. They are completely destroyed. It is that kind of image. That's what was in my mind at the time (I wrote it)..."<sup>63</sup> In death, Tatsuo becomes botanical; he withers and dies in order for the seeds of potentiality to emerge.<sup>64</sup>

The final moments of *Himatsuri* do not make clear what exactly will grow from these seeds of potentiality that are metaphorically planted by Tatsuo's fiery death. The film does not present a clear-cut vision of the future. In the aftermath of Tatsuo's murder-suicide, *Himatsuri* cuts to a few scenes demonstrating how quotidian life continues in Nigishima: the village's merchants close up shop and head home. *Himatsuri* then ends with a shot of Tatsuo's hunting dogs (who have been let out of their cages) sitting calmly and looking over a cliff at the harbor

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<sup>61</sup> Of course, such a conclusion is dangerous, and risks justifying extreme domestic violence. This is particularly true given the fact that Nakagami based his screenplay on a real-life incident of familial murder-suicide. In a 1985 interview in *Eiga jōhō*, Yanagimachi speaks of Tatsuo's decision to kill himself and his family within the context of *muri-shinjū*, a form of forced double-suicide that was taken up as a frequent narrative trope in early modern Japanese theater. Yanagimachi speaks of Tatsuo's death as "beautiful," and suggests to the interviewer that there is something unique about a Japanese sensibility that allows *muri-shinjū* to be beautiful. The interviewer disagrees, interjecting that he cannot think of Tatsuo's actions as beautiful. See "85nen no kitaisaku 'Himatsuri' o kansei. saseta Yanahimachi Mitsuo kantoku ni kiku" p. 53. In my botanical reading of Tatsuo's murder-suicide, I do not intend to glorify or make beautiful such images of domestic violence. For all of its thought-provoking figurations of botanical subjectivity, *Himatsuri* ultimately reaches a highly problematic conclusion. It exposes the dark potentials that also lay within the realm of becoming botanical.

<sup>62</sup> As Tatsuo's killing spree is briefly interrupted by the return of his children, the three wooden torches he carried in the fire festival (one for Tatsuo and two for his young sons) can be seen hanging in the entryway to the house. The film lingers a brief moment on these torches as if to suggest they have reignited through Tatsuo's destruction.

<sup>63</sup> Yamaguchi p. 34. Translation mine.

<sup>64</sup> Critics such as Donald Richie have understood Tatsuo's act through the language of "sacrifice." Richie claims that: "Throughout history, no community in its quest for survival has been able to avoid destroying nature, or even killing. The sacrifice here (in *Himatsuri*) is not one of protest; it is necessary for the survival of the village as a whole." See Ranvaud p. 188.

below. The sun is setting, casting a pinkish light over the water. Takemitsu's ethereal score, with its high-pitched flutes, drowns out any diegetic noise.

Suddenly the film cuts to a close-up of the water. A black substance is seen bubbling up to the water's surface from below. Dead fish float to the surface, filling the frame. Sunlight reflects brightly against the oil collecting at the water's surface, until the screen turns a uniform shade of red that evokes both the color of fire and blood.

A group of village fisherman then stands on a dock looking out at water. The red of fire/blood reflects back onto them, tinting their devastated faces. Throughout the film, it has been rumored that Tatsuo was responsible for dumping oil in the ocean. The villagers now look perplexed; with Tatsuo dead, how did the oil get there? The film ends with one last wide-angle panoramic view of Nigishima; a red sun hangs low between two mountains above the water. In the center of the water is the area where the oil has surfaced, which reflects the sun in a way that makes it look as if the water is on fire.

The screen slowly fades to black, but does so in a manner that leaves the bright red oil spill in the center of the frame illuminated as the final image of the film. In the end, it remains unclear if Tatsuo's fiery act has prevented the development of aquatic park and the ecological damage it is sure to bring. *Himatsuri* does not present us with an image of the future, but rather lingers on the state of possibility that Tatsuo's death opens up. The final image, in which the very site of the proposed development appears to burn, suggests that perhaps it, too, has been set aflame by Tatsuo's becoming botanical in death. Anna Tsing claims that in the aftermath of disturbances such as fire that "livable ecologies come back." *Himatsuri* does not reward viewers with an image of the livable ecology of Nigishima coming back. It does, however, plant the seeds for this possibility, however devastating the immediate present of the film's ending may appear to be.

### **The *Somabito* in the films of Kawase Naomi**

The economic precarity of Japanese *somabito* villages (such as the one depicted in *Himatsuri*) did not improve in the years following *Himatsuri*'s release. With the collapse of Japan's "Bubble Economy" at the end of the 1980s, rural depopulation (or *kasoka*) and economic downturn continued to afflict rural villages. For film director Kawase Naomi, the plight of the *somabito* was felt close at hand in her native Nara Prefecture.<sup>65</sup> Kawase discusses the economic plight of the rural forest communities of Nara:

For more than ten years I have felt that "something is strange with the mountains" ("*yama ga okashii*"), and that if we don't do something about it, something bad will happen. The forestry profession is in decline, the people connected to it are aging, and the young people that could take over are leaving. It's a dangerous job—the roads are not maintained, and two acquaintances of mine died in accidents involving the felling of trees. If you get hurt, it can take two hours to get to the nearest hospital because the work is so deep in the mountains. The state of the forest is the state of humanity. I want to pass

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<sup>65</sup> Kawase is recognized as a major figure in contemporary Japanese cinema. In 2018, she was selected to direct the official film of the 2020 Tōkyō Olympics, following in the footsteps of Ichikawa Kon (who directed the film for the 1964 Tōkyō Olympics) and Shinoda Masahiro (who directed the film for the 1972 Sapporo Olympics).

along to future generations a beautiful forest, and the idea that we continue living along with it.<sup>66</sup>

Kawase's filmography demonstrates a strong investment in the relationship between the human and botanical world, in particular within the forests of Nara.<sup>67</sup> Her films are replete with botanical becomings that explore the impact of plant life (in particular trees) on human subjectivity, as well as the relationship between plant life and notions of the future. Her 2018 film *Vision* feels like an answer to the question left unanswered in many of her earlier films, as well as an answer to the question left hanging at the end of Yanagimachi's *Himatsuri*: just what kind of future is opened up in the destruction of fire? While *Himatsuri* finds the potential for futurity in its final fiery moments (an image screenwriter Nakagami Kenji likened to bamboo going to seed and then drying up), it does not offer a clear vision of what would grow in the aftermath of Tatsuo's death. It's ending leaves the future open, dangling in possibility. *Vision* closes this loop, making fire and disturbance ecology a part of a recurring, ritually cyclical balance of the forest. As it attempts (in its narrative unfolding) to mimic the unfolding of time as experienced by the forest, *Vision* ties the future (of the *somabito* and humanity at large) back to the past—a past deeply entrenched in mythology and spirituality.

Beginning with her debut feature length film *Moe no suzaku* in 1997 (a departure from her already established career as a documentary filmmaker), Kawase has explored the ecological connections (material, spiritual, and economic) between the *somabito* and the forest.<sup>68</sup> Like Yanagimachi Mitsuo and Nakagami Kenji in *Himatsuri*, she has envisioned a potential future for the *somabito*-forest assemblage in the wake of fire. *Moe no suzaku* (or simply *Suzaku* in English) shares many similarities with *Himatsuri*, including the verdant cinematography of Tamura Masaki, characterized by long takes and wide shots of forest expanses. Set within the forested landscape of Nishiyoshino in Nara Prefecture, *Moe no suzaku* narrates the economic decline of a rural logging community. The village and forests of Nishiyoshino lie some 70 kilometers west of Nigishima (the setting of *Himatsuri*). Like Nigishima, the Yoshino region of Nara Prefecture is a crossroads of several overlapping histories. It is home to a long history of forest management that intersects with its long-founded significance as a mythological and spiritual site (as

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<sup>66</sup> *Vision* Promotional Brochure.

<sup>67</sup> In addition to the three Kawase films I mention in this chapter, *Moe no suzaku*, *Somabito monogatari*, and *Vision*, Kawase's 2007 film *Mogari no mori* (*The Mourning Forest*) takes up the trees of Nara as an essential focal point. *Mogari no mori* is a tale of grief, in which an elderly man escapes from an assisted-living center to look for a tree that he believes now houses the spirit of his dead wife. The film resonates strongly with the thematic elements I discuss in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Several of Kawase's other films also revel in the botanical world. According to Kawase, her very first encounter with a camera hinted at a botanical becoming: "It was an assignment during [high] school to go out into the city [Nara] and take pictures of things that we liked. Up until this point I had been on a steady path of going to school, studying, and getting good grades. Everything had been proscribed and that was the life I led. Then I was told to go out into the world and find the things that I liked. Initially that was very hard but eventually I felt as if the world were coming to me. I used the camera to click the shutter and take images and a few days later I developed these images and put together a film. What surprised me the most about [this experience] was that when I screened my film in the dark, this image of a tulip appeared. But there was something else that appeared with the tulip—it was me... That is to say, what I discovered was an image of myself as well as an image of time passing . . . In that instant I thought how wonderful images are. It [film] was like a time machine for me. Film makes possible a past or a future existence of yourself..." (Quoted in Schonenveld p. 7).

<sup>68</sup> Like *Himatsuri*, *Moe no suzaku* was screened at the Cannes Film Festival, where Kawase was awarded the prestigious Palme d'Or prize, making her the first Japanese recipient in the festival's history.

discussed below).<sup>69</sup> In a narrative echo of *Himatsuri*, the father of the Tahara family (who serve as the narrative focus of *Moe no suzaku*) concludes that he must die in order for something new to grow; the word “*moe*” in the film’s title means “new growth,” while “*suzaku*” refers to the mythical Chinese “*zhūquè*,” a phoenix-like “vermillion bird” associated with fire.<sup>70</sup> As his way of life can no longer support his family, the Tahara patriarch kills himself, creating a disturbance in the village ecosystem meant to open space for renewal.

The same year she released *Moe no suzaku*, Kawase returned to her documentarian roots and released *Somaudo monogatari* (*The Weald*, 1997). The film documents the hard lives of the *somabito* (or *somaudo*, a variant of the word *somabito* that is used in the title of the film) of Nishiyoshino (the same setting as *Moe no suzaku*). The film plays like a supplement to *Moe no suzaku*, depicting the actual *somabito* that served as the inspiration for the fictional narrative of *Moe no suzaku*. On her official website, Kawase explains that she attempted with the documentary to envision a future for the economically disenfranchised forestry community: “Replacing the ‘facts’ of the life they have spun with my own ‘truth,’ I spin a tale in cinema, so that this may become a film that continues from the past to the present, the present to the future.”<sup>71</sup> She discusses the *somabito* as if they were themselves trees, imbued with a resilience that can weather the storm of economic depression:

I was given a lot of hints on how to enrich life from the *soma* people who live in Hirao, Nishiyoshino-mura, Nara Prefecture. The accumulation of their lived days has taken root in the earth and returned to nature. Just as massive trees withstand the wind and the rain, the cold and the heat, these people endure the twists and turns of life by simply existing, developing deep wrinkles.<sup>72</sup>

Kawase would return to this image of the *somabito* as a resilient tree and stage the botanical becoming it signifies in her 2018 film *Vision*—a film in which seemingly human characters turn out to be trees in human form, and in which, as Kawase claimed, “the state of the forest is the state of humanity.”

In *Vision*, Kawase finds the future for the *somabito* that she sought in both *Moe no suzaku* and *Somaudo monogatari*. *Vision* is a botanical becoming in the form of an eco-fable that finds life and futurity where one might least expect it: in the aftermath of a forest fire. The film articulates the principles of disturbance ecology, namely that ecological disturbances such as fire are necessary for the continued health of an ecosystem. Like *Himatsuri*, *Vision* arrives at this conclusion through a deep investment in the ritual/spiritual traditions of its setting. Unlike

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<sup>69</sup> See Tsunahide Shidei “Examples of Agro-Forestry in the Warm-Temperate Zone of Japan” and Conrad Totman “Land-Use Patterns and Afforestation in the Edo Period” for information on Yoshino’s history of forest management.

<sup>70</sup> Kawase explains how the lush images of the natural scenery suggested by the work’s title occupy a central position within the film: “The word *moe* originally meant new green growth and by extension all of nature. I wanted to portray nature as a major character, along with people in my film” (McDonald p. 247). See François Berthier “Le Phénix rouge de la tombe Kitora (Japon)” for a consideration of the similarities between the *suzaku/zhūquè* and the phoenix.

<sup>71</sup> “The Weald 1997”

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. Takushi Odagiri questions that what extent Kawase sought to highlight the economic precarity of the *somabito* in this film, responding to Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp’s claims of this nature: “It is questionable if *The Weald* was meant to be a representation of ‘the harsh economic reality of the era.’ In both the fiction and nonfiction films of 1997, Kawase’s new-documentarian method didn’t essentially change” (Odagiri p. 372).

*Himatsuri*, it does so without the presence of a singular, egoistic character at its narrative center. Rather, it explicitly imagines, through destruction and renewal, that the human ego itself can be overcome, and that the entirety of humanity can become botanical.

## The Spiritual Landscape of Yoshino

Like *Himatsuri*, *Vision* is set in region of deep political, religious, and mythological importance. *Vision* takes place in Kawase's native Nara Prefecture, in the mountainous and highly forested region of Yoshino (the same area seen in her earlier films *Moe no suzaku* and *Somaudo monogatari*). Compared to Kumano, Yoshino sits at an even more direct intersection of spirituality and political power. Yoshino is located at the southern end of the ancient province of Yamato, home to the imperial capital of Heijōkyō from AD 710 to 794 (an historical era known as the Nara Period).<sup>73</sup> In several respects, Yamato province is a point of origin for the modern Japanese state. The Nara Period saw major developments in the consolidation of imperial power, including the composition of Japan's earliest mytho-histories the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* (discussed above in relation to Kumano's place within Japan's early mythology). Both of these histories mention the region of Yoshino as a place inhabited by native gods that come to submit to the legendary first emperor of Japan, Jimmu.<sup>74</sup> It was also in the Yamato region that Buddhism became tied to the imperial court; central to the legitimization of the court was the embrace of Buddhism as a quasi-state religion, which led to the construction of monumental Buddhism temple complexes, including Tōdaiji—a marvel of sacred wooden architecture.

The forests and foresters of the Yamato region (and the greater Kinai region, in which Yamato is located) were instrumental to the construction of such monumental religious sites during the Nara Period (which included both Buddhist temples and native Shintō shrines).<sup>75</sup> Yet the forests themselves also manifested a spiritual aura that extended beyond their role as natural resources in the construction of religious architecture. The Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs describes the region of Yoshino as a place where forests, forestry, and spirituality overlap:

As the place where the gods and Buddhas have been ensconced since long ago, natural forests are also preserved and attended to very carefully. For centuries, the people of Yoshino have been nurtured by and help cultivate both natural and artificial forests. Visitors are able to feel the sacredness of the land of Yoshino...<sup>76</sup>

The abundant forests of Yoshino are sacred places, the extent to which even surprised *Vision*'s production staff. According to producer Yamamoto Reiji, the crew was unaware that the site of

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<sup>73</sup> The imperial power in the Yamato region is said to stretch back even further than this, however. Some historians refer to a so-called Yamato Period that includes both the Kōfun Period (250-538) and Asuka Period (538-710)

<sup>74</sup> Torquil Duthie explains: "In both the *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki* the earliest mention of Yoshino is as a place inhabited by earthly gods (kunitsukami 国神) who submit to the legendary first emperor, Jimmu 神武. Yoshino reappears briefly during the reign of Ōjin 応神, and then later as a hunting destination in the accounts of the semilegendary fifth-century reign of Yūryaku 雄略" (Duthie p. 191).

<sup>75</sup> See Totman's *The Green Archipelago* for an thorough analysis of just how much lumber was used during the Nara period to build both religious and imperial buildings. According to Totman, Tōdaiji alone used enough wood in its construction to build "three thousand ordinary 1950s-style (18-by-24 foot) Japanese dwellings" (*The Green Archipelago* p. 17).

<sup>76</sup> See <http://en.japan-heritage-yoshino.jp/>



the film's fiery climax was located near the ruins of Homusubi Jinja, where the god of fire was enshrined.<sup>77</sup>

Set within this origin point for Japanese political and spiritual history, where “visitors are able to feel the sacredness of the land,” *Vision* is infused with an aura of the past. What sets *Vision* apart from *Himatsuri* is that Kawase's film strives to reintegrate this past into the present, as well as into the future. *Vision* portrays the cyclical nature of disturbance ecology (destruction and regeneration) as the inescapable foundation of unfolding time. Where in *Himatsuri* Tatsuo's uniquely spiritual-ecological connection to the land of Kumano painted him as a misfit out of time in his present and the future of his community, a ritualistic disturbance ecology is available to *all* characters in *Vision*, whether they realize it or not. *Vision*'s narrative time unfolds such that characters (and viewers) only realize its cyclical nature after the fact, long after they are already within the ebb and flow of the logic of disturbance ecology. *Vision* accomplishes this by making the spiritual aura of Yoshino (in which a mythological past is present within the forest) legible through a complex narrative structure that I call “forest time.” Forest time unfolds in a ritualistic and cyclical manner that finds a home within the logic of disturbance ecology, and is made visible through a cinematic-botanical subjectivity.

Like *Himatsuri*, *Vision* portrays the forest as an assemblage comprised of human and botanical life, and constructs, through its cinematography, a botanical subjectivity that brings the *somabito* and the trees of the forest together. Photographer Dodo Arata (1974- ) served as the film's cinematographer, his second collaboration with Kawase. Like Tamura Masaki's camerawork in *Himatsuri* and Kawase's own *Moe no suzaku*, Dodo's cinematography moves between the scales of the forest, from the miniscule life found on the forest floor to the *somabito* climbing and felling trees, and further up to the expansive forest canopy. The forest canopy is full of rich colors through the film—a deep green that gives way to more autumnal hues of red and yellow as the narrative progresses through the seasons. Bright light streams through the tops of the trees in several moments, and fog moves throughout the spaces between giant trees, illuminating the spiritual aura characteristic of Yoshino that clings to humans and nonhumans alike. As the camera moves through the forest in this manner, it highlights the interconnectedness of the cross-species relations that make up the forest assemblage (to return to Anna Tsing's language), and presents a botanical subjectivity that is shared throughout the forest between humans, botanical nonhumans, and spiritual entities. In *Vision*, this subjectivity finds further expression within a cyclical and ritual unfolding of time—a plastic form of time that allows both the forest ecosystem and human subjectivity to be reimaged.

## The Cyclicity of Forest Time

*Vision*'s opening images foreground forestry work—a way of life tied to the environmental and spiritual history of Yoshino that embraces the plastic art of change through

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<sup>77</sup> See *Vision* Promotional Brochure. Yamamoto further recounts how the crew performed rites of purification at the local Kasuga Jinja before commencing filming, and prayed for success in filming at Kinpusenji, a major temple for practitioners of the form of Buddhist asceticism known as Shūgendō, which I discuss above in relation to Kumano (See *Vision* Promotion Brochure). While the founding of Kinpusenji is traditionally ascribed to the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, “(the) cult of Kinpusen surely goes back to the beginnings of Japanese history, and its origins must have had to do with ideas of mountains as the source of water and mineral ores, and as the sacred dwelling place of ancestral spirits” (Tyler p. 173)

disturbance. It is clear that the village of Yoshino is suffering from the economic decline of the forestry profession that also afflicted Nigishima in *Himatsuri*. In the opening scenes, we see Tomo (a *somabito* who lives a secluded life in the forests of Yoshino) use a chainsaw to fell a large cypress. A few scenes later we see a group of elderly villagers (likely *somabito*) sitting in the forest lamenting the how much the forest and the community has changed, and how many people have left the village behind.

Despite highlighting these hardships, *Vision* offers hope for the *somabito* profession; in its cyclical vision of time, *Vision* sees an unbroken link between the *somabito* of the past, present, and future—a link understood through within the rubric of disturbance ecology and its alternating periods of destruction and regeneration. Late in the film, Tomo begins to teach the ways of the *somabito* to Rin, a young character with a complex backstory who represents the future of the forest ecosystem within cyclical time (I explain Rin’s role in the narrative in detail below). Tomo takes Rin to the marketplace where the large cypresses that have been felled in the forest are sold.<sup>78</sup> As the two lean in and appreciate the impressive size of the tree, Tomo tells Rin they have to work in the forest for the sake of future generations: “It’s not just us, right? The previous generation, the generation before that, and even further back, those people before us grew and raised these trees. That’s why they are here now. We have to work hard and link up with them.”

Tomo’s vision of time in this dialogue links generations of *somabito* (past, present, and future) together within the assemblage of the forest. Tomo recognizes that the lifespan of the forest is far greater than that of the *somabito*, and that the work of past *somabito* informs the work of the current *somabito*—their felling of the forest in the past (a period of destruction) cleared space for the trees of the present (a period of regeneration). Extrapolating forward, he explains to Rin that their work in the present will likewise influence the *somabito* of the future. What Tomo does not yet realize, however, is that Rin is not merely the next generation of *somabito*; within *Vision*’s mythological narrative, Rin is a manifestation of the forest. He is a figure that embodies the spiritual and material ecologies of Yoshino. He is a spiritual entity—a tree in human form. As a manifestation of the forest, Rin exists within a different flow of time, one that unfolds cyclically, and not in the clear-cut progression of generations.

*Vision* offers a metaphysical speculation through a cyclical, non-linear narrative and chronology that mimics what I call “forest time.”<sup>79</sup> Forest time attempts to capture the complex manner in which the assemblage of the forest experiences time, while also capturing the ritual flow of time inscribed into the spiritual landscape of Yoshino. It captures the plasticity of

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<sup>78</sup> This scene resembles a scene in another film that explores futurity in relation to Japan’s forests: the 2014 comedy film *WOOD JOB! Kamusari naa naa nichijo*. Based on the 2009 novel by Miura Shion, and adapted and directed by Yaguchi Shinobu, *Wood Job!* stages the return to domestic Japanese forestry as a site of futurity. In the film, high school student Yūki fails his college entrance exams, setting him up for the social and economic precarity of a *rōnin*, one who has failed to advance to the next level of education. Yūki’s anxiety over his future is quickly mitigated by a brochure advertising forestry jobs in the countryside (modeled on the Japanese Forestry Agency’s “Green Employment Program”). As a new recruit, and as an outsider from the city, Yūki is not allowed, in one scene, to cut a 105-year-old tree. Yet the sight of his supervisor cutting the large tree enchants Yūki, as does the smell of the tree at the wood market, where it has been cut into logs. At the market, one log made from the 105-year-old tree sells for around seven thousand US dollars. Astonished by this economic success, Yūki wonders why his superiors do not “clear the mountains” in order to become rich. The villagers scold him, asking what would be left for future generations if they cut all the trees down.

<sup>79</sup> Guy Lodge’s overall positive review of *Vision* in *Variety* magazine critiques what I call forest time, claiming that the film “goes full windchime nirvana in its second half, fudging chronology and existential dimensions to borderline incoherent effect” (Lodge).

disturbance ecology—an unceasing cycle of change (a “becoming”) in which the past, present, and future influence one another. Because a forest is not a singular entity but is rather a web made up of “cross-species relations,” as Anna Tsing claims, forest time does not follow the straightforward, linear timeline of the human: namely, birth, life, and death. The short *durée* of the human lifetime is only part of the much longer *durée* of the forest assemblage. Within the long *durée* of forest time is a cycle comprised of *many* births, deaths, and rebirths. Individual humans and trees (which both contribute to the constitution of the forest) may die, but the forest remains to see the birth of new humans and new trees that come to reconstitute the forest anew. The forest, seen as an entity in its own right, survives through these changes. Forest time is a component of the botanical subjectivity on display in *Vision*; it conditions the way the characters in the film experience themselves as a part of this greater forest assemblage that persists through changes, including death.

*Vision* attempts to make the long *durée* of forest time legible in its roughly two hours of running time. The film stars Juliette Binoche, who Kawase met in France at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival. Binoche plays Jeanne, a travel writer who ventures to the remote forests of Yoshino in search of a mythical herb named “vision.”<sup>80</sup> There she comes into contact with Tomo (Nagase Masatoshi), a *somabito* who tells Jeanne that his job is “saving the forest,” and Aki (Natsuki Mari), a blind woman deeply connected to the forest. While *Himatsuri*’s narrative development and staging of disturbance ecology depended solely on the figure of Tatsuo, *Vision*’s narrative conclusion depends on the relationships between this web of characters, and the roles they come to play within the ritual burning of the forest that marks the film’s narrative climax.

The development of forest time is furthermore an attempt to make legible the spiritual aura of Yoshino. *Vision* treats the spiritual atmosphere of its setting differently than *Himatsuri*. In *Himatsuri*, the otherworldly aura of Kumano is largely registered in its intense focus on the verdant forestscape and its sculpting of a botanical subjectivity that floats between Tatsuo and the forest, augmented by the ethereal sounds of Takemitsu Tōru’s score, which announces the presence of the *Yama no kami*. The forest’s spiritual aura in *Vision* does not rely on non-diegetic music to signal the presence of the divine, rather that presence originates in these natural sounds themselves, and is augmented by the cyclical, near-mythological roles played by the characters in film. *Vision* is almost completely devoid of music. The vast majority of the film is

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<sup>80</sup> Like the title of the film, the mythical plant is referred to throughout the film by the English-language word “vision.” Despite the herb only appearing in this region of remote Nara, and despite its supposed long history as a mythical plant, no Japanese name is offered. This use of the English word “vision” contributes to the film’s attempt to deconstruct language in the service of botanical thinking. Throughout the film, language is called into question; Jeanne cannot speak Japanese, and must communicate with Tomo in English. When the character of Rin is introduced, at first he appears to speak no English; yet by the end of the film, he inexplicably demonstrates a fairly complex understanding of the language. Near the end of the film, Jeanne sits with Rin and discusses the coming arrival of “vision.” She tells him, “It’s not that we haven’t evolved. Of course we’ve evolved. Compared to the era of the monkeys we’ve learned to speak. So we have the capacity to understand what other people think. We understand speech. But sometimes we can’t understand each other’s feelings. And sometimes, because we have language, we can’t understand each other.” The characters in *Vision* necessarily use language to communicate, but as Guy Lodge writes in his review of the film, “The film actually makes more sense the less its characters speak” (Lodge). I agree with this assessment; the true logic of the film is not to be found in the confusing dialogue between human characters. The ecological logic of the film unfolds not through such language, but rather through cinematographer Dodo Arata’s visual sweep through the scale of the forest, and the cinematic botanical subjectivity and cyclical flow of time it establishes.

soundtracked by the ambient noises of the forest: the loud drone of cicadas, the chirping of birds, and the rustling of wind through the leaves. This natural ambiance gives off a sense of liveliness at all times, making the forest feel present and alive.

*Vision* makes the spiritual landscape of Yoshino legible by destabilizing the boundaries between the forest and the film's human characters—it gives, at times, spiritual entities corporal form. It is clear that the blind character Aki is a mythological figure. She occupies a narrative space similar to the *Yama no kami* or Mountain Goddess in *Himatsuri*. She is a spiritual entity belonging to the forest. It is suggested throughout the film that Aki is actually a tree (or group of trees) in human form—at certain moments in the film (including after she has seemingly died) she is shown performing dancelike movements among the trees that mimic the swaying of trees in the wind. In such moments, she communes with the forest in such a way that she appears to be one of the trees that surround her. Her name, “Aki,” even resonates with the Japanese word for tree, “*ki*.”

At the start of the film, Aki has a special knowledge of the ritual unfolding of time in the forest. She tells Tomo she is one thousand years old, born “when the stars were born.” Aki understands “forest time,” and states early in the film that the time has come to ritually renew the forest assemblage, claiming that “there is something strange (*okashii*) with the forest lately.” Aki's role throughout the film is to teach the other characters the ecological necessity of burning down the forest in order to restart the cycle of forest time.

Unlike Tatsuo in *Himatsuri*, Aki is not a “misfit,” to return to film critic Ogi Masahiro's assessment. In calling Tatsuo a misfit, Ogi claims Tatsuo is out of place in his contemporary moment. As time in *Vision* operates cyclically, the past is not out of place in the present within forest time, but rather comes back around to structure the future, just as dead trees (or “snags”) can become a site of regrowth for nonhuman plants and animals. In the same scene in which she claims to be one thousand years old, she tells Tomo that they will meet again when she “turns seventeen years old.” The comment bewilders Tomo (and the audience) due to Aki's advanced age. Her comment speaks, however, to the botanical subjectivity on display in *Vision* through its development of forest time. Within *Vision*'s complex timeline, the past is never just the past—it can become the future.

## Ritual Renewal through Fire

As the spiritual center of the forest and the only character to understand the strange flow of time taking place in the forest of Yoshino at the start of the film, Aki sets the narrative in motion, with the goal of renewal. Aki, as an embodiment of the forest, enacts a plan to introduce disturbance into the ecosystem in order to keep the cyclical flow of change in flux. In order to address the “something strange” in the forest, Aki needs Jeanne and Tomo to fulfill ritualistic roles within her plan, which ultimately ends in the forest catching fire.

Jeanne arrives in Yoshino with only a faint idea of her purpose. While she states her goal is to find the herb “vision,” her knowledge of the plant is tenuous. She is unclear where she has heard of it. It is as if something beyond her control has called her to the forest. Jeanne is convinced, however, the tales of “vision's” magical powers (the ability to end human pain) are real. Arriving in Yoshino, she meets Tomo at a local shrine—a site that makes visible the spiritual landscape within which the film's narrative will unfold. Although their meeting appears accidental, it was fated to happen; Aki told Tomo to go pray at the shrine at that particular day

and time. In secretly arranging this meeting, Aki has set up the conditions to ensure the cyclical regeneration of the forest.

The regeneration that Aki sets into motion is ritualistic, and seemingly connected to the shrine where Jeanne and Tomo meet. At the shrine, Jeanne notices a painting on one of the walls. It depicts a forest with several trees on fire, and what looks like a white cloud or a gust of wind passing through the forest. Tomo tells Jeanne the painting has been there from long ago. The film cuts from the painting to the forest around them, making it clear the forest in the image and the setting of the film are one and the same. In the film's fiery climax—in which the disembodied spirit of Aki helps the forest catch fire through her tree-like movements in order to restore ecological equilibrium through disturbance—it is revealed that this image depicts a reoccurring event. The “vision” that Jeanne seeks in the forests of Yoshino is revealed not to be a medicinal herb, but rather this ritualistic event: the destruction of the forest through fire, which opens up a future by allowing a new cycle of the forest to begin.<sup>81</sup>

Bookended by the image of painting of the fire in the beginning of the film and an image of an actual fire in its conclusion, *Vision* attempts to construct a narrative that is structurally cyclical. It is also botanical as it follows the natural cycles of the forest—an unending process of birth, disturbance/death, and regeneration/rebirth. In Yanagimachi's *Himatsuri*, Tatsuo's death is an attempt to enter into this cycle; yet the narrative development of *Himatsuri* ultimately follows the linear path of Tatsuo's lifetime, and as his death marks the end of the film, it leaves regeneration merely a potentiality, and not a certainty. In *Vision*, regeneration is made certain as an inevitable part of a cycle. As the film cuts away in its final moments from the charred forest back to the ancient painting of fire it presented at the film's beginning, it shows us the future by returning to the past. The narrative of *Vision* forms an uroboros—a closed loop that ends where it begins.<sup>82</sup>

### Ritualistic Roles within Forest Time

The characters of *Vision* get swept up in the cycle of the forest, and come to fill ritualistic roles that are necessary for the renewal of the forest through disturbance ecology. They become something akin to archetypes or mythological figures that are devoid of individual egos. This egoless state is an ideal that *Vision* sees as a possible future for all of humanity through the plasticity of becoming botanical. Becoming botanical within the logic of disturbance ecology allows for humans to fully enter into the reoccurring cycles of forest time—a more ecologically sound form of subjectivity that *Vision* aligns with the *somabito* way of life.

The extreme plasticity of *Vision*'s characters makes it difficult for viewers to locate their places within the narrative. As the characters in *Vision* become written into forest time, the

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<sup>81</sup> The fire that rages at the end of *Vision* is an event in the manner described by Artemy Magun, who discusses the figuration of the event in the philosophy of Vladimir Bibikhin: “the event is characterized by a high intensity of completion, but at the same time it does not derive from a subject's will but comes to the subject from outside, from the substantial life of society, with its past and future” (Magun p.135). Magun's description here fits the event of “vision” well: Jeanne (who ushers in the fire event) both comes from the outside (from France to the forests of Yoshino), but also is acted upon by an outside—the forest itself. How we understand the event depends on whether we read Jeanne as the protagonist of the film, or if we rather see the forest as the protagonist.

<sup>82</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, this was Osaki Midori's original plan for her novella *Dainana kankai hōkō* (*Wandering in the Realm of the Seventh Sense*), a text that also exhibits something of a botanical structure in its repetitions.

logistics of their personal histories become complicated and confusing. For example, when Aki meets Jeanne ostensibly for the first time, she remarks “It was you, wasn’t it?” (“*Anta dattanda ne?*”). No explanation is given for this comment. It will only make sense once the film later establishes a new, cyclical history for both characters.

Although Jeanne arrives in the village of Yoshino a stranger, she quickly becomes a part of the forest assemblage, and her past is rewritten (or, in more ecological language, “renewed”). Jeanne becomes (in the past) the mother of Rin (the young character Tomo teaches to be a *somabito*, as discussed above). Rin mysteriously appears in the forest after Aki dies.<sup>83</sup> His appearance is sudden to both viewers and the characters of the film. *Vision* suggests that Rin is a new iteration of Aki, who is herself a manifestation of the trees in the forest. In other words, “Aki” is a role that is now being played by Rin.

As Rin appears in the forest following Aki’s death, it seems as if Aki’s comment that she will see Tomo again when she “turns seventeen” may be referring to this moment. Although Rin seems too old to be seventeen years old, he does, in one scene, pick up a cicada shell and makes a vague comment about how “there were many gathered long ago.” In an earlier scene, Jeanne speaks of the seventeen-year cycle of certain cicadas with Tomo; as viewers we are primed to consider that the strange figures of Aki and Rin may emerge and die off in cycles like cicadas.

And yet within the narrative web that Aki sets in motion in *Vision*, Rin will become Jeanne’s son, fathered by a *somabito* character who was accidentally shot by a hunter in the forest prior to Rin’s birth (a scene viewers will come to recognize as the opening scene of the film). As Jeanne falls into the forest time of *Vision*’s complex narrative, she too becomes an archetypal/ritualistic figure. She likewise becomes botanical as a reproductive element of the forest assemblage—in becoming the mother of Rin, she simultaneously becomes the mother of Aki (of whom Rin is a new version), and thus a mother figure to the forest itself, contributing to its regeneration/rebirth within forest time.

## **Disturbance Ecology and The Liveliness of Destruction**

The complex web of cyclical time that drastically changes Jeanne’s personal history (turning her into the mother of Rin) unfolds slowly in *Vision*. As Jeanne comes to stay with Tomo and continues her research on the plants of the forest, she spends more time in the forest and begins to have visions that could either be memories or premonitions. The short, fragmentary scenes are sepia-toned, suggesting they are from the past. These scenes, we come to understand by the film’s end, are the backstory of Jeanne and Rin’s father. They tell, in fragments, the new history that Jeanne adopts within forest time—they are the mythology she comes to embody within the forest. They are visions of her subjectivity regenerating itself.

As her new history is slowly revealed to her, Jeanne becomes increasingly convinced that “vision” will make itself known in the forest. She explains to Tomo why she believes the time for “vision’s” appearance is near: “When life develops too far, it begins to destroy itself with its own will. And then, we each have to find a way to manage on our own.” Jeanne ultimately decides to return to France, but promises to come back to Yoshino soon. She is convinced

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<sup>83</sup> The promotion brochure for *Vision* specifies that the kanji or Chinese character used for Rin’s name means “bell.” However, without seeing it written within the film, the name conjures up the *on-yomi* or Chinese reading of the character for the Japanese word *hayashi*, meaning forest or grove of trees.

“vision” will “release its spores” in either the fall or winter of this year.<sup>84</sup> Like Nakagami Kenji’s explanation of Tatsuo’s murder-suicide in *Himatsuri*, a form of disturbance he likened to a bamboo plant going to seed and drying up, *Vision* portrays the future through botanical language, even though by the end of the film it is clear “vision” is not a actually plant (as Jeanne believes in the beginning of the film), but rather the cyclical destruction of the forest by fire.

Jeanne returns to Yoshino in the fall. The leaves of the trees in the forest have turned bright red, approximating the image of fire before they die off in winter. We see Rin walk in the forest and up to a giant cypress tree that has been showcased throughout the film.<sup>85</sup> He begins swaying, approximating the movements of the trees around him, just as Aki had previously done. In an illustration of the nonlinear nature of forest time, and of the spiritual aura of Yoshino in which the past is always present, Rin sees both Aki and the man that was his father (the man who became Jeanne’s ex-lover in her rewritten history), both of whom are nominally dead. They began swaying along with Rin, and the forest bursts into flames.<sup>86</sup>

As disturbance is introduced into the ecosystem as the forest burns, forest time appears to re-set. Through the event of “vision,” disturbance gives birth to a future in which the past is not dead and gone, but rather participates in the sculpting of the future: the past (embodied in Aki and Rin’s father) participates in the fiery event of “vision” and gives birth to the future (embodied in Rin). Tomo sees the smoke from the forest fire and rushes into the woods. While en route, he hears the barking of his beloved dog that had tragically died a few scenes earlier. Aki’s disembodied voice emerges from the forest, telling Tomo that he “is not alone.” Tomo then finds Jeanne standing at the edge of the fire. He screams for Rin, and tells Jeanne they need water. Jeanne, however, has already become botanical, and understands the regenerative event taking place. She responds to Tomo, “We don’t need water. “Vision” is about to be born.”

As “vision” is born, the past, present, and future come together. The ritual by fire is complete, and destruction has given way to liveliness. The film cuts from Aki, to Jeanne’s ex-lover (who is grasping a blanket), to Rin, who has now taken his father’s place, holding the same blanket. The camera focuses in on glowing embers and the charred remains of trees. Jeanne, Tomo, and Rin look over the scorched wreckage. The sound of birds and the flowing of water can be heard. Tomo remarks, “The mountain is lively, isn’t it?” (“*Yama wa nigiyaka da yo na?*”). These are the final words spoken in the film. They mark the renewal of subjectivity (the becoming botanical) found in the renewal of the ecosystem through disturbance ecology: as the forest burns and starts anew, so too does Tomo’s understanding of his place in the world.

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<sup>84</sup> Jeanne speaks with Tomo about “prime number cicadas” that only emerge from the ground every 7, 13, and 17 years. As viewers, we are aware of Aki’s previous mention of meeting Tomo again when she is 17, a statement that now means something new in the wake of her death. Jeanne links the cycle of prime number cicadas to the “periodic cycle” of “vision,” which she now states confidently as 997 years. She says that if her calculations are correct, it has been 997 years since it last appeared. Given Jeanne’s lack of knowledge concerning “vision” up to this point, her certainty is surprising here. How has she gained this knowledge? How long has she been living with Tomo in Yoshino? *Vision* is not concerned with these questions, or with making a clear narrative arc. Like many other developments to come, Jeanne’s understanding of the cycle of 997 years comes out of nowhere, as if the forest is revealing itself to her as it sees fit.

<sup>85</sup> According to the promotional brochure for the film, this tree is referred to as the *moronjo no ki*, and is known for its medicinal properties. According to the entry for the *nezumisashi* tree on Uekipedia (an online field guide of Japanese trees), the medicine made from *moronjo no ki* is used for urinary problems, rheumatism, nerve pain, and the common cold.

<sup>86</sup> This scene marks Kawase’s first use of computer generated visual effects. The scene used both CGI fire and actual fire, which required several tons of water to be available on the day of filming. See *Vision* Promotional Brochure.

Tomo sees a renewed sense of life teeming in the forest in the aftermath of destruction. He begins to think like the forest and realizes the logic of disturbance ecology—namely, that futurity or new life comes from destruction or death. Unlike in *Himatsuri*, where such knowledge was available only to Tatsuo, and required his martyrdom for its realization, *Vision*'s ecological conclusion is participatory among its characters. In the final moments of the film, all three characters (Jeanne, Tomo, and Rin) have arrived at this ecological epiphany, and have participated in its ritualistic enactment.

Where in *Himatsuri* it was Tatsuo's death that took center stage in the disturbance of fire, it is new life that emerges from within the remains of *Vision*'s fire ritual. Producer Yamamoto Reiji likens the vision event to the ritual Yamayaki festival in Nara, where the mountainside of Wakakusayama is set ablaze annually in the month of January.<sup>87</sup> He explains the event of "vision" as "a scene in which the forest regenerates (*mori ga saisei suru*) through wildfire."<sup>88</sup> Echoing Nakagami's claim that Tatsuo's suicide in *Himatsuri* was like a bamboo going to seed, Kawase explains the ecological disturbance of "vision" as that which is necessary for the potential of futurity to emerge: "'Vision' is the 'seed of potentiality' (*kanōsei no tane*) that exists within us, that helps us accept things and then overcome them... 'Vision' is necessary to move into a new world" (*"tsugi no sekai ni iku tame ni 'bijon' ga hituyō da"*).<sup>89</sup>

The "new world" that Kawase envisions opens through the death of certain organisms within the forest assemblage (including Aki and Rin's father). As Brodie et al claim in regards to disturbance ecology, "There are winners and losers in every disturbance event; the death of established organisms creates new niches and living space for others..."<sup>90</sup> This was Tatsuo's plan in *Himatsuri*, as he killed himself and his family to create new space for the future to take hold. *Himatsuri* does not show the results of his action, however. In *Vision*'s final moments, we actually see the future (as do Jeanne and Tomo) in the "lively" sound of birds and water flowing within the charred forest. The future is further legible in the figure of Rin, who is poised to become the new spiritual center of the forest (a position previously occupied by Aki), as well as the next generation of *somabito*, having been taught the profession by Tomo.

These images of the future depend on the past. Rin may be of a new generation, but he belongs to the same forest assemblage that both Aki and his father did. In other words, the "renewal" of the forest does not mean "replacement." Within the ecology of disturbances, the boundaries between old and new, past and future blur: "Many 'biological legacies' in the form of surviving organisms and propagules (such as seed banks and root stocks in the soil) from the pre-disturbance ecosystem are carried through into the post-disturbance ecosystem, potentially influencing the overall biological response to disturbance."<sup>91</sup> Within the cyclical forest time that *Vision* presents, the past is inseparable from this future that has opened up through fire—characters both living (Rin, Jeanne, Tomo) and dead (Aki, Rin's father, Tomo's dog) are all present during the fiery event of "vision." They will all contribute to the future—a future that *Vision* imagines has profound implications far beyond the immediate space of the forests of Yoshino.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Vision* Promotional Brochure.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Brodie et al. p. 121.

<sup>91</sup> Brodie et al. p. 122.



## Evolution and the Destruction of the Human Ego

As it offers an image of a forest undergoing ritual renewal through fire, *Vision* imagines that the disturbance of forest fire can likewise sculpt humanity anew, effecting an evolutionary change in the human species. Jeanne tells Rin near the end of the film: “There are people who say that human beings are still raw.” The fire of the “vision” event is meant to address this rawness, this imperfection that leads to “pain,” as Jeanne stresses throughout the film. *Vision* turns to evolutionary theory, positing that through the regeneration of the forest (through fire), humans can evolve into something new. This something new is a botanical becoming.

*Vision* imagines an evolved form of humanity (and an evolved subjectivity) that no loner possesses an individuated human ego separated from the natural world, but rather experiences itself as an ecological being enmeshed within a larger ecosystem, like the forest. In other words, it images an evolutionary change that affords all of humanity the kind of botanical subjectivity inhabited by the *somabito* characters in *Vision* (and *Himatsuri* before it). Thus, this something new is, in cyclical fashion, also something old—a return to the way *somabito* have inhabited the region of Yoshino for centuries. As Kawase has claimed: “The state of the forest is the state of humanity.”<sup>92</sup>

The overcoming of the ego through disturbance ecology is at the heart of *Vision*: the very event of “vision” is the destruction of an individuated selfhood in the service of becoming botanical as a part of the “multispecies assemblage” of the forest. The event of “vision” renews the subjectivity of the human characters as it shows them their place within the greater forest assemblage. The fire at the end of the film teaches Jeanne and Tomo how to see themselves as a part of the forest matrix; after the fire, Jeanne holds Rin in her arms and nods when he asks (in English) “Is it you?” In this moment, Jeanne finally understands and accepts her new role within the forest. The fire likewise teaches Tomo to see the liveliness of the forest amongst the charred remains. Cumulatively, these individual epiphanies come together to suggest the possibility of widespread change for humanity. The film positions the renewal of human subjectivity at large in the aftermath of fire. It looks to destroy the individual ego for all humankind through the destruction of fire, planting the seed for something new to emerge.<sup>93</sup>

*Vision* looks for the possibilities of wide spread transformation through the language of evolution. Evolutionary thought can provide a framework through which to view humans and plants as relatives within deep time, as explored in Chapter 1 of this dissertation (in relation to the writings of Osaki Midori and Imanishi Kinji). It also provides a framework through which to posit change at the level of the species. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, disturbance events like the one on display in *Vision* are precisely what drives evolutionary change: “Natural selection, while it operates as an ordered and ordering network of processes, is in fact made up of nothing but thousands, millions of accidents, momentary events, that lead to the death of some, not because they were less well adapted but because they were, say, in the wrong place at the wrong time.”<sup>94</sup>

The “vision” event (the fire that renews the forest) is similar to one of “these millions of small events” as it forces the forest ecosystem to change and adapt accordingly. A sense of plasticity is necessary to survive and thrive in the aftermath of the forest fire. *Vision* strives to

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<sup>92</sup> *Vision* Promotion Brochure.

<sup>93</sup> *Vision*’s figuration of evolution resembles Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “involution:” a creative and self-directed form of evolution that “that turns backwards in the name of a kind of progress” (*A Thousand Plateaus* p. 278).

<sup>94</sup> *The Nick of Time* p. 49.

grant humans an evolutionary plasticity—an ability to change and evolve in the face of destruction. Yet the “vision” event presented in the film is not, as Grosz writes above, an accident—it is a recurring ritual. The characters of *Vision* (both human and nonhuman) are not “in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Within the cyclical logic of forest time, they are in the exact right place, at the exact right time to usher in the future. Aki has made sure of this by secretly setting up the initial meeting of Tomo and Jeanne, and by dying to make space for Rin to emerge.

Jeanne introduces evolutionary language in a monologue addressed to Rin (who, in this scene, she does not yet know is/will become her son): “In the ancient part of the human brain there is an aggressive instinct that is passed down genetically. And it seems that it will never change. We evolve so slowly.” As she draws out this last line of dialogue, cinematographer Dodo Arata’s camera moves from Jeanne and Rin to a rippling shot of water flowing. We are then presented with an abstract image: a pale blue screen that is revealed to be the surface of water only when an unidentifiable substance (perhaps a clump of gold leaf/gold paint or some sort of metal) drips into it. The scene echoes the closing moments of *Himatsuri*, in which oil floats to the surface of water and approximates the color of fire and blood.

The shift in imagery is striking, as the majority of the film has been spent in the forested realm. Suddenly, we are transported somewhere different, somewhere beyond the realm of botanical subjectivity. There is something off with the image of water; it is either in reverse or upside down, but the lack of perspective makes it difficult to tell. This ambiguity is pivotal, as it poses a question that gets to the heart of Jeanne’s words: is the figure in the image coming together, forming something new? Or is it breaking apart?

Within the logic of disturbance ecology, coming together and breaking apart are not contradictory images. A forest fire does both—it creates new life by breaking apart certain “multi-species relations” and bringing together others. Like the fiery event of “vision” at the end of the film, this image of gold dripping into water is an image of futurity, as well as an image of ongoing change that makes visible Jeanne’s longing for human evolution.

Dodo next cuts to a different image of futurity: the interior of a hospital, where a newborn child is being handed to a parent. A new generation appears to be in the process of being born. We quickly return to water; this time the shot is submerged below the surface, and we see air bubbles moving up to the surface. This series of images (the only ones of their kind in the film) bring us out the local ecosystem of the forest and into a wider, more abstract visual space. This change in imagery highlights Jeanne’s move into philosophical abstraction as she continues to discuss the aggressive nature of the human ego. She continues: “We still carry that aggression inside. War and atrocity are acts of murder that only humans commit. No other living species commits such acts. Perhaps ‘vision’ is like us humans—with the power to create and the power to destroy. Maybe with its self-destruction it sends us some kind of message, at an instinctual level.”

With Jeanne’s monologue and Dodo’s imagery throughout, *Vision* presents an ecological vision of the future that privileges ecosystems or assemblages over individuated selves. This is not the case with *Himatsuri*, where the individuated selfhood of Tatsuo ultimately renders him something of a martyr, even as he violently murders his family, including his two young sons. Many selves (human and nonhuman) have died by the end of *Vision*, but the forest matrix lives on, as do the ritual roles necessary to maintain the forest ecosystem. They are renewed through destruction. In Jeanne’s monologue, *Vision* aligns the human ego with the destructive threat of

war, and registers a concern for the future of the human species.<sup>95</sup> The vision of the future that Kawase presents in the film is one in which the violent-destructive properties of war are replaced by the regenerative-destructive properties of disturbance ecology—her film reframes destruction as productive. In its embrace of evolutionary thought and disturbance ecology, *Vision* suggests that the transformation required for humanity to see the liveliness of disturbances such as forest fires (as Tomo does in the end of the film) *requires* the destruction of the ego. It requires a becoming botanical that leads to a botanical subjectivity that experiences itself within the long durée and cyclicity of forest time.

Kawase discusses this transformation as a loss of selfhood and an embrace of alterity, leading to a future-oriented thinking that is based on the past:

Within (the realization of accepting the other) there is also the experience of losing what one holds dear. There is the destruction of the ego (*jibun o oshikoroshite*). Even if one is not able to accomplish what one needs to do for those people living in the same generation that one is alive, one can sculpt out a form that will enable the next generation to do so. Humans, at most, live 100 years. What can one accomplish in 100 years? If one links oneself up with what people of the next generation will want, then one can begin to think within a span of 200 years... In the past, we didn't grow fruit trees on the land so that we ourselves could eat, we grew them for our grandchildren.<sup>96</sup>

The future that Kawase envisions is utopian and idealistic (much like the utopian evolutionary thinking found in the writings of Osaki Midori and Imanishi Kinji, as discussed in Chapter 1). And yet Kawase's utopian evolution emerges from devastation, from within the wreckage of fire.

The seeming contradiction of *Vision's* ending, in which Tomo remarks on the liveliness of the forest as he looks over its charred remains, speaks to the potential for humanity to evolve in a more ecological manner—to become like the *somabito* and embrace disturbance ecology in order to better care for the local ecosystems. This, *Vision* suggests, is the ultimate form of regeneration for the *somabito*: not merely an economic recovery, but a species-wide embrace of the ecological logic that the *somabito* represents. In *Himatsuri*, this logic was only available to Tatsuo, a fact that resulted in his egoistic, violent sacrifice at the film's end. *Vision*, on the other hand, offers this logic to everyone, including viewers and future generations to come.

In *Vision*, destruction sculpts the forest anew, forming new, fertile ground for a future to take hold—a future born, in Kawase's words (which resemble those of Nakagami Kenji), from the “seed of potentiality.” Although *Vision* grants viewers with images of this future in its final moments, it remains unclear whether or not the fire of “vision” will affect the kind of widespread evolutionary change that could lead to a species-wide botanical becoming. But if Kawase is correct, then such uncertainty is not a problem, as the future sculpted through destructive plasticity in *Vision* may enable the next generation to better envision their own path to regeneration in becoming botanical, by burning it all down one more time and starting anew, again.

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<sup>95</sup> Kawase has stated that it is the conflict between the human ego or “self” and an acceptance of difference or “the other” that leads to war. She explains in a 2014 interview: “Speaking broadly, I think that if one is able to recognize ‘the other’ and allow one’s differences from the other to exist within them, then peace is possible. When we compare this and that, compare ourselves to others and compete with them, then living becomes tiresome. If we don’t accept others, including those with different religions, then war will never stop.” See “*Shinshun intabyū: Eigakantoku Kawase Naomisan (3) ‘7dai saki e’ tsutaetai taisetsu na koto.*”

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

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