

The Inside and Outside are One and the Same:
Field Recording, Vibration, and Disaster in Northeastern Japan after 3.11

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Abstract

This dissertation maps a politics of listening through the field recording practices of sound artists, archivists and composers directly affected by the earthquake, tsunami, and radiation releases that impacted the eastern coastal areas of Tohoku, Japan on and since 2011. The megathrust earthquake on March 11, 2011, set off a series of events—now referred to as the 3.11 Triple Disasters—that not only impacted already struggling, subjugated cities and towns, it also disturbed the ideologies and networks that drive that subjugation under the capital-nation-state. While the individuals discussed here are directly affected and directly respond, their activities are marginalized, illegible to the dominant positions taken in the popular 3.11 debates. These latter positions debate Tohoku's entrepreneur "recovery," the nation's role in "recovering" a unified identity, and the state's failures or victories in effectively distributing "recovery" insights and reparations—and in so doing shore up the antinomies of the capital-nation-state hegemony. Under such dominant understandings, the disasters are totalized objects, informationalized and de-contextualized, utilized to rationalize this or that position. And those affected oscillate between "survivors" and "victims."

These individuals seek alternative ways of living in vibrating places. I focus especially on three individuals, K, Sato Nami, and Nagahata Koji. They take up sound-based cultural activities that dynamically and critically intervene in their local post-disaster situations. Each individual centralizes field recording, mobilizing the performativities, meanings, and attunements that such an auditory practice might afford. A blogger and theatre director who lives and works in "the most devastated city" records hours of waves on a wall along the coast; a musician whose town was destroyed and never rebuilt records events in the now open area with members of her community; a professor goes to hot spots within and around Fukushima city and records "radioactive silence"... The field recording practices are interpreted as various politics of listening, that is, transductions of processes of attention and intensity that rework the patterns in the field of relations imparted to the subject. The dissertation argues that, against the objectification of the vibrations of the disasters, the vibrational disruptions and energies of the events are injected into the practices as sonic demands that emerge in the affected places.

For my parents

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Image 1: Dancers circle the festival yagura during 2019's *Project Fukushima*. Photo by the author.

Opening

We were all there for the first time.

It was a sweltering afternoon. August 4, 2019. This year's Festival Fukushima was about to begin. The festival was again taking place in Fukushima city at Machinaka Hiroba ("The Downtown Piazza") a single city block of open asphalt.¹ The free festival that began in 2011—opening amid serious radiation concern to equal parts enthusiasm and consternation—had taken place here since 2013. Small groups moved about in the heat. Food and merch tents lined the lot. The surrounding low-rise buildings, irregular and gray, looked drab against the tents' shocking sunlit white. The festival *yagura*, a wooden two-storied turret-cum-stage, stood in the middle of the lot decorated with messages of encouragement, sponsor advertisements, and electric lanterns. An island of colour. Soon everyone would dance around it. A tree at the edge of the lot, towering and alone, flushed a deep green. The tent where the musicians would play was empty.

Nagahata Koji, Sato Nami, her partner, and I stood at the threshold of the festival ground. The sidewalk of the winding street baked our legs. Sato Nami, field recordist and musician, lost her hometown, Arahama, in the tsunami. She had never been to the festival, concerned instead with her stake in Arahama's uncertain future. Nagahata Koji, field recordist and professor, is among the radiation affected. He had never been to the festival, being one of its vehement detractors since 2011. I myself, a graduate student, despite having lived in Fukushima prefecture from 2011-2014, had never been to the festival out of sheer ignorance. My life at the time had been cloaked under a veil of a very different kind of trauma as a member of loving family turned

¹ "*Machinaka Hiroba* [The Downtown Piazza]," Fukushima City, accessed May 25, 2024, <https://www.city.fukushima.fukushima.jp/shigaichi-seibi/shisetsu/koensports/044.html>

toxic—a chaos I was constantly trying to escape. That evening, the four of us grouped together for the festival like puzzle pieces from different sets cut to fit the same way.

The musicians entered. Ōtomo Yoshihide, composer, musician, and one of the festival directors, gave a brief speech about having a good time, and the music began. The professional band, full of brass and percussion, played pop songs. They played a song Ōtomo composed for the popular television series, *Amachan*, about a girl becoming an oyster diver in her mother's 3.11-affected hometown. Sometimes they played with the crowd, who, over the Internet, had been asked to bring instruments and given access to scores. Only a handful participated. Still, audience and participant blurred. Festival structure and concert structure pushed at each other's seams. I had not brought an instrument despite years of playing guitar. I stood under a tent next to the dancers circling the turret. Dancers on the turret signaled people to join. Singers coaxed the crowd from the turret's top. Most, like me, stayed put, a circle around the circling dancers. My urge to dance fought with my shame—without an instrument I had difficulty crossing that line. Sato danced often. Nagahata and Sato's partner set up a picnic blanket at the edge of the lot near the tree.

Night fell. Sato stood next to me, watching the circle. Ōtomo announced the band would begin playing Bon-odori. The festival was near O-Bon, a series of days in which people welcome their ancestors back from the land of the dead. The festivities always include a Bon-odori, a "dance for the dead." The band played and more attendees joined. Sato seemed to sense my tension. A little shove broke it. We entered the circle. Sounds filled my ears. Steps fell into rhythm. Something nearly took over, but a sour obscenity remained. What was I transgressing?

There was an intermission in the music. People stood in line at food trucks. Suddenly everybody stopped talking. An earthquake. It started slowly and wouldn't stop. The earth

lurched. I lost my footing. Nagahata reached for my arm as I righted. Everything sounded until the shaking waned. “That was a big one,” everyone said. Phone screens lit up faces checking information online. Where was the epicenter? Was our shaking the worst of it? Lamp posts swung back and forth. The earthquake was an aftershock of 3.11, eight years prior, and one of largest earthquakes that year. The blunt yet blameless irony of the earthquake hung in the air. The sense of togetherness reached a strange pitch until it melted back into the festival.

Ōtomo returned and announced that the music would continue. Everyone applauded. The band would finish with the festival’s own Bon-odori. Ōtomo and the other festival organizers had produced it complete with music and choreography, disseminated across social media since 2013. The song is called “Ee jai nia ka Odori,” the “It’s All Good Dance,” an oblique protest against nuclear power and the 3.11 fallout. The song likely references the “Ee jai nai ka” phenomenon, a Dionysian mixture of festival, worship, and protest that swept working class segments of the country from 1867 to 1868 at the turn of the Meiji Reform.

The music began. The circle of dancers circled. In a flash of pain and gladness I asked Sato if she wanted to join again. We ran.

Fewer people danced now, but we danced. Almost everyone dancing knew the movements. At some point I got the hang of it. Form took over and I entered the music. In the once irradiated summer world, at the once irradiated summer festival—we danced. We danced knowing that this particular “we” was stuck in the dance. Most were perfect strangers. I danced knowing I stuck strangely in this “we.” I was the stranger who came knocking among strangers. But this was the potential. We, the we that was stuck, got stuck in something different for a change. Being stuck there voiced a defiance, somehow both open and closed, against forces outside and inside us. We danced not quite believing the dead were there, not quite accepting

they were gone. We danced after the quake. I recalled something Sato's mom told me: *the inside and outside are one and the same*.... The singer, in a folky major ringing out from the PAs, sang:

*The excess of the earthquake is the mark of our home / Hey ho, Hey ho / The earth shakes and I lose my footing / Oh, well, Wha'chya gunna do? / Night is always followed by the dawn / All stomachs get hungry, All stomachs get hungry*²

² 「ジシン過剰はお国柄 / どどんがどん / どどんがどん / ゆれてあわてて踏み外す / えらいこっちゃ えらいこっちゃ / えらいこっちゃ えらいこっちゃ / それでも明けない夜はない / それでも減らない それでも減らない / それでも減らない腹はない」

Map



Image 2: Map of locations within Tōhoku pertinent to chapters

Introduction

I

In Japan earthquakes are first heard. There is an onomatopoeic word for the sound, that is, the sounds of an earthquake traveling through the air before the shaking is otherwise perceptible: *guu*. While I lived in Japan, although I felt I had a sensitive ear as an autodidact composer of electronic music, I was always the last to hear the *guu*. In any given circumstance, I would first notice that everyone else had noticed something. Everyone would stop and all heads but mine would turn at once while I continued whatever it was we had been doing. This occurred many times while I lived in Shirakawa, Fukushima from 2011-2014, right after what is now called the Great Eastern Japanese Earthquake Disaster of March 11, 2011—or 3.11. And so ears were especially alert for the sounds. Each time, before I knew it, the earth’s shaking came. Sounds everywhere. An energetic uproar—as if everything suddenly announced itself. A topological contortion—in which the contours of reality warp and wend while holding shape.

Being with others during and after most earthquakes is an uncanny experience. During earthquakes everyone stops, eyes wide, listening to everything, staying alert. And yet the sense of others never disappears. Are *we* in danger? After the shaking stops everyone asks if everyone else is OK. In most earthquakes in Japan not much breaks. The mood after such earthquakes is strange: together, everyone feels the contingency of not only the ground under our feet, but everything else too. And not just the contingency: the particularity. Is it, then, not actually the case that *what is there* does, in a disturbing but buzzing way, announce itself? Whether it happened in an office, a classroom, or at a festival, something about the place comes to feel different, the collectivity we are staging becomes apparent. The very air, and the voices that ask “is everyone OK?” that enter it, seem liable to shout back. But the voices ask. A collectivity built

on uncertainty and particularity emerges, built on an awareness of the contingency of being, the choices within that contingency, and the possibility of other choices too. Does the possibility of other choices not further raise the possibility of hearing another announcement in the vibration and its aftermath: that spaces are modal, shifting, variable even as they are constrictive, constraining, confounding, that they are indeed vibratory, energetic, and mysterious even as they are concretized, arranged, and (apparently) solid?

Now, the events that brought about the onset of “3.11” (which, not least of which because it is ongoing, cannot be considered only “a day on the calendar”) were far more violent than what I have just discussed. Along the Eastern Tōhoku coast, 3.11’s earthquake lasted more than six minutes. Thrown to the ground. Being in the lurching cacophony—one minute, two minutes, three.... Minutes lose meaning. Walls seem to turn to jelly. I have spoken to many and heard of many more say they encountered death in “that time” of the 3.11 earthquake. Death—the end of time. I wager that this could be clarified in a Heideggerian way: to say they encountered death is to say they encountered the potential of *their own* death in that time, and that, phenomenologically, this also potentially leads to a kind of wakeup call where one, if one is still lucky enough, comes to live one’s life in accordance with that inevitability. However, does there not remain a through-line between the earthquakes described above where “not much breaks” and the 3.11 earthquake where a lot did? That is, does the question of the announcement of the arrangements of the real and announcement of the energy that this real *is* not still hold? In other words, it is not only one’s own being-towards-death that was encountered in those six minutes but *life*, vibration, the Other writ large. Time—another time, an other time; space, energetic. If, as Heidegger says, our being-towards-death is our ownmost potential that is fundamentally unowned—if, that is, our capacity to cast our look to the future end is the cast in which our

meaning is shaped—then is it not also the case that this being-in-life is also our ownmost and not ours at all, that it is precisely the “stuff” out of which “the cast” is made, coming as it does from the Other, the earth, the cosmos? Casting gazes, casting a shape, the material of the cast, and also the cast, the support, around what is flawed but that comes from what is necessarily “complete” in its “incompleteness”—energy and its “shapes.”

The 3.11 tsunami were extremely deadly. In them, the problematic of life and death is further exacerbated. The stories one hears of that cold March 11 night are harrowing—impacts, flights, fires.... I will not repeat them more than this. The tsunami was violent and to live along a coast means to live between those waves. Do we abandon that between-ness, that openness after the wave, hiding it under our order, or do we engage those spaces in the interval of that mayhem knowing that the interval is the lot of our space? There is a general degradation within capitalist modernity of the awareness of the specificities of geo-energetic locale. If those who died and were affected along the coast can be called victims, then they are also victims of this degradation *of space* (and not only their spaces). The degradation is simultaneously imaginal and material—much of the Tōhoku coast was once mangroves. Mangroves absorb the energy of the waves; they are reliant on it, thrive on it. Waves, then, are a way of moving energy, tight patternings of give and take, back and forth as constitutive of life. If the marine biome relies on waves—a coastal ecosystems built on in-and-out energy—then we are dependent on waves too. And not as “dependents,” either, only: because we are energy too.

The radiation release must also be thought of as the problem of the understanding, socialization, and negotiation of energy, of life and death, of time and space—or, in this case, the lack thereof on the part of the State formation and the greed of TEPCO as one among the privatized electricity monopolies in Japan. Here again, there is a potential through-line of

awareness that was missing: of a public concerned for the production of energy as a lived reality, of the forces of energy at work in a nuclear facility, of the terms of spatial arrangements of a social infrastructure, of the sense of energy one mobilizes in one's life, including that of the grid, the body, and psychic energies, all the way to an awareness of what it means that the sun shines warmly on your face. There is a through-line between the fusion-born sunlight and the fission-born energy of a nuclear plant. There is a through-line between the illusion of the separation of energy from life and the building of a reactor on a coastline prone to massive waves. To have been affected by the radiation in Fukushima—in material, imaginal, practical, social, and political ways—is to have been affected by the consequences of the contemporary fear of energy. To be affected means to suffer in your body and in your imagination the material traces of this abjection. It might also mean to have been affected by the lived awareness that something must and can change. We live by, through, *as* energy—whether we like it or not.

II

The purpose of this dissertation is to follow, after such a massive incursion of various energies, cultural practitioners who attune themselves to the announcement of the energies they rely on—that they *are*—within the death knell of the dominant arrangement of those energies (external and internal). I follow those who resist the way energy is re-appropriated to make it seem like there were no hiccups, no shifts at all, in the events of 3.11. They show that there is a through-line between a social abjection and an internal one. I find they hear in that clanging toll not a warning of an impending end but a marshaling to a new beginning. They hear in the vibrational rupture not only the threat of death, but in facing death, the promises and threats of life. My assertion is, through the gritted teeth of pain, a call is noticed and in some cases an attunement to

vibration is sought. The through-lines of a politics of life are heard. I assert so because, in part through them, I, too, have come again, through gritted teeth of pain, to that call.

I attempt to navigate the through-lines with three informants. I navigate them not as an expert, but as a “diplomat,” as Isabelle Stengers puts it: not by presenting a kind of “knowledge” that comes from some transcendent above that remains unthreatened by what it purports to know, but rather by engaging in the slower attunement to particular situations and the decisions that arise out of that attunement.³ Thus, I find that the lines are vibrating. Shaking (earthquakes), waves (tsunami), fission decay (radiation)—all *vibration, energy*. Two sides of the same cosmic coin. And I find that these lines map the need for a politics that recognizes the way vibration/energy arrives both from within and from without; that these energies be recognized in their refusal to be “fully” recognized ontologically, all the way down, even as they make up—*are*—our worlds. That is another way of saying: our politics must be attuned to the fact that our subjectivity makes any “full” sense of energy impossible even while we are “fully” energetic. Therefore tactics of attunement to energy are undergone as an opportunity to participate in the psychic/social/political/cosmic energetic arrangements that we are.

Indeed, in this, I am informed by Stengers’s *cosmopolitics*. Stengers uses this term to denote that which resists any and all attempts at being “absolutely” represented or providing an “absolute” ground from which to represent—the *cosmic*—and that which, both as a necessity but also a challenge, must bear our signature as we aim to organize worlds with, through, and across this resistance—the *political*. The cosmopolitical question is “the question that gives resonance to the unknown implied in what we have been able to create, and prevents what we have been

³ Isabelle Stengers, ‘The Cosmopolitical Proposal’, in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour, Exhibition, ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 20.03.-03-10.2005 (Cambridge, (Mass.): MIT press, 2005), 1002-1003.

able to create from obscuring its own conditions.”⁴ Stengers asserts cosmopolitical questioning disrupts Kant’s “cosmopolitanism,” which Kant used to denote an earth-wide tribunal that would govern based on a perfected transcendental rationality enabling a perpetual peace in the name of the “common good.” For Kant, this rationality is perfected when it comes to understand, through itself, ultimate moral imperatives or rules. For Stengers, such a removed project is doomed to fail specific situational problems and would therefore act as “a weapon of war against everything that appears to infringe those rules.”⁵ Cosmopolitics would begin when those ready-made rules are abandoned for the more difficult but vital processes of attuning to what a situation demands of us and for creating the conditions (which might include the conditional rules) in which this demand can continually be heard.⁶

⁴ Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, 2 vols, Posthumanities 9–10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), vol. 1, 82.

⁵ Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, vol. 1, 80.

⁶ There is a great deal of complexity here. I should first mention that there is a “critical cosmopolitanism” in cultural studies and political philosophy which asserts we must nonetheless attempt to trace lines of global power and map possibilities of global solidarity and change. For a theory of this challenge, see also Spivak, ‘Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet’, in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, First Harvard University Press paperback edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013). There she discusses her concept *planetarity*. Essentially, the “global” is not a present entity but is precisely “a situation” that demands our attention. It is a potential that we must bring into being—always. I agree with this. While my tactic in this dissertation is to focus on local cosmopolitical circumstances, I would not foreclose the global politics that are necessarily implied in these “local” arrangements. Both “critical” and Stengersian cosmopolitics attempt to “think beyond the nation,” as the subtitle of an important “critical cosmopolitanism” collection states: Pheng Cheah, Bruce Robbins, and Social Text Collective, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, Cultural Politics 14 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). The problems I read in these local circumstances while remaining highly specific nonetheless speak to broader modern problems. Indeed, I borrow some of the style—the tactics of articulation—necessary to articulating “the planet” (which can never be fully articulated) from Spivak in this introduction. This deconstructive language of alterity, this “realism of the remainder,” will get me into trouble with the speculative push I take up here, but I think only provisionally: Morton’s object-oriented ontology speaks of “withdrawal” (i.e. alterity) too. And cosmopolitics also names the way that everything must be taken, as Kant said, “as an end in itself.” Thus there is a Karatanian re-evaluation of Kant here too. The effect I’m looking to hear is this does not only apply to “humanity.” This means Stenger’s cosmopolitics is plural yet planetary even as it affords a means to see localized circumstances beyond the broader global capital-nation-state dynamics which Stenger’s as a post-Marxist critiques too. We need to agree to a plural means together.... We need to *agree* to *disagree* (and not just disagree). I return to this in the conclusion.

Addressing the way a cosmopolitical perspective stems from a political ecological one, Stengers writes,

“Political ecology affirms that there is no knowledge that is both relevant and detached. It is not an objective definition...of a flood that we need, a detached definition everybody should accept, but the active participation of all those whose practice is engaged in multiple modes...with the river. As for the cosmopolitical perspective, its question is twofold. How to design the political scene in a way that actively protects it from the fiction that ‘humans of good will decide in the name of the general interest’? How to turn...the river into a cause for thinking? But also how to design it in such a way that collective thinking has to proceed ‘in the presence of’ those who would otherwise likely be disqualified as having...nothing to propose, hindering the emergent ‘common account?’”⁷

Stengers claims, then, that the “cosmos” is a kind of event with both local and networking consequences, a refusal to move too quickly in decisions regarding what a particular relation with the Other *is*.

In Stengers’s example, this Other can be called the river. The example is of course pertinent to this dissertation. This Other is also a nuclear facility: modern capitalist nation states refuse the attempt to give resonance to the unknown in this creation and obscure the conditions of its creation almost completely. I attend to these spaces in 3.11’s post-disaster milieu—a tsunami-affected city (Chapter One), a tsunami-affected open space (Chapter Two), and a radiation-affected city (Chapter Three). Their names are Ishinomaki, Arahama, and Fukushima, and their locations across eastern Tōhoku are indicated on the map that opens the dissertation.

⁷ Stengers, ‘Proposal,’ 1002.

And I do so via the study of three individuals who I argue attempt to engage spaces in a cosmopolitical way. That is, they attempt to make decisions about what it means to live in these spaces—the wave-bound ocean and the coastal proximity to such waves; the open space after destructive change; a city whose proximity to power generation is writ large across the urban landscape—in the presence of that which normatively appears to have nothing to propose: waves, openness, radiation. They attempt to make these spaces a cause for thinking under a necessarily re-worked understanding of what this “thinking” is—choices, actions, experimentation, responsivity, improvisation with what is *there*. They do so against the State formation, hellbent on administering precisely what Stengers asserts we don’t need, the fast objective definitions of these disasters, in the name of various conservative ends under the banner of the national “common good.” Each individual does this work in a mode of thinking, a cultural practice, called field recording.

Why each individual turns to field recording, how field recording can undertake a cosmopolitical questioning, and how field recording moves in relation to the Other—these are questions the dissertation explores. I argue the move to field recording cannot be disregarded as “arbitrary.” A significant hint arrives in the understanding that field recording instantiates a transformation in understanding the relations between space, human culture, and energy: the translation of spatial relations to vibrational ones and back again. This dissertation hazards the speculation that this translation, also a transduction and a mediation, gestures at vibrational/energetic ontology. The dissertation hopes to open, with others, a cosmopolitical questioning concerning the relations between space, organization, activity, and energy. It argues that these relations become more difficult to ignore in disaster situations like 3.11. And this difficulty produces both reactionary and revolutionary responses in the humans involved, which,

in the case of 3.11, effectively means almost everyone on the entire globe. However, my scope is to those practitioners engaged in a particular “mode” of engagement with the spaces called field recording.

Given Stengers’s insistence on reserving for the cosmic a status of an unknown or reticent actor beyond our capacity to represent either subjectively or politically, this move to associate the cosmic with the ontologically energetic or vibrational may seem suspect. And, it is true, it is necessary to tread carefully on such an ontology...because if “ontology” is said to be a “ground,” it must be accepted that the ground is not stable. No naive ontology that claims to know unequivocally what “is” will do here. Or—even if vibration “is what is,” it is not possible to know what its potential is. To think ontologically does not mean we need to risk claims to “know” anything about what “is” from the transcendent position above—it cannot mean that. It means to engage with the real across the way it appears to us—mathematically, phenomenologically, vibrationally. In this respect, I would gesture at the metaphor Stengers uses: the cosmopolitical event is *a question that gives resonance to the unknown*.

I take this metaphor as instructive—or, it seems to me an opportunity to conceptualize this languaged motif in terms of the vibrational metaphor it utilizes. *To give resonance to the unknown* suggests that the unknown resonates. The unknown *remains unknown* while impacting and emerging as what appears. This sounds to me a great deal like the Buddhist concept of emptiness, or *śūnyatā*, a cosmic principle (and potentially cosmopolitical proposal) I will discuss more below, and one that is important for the understanding of field recording taken up here in the context of Japan. In short: *śūnyatā* names the way that everything is resonating, and that, as a resonance, there is nothing “in the middle” to situate an essence. And it is precisely through this “lack” of a grounded essence from which plenitude erupts and through which anything comes to

appear. The Heart Sutra puts it succinctly: “form is empty, emptiness is form.”⁸ Buddhisms can be said to have taken up various attempts to “give resonance to the unknown” within. And I am compelled by the notion that—as signaled by the bell always sounded first in Tantric ceremonies—the first thing to emerge from emptiness is vibration, sound/space thereafter. Resonance, the exchange of energy within and across mediums, appears entirely relevant to 3.11. And this “first the bell” quality of Tantrism appears relevant to the “first the field recorder” of these individuals.

I argue resonance “itself”—vibration, energy—must also undertake a cosmopolitical questioning in its various manifestations. And that spaces are in fact particular organizations of resonance. Spaces form imperative cosmopolitical questionings. Space is Other. Spaces are Others. As post-structuralism has taught, to be alive is to be taken up in a responsibility towards the other whether we are aware of it or not. And field recording potentially takes up this responsibility in a cosmopolitical way: by giving resonance to the unknown. The important question is simultaneously *how* and *why* cultural practitioners take up field recording in this way during 3.11. This answers, I think, come from both the cosmic and political scenes.

Thus, I turn for aid to the work of Marcus Boon and especially his recent *The Politics of Vibration* where, via Stengers, Boon conceptualizes music cosmopolitically as a mode of being with vibration.⁹ While this dissertation does not quite concern music (although music is an important aspect of Chapter Two), Boon offers surprising modes of approach for thinking the relation between field recording and space.

⁸ ‘The Heart Sūtra,’ LamRim, accessed May 25, 2024, <http://www.lamrim.com/hhdl/heartsutra.html>, accessed 05/07/13.

⁹ Marcus Boon, *The Politics of Vibration: Music as a Cosmopolitical Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

Boon, mobilizing the work of Catherine Christer Hennix, argues that the relationship between music, psyche, culture, politics, and the universe is not only phenomenological but *spatial*.¹⁰ Music is an organization of sound and therefore vibration. Musics select and occupy various kinds of “spatial” relations to vibration in pluralistic and historical ways. Or, as Boon puts it succinctly elsewhere, “What we call music is a practice of sonic access to that which presides the historical and philosophical organizing of the subject-object relation.”¹¹ This is not saying “all music matters”—on the contrary. Music, precisely as an engagement with vibration, is the site of a cosmopolitical historical unfolding deciding: who and what count as real; what actions with vibration/energy are permitted to whom and by whom; what relations with each other through vibration/energy are open and cared for in a society; and, importantly, what engagement with the cosmic other means. A macro question emerges: is the energy of music sublimated into a violence, or is it encountered as a mode of love with the other?

The key for the present study is Boon’s mobilization and more general analytical application of Hennix’s work on three mathematical terms: *topology*, *modality*, and *topos*. Briefly: a shape is said to be *topological* if it can be de/re-formed without its spatial properties being changed; a *modality* is a way of engaging specific protocols or movements through a topology; a *topos* is an abstract generalization of the rules or properties of different topologies (of thought, of mathematics, of shapes) that allows for radical resonances, bridges, insights across the differences to emerge. Hennix mobilizes these terms to understand relations with matrices of sound build on various mathematically deduced vibratory relations of the cosmos. Crudely put,

¹⁰ For an important recent collection of Hennix’s work, see Catherine Christer Hennix, *Poësy Matters and Other Matters*, 2 vols, (Brooklyn: Blank Forms Editions, 2019).

¹¹ Marcus Boon, ‘Abject Future: Tyler, the Creator, Azealia Banks and the Politics of Vibration’ (Keynote, School of Visual Arts, 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEQR4WuTx9k&t=1604s&ab_channel=SchoolofVisualArts.

she makes and listens to mathematically derived “drones.” Boon’s insight is to extrapolate from this and analyze how these spatial vibrational materialities are functioning even in cases where the cultural practitioners do not consider their practice, say, mathematically. Or that rather, mathematics is one among many openings within and across modernity to realize the wisdom in the experiences of music that situates themselves within vibration; and do so differently than the hegemonic modern subject does (where music is “arbitrary,” a matter of “preference” and “entertainment”).

Boon/Hennix, then, use “space” to understand music: a scale can be understood topologically, and so can a sound and its frequencies; a modality is a way of moving within that scale or set of frequencies; a topos is the arrival of a relationship between, speculatively, mind and matter (in this case, “the scale”) that allows for transformations and resonant navigations to occur. Musical experience is therefore related to the development of *topoi*—bridges between mind, sonic organization, and the vibrant cosmos. The challenge and opportunity this dissertation takes up, then, is to add the spatial vibratory understanding of music to a practice that deals with vibratory problems of space. Spaces are understood as *topological*; they have particular arrangements that are capable of radical shifts. These shifts are effected by particular *modalities* of encounter with that space; practices of space become improvizatory, not in an “aleatory” way, but in an experimentation with a particular mode engaging the particular shifting contours of that space. And these modalities may effect *topoi*—abstract and delicate emergences—between mind, modality, and matter that allows for radical bridges between fields of reality enabling transformations regarding how spaces are navigated and understood. Where it appeared surprising to apply spatial understandings to vibration, I attempt to make the move back by retaining a vibrational understanding of these spatial concepts. In the same way it appeared

counter-intuitive to think something like vibration—apparently purely unstable, time-based, flux-bound—spatially, I expect it may at first appear counter-intuitive that something apparently purely stable, outside time, and eternally solid can be thought energetically or vibrationally.

Again, when I say “improvisational” I do not mean “aleatory.” Field recording is often considered “aleatory” because it adds a vibratory aspect to space—in other words, vibration is considered the added “aleatory” element to an otherwise solid spatial “background.” For some, this “aleatory” quality reveals the most “radical” a-social absolute music (sound-in-itself discourses). For others, it reveals the possibility of the most “radical” socially determinant modifications (acoustic ecology discourse). In each case, field recording seems special for either its “exchange value” (a pretty artwork) or its “use value” (to automatically show something)—both ideologies of liberal capitalism (on the consumption side and the production side). In other words, both are antimonies dominated by the same reification: each consider that their work offers what is “merely there.” They think they are both a way out of the subjectivist bind, but they merely reinforce it in pernicious ways.

To say field recording is not (or at least not always, or not potentially only) “aleatory” but modal contradicts these contemporary conceptions of field recording which both argue they show an “open time” (and there ideologically “open horizon”) in space. What a cosmopolitical field recording practice sustains is different: a speculative turning and working of a relation to a space via transductions and honings. The “sounds” are not “just there;” rather, vibrations are *made* (not only by us!). A space is engaged such that particular arrangements of occupying that space are explored in conjunction with what the space itself fosters or restricts. Expressions of movements and soundings are then understood as various potential modalities of the vibrational expression of the potential energy and modalities in that space, which, crucially, field recordings

transduce. Spaces “contain” energy. Field recording potentially engages what this containment is and how the “is” of this containment is concomitant with the social/imaginal arrangements that occupy the space—or how spaces’ contained energies hint at entirely different social relations to a space that recognizes its “being contained” by the space. What every space affords is afforded by an “unknown”: the energies it contains and sustains.

Field recording attempts to give resonance to the unknown—to negotiate and make decisions about what a particular space is “in the presence of” that which is outside the human which nonetheless plays a pivotal role in how humans might ethically inhabit it. Indeed, *field*—a topological space—is taken seriously here as a part of field recording, and therefore human activity (humans, human bodies, and “humanity,” too) is considered not to “inhabit” space but to be emergences *of* space. Field recording is here understood as attending to topologies via modal intra-activities such that topoi of transformation occur. A topos is a rendering of the space arriving from the structure of the space, which is itself vibrational, allowing for a reconfiguration of how that space and the self in it are felt, considered, performed.

III

Field recording in Tōhoku after 3.11 is filled with the politics of vibration. Tōhoku was affected by multiple kinds of vibration which altered its material and imaginal organization. In this, Tōhoku itself can be thought of topologically; or, “Tōhoku” is a topological structure within the topology that is the geography. The Tōhoku topology is in one sense its infrastructure, the lines that enable movement of materials, people, information. It is in another sense therefore also a particular orchestration of the energies inherent in that system and borrowed from the land in

translational ways. And therefore, the the physical and subjective relations—hailings, patterns, habits—are also part of this topology as that which the structure demands.

The triple disasters threw this topology into a different configuration, radically affecting *what* eastern Tōhoku is. Tōhoku was “stretched,” shaped differently. The shock to this structure is concomitant with a shock to the subject. And one can think of Japan also as a topology in which Tōhoku is set, so that it is impossible to ignore the way the Tōhoku event de/re-formed the relations between Tōhoku, the nation, the land, and the people. These differences were felt at the level of the subject and its interpretations of the body re-emerging in this radical shift. As mentioned, a topology is capable of maintaining a certain logic or structure even while undergoing radical transformation. The possible differences of a sets of relations, behaviors, habits, imaginaries—and therefore power structures, subjectivizations, worldings, etc.—were therefore experienced within a collapse that nonetheless registers that difference and reacts to it. It is therefore appropriate to say that Tōhoku, Japan, and subjectivity experienced a topological transformation in the events of 3.11 and that responses to 3.11 must be considered within this difference.

These responses involve a subjective relationship to energy, to that which appears from outside the subject, which nonetheless is shown to be capable of re-orientating or de-familiarizing the subject’s relationship with itself. Many attempt to utilize momentum and have the “stretched” Tōhoku snap back into place. In this, Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection is important. Kristeva writes, “apocalypse...seems to me rooted...on the fragile border...where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.”¹² Abjection is the experience of disgust at that which

¹² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 207.

agitates the border between the subject (the border that is the subject) and “its” world. The force of “abject horrors”—blood, darkness, corpses—hint at what is more deeply and “properly” abject to the subject: that which I call “I” is not the way that I am; the way I am is always in excess of what I say I am to and for myself. Abjection is the attempt to get rid of the incursion of what appears as if from “outside our being.” It is an experience that wells up from the unconscious and must be navigated with care. I understand the abject to occur within the psyche’s response *to* the intensive, energetic activity of the psychic and spatial apparatuses. Indeed, Freud’s early work is explicitly a study of psycho-energetic forces. And vibrational culture, as Kristeva offers and Boon explores—whether it be music, dance, or even forms of visual relations to energies—are ways of placing or displacing the psyche’s relation to its intensity. More than this, the intensity *is* resonant between the inside/outside and this is precisely what appears abject.

Abjection becomes a truly sticky problem within modern secularism, as Kristeva asserts, because of long and difficult shifts in cultural relations to alterity: from “archaic” worldings of sound and figure, from rituals of power and offering, from State-related rituals and their religious institutions, and now modern “rituals” that appear to do everything in their power to hide the negotiation with alterity from themselves and whose purpose nevertheless remains a cathartic relationship to energy. These are the Freudian ruins of our unconscious—the deep frequencies we must play with. And Kristeva asserts the displacement of alterity in modernity only increases the enigma and power of these rituals to govern and traumatize our relationship to our own subjective intensities and our necessarily intensive relations to the Other that is inside/outside the self. This in turn creates psychic states all-too familiar to many today, include me: depression, cynicism, apathy. Or, violent responses: control, aggression, pandering.

It is not surprising, then, that the abject is associated with disaster. Disaster is an incredible incursion of energy from the “outside.” The pain of disaster—in responses of all kinds: affected, onlookers, conservative, progressive—is real and enormous. And this pain must be treated with care. I hope to bring this care to the following claim: the “modern abject” has a constitutive role in the constellation of the most famous and influential responses to 3.11—what could be called the “3.11 canon.”

A good summary of these responses can be found in the introduction to a 2014 collection of essays on 3.11, *When the Tsunami Came to Shore*.¹³ The introduction, by Roy Starrs, places as its keystone the infamous and infuriating comment by the right-wing politician Ishihara Shintarō, that 3.11 was a “heavenly punishment,” *tenbatsu*.¹⁴ As Fabio Rambelli in the same volume shows, the comment repeats an Edo-period Confucianist orientation—the notion being that the social order upsets the mandate of a heavenly order and therefore a punishment is “automatically” dolled out.¹⁵ In this case, it is not clear who is deserving of punishment given that, first, Ishihara is apparently among those leading the national way; and, second, it is completely absurd to say that those killed or displaced during 3.11 are bearing what was coming to them on behalf of the nation. The claim must be understood psychoanalytically: a deep anxiety and guilt in toeing the Superegoic line manifests in a sadistic relationship to the other. In this quintessential formulation of Girardian sacrificial structure, something must be sacrificed for the order of things to continue; the knowledge that the order is contingent must be put away, put down.¹⁶ In other words, the threat from the outside is registered but a capitulation to the subject

¹³ Roy Starrs, ed., *When the Tsunami Came to Shore: Culture and Disaster in Japan* (Leiden ; Boston: Global Oriental, 2014).

¹⁴ Starrs, ‘Cultural Responses,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 3.

¹⁵ Rambelli, ‘Gods, Dragons, Catfish,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 53.

¹⁶ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory, John Hopkins paperbacks ed., (Baltimore: Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979).

and its borders is doubled down on, causing the other to become the enemy. There is another perplexing layer: Ishihara's statement was widely criticized. Yet voter turnout, for example, in Japan continues to be low and right-wing factions, to a broad swath of the public's dismay, continue to dominate what can only in the thinnest sense be called Japan's democratic process.

Also perplexing is the way Starrs, while admonishing Ishihara, nonetheless asserts his statement represents a particular transhistorical religious baseline response to disaster—including within secularism. I don't think this is the case; it certainly doesn't *have* to be the case. The claim is, I think, also symptomatically modern: all of history has ended and is known; we are only undergoing deflated repetitions of the same. This misconstrues our apathetic failures with a "truth." In one sense, then, Starrs is all too right in observing the way the Girardian sacrificial logic continues to pervade secular culture. On the other hand, religious and secular responses to disaster have been highly variegated, especially among folk spirituality and non-writing indigenous cultures, a line I cannot demonstrate here. But those I work with here attest to this difference in, I will argue, a "post-secular" mode, a hint of the a-modern. Their field recording practice is illegible and threatening to national mythical frameworks given the way they live alternatives to the secular abjection of disaster in the wake of its actual violence.

What is more pertinent here is the way Starrs, cutting the past short, cuts the future short too by characterizing the sacrificial keystone of disaster as deriving from human and nonhuman essences. Starrs writes, "I would argue that human responses to disaster tend to be broadly similar in the first instance—that is, on the immediate, instinctive level where the primal will to survive operates—but that cultural differences come into play shortly afterwards, at the moment when the victims begin to interpret their experiences and develop psychological and ideological

strategies for coping with them.”¹⁷ I think understanding responses to disaster within ideological terms is highly important. However, I do not follow Starrs in the clean binary of “instincts” vs “psychology.” First, it is dangerous to mystify instincts, as if we have direct access to them, as if they weren’t themselves complex historico-biological tendencies, as if *drives* (*Triebe*) do not remain a problem in subjective life. The claim that they are “unmediated” and “base” is a mediated, ideological claim. “Drives/Instincts” remain relations with energy, and therefore must be filled with ambivalences and joys, fears, and longings, refusals—as they are on the levels we can observe. And “psychology,” the other side of the binary, is equally essentialized. Heidegger, in his *Being and Time*, has long-since dismissed thinking the human “psychologically.” Here, “psychology”/“ideology” seems a rough stand in for “subjectivity”—but again, why must subjectivity be considered an immovable, deterministic a-historical structure? Is our subjection to subjectivity not precisely the problem and are there not other ways of *becoming an ethical subject*? My wager, with poststructuralist thinkers, is that this becoming-subjectively-ethical involves a relationship to alterity, precisely what is closed off in the binary “instincts vs psychology.” Instincts: the pleasure principle (balance). Psychology: the death drive (imbalance). We must think “beyond the pleasure principle” while being vigilant of the machines of meaning and terror that the death drive builds. We must try built meaning/order “in resonance with the unknown.” Or, as Deleuze and Guattari put it: “invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive.”¹⁸ Put simply, in a strange and distorted mirroring, Starrs’s analysis repeats Ishihara’s abject right-wing logic: for psychology, the sacrifice is necessary.

¹⁷ Starrs, ‘Cultural Responses,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 8.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2007), 160. And the very next sentences will be crucial for the thinking, discussed below, of what field recording means in this dissertation: “Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an

The responses on the opposite side of the canon are no more reassuring. Takahashi Matsuo is a prolific poet who writes about his homoeroticism. He represents a kind of “left” gesture to create an inclusive national discourse, including in his sweeping 2011 retrospective of the history of Japanese poetry *From Susanoo to 3/11*. Takahashi claims that “the unparalleled disaster that brought about this wasteland [i.e. “3.11”], has as its epicentre the unbounded desire of each and every one of us in Japan.”¹⁹ Where Ishihara’s claim inherited from State-Confucianism, Takahashi’s clearly inherits from what can be called a “capitalo-Buddhism.” Takahashi’s position is synonymous with the dominant modern “left” response—guilt and shame accompany *self*-punishment. Takahashi is speaking of capitalism and consumerism. But his characterization of the issue being *unbounded desire* is all too typical of moralistic claims regarding capitalism and desire. The problem is apparently desire itself, which capitalism exploits and opens up. This is a quintessentially modern abject response, which sees desire (another name for intensity/energy) guiltily as an “other in the self” to be violently controlled. The “unboundedness” of capitalist desire is only called such *because it is so bounded* by capitalism. It is precisely the way desire *exceeds* the capitalist constrictions that is terrifying. And again, Takahashi’s critique, by asserting he addresses “everyone in Japan,” implies a kind of violent state of exception for Tōhoku. Are Eastern Tohokians included as “every one of us in Japan,” and if so, is their suffering still a punishment, and if not, why do they suffer “outside?”

Takahashi repeatedly names the abject: “wasteland.” Where is this wasteland? He names it again when, in a long 2011 poem, he asserts nuclear energy is a reanimated corpse seeking

entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor,” Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 160.

¹⁹ Quoted in, Angles, ‘Now,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 130.

revenge.²⁰ By releasing this monster, we are ultimately unforgivable, not worthy of “purification,” another theme of the abject: “The flow of tears eventually purifies the one who weeps / But we are not comforted, we are not purified / The reason is that our grievances and protests / Are finally against ourselves, our avarice, and our idleness.”²¹ While this is in some sense true, it also, in its performative proclamation, represents not only a dangerous fatalism but, interpreted psychoanalytically, carries a surplus enjoyment where the very self-flagellation (before another Superego) administers the otherwise vilified relation to desire. The self-destruction about the lack of ability to grieve and therefore change becomes the very condition of enjoyment, of self-creation. But why can’t grief be rejuvenating, healing, transformative in precisely such a circumstance as ours? What would it mean to take on, if in a mediated way, the suffering of others? What would it mean to say *we live/are the suffering of others*? This is indeed part of what a “bodhisattva” is. Why aren’t we/they deserving of this forgiveness?

And yet, the analysis offered by Angles is typical: Takahashi is asserting we are out-of-balance with nature.²² This is the typical “left” ecological response today: that “humanity” must return to seeing itself as “inside” Nature despite running amok with it; we must be punished, become puritanical, and repent our hubris; we must get back “inside” the “outside.” Notice that Angles analysis also repeats Takahashi’s abjection, if in a distorted way, in that the “punishment” discourse is now only just visibly hovering in the background: we must be beaten back into *our place*. Is “nature” in any sense “ours”? Again, the problematic of *subjectivity* is lost—i.e. a full

²⁰ Takahashi writes, “the buried, anguished corpse has regained its breath/And has returned, harboring its anxiety and fear for revenge,” quoted in, Angles, ‘Now,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 130.

²¹ Angles, ‘Now,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 130-131.

²² Angles writes, “In some ways, this rhetoric might sound at first like the nationalistic ‘luxury is the enemy’ kind of rhetoric used to justify the rationing system during the Second World War, but in Takahashi’s case, the object of his criticism is a civilization that lives out of balance with nature, placing its own consumerist needs and short-lived comfort before the well-being of the environment and even the world in general,” Angles, ‘Now,’ *When the Tsunami Came*, 130.

admonishment of “myself” only re-inscribes a transcendent position that allows us to “reject”/abject the problematic that is ourselves. We must dismantle this binary—nature vs human—and fight against its effort to debase and humiliate *both* “us” and the “non-human” too. What does it mean instead, *not* to strive to *humble*—to abase—but to *be* humble? It is precisely this refusal to be humble, to be responsible, that allows a nuclear facility to be built on the tsunami prone coast. Is it possible to say we are *both* inside and outside alterity? Is it possible to say that a kind of alterity is constitutive of reality? We must say: *the inside and outside are the same*. This is what I will be arguing, introduced here in section IV, then throughout the chapters.

I find both these and other Japan-based responses to 3.11 and the critical analyses to those responses are often symptomatic of the modern abject. In the case of the “direct” responses, a repetitious traumatic tautology is claimed: we are lost because we are lost. Note this coincides with Japan’s “Lost Decades.” They describe a kind of loss as a lamentable requirement, but it is precisely in that lament that the tautology is affirmed. To put it strangely: this loss is gained at the *expense* of (within the *sacrifice*) of the other. The ensuing academic analyses seem only to then put into an “objective” and “neutral” language what these “direct” response say so flippantly: we are indeed lost and only another sacrifice will allow us to bear the pain of finding our way back. Both the responses and the analyses seem to throw up their hands (and throw up (abject!) their desire) for various versions of cynical dismay and *cynical display* (which gives surplus enjoyment) which contains the various temporal ideas of “recovered progress” (back to, away from, towards again) such that the present can truly disappear (thereby *satisfying* the cynicism). Thus, what is at work here is a *sacrifice* of the other such that a self-essential “fullness/lossness” is claimed *in the name of* the other but *for the sake of* the self. They speak *for* an other (a natural order, a victim) from a position of illusory power while claiming to

only speak *of* it from a position of fallibility. Another way of putting it is in the Girardian language of Jean-Pierre Dupuy: that these secular responses bear “the mark of the sacred” in the way they attempt to find some transcendent meaning *through* the Other called “disaster.” Disaster is utilized to assert a transcendent claim, a “meaning from above” that must be “read” in the destruction. While I will assert in a moment there is not “*a* meaning” to be “read” but a “call” through which vibration emerges, Dupuy’s claim that ideology feeds off disaster is well warranted.

I have thus returned to Stengers’s warning: the Other is not that which offers itself as a ground for our representative assembly nor as that which can be the bar for what representation is. Throughout the dissertation I will apply this to thinking ontology, depropriation, and unowned collectivity—but for now, it is important to note that all of the above responses are taking part in precisely what Stengers warns against: the aim to find what is “good for all.” Certainly, the claims above, symptomatically, state, “this is what is bad for all.” We must pay attention to this flip while recognizing its effort to nonetheless secure a dominating, rule-based position. In sum, it is precisely through our (*masculine*) cynical apathy today that we (phallogocentrically) make claims for what is “good/bad for all.” This dominates our subjectivity in an effort to find a stable ground while dominating the Other despite all claims to be thinking *for* it.

And this final claim—about making claims for and in the name of the Other—allows me to pivot to what Stengers’s shows is the contemporary result of the “good for all” discourse, namely “objectivity.” The logic of “objectivity”—describing the disasters “objectively”—fills the public institutions that have quickly filled up the ambiguous post-disaster eastern Tōhoku spaces. I find it deeply symptomatic that, despite the calls for punishment, sacrifice, retribution, revenge, rage, depression, repentance, and for a subjectivity whipping itself into shape to be its

own master at the whip—despite this, *objectivity* is what *dominates*. We hope to *defer* to this objectivity. We hope it will solve the problems. We still hope the Superego will reveal Himself in the material world. There is something *there*; it is everywhere—but it is not a He. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, it is precisely in the moments that choice becomes an imperative that we complain our societies are becoming less free and seek a quick fix. This is part of the anxiety regarding ecological crisis and the discourses of objectivity that follow them. Objectivity is the ultimate expression of the modern subjective desire to administer what is good for all. It is the ultimate expression of the attempt to repress and/or idealize—that is, reduce, appropriate, dominate—the other. There is a big difference between the “objectivity” that a vulgar “Enlightenment” seeks—the reduction of things to singular, mute, matter, on the one hand—and the post-Enlightenment “objects” of object oriented ontology—which in fact hazards that all “objects” are like transcendental “subjects,” things withdrawn from each other and in themselves even as and because they are interacting. This informs my thinking (section IV). The topology of space is a transformative, vibrating, translation, transductive, plural, historical “real.”

Again, the dream of/for objectivity slowly creeps into and dominates post-disaster eastern Tōhoku spaces. From disaster monuments to information centers, national television programs to state policy, the “healing” that these institutions offer often unconsciously reproduces the suffering, guilty subject. It is within the often celebrated and “critical” solutions that the problem of today reproduces itself. And locally decried actions go on anyway. Each chapter introduces a “disaster monument/exhibit/information center” (they are often rolled into one) as the background for the chapter’s critique. In Chapter One it is tsunami walls and the “objectified” (made to appear innocuous) coastal geographic history in tsunami information centers. The tsunami walls are abhorred by many along the coast. In Chapter Two it is “disaster prevention”

(as if the earth's magma could stop churning) in a monument-cum-exhibit of an affected school where the history of the town is sacrificed for a future the local people don't want. In Chapter Three it is radiation readings online and in public institutions across Fukushima, readings that aim to convey "everything is fine, nothing has changed" when a great deal changed indeed. The field recordists in each chapter combat the "subjectivist/objectivist" tendency.

And yet they are combated in turn by the national "objective" progress discourse called "recovery" *fukkō* 復興. "Recovery" is the discursive token of the regime of objective equivalence used to describe all the actions I just mentioned: the walls/the capitalist future on town land/the radiation numbers everywhere: all recovery. That "recovery" can apply to all cases is part of the regime's deception. "Recovery" is the "quick fix." This is not to say institutions that celebrate or seek "recovery" are intentionally malevolent. What is done is largely done with the utmost good faith. The way forward is not made by playing a dualistic, moralistic blame game. But the "tsunami's preservation" or the "information on fallout" have performative repercussions conditioned by the hegemonies I'm trying to outline. These descriptive acts are always, as Judith Butler outline, prescriptive acts too. The tsunami was this high—we've got you covered: go work here again. The land is this size—it's up for sale: it is no longer yours. Radiation is this level—that's not dangerous: go on as if it is not there. They bear the mark of the modern abject's sacred: the information, preservation, and "prevention" contain, both in terms of absenting and reproducing, the interpretation of the disasters' violences as an act of power that sacrifices those on whose behalf the containment is made.²³ "Recovery" asserts the capital-nation-state knows what's good for all.

²³ See Dupuy's description of this double movement of sacred "containment" here: Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

It does not have to be this way. And there are facets of thinking and acting throughout Japanese history where it wasn't this way. Post-Marxist historian Amino Yoshihiko explores many counter-state formations: from itinerant groups to merchant organizations, seafarers, and religious groups.²⁴ The cult of Amaterasu, the Emperor, and the State was a violent though slow-moving, incomplete, and often threatened force. And while recently in Japan the Ainu and Ryūkyū populations are asserting their historical and contemporary autonomy from the Japanese state, Tōhoku, too, was for much of Japanese history “outside” the state even when “inside” it. Tōhoku was the state’s “other.” And there are growing voices, including recently by the individual I discuss in Chapter Two, who, given confidence by the Ainu/Ryūkyū assertions, assert that Tōhoku bears a similar right to its autonomy (as the Ainu/Ryūkyū). (Whether this “similarity” erupts in a counter-organization or in more autonomous states remains to be seen.) Amino, who I reference again, discusses an intriguing history of difference related to the *abject* in Tōhoku: whereas in early medieval Yamato the afterbirth placenta was sealed and taken deep into mountains, there is evidence showing that in “Tōhoku” the placenta was buried under the home’s front entrance door frame so that people would “step on it” and make the child, who relates to that placenta by association (association being part of an ongoing magical unconscious), stronger.²⁵

I have found that a Tohokian difference is sustained in local associations with 3.11, which I explore in the chapters as each individual and their practice confronts/departs from the State. In other words, there is a colonial kind of relationship unfolding between Tōhoku and Tokyo, a relationship also exacerbated and “stretched” (changed) in 3.11. Indeed, Tōhoku is described by

²⁴ In English, see, for example, Yoshihiko Amino, *Rethinking Japanese History*, trans. Alan S. Christy (Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan, 2012).

²⁵ Amino, *Rethinking*, 182-183, n19.

critical scholars in Japan as an intra-national colony whose structure of domination is modeled on the early 1900s domination of Manchuria, Korea, the Philippines, etc. Oguma Eiji's work is exemplary here. Oguma spells out that the postwar history of rice mono-culturalization, industrialization, and the proletarianization of Tōhoku are synonymous; wartime rice rules are still in effect.²⁶ And, it is a now often cited, important fact that every "drop" of Fukushima Dai-ichi's electric power was sent straight to Tokyo. Oguma also, in his 1996 *The Origin of the Myth of the Homogeneous Nation*, makes a surprising claim: the myth is young and was only secured after WWII.²⁷ This process, however, got under way during the Meiji "Restoration" (1868-1912), also relatively recently. Thus, Karatani Kōjin's own *Origin*, where Karatani asserts the perspectives, conceits, and subjective formations of modernity were disseminated in artistic conventions during the Meiji period.²⁸ And, especially important for my purposes here, Jared Figal, in his 2000 *Monsters and Civilization*, argues, exhaustively and assertively, that the Meiji state officials and intellectuals both suppressed and organized, objectified and re-configured the diversity of folk beliefs at the turn of the Meiji "Restoration."²⁹ Figal argues Japan's modernity appropriated and sublimated the negotiations with alterity in the multiplicity of folk beliefs into a single, unified understanding of "spirit" and "Japan." It is precisely this quality of modernity that leads to the modern abject.

It is a problem, then, of subjectivity—or rather, it is necessary to problematize subjectivity, to re-think of it in terms of its disposition towards/as the Other. The colonial and

²⁶ Oguma Eiji, 'The Hidden Face of Disaster: 3.11, the Historical Structure and Future of Japan's Northeast,' *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol 9, issue 31, no 6, August 1, 2011.

²⁷ Oguma Eiji, *A Genealogy of 'Japanese' Self-Images*, English ed, Japanese Society Series (Melbourne : Portland, Or: Trans Pacific Press, 2002).

²⁸ Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1993).

²⁹ Gerald A. Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*, Asia-Pacific (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

homogenizing forces of modernity and Tokyo occur on that subjective plain, *in that field called subjectivity*, often in extremely direct ways. One of the individuals I spoke with during fieldwork in 2018-19, a mother of one of the main informants, sat on a jury deciding how much an individual should receive in payment based on the “objective severity” of their “mental health” “determined by” the tsunami. While diligently attempting to secure fair treatment within this system, she felt it was wrongheaded. Somehow, to consider money as a universal translator for trauma, on the one hand, and individualizing and objectifying mental states, on the other, were *two sides of the same coin*. That is, the mental difficulties of the participants were tied to the supposed solution. She implied, radically and plainly, that other configurations are not only possible, but imaginable, potentially there, desirable. In this case, especially, this person lamented the absence of any consideration of the impacts on the lack of collectivity on mental health. Many of the individuals seeking reparations were woefully isolated. Many had never lived in cities before and were unfamiliar with and unwilling to submit to the demands of that topology—i.e., they were isolated too.

I want to focus on the phrase this individual used—*two sides of the same coin*—because it has become the touchstone—indeed, the *topos*—of my own thinking. The phrase is 表裏一体 *hyōri-ittai*, and it literally reads, “the front and back (are) a single body.” It is in this sense that the individual was using it. The phrase asserts that two things normatively considered separate are, quite simply, *the same*. This person shared the phrase in sadness, but also in hope. In the case given, society was the “front,” and the mind “the back.”

The phrase is part of a post-Buddhist constellation of everyday thinking in Japan, and it has become my own keystone. In thinking about space, energy, and subjectivity, this idea also appears: “the inside and outside are one and the same.” The remainder of the introduction will

consider how, after 3.11, this thinking affords a topos-like foothold on a considerably shakier but more energetic path departing from structural abjections/“subjections” of capital-nation-state modernity and how this relates to the field recording, energy, and space constellations taken up in the chapters.

IV

As Timothy Morton asserts, both “Nature” and “Matter” must be rejected as concepts.³⁰ They both reify. What animates us arrives from in here—the alterity within—and out there—the alterity without. At best, as Spivak writes, these terms (Nature/Matter) are what “we provide for ourselves [as] transcendental figurations of what we think is the origin of this animating gift of animation, if there is any: Mother, Nation, God, Nature. These are names of alterity, some more radical than others.”³¹ I am hazarding another name called the energetic/vibrational cosmos, a risk that attempts to curve the transcendental while retaining the sense that I still participate in an act of naming. This name witnesses the ongoing inquiries of science into the ambiguity and vibrational quality of what *is*—that there is no place of witnessing that does not affect and be affected by what is witnessed and that vibrational energies manifest what is witnessed—as it also witnesses human relations with alterity—that, referencing Spivak again, it is not just our obligation to be responsible towards the other but our “right,” our joy, our love. I think this responsibility is always also a response-ability, as Donna Haraway calls it: how to live and die well.³² The attunement to this cosmic and groundless ground might erupt from that “third space”

³⁰ Timothy Morton, ‘Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology’, *Qui Parle* 19, no. 2 (2011): 163–90.

³¹ Spivak, “Planet,” 338-339.

³² Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Paradigm 8 (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

described by Gregory Bateson: a futurity emerging between “established materialism, with its quantitative thinking, applied science, and ‘controlled’ experiments on one side, and...romantic supernaturalism on the other.”³³ Thus, the realm of new “sacred.” With the rise of the “new religions” in Japan (many of which I would call exploitative capitalo-spiritualisms) and the re-invigoration of fundamentalist monotheisms the world over alongside the ongoing and impending ecocides wrought by secular capitalist apathy alongside the growing “new barbarism” that Stengers defines—with the mixing of this potent and terrible combination, the imperative to think this “sacred” becomes all the more acute.

Being is lived as a response to the other—this is the first instance of the inside and outside are one and the same. Such a response-ability reorganizes the modern subject’s relation to what only appears as arriving from “outside” it. The abject is mitigated such that there is a willingness to be exposed. This is where healing is. The Other, the energy within the self, is no longer experienced as (only) painful. This is a primary issue (the most radical) psychoanalysis attempts to address. As Kristeva writes, in a comment appropriate to questions concerning disaster: “The border between abjection and the sacred, between desire and knowledge, between death and society, can be faced squarely, uttered without sham innocence or modest self-effacement, provided one sees in it an incidence of man’s particularity as mortal and speaking. ‘There is an abject’ is henceforth stated as, ‘I am abject, that is, mortal and speaking.’”³⁴ Facing this border, this incidence of humanity as a temporal composer/composed, amounts to engaging a field. The border, a horizontal line, vibrating. A space.

Deleuze and Guattari speculate as to how this border exists. The universe is a composed of blocs of sensations emerging from and being concomitant with the ontological. The subject is

³³ Quoted in Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, 78.

³⁴ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 88.

aware of affectations, perceptions, and concepts; it experiences and, hopefully, interprets. But the subject is laced with “nonhuman becomings” of bodily and psychic affective becomings and is exposed to the milieu’s organizations of energy, or “precepts.” A practice of attunement can, “wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject [and] wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another: to extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations.”³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari are speaking of art here, but I consider a space a bloc of sensations. As space, it is there, but in its engagement the there-ness-es of the space are revealed. The space and “us” are a bloc of sensations. A topology. Unlike art, which creates its own blocs with materials and decisions called “styles,” the materiality is always-already there as part of space, and therefore the “style” of being in a space is more appropriately named the modality of navigating a topology.

Two further aids from Deleuze and Guattari. First, periodicity, resonance, and withdrawal—thus, modalities of *vibration* are named as the most “basic” yet crucial means of participating in blocs of sensation, fields of relation. There is a convergence with *the way* reality appears and *what* reality is: vibration. Second, the relationship of this *how* with the *what* is named “void:” “blocs need pockets of air and emptiness, because even the void is sensation. All sensation is composed with the void in composing itself with itself, and everything holds together on earth and in the air, and preserves the void, is preserved in the void by preserving itself.”³⁶ Field recording potentially partakes in a means of attunement to this (to use Karen Barad’s term) intra-activity of reality, emergence, and milieu. Field recording is a way of focusing on the periodicities, resonances, and withdrawals of space and one’s actions and

³⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell III, European Perspectives (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 167.

³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Philosophy*, 165.

sensations there as well as a way of attune to how all of this comes from and melts back into the earth, the air, the groundless ground, the vibrational void. Earth remains an alterity, and yet, like our body, is a structure within certain energetic configurations and potentials; it holds and reflects, releases and diffracts. The air remains an alterity, and yet, like our mind, is a medium that shapes and is shaped by energy, that rides and is the riding of flows of intensity. To be in this way is to be spatial—modes of structured intensities made particle-like; modes of flows of intensity made wave-like. The inside and outside are one and the same.

This unfolds in a problematic of “a life.” A great deal of post-Delueze and Guattari work will make claims as I did of ontology. However, the why and the how of the subject are often lost. And sound studies frequently deploy the fantasy that the subject will disappear through sound—an ideology linked with the logic of the subject *par excellence*! A lot of field recording practice shares this problem. I want to think instead with the mind as a way we expressing to ourselves our relations with the other. Attempting to “do away with” myself is symptomatic. I am part of the field that appears; I appear as part of the field. Thus: what does it feel like to attune to becoming-spatial? why do people take this up in certain ways? This is where *topos* is a crucial concept—a topos is precisely the becoming-other of the psyche, an abstract set of resonances and withdrawals developed out of a periodic inquiry and expression of the relations between me and the other. Field recording potentially regards itself as being disposed to the development of a topos, a psychic/material/energetic abstraction arising out of practice. Practice is the stylization of a relation to the other(s) in/as space. This is effectively what Boon explores in the *Politics of Vibration* as the prominence of “target states” of practice, which many modern subjects today are deeply ambivalent about. Target states—their fascination, reification, and abjection—are part of the contemporary politics of vibration.

And yet target states are where modal relations with the other are made. I take up Hennix's term "tactics of attention" here to describe what a modal field recording is. Hennix's term refers to the subtle journey within particular experiences of music that attend to the contours of that which appears (simultaneously as "music," as highly psychotropic yet aware "target states," as collective "moods"). This subtle journey is what she calls "controlled acts of intuition" that are capable of attuning to alterity to modify the unconscious so that this attunement can be "crystallized" into configurations that are brought to bear on the more familiar experience of subjective awareness.³⁷ It's not just "listening to music" or "a space" for a while, but a semi-conscious yet directed, co-emerging improvisational intentionality—not "the subject's" Husserlian "intention", but a split intention that arrives both with mind and the physics of vibration. The hope is that our fantasies about who "we" are or what reality "is"—and the violences and abjections on which those fantasies rely—will, in a sense, evaporate or be redirected. The hope is also the joy because it means arriving at compassion for everything energetic—which is everything, including violent energies like earthquakes and tsunami and radiation—rather than an abjection of it. That is, we can recognize the suffering and injustices

³⁷ Hennix writes, "Maybe the most vivid of the Modalities of Modal Music is the Modality of Infinity. The idea of the infinite refers to an unending process, that is, a process without any conceivable end, reaching out toward the Future, while constantly leaving the Past pulsing behind. Here, one can find the basic substance of the intuition of Time as it reveals itself in its most undisturbed form. But although Time might be the most requisite part of music, there are nonetheless equally vivid and important vertical tactics of attention, each requiring its specific spectra of Modalities, all of which unfold with the directed spreads of time. It is the liberation of the latter Modalities that the Creative Subject constructs when he is subject to an activity involving the 2 Basic Acts of Intuitionism.... Here, the mind is cleaned from its excess garbage by controlled acts of intuitions and the vertical Modalities crystallize out to abstract configurations of intensions and arrow diagrams "Intuitionist," quoted in Boon, *Vibration*, 91. And, I have also borrowed the language of "cystallization" from Boon, who explains Hennix's claim by saying that tactics of attention "impl[ies] practices by which the subject comes into being in relation to a non-linguistic, non-knowledge. ...Because awareness is evolving or crystallizing, there is the sense in which a knowledge beyond correlation is being constructed iteratively," 'The Drone of the Real', (YouTube video, 2015), 27:32-27:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7jMpcoDVWo0>.

these events produce are there without using the “earth disasters” as excuses to abject that suffering and injustice, without re-directing it. One acknowledges vibration is constitutive.

Out of time emerges an idea and experience of vibration—and, I wager, space. The point here is not to “be the earthquake” or refuse any sense of pain as being “illusory.” Pain is energetic and real too. And, as Haraway discusses, hard choices must be made that effect the lives and deaths of not “just” us—we must *share suffering*.³⁸ And where music has a vibrational structure that offers itself to tactics of attention, to this “sharing,” a space offers itself to be explored and taken up. With field recording, one must listen to that which makes sound in the space for the space’s topology to emerge—and what makes sound can be others of all kind, as well as yourself, and the space “itself” with air, echoes, and waves. This is why field recording is less interested in “events” and more interested in a slow and recursive echoing of space, whether that be repeated listenings or recursive walkings of that space or both—again, with others, with yourself, with the space. Through this modal recursivity a topos might emerge: an abstraction of the space that is rendered as one moves about it, a topos emerging as a psychotropic “target state” which can then be explored within a tactics of awareness.

Recall that a topos is a purely abstract “field” in which translations between topologies are made or insights into similarities are felt. That topos might appear in “meditative” ways or “collective” ways—individual ways or dividual ways, to reference Deleuze and Guattari—depending on the tactics, which would also shift the “meaning” or expression of the field

³⁸ Haraway, “Companion-species worlds are turtles all the way down. Far from reducing everything to a soup of post- (or pre-) modern complexity in which anything ends up permitted, companion-species approaches must actually engage in cosmopolitics, articulating bodies to some bodies and not others, nourishing some worlds and not others, and bearing the mortal consequences. Respect is *respecere*—looking back, holding in regard, understanding that meeting the look of the other is a condition of having face oneself. All of this is what I am calling ‘sharing suffering.’ It is not a game but more like what Charis Thompson calls ontological choreography,” *Species*, 88. Can space not be thought of as a “companion species” that holds other companion species—can field recording as a “art” practice not be a means of attuning to this sharing? I think so.

recording act. In this dissertation there are two meditative ways and one collective way. Field recording does not have to be done “alone.” The politics of these ways are different, and I’ll be exploring their implications. But each field recording tactic can, like a “piece of music,” be translated into modes of presentation; these modes too change the expression and meaning and can attempt to work towards an affecting experience or bar one. Ideally, these expressions are then listened to among those who claim a relation to that space already, making more subtle and complex the meaning of the expression of their relation to that space. Or those who make no claims to that space but from which can nonetheless reorganize their relation to the imagination of space, self, and their own spaces.

Hennix is intervening in Lacanian psychoanalysis. And it is worth remembering that Lacan thought the appropriate rendering of the energy/structure of the subject was *topological*. What especially interested Lacan were apparently “impossible” topologies that showed how the internal and external exposure of the subject with “its outsides” becomes not only undecidable but a fact, if you like. Hennix asserts, then, that a topos is the exploration of the topologies of subject and musical or, this case, topological space. In this sense, the subject/unconscious are not only structured like a language, but like a sound.³⁹ If topologies of energies in various states of concreteness and fluidity exist within and without us, then it becomes difficult to say why, despite and thanks to manifest and real separations, the inside and outside are not “one and the same.” This is a radically different understanding of “sameness”—but, I think, a compelling one. As psychoanalysis asserts, there is an “inside-outside” called the unconscious, but this internal externality is part of what is indirectly accessed in “the talking cure,” and the listening cure too.⁴⁰

³⁹ Boon, ‘Futures.’

⁴⁰ This paragraph is indebted to Boon’s discussion of awareness throughout *Vibration*, but especially the chapter on Hennix.

In Japan, there are traditions of building a relationship with the Other that often articulate the other “spatially” and express the seeking of this relation through technics of awareness. The various ways Buddhisms deal with the concept *emptiness* Skt. *śūnyatā* Jp. 空 *kū*. is important. Often this “other” is explicitly regarded as a psychic principle of reality, or a cosmic principle of vibration, of space. And, as in many non-modern traditions around the world, relations with the other are said to be reached through target states, which unfolds in various practices of mediation. The character for *kū* appropriately translates *śūnya*: “empty, hollow, void.” And yet it also has its own resonances that speak to Japanese contexts. *Kū* also means “space, air, sky” and is used in expressions related to “memory” and “wandering thoughts.” *Kami* and their spaces are another articulation. The stone or tree that strikes one necessary to worship, bound in *shide*. The invisible occupation of a space by a *kami*; the displacement and therefore intensification of a sense of the alterity of space.

And yet, I am not advocating a romantic return. Thinking, as a way, passes through modernity and science while keeping in mind what pre-modern cultures did and said. Japan is undergoing a traumatic relation to modernity, as I sketched above in relation to the influence of Tokyo and the modern state formation, which means it is undergoing a traumatic relation to what before modernity was organized as “the sacred.” The terror exercised through Shinto and Buddhist discourses during WWII are part of this. The two-pronged Nation-State response to 3.11 are a prime example of this double trauma: scientific disaster response (state) plus an ambiguous relation to “Shinto” as a heritage as well as a destiny (nation). This is really three pronged, with “freedom” to enact progress the implied neoliberal capitalist “solution”—*capital-*

nation-state.⁴¹ The contradictions of this circumstance produce immense anxiety.⁴² But I seek the Batesean potential: the emergence of a vibrant relation that escapes the bind between scienticism and fanaticism. Indeed, such an escape (which also means to live in being bound) often seems ready to burst out in today's popular cultures as much as this same culture twists back on expressions of abjection therein: everything from the "traditional" ceremonies involving collective responses to bells, to the repetitions of the waves of Hokusai's *Under the Wave of Kanagawa*, to the incredibly detailed musical education in Japan's middle/high schools, to the popular desire for "power spots," to the underground relationship with "noise music," etc. The horror of the nuclear attacks on Japan—the abuse of energy—resound ever more tragically in this context. And yet, that a wave brought about another radiation release from within Japan itself—this is potentially a profound moment to reflect on the meaning of waves.

It is no overstatement to say that vibration is caught up in an incredible and complex cosmopolitical historicity in Japan. Vibration—in its many forms—is the very battle on which subjectivity and practice are waged via the impulses to control and privatize vibration and the impulses to think and *be* the impossibility of such an act.

And the individuals I work with, I claim, are taking up field recording in a way that passes through modernity within the horizon of Japan. They identify as secular and modern. They also are not "political" in the classical sense of refusing their labour or organizing protests

⁴¹ Karatani insists these must be thought together. "Capital, nation, and state are distinct entities, each operating according to its own principles, but like a Borromean knot, they are linked in such a manner that all will fall apart if any of the three is missing. I have called this Capital- Nation- State," *The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Exchange*, trans. Michael K. Bourdaghs (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2014), xiv. It is significant that Karatani gives this a topology: the Borromean knot, which is one of the same topology Lacan used to discuss the subject. I will return to Karatani in Chapter Two.

⁴² Karatani again: "When individual national economies are threatened by the global market (neoliberalism), they demand the protection (redistribution) of the state and / or bloc economy, at the same time as appealing to national cultural identity. So it is that any counteraction to capital must also be one targeted against the state and nation (community)," *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx*, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 281. But mostly people travel this loop over and over again.

or trying to directly overthrow the state—although they are not politically “quiet” in this sense either. Their work, however, is in the re-construction of desire. I analyze them in the Gramscian response to Marxian politics: that it is precisely desire, which is bounded by the relations it makes, on which the battle for equity and justice must always be waged. In this, they are making waves—both literally and figuratively. They all do so via field recording.

In chapter 1, K. confronts the state with what its mythic relations to ocean and death refuses to face—the other. The field recording here is primarily a series of long (often half-hour) recordings of ocean waves crashing against a tsunami wall near where K.’s home and family was affected in Ishinomaki city. They were released in 2014. K. places this practice in the context of a blog and other activities that each, I argue, explore relations with trauma, abjection, and what it means to mourn. K. attempts to mobilize “the powers of horror” to defy the state’s own symbolic logic. What the state purifies and sacrilizes—death, the ocean, the shoreline, its own history, K. confronts by creating situations in which the alterity of these things appears.

In chapter 2, Sato Nami participates in the re-appropriation the state-owned open land where the coastal town she lived in, Arahama, Sendai, once stood. The field recording here is a complex one: it relates the sound of the void—its air and waves—with formal and informal collective events undertaken by the people who still want to call Arahama home. It then mixes, incorporates, and expresses these relations in various forms of music. I argue the most “radical” (in terms of being a-modern) expression of this is the album *Our Map Here* (2019). The chapter argues Sato takes up a kind of “women’s writing” of space, an improvisatory, modal, collective, creative relation with alterities of many kinds. Abjection is turned into creative production.

I have placed an interlude here to contextualize the problem of radiation for the following chapter. This “second introduction” analyzes the politics of Fukushima Dai-ichi and the social

abjection of radiation. It argues that identifying radiation with “human folly” is not adequate to the demands of a possible response-ability to its alterity. It is couched in my own experience of this radiation abjection as I lived and worked in Fukushima from 2011-2014. I consider the relationship between “Hiroshima/Nagasaki” and “Fukushima” here also.

In chapter 3, Nagahata Koji refuses the state-imposed social purification of radiation by creating a “non-purified” yet “non-abject” archive called the “Fukushima Soundscapes Archive After 3.11.” The field recording here is as apparently paradoxical as it is powerful because, while deliberately going to hotspots in and around Fukushima city, Nagahata makes no effort to “sonify” the radioactive presence there. The field recorder is here analyzed as an attunement device that aids in a tactics of attention to the shifted alterity of these spaces and to enable a response-ability to one’s relation therein. I analyze Nagahata’s act in terms of sacrifice that turns the violence of dominant social sacrifices onto the self in the hope of establishing a sociality based on the “non-violent” sacrifice with and for the other.

Chapter Four moves from these very specific case studies to the broader post-3.11 cultural sphere. Here, I consider the piano as field recorder. I exposit the confrontation between a capital-nation-state sanctioned “miracle” piano, appearing in the popular 2011 New Years singing television program, and a “tsunami” piano created by the late Sakamoto Ryuichi with other artists. Both pianos were affected by the 3.11 tsunami. The “miracle” piano was refurbished to the extent that it is almost impossible to tell it had been affected. The “tsunami” piano was left in its tsunami-affected condition and linked up to a network of earthquake meters and artworks. I argue the “miracle” piano as mobilized in the TV program was expressive of the modern abject. And that the “tsunami” piano points beyond it—towards an attunement to the role of energy in our fields of emergence.

I have sequenced the central tripartite chapters in the above way because I see three primary movements across them. The first movement relates to abjection and energy. The chapters express an increasingly non-abject relation towards the ontology of energy: from utilization of the power of the force of abjection, to the implicit connection between void and community, to the renunciation of abjection in the face of the normatively hyper-abject. The second movement relates to relations with the state. The first chapter confronts the state, the second feeds off and defies it, and the third attempts to construct a tapestry of space outside it. The final movement concerns not a movement but a closure: I see Chapter One and Chapter Three nonetheless participating in constitutive abjections—K.’s takes up the feminine as a site of abjection while remaining in a negative relation to that site; and Nagahata’s archive performs abjection on his behalf, expressing a desire for “useful” representation and the “informed” universal knower offered by an individualized “masculine” sacrificial hope, which then dominates the presentation of the material, expressing a lack of any modal relation to the archive listener.

Still, each seeks the present as something a-modern, as a thick field to be response-able to and in. It is telling that each informant thinks of their practice in relation to a “void” or field reminiscent of “emptiness / *kū*”: K. seeks an exposure with nothing but waves; Sato speaks of the necessity of the “unknown” for space to emerge; and Nagahata speaks of all sorts of “silences.” Further, they all enter spaces that are normatively “abject”—a tsunami-affected shoreline; an open field where a town once stood; an irradiated grove—while claiming exposure is necessary and/or not abject at all. I have gone to each of these places, too. I was in contact with K., but I did not witness waves with her. Although, I stood on many tsunami walls myself. I hope to

contact her again. As for Sato and Nagahata, I spent time with them across several months in 2018-2019 on fieldwork. I did their practices with them at that time.⁴³

V

In *The Seeds of Time*, Fredric Jameson writes, “It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations.”⁴⁴ We do not know how to change the means of production. And yet, Jameson’s tactful “seems” rhetorically suggests a bisecting question: is it really so easy to imagine the complete deterioration of the earth? Perhaps the opposite is true: only when we can actually accept that we cannot imagine the—*currently ongoing!*—deterioration of the earth—and the cosmos—will capitalism begin to break down (in us).

As Gayatri Spivak says, it is dangerous to rely only on the imagination. It is only when we are epistemologically prepared that we become prepared to overthrow the status quo. This epistemology must include, prepare within itself, an awareness of the fallibility of any epistemology.⁴⁵ I have hazarded that the epistemology necessary to this study is a “transcendental” one, and that it is built on a knowledge and pragmatic attunement to vibration/energy. Thus, I am influenced by pre-capitalist discourses about relations with this Other. Key for this dissertation is a figure like Kūkai (774-835), from Japan’s early influential Esoteric Buddhist tradition, who, in his essay “The Meaning of the Word Hūm,” writes, “Even if

⁴³ Our exchanges, and the records of them in the chapters, were all done in Japanese, digital dictionaries notwithstanding.

⁴⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), xii.

⁴⁵ Spivak, ‘Planet.’

a flood in the age of universal destruction causes the earth to drift, or devouring flames burn the buildings, that space is thereby not decreased is an attribute of great space.”⁴⁶ “Great space,” “void,” the unfolding of the real. Even if a six-minute earthquake occurs, or a 10-meter tsunami, or the spewing of radioactivity—these must be thought of without malice and with responsibility. We must be committed to the pain that emerges in these spaces without assuming that pain is ever fully entered, thought, captured, sealed, or released. We must be committed to the necessity of thinking practice in terms that “weakness” but not (only) as a danger; rather as an affirmative weakness, a “joying in the truth” of the fact that “I am abject,” as Kristeva puts it. While heeding Kristeva’s warning regarding the narcissistic dangers of thinking one can get beyond the social and “return to the mother,” I take up the speculation that the “social” is part of an assemblage of vibration that relies on resonance and withdrawal, captures and escapes, encounters and patterning, and the sighs (mournful and erotic) of dissipation—of an ontology that constructs both the Kristevan semiotic and symbolic as well as everything else. I practice from a position that is as fallible as it is connectible, as partial as it is networked. As Jacques Derrida writes, “One has to accept that ‘it’ [ça] (the other, or whatever ‘it’ may be) is stronger than I am, for something to happen. I have to lack a certain strength, I have to lack it enough, for something to happen. If I were stronger than the other, or stronger than what happens, nothing would happen. There has to be weakness, which is not perforce debility, imbecility, deficiency, malady or infirmity.”⁴⁷

In sum, I think of field recording as a potential practice of opening to this weakness-cum-strength. I think my informants are taking up this weakness-cum-strength. I am influenced by

⁴⁶ Kūkai, ‘Hūm,’ *Major Works*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda, Records of Civilization 87 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

⁴⁷ Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, ed. David Webb and Giacomo Donis, trans. Giacomo Donis (Malden, MA: Polity, 2001), 64.

studies of the “anthropologist ontologists” of non-capitalist, a-modern cultures that have within them the awareness, care, and decisions towards what *is*, studies who hope to turn back to the modern capital-saturated readers’ to help them turn their backs on this thin present. The Dreaming space in Australian Aboriginal cultures...; Andean conceptions of a mountain as an “Earth Being”....⁴⁸ These epistemo-ontologies must fight to survive. Spurred by those studies, this is a political anthropology of the modern, a different kind of fight.⁴⁹ Rather than show us our deceptions by contrasting the rich and threatened worlds of a-modern peoples, I want to show how we are deceiving ourselves into a thinking that threatens us by saying that, as Latour puts it, “we have never been modern.”⁵⁰

Part of what this means is taking the movement through modernity as an opportunity to re-evaluate what tradition says about the cosmos. Analyzing field recording is an opportunity within this opportunity—because field recording is itself an opportunity to attune to this problem and what lies beyond it. Inspired by Walter Benjamin’s claims that idol-art-revolutionary practice can be thought as emerging now, I draw from a parallel history of meditation and ritual in thinking the ways these practices have moved from ritual to art to practice. I am especially

⁴⁸ See: Michael Taussig and the Columbia-bound terror-healings of ayahuasca and music; Marisol de la Cadena and the Andean Quechua’s “earth beings” that are the mountains they live on; Deborah Bird Rose and the Australian Indigenous Dreaming as a relation between self, land, and the beginning of time. Found in: Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987); Eduardo Batalha Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish, First edition, Univocal (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014); Marisol de la Cadena, *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*, The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 2011 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996).

⁴⁹ Here I would also gesture at cultural studies, urban studies, especially as it relates to “modern” space, in canonical works: Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life. 1*, trans. Steven Rendall, 2. print (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 2013); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, 33. print (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2013). But also recent work in sound/auditory cultural studies. See especially, Julian Henriques, *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

⁵⁰ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Porter Catherine (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

inspired by Esoteric Buddhist rituals: the chanting of mantra; the staring at a visualization of a topos; the sitting with a ringing bell; the noisemaking of collective wish-making.... As well as the “ritual” of meditation, which is an encounter with the unfolding self and its psychic other(s). My thinking inherits from these rituals the attempt to commune with something of the ontology of appearance as such, to the vibrational cosmic nonduality of what is. I also draw from this history in asserting that field recording can act as “rituals” once did without an immediate, nostalgic, or appropriative reintroduction of ritual as such. Field recording participates in a place as an “event” that sits to the side of everydayness but nonetheless informs, confirms, mourns, transforms and celebrates what that everydayness is.

Field recording is a way of removing one’s expectations concerning how a space is in order to notice what is actually unfolding there; a way of being with a sound such that the ambiguity of the listening and the sound collapses into an iterative entrainment with the co-arising of the sound and consciousness; a way of being in a space to uncover possible lines of flight in its structure so that self and a body can become adapted to the potential of that departure; a way of noticing and exploring subtextual desire as it erupts in the networkings of particular relations; a way of negotiating with the subject of the self and the subject that is the other such that decisions can be made within and around the force of what is normatively abject; and a way of coming to terms with vibrant being as such.... Post-ritual/post-art field recording practices can act to bolster and weave assemblage-making and distribution, towards sharing, collecting, organizing, and performatively enacting relations with the others of all kind within the Other that is the Same that is the cosmos.

This is all also a way of saying: my life, as a mixed Italian/Anglo white kid growing up in the Toronto, Canada suburbs, is constituted by a systematic abjection of space. I grew up out of

something that doesn't grow. Topoi were taboo. Canadian suburban life is, or at least was while I was growing up, constituted by a refusal to acknowledge the terror of the stolen land. A non-relation to the land is naturalized so that the primary, historical, and actual white relation with the land—the colonial stealing of the land—is not registered in everyday life. The suburb *is* this non-relation repressing the terror: structurally repetitive with neither gathering space nor collective sonic privacy with windows looking at other windows, a panopticon in its efficiency and control. And our non-relation is celebrated as proof of our presence. This project intends to fight that. It is appropriate to say “I am” trying to work against the abjection of the land that “I am.”

That trauma is laced with another for me, much more acute though built on the chronic one above, that also marks my entrance to the subject of 3.11. A family terror. Someone in the family was different, and an incapacity—due to fear, guilt, and misunderstanding—to address that difference created a violent home for all. The incapacity was not for lack of trying; it was the trying, a trying that tried to “fix” the difference, that incapacitated us. The violence was primarily emotional but in the end of it was physical too. The trauma here is love turned dangerous—a love turned into ultimatum, test. A love that would not work. A shining love turned secret and shadowed. A real love turned resentful. A love that would, if only, go away but, if gone, would be too awfully missed. A love as true as terrible. Day in day out. But really bad for 15 years. Until finally: a love that had the one who suffered most, my older brother, excommunicated and the one who suffered that suffering most, my father, pass away.

Living the manifest failure of a tragically persistent symbolic/paternal order alongside the repeated pragmatic and eventually desperate expulsion from maternal care, it was difficult to find a way back into an autonomous relationship with both the symbolic and energetic. The trauma is that the necessary expulsion from the maternal was dramatized and re-performed while the

entrance into the symbolic was witnessed as a non-entrance, built on what I had long-since seen was the non-entrance of capitalist consumerist life. I turned to music. In one sense, music was twisted into a hope for a re-entrance into the maternal, which meant a hope spurned by a fantasy in the symbolic order (organized as desires for mastery and respect) even though and because I was suspicious of any symbolic. Music became both the planned escape (repression/repetition) and because of that a trap (ideology), the site of the drama of trauma, even as it was more than that too. Because music was also my desire for healing, to find a way to take up meaning/energy again against but expressive of both capitalo-colonial suburbs and a familial terror, to take up an ordering of myself in a non-narcissistic style that takes part in/of the space I am (not). This flinging of capture and escape and hope initially flung me to Japan in 2011-2014, where I made music and taught English. It eventually led me in 2018-19, in a flash of healing resonant with the flashes of healing that had occurred in graduate school, again to Japan, seeking more healing but also trying to understand (my) trauma and vibration as resonant in the work of the field recordists discussed here.

My way into thinking field recording and 3.11 in Japan was born from an attempt at “self”-fashioning too: to find a way into love without the abject after violence. This was not a traumatic repetition, but one which re-organized my relationship to the terms. Because love is love insofar as it arrives from and is response-able to the other; love is the unconditional gift that requires work. And while the problem of space in Tōhoku, Japan’s 3.11 is very different, by thinking through that difference and the healing work of the individuals discussed here, I work through healing. As the Buddhists say: In the three poisons are the three wholesomenesses. As

the German continental tradition says: Where danger is, grows the saving power also.⁵¹ In my experience, trauma can be something like that too.

⁵¹ Hölderlin “Patmos,” quoted in Martin Heidegger, ‘Technology’, *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, ed. David Farrell Krell, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2011), 333.



Image 3: A tsunami wall like the one K in this chapter records on. Photo by the author.

Chapter One

Repression/Idealization vs The Force of Abjection:

Wounds and Waves in the Work of K

In the introduction I argued, drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva, that predominant responses to the events since March 11—what I called the “3.11 canon”—are taken up in a process of unconscious abjection. The focus of the critique was to show that, far from committing to an exposure to the other (the affected, drives/desire, waves, radiation, energies of all kinds), these responses take up a narcissist position in the name of the other. To name naming means to evoke language, and to name it alongside narcissism means to evoke the Symbolic. What I argued, then, was that these responses are in fact taken up in the re-inscription of a Symbolic order; they are taken up in and by the *defensive* quality of language, that which builds barriers against exposure to excess/other, which therefore, because the other is not irreducible to the subject/Ego/Symbolic, requires a reifying relationship to that other; this defense requires the other to be either *repressed* or *idealized*. Who represses and who idealizes is utterly predictable: the right is obsessed with “purity” (idealization), the “left” with guilt (repression). Thus, “heavenly punishment” was an idealization, the “unforgivable wasteland of the self” a repression. In both cases, in order to hide the Symbolic lie, violence manifests—the mark of patriarchy.

In this chapter, I continue to draw on the way Kristeva sees a way through this Symbolic bind: the *semiotic*, the relationship to the trace of excess in the Symbolic that erupts in the soundings, patternings, and pain/pleasures of orderings of all kinds, languaged and musical—

and, I will add, vibro-spatial. Kristeva sees the bind transforming in the work—the making and reception—of a culture aware of and in relationship with its own symbolic/semiotic productive knotting. Kristeva calls this commitment, this weaving of the double bind of language and excess *sublimation*. Sublimation is the re-organization of the subject’s relationship to the excessive energetic forces (the drives, desires, psychic energy itself) that generate but are never captured by the symbolic productivity of the subject. However, Kristeva also sees a kind of hiccup, a risk in this process: that what is excessive becomes identified with its “excessiveness,” thereby remaining abject precisely by being identified as “outside” the subject, what the subject/symbolic could never *be*. And thus a kind of *ressentiment* emerges, where, instead of being taken up in a non-essentialized and non-narcissistic way, *the subject is identified as an other* to this excess. Rather than a reified subject assured (through idealization) or guilty (through repression) of its status in the Symbolic, this “subject of abjection” is reified in an opposing way: not sure of anything, it makes no orderings, and is therefore taken up in abjection over and over. A deeply painful trauma ensues. Sublimation is barred.

This chapter analyzes the work of an individual named K in this context. It argues K’s work is taken up in this process of being a “subject of abjection” with a critical edge. K’s childhood home and neighborhood in the coastal areas of Ishinomaki city were devastated by the tsunami. While she did not experience the tsunami herself, I believe family members died (close relations and a pet), and many of K’s friends lived through harrowing events. A whole tapestry of relations and imaginations of home, place, space, purpose, life was devastated too. Such devastation creates a violent exposure to excess as well as the risk of identifying that exposure as necessarily violent. What makes K’s work critically important is the way she attempts to live this violence, become it, in order to put the lie to the nation-state’s idealistic appropriation and

repressive reification of “3.11.” K is angered that these go on in and through “Ishinomaki” and is aware that these appropriations mark the return to what made 3.11 so difficult: a society that abjects its outside.

To combat this, K takes up a variegated practice that stages “an abject everydayness”: she writes prose-poetry blogs, takes photographs of abandoned gloves, and field records the post-3.11 coastline. The prose-poetry fixates on the ambiguous positionality of the “I” that writes, the photographs stage an encounter with death, and the field recordings hear in coastal waves the absence and disruption of order. As I will show, she wants to prevent the dominant order from washing its hands of the dead in the salt waters of the ocean from the safety of the tsunami wall. She wants to become the “archaic mother” in its abject, quiet yet interminable manifestation. The “archaic mother” is often identified by psychoanalysis as a reactionary fearful figure of the “too muchness” of desire (blobs, shapeshifters, alien brooding...). K attempts to embody this “too muchness”—and that is the issue. Embodying the “too muchness” reifies it. The staging and practice are defined by K as the attempt to sustain a “wound.” In a word, K attempts to become the force of abjection, which doubles the trauma she suffers. I think this tragically reifies the “woundedness” of our temporal condition and blocks the healing of sublimation.

Still, K’s practice is instructive; we have something to learn from her pain. Each facet of her practice reveals in shadowy opposites the potential of what is to be gained: an ethically productive “I,” a non-reified public relation to death, and an awareness of the give-and-take of a wave-bound space, and, after an introduction to Ishinomaki’s “3.11,” I tackle each of those facets in the sections of the chapter.

I

Ishinomaki bears the difficult title of being the municipality with the most people passing away on 3.11/3.12. The municipality was so violently shaken by the earthquake that some areas dropped as much as 1.2 meters. This subsidence itself increased the vulnerability to the ensuing tsunami, which reached over ten meters high. The municipality reported approximately 3000 deaths with approximately 2700 people unaccounted for. Approximately 29,000 people lost their houses. The coastline of Ishinomaki city itself was zoned both residential (low rise and single home) and industrial storage. As I will discuss more below, it was once mangroves. The coastal neighborhoods became almost completely inculcated. The tsunami collapsed warehouses of flammable liquids that spilled over the surface of the flooding. These flammable liquids somehow ignited. The broken wood of the buildings and boats soaked in the liquids sustained and spread what became a terrible conflagration. Close to fifty percent of the city's jurisdiction was heavily damaged. The liquids were heavily polluting and the fires extremely deadly. However, the fires are often depicted in the same way the tsunami is: neutrally, symbolically. So, this is the first ambiguity: that Ishinomaki city, like Fukushima prefecture, is the site of a human disaster but that these fires are "abjected" precisely to the degree that they signal the fallibility of the human order. They do not illicit the same fascination as the tsunami. I return to this in a moment.

The second ambiguity comes from an especially difficult 3.11 event Ishinomaki has become identified with. Through it, I can introduce Japan's 1990s "100 Soundscapes of Japan" project which, pertinent to this dissertation, contributes, I think, to the following events' lasting traumatic ambiguity. The municipality of Ishinomaki is largely rural. And coastal rural towns, like those on the Ishinomaki peninsula, were hit hard. As were towns along its major rivers. As happened across Tōhoku and across time, the March 11 tsunami swelled up river ways. And the

largest river in Tōhoku, the Kitakami River, empties into the ocean in Ishinomaki. The river's massive mouth meant the swell was less impeded. The powerful flooding occurred for some distance up the river.

The traumatic event involves the deaths of a group of children and teachers at an elementary school, Okawa Elementary School, situated along the Kitakami River very close to its mouth. The circumstances of this event are recounted in the ruins of the school itself which have been converted into a museum dedicated to this and other Ishinomaki-based events. After the earthquake, teachers in authoritative positions asserted it was necessary to stay put in the school yard. Debate ensued. When evacuation was finally realized as necessary some forty minutes later (likely amidst resounding tsunami warnings on town PAs), rather than seek higher ground in the nearby hills, the teachers decided to proceed to the center of town, which crossed a long two-lane bridge over the wide river. By this time the tsunami was swelling up the river. Most of the group was caught on the bridge. A single teacher broke from the authoritative stupor in the school yard, took an individual student with them, and went to the nearby hills—they lived.

It is tempting to lay the full blame on individuals, on a particular “personality.” But such blame is what leads to many “good for all” justifications that are in place—like the massive tsunami walls. The walls are justified as a corrective against individual folly. But the authority that caused the deaths is more than an individual failure; it is a structural authority, a broader failure of a modern authority that drives to protect against all failures of positions of its authoritative knowledge by occupying an ever more violently “certain” position that filters out the memory of its entrance into and dynamic of the symbolic order. This, too, then, must be analyzed psychoanalytically. It is a panicked patriarchal authority that asserts itself as “good for

all.” The insistence of holding the children and teachers in one place is the authoritative subject’s attempt to gain control of its own sensed fallibility. The impending danger of the tsunami and the impending danger of the failure of the symbolic are intertwined. The unwillingness to change a decision is the panic experienced by an authority challenged. The drive attempts to keep the illusion that the world is under its delicate control, an image of symbolic power. And there are other specifics too: the decision, once the decision is reached, to move towards a center. This speaks of the anxiety of an authority appointed in reference to a center—the town center is a metonym for the State center. This periphery/center dynamic speaks to a broader authority’s ability to enact through a local authority the homogenization of space, i.e. the subversion of the possibility of local practices, knowledges, acts, that relate to where they are.

It is therefore worth noting that the mouth of the Kitakami River was selected as one of the “100 Soundscapes of Japan” in the 1990s, especially for the sound of the wind in the reeds there.⁵² A collaboration between the Soundscape Association of Japan (SAJ) and the governmental Environmental Agency (now the Ministry of the Environment), the title in Japanese is literally “The 100 Japanese Soundscapes We Must Leave Behind.” I spend more time analyzing this archive in Chapter Three, but on one level the archive is self-explanatory: the Association and the Agency selected, recorded, and “preserved” the sounds of 100, most “natural” locations across the national archipelago. However, there are significant relations to this fact and the event at the elementary school that might not at first seem clear. The “100 Soundscapes” participates in and develops a symbolic order that conditions how land is perceived in Japan: what I call the national/natural mosaic. The celebration of a “situated environment” among other “situated environments” across a national space only appears

⁵² ‘*Nokoshitai Nihon no ne-fukei 100 sen* [The 100 Japanese Soundscapes we Must Leave Behind]’, The Ministry of the Environment, https://www.env.go.jp/air/life/nihon_no_oto/index.html.

pluralistic. It is rather a means of asserting a unified and enduring picture. Each place is inflected with the sense of national pride and unification, totalizations that strip any relations with the burdens of what the land demands. Each place is recorded “as is”—implying, via reception, a neutral “there-ness” to these spaces, an objective outer that is the pride of an essential “inner.” There is a link between the totalizing symbolic orientation to sound and space and the incapacity of the authority to accept the reality of the wave. Or rather, the link is precisely the insistence on ignoring the fallibility of that orientation, doubling down on what must allegedly endure: *the authoritative subject, the subject that is “given” by the “objective” possession of that land.* Authority is placed on the subject that can “speak for” that which—what one would otherwise expect—radically threaten that subject. I am not saying the teachers were thinking of the “100 Soundscapes” when they decided not to move from the school grounds. But it is certain the weighty, nation-inflected, symbolic web associated with “mouth of the Kitakata river” was part of the drive to remain standing, to *stand* on the subjective authority, on the apparent givenness of the land *to the subject*. Note the link between “we must leave the soundscapes behind” and “we must stay behind”—each bears a kind of sacrificial logic where the sacrifice *implies* the succession and securing of the nation/the subject. Thus there is a link between sound wave and tsunami wave. It is, I argue, part of a broader social reification of waves. It is part of a rejection of the way relations with waves imply local decisions within an emergent field.

Rather than a critical moment to question the social milieu, the responses in Ishinomaki were quick and typical: the tsunami was “objectively” matched by the construction of tsunami walls; those who died/that which was destroyed became “preserved” as valorized “victims;” and those that endured/that which endured become signs of “recovery” (i.e. capitalist “progress”). The present disappeared. This tripartite Symbolic soon began speaking for those like K. And,

although the following is a quote from a “memorial park” that was built after the work of K’s I discuss below, it is indicative of what K had to endure and why she speaks in anger. The Ishinomaki Minamihama Tsunami Memorial Park advertises its purpose as such: “In mourning and for the repose of all the lives who fell victim to the Great East Japan Earthquake, [the memorial park strives] to pass on the account of the town and the disaster, to grow a forest embodying the power of life, and to secure the bonds between people.”⁵³ The statement is filled with the dominant Symbolic in Japan: “forest” (a small pine grove planted in the park) uses the same word for “shrine grove;” “bonds” became a buzzword, something like “freedom” in the West—a word filled with what it denies; and, tellingly, the word for “victim” is not 被害者 *higaisha* (lit. person who suffers and is by implication alive) but the ceremonial 犠牲 *gisei*, a word which expressly links the meanings of “victim,” “sacrifice,” “gift/offering (to the *kami*),” and “scapegoat.” The mark of the sacred is clear: a fundamentalist relation to a people, secured by a benevolent and controlled/uncontrolled “nature/life” (i.e., it is not clear whether the forest is a “representation” of or *is* that force), which is given at the expense of/thanks to the sacrifice. Prime ministers and other governmental figures routinely go to the park and bow to the ocean for the “repose” of these “victim/sacrifices,” which is churned about in the spectacle machine called “the news,” including during the work of K analyzed here.

This park was built over an area affected by the fires and was being built just as K began field recording waves in 2014. In fact, the memorial park and K’s recording site are near each other. The memorial park sits next to the mouth of the Kyukitakami River; K’s recording site is

⁵³ The reconstructed quote reads as follows: 「東日本大震災により犠牲となったすべての生命への追悼と鎮魂の思いとともに／まちと震災の記録をつたえ／生命のいとなみの杜をつくり／人の絆をつむぐ」, ‘About,’ Ishinomaki Minamihama Park, Accessed May 25, 2024, <https://ishinomakiminamihama-park.jp/about/>.

at the mouth of the Naruse River at the opposite end of the city. Parks and exhibitions-cum-museums of “3.11 ruins” like these are the hallmark of the especially violent post-3.11 tsunami spaces. In my field work and recently in the news, people who locally organize these institutions complain about the State’s overt domination of the direction of their conception and construction.⁵⁴ We will visit another in some more detail in Chapter Two. And we will visit a very different grove, a radioactive one, in Chapter Three.

What this introduction to the chapter shows is that K will try to corrupt these impulses that hide from themselves the productive fallibility that sustains them: she presents the “I” who speaks in confusion rather than in the perceived security of its positionality; the potential traces of the dead, adults’ and children’s gloves; the drawn waves breaking the obsessional “sacrificial commemoration” and “national symbolic.” K works in the city, on the tsunami walls, and via blogging media: all sites of the idealization/repressions of the symbolic order, K intervenes in, destroys the confidence in, fills with the pain of her suffering, removes the security of the illusory everydayness by presenting another, repeating everydayness. Her staging of abjection is tactical, a trauma turned into a weapon, which, in so doing, also severs a bind that K will not re-knot, a topological trauma that K herself loops.

II

K is one of many non-professional artists that populate all corners of Japanese society. They can be of lesser means and so they often work day jobs, even night jobs, or study a subject that will lead to a job. However, seeking some way of responding to or interpreting contemporary urban

⁵⁴ Hiroyasu Yamauchi, a director of much of the memorial constructions in Ishinomaki and Kesennuma (further north in Tōhoku), is a vocal critic of this imposition of the state. See the recent, <<https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14445608>> and also the conversation with Yamauchi here: <<https://moa.ubc.ca/exhibition/a-future-for-memory/>>, with translational subtitles by myself.

life, they spend a great deal of time making and sharing popular forms of art. Photography is especially prominent in this socially alternative scene. K is part of it. K responded to 3.11 by participating in many of the “art archive” 3.11 projects. K in fact worked in the theater scene, but after 3.11 was forced to find more permanent means of employment. This marginality/centrality tension is central to understanding her work. That is, she at once has the sense that art is central to a life, that some artists are highly influential in their endeavors, but also that she and many like her are barred from such an influential life by the dynamics of capitalism and nepotism. This desire and suspicion of highly influential artists is a forced historical ambivalence that marks her work. And 3.11 exacerbated this further: suddenly what she had experienced was necessary to express in an artistic way and yet *the way* to express it was often conditioned but national discourses from the outset.

Reporting on her understanding of her experience as a participant in collecting stories of those who experienced the tsunami, K claims: “Listening to the stories of others is difficult because, through their words, we come to vicariously experience them. But we must not let these wounds and pains scab over. I think it’s necessary to keep the wound pussing, itchy and painful. Don’t cover it with a veil. Expose it.”⁵⁵

As I will show, this surprising claim is in a sense the “thesis statement” of K’s work. K is attacking the way the difficult stories of those affected are ignored in favour of the various ritual-like performances outlined above. K is clearly enacting a kind of negation—*don’t let the wound heal*—against the fantasy that there was no wounding *and no “wound” or fallibility of meaning* at all. She poses a negation to combat repression.

⁵⁵ I will not reference the original in order to maintain K’s anonymity.

Speaking psychoanalytically, the conservative discourse above attempts to codify a return to the sensual via an entrance into the symbolic that in fact cuts, surrounds, circles, and overdetermines. They claim, in other words, to inhabit a self-wholeness, to effectively *be in “the mother” without being the mother*: the supportive energy of “nature,” the gift of society by “victims/sacrifices,” to propriety and the future that will have always been. This is the language of *repression/idealization*. It hides from itself in its very claims about connectedness the unconscious realization that this connectedness is impossible. The illusory invention and satisfaction of a wish, and the suffering this causes given that the wish is never fulfilled, leads to authoritative violence when that lack of fulfillment is made apparent. The affirmation hides and then dominates. It is a very “adult,” very phallic, and very State-like strategy.

K is clearly taken up in the more subtle psychoanalytic act of negation. She attempts to step back from repression towards denial. She attempts to not only point out but *inhabit*—and that is the interest here but also the trouble—the denied satisfaction of the drives. Denial relates to the childhood experience of its ejection from the mother’s care, which was and could never be “full,” to the awareness of itself that emerges in this ejection and the resentment that often ensues. Here, that ejection is re-experience by K, embodied in the violence of the disasters and, crucially, in the refusal of the dominant order to accept that that “origin” and lastingness of that violence is in part perpetuated by the modern urban experience.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud analyzed the reason for repetitive traumatic acts in his grandson’s game: the child saying *fort/da* (gone/there) while throwing and pulling back an object in the absence of the mother, looking at himself after “gone,” and saying “oooo,” which amounts to vibrational/energetic pleasurable working through of the pain of this separation, the

development of the necessarily sublimational self.⁵⁶ In *Negation*, Freud uncovers the transition from the pleasure/pain of the *fort/da* experiments of the early child, to, as Kristeva summarizes, “a psychic register which gives rise to the Symbol of negation and no longer assimilation/defecation [*fort/da*], to ‘This is not my mother’, equivalent to ‘I don’t like my mother.’”⁵⁷ Now, Kristeva argues this entrance into the Symbolic, into order, is never only, not even primarily defensive (repressive/idealizational); rather, order (orchestrated in language and habits) *invests* in the separation, *takes up* the energy that it is always also perpetually ordering: the perpetual investment *is* the languaged/ordered subject. We are our psychic inscriptions—the power of writing, the energy put to the ordering. Kristeva writes, “Indeed, the psychic inscription never stops acting, being active and thus energetic, by doubly reversing itself: toward its energetic source and towards its own opposite direction, to preserve desire like a secret around which the psychic identity clusters, that is to say the imaginary and symbolic identity of the Ego.”⁵⁸

This is precisely the issue: K attempts to *expose* this secret by *declustering* her symbolic identity. Expose the wound—expose the secret. K attempts to always *decompose*—like a corpse, like the corpses she “sees” everywhere, the absence taken up as presence by the hegemony. Decomposing herself, tearing herself apart, she enacts a desperate attempt to reveal, tear open, the way to the secret. She works against the development of a subject, of a style of being, to such a degree that she is bound to a depressive strategy. She does so as a *force*, in order to force open, tear down, the dominant clustering, the dominant order, around 3.11. She attempts to make the

⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey, Standard ed (New York: Norton, 1989).

⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva, ‘The Impudence of Uttering: The Mother Tongue,’ Kristeva, trans. Anne Marsella, <http://www.kristeva.fr/impudence.html>; Sigmund Freud, ‘Negation’, in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay, Norton paperback ed., reissued (New York: Norton, 1995), 666–69.

⁵⁸ Kristeva, ‘Impudence’.

tsunami *her own sacrifice*, a new gift that never gives in order to terrorize the way the tsunami has been perversely, neurotically made into the ultimate giver, i.e. the ideological mother. K hates the way the violence of tsunami is affirmed in a perverse and violent wish fulfillment. In this way, however, she comes to disdain the way this secret is never, ultimately, revealed—because i) she is a subject; and ii) the energetic *is not only violence but also pleasure*, not only Thanatos but Eros too. The fear, the trauma, is that the secret remains also the “origin” of composition. The gaps in the symbolic clustering are precisely what is required for an affiliation with the secret, the Real. Her acts invest in psychic destruction, one which she hopes will destroy the dominant order, but in that destructive impulse—in that attempt to mirror the tsunami, to be what harmed her again to *show* that it should have harmed the hegemony—she harms herself. To invest in destruction remains an investment, a patterning, of energy, to be a force that strategizes to keep the wound open. The fear: the wound *composes*. She fears the human element and denies it as she inhabits it. And this composition/decomposition might be what “structures” the energetic cosmos also—I return to this below. Thus, she must harm herself in order to harm the hegemony. In this, a new clustering is made, an anti-body clustering turned constitutive, a clustering that registers only the pain of what is made and abjects the pleasure of the making. An individualization that seeks to decompose itself into oblivion in response to its dissolution from community.⁵⁹

K is taken up in a counter-relationship with that which attempts to utilize her as a figure, as a representative. She attempts to break it down by breaking herself down, by refusing to

⁵⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy writes, “But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community. By its nature-as its name indicates, it is the atom, the indivisible-the individual reveals that it is the abstract result of a decomposition. It is another, and symmetrical, figure of immanence: the absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and as certainty,” *The Inoperative Community*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 76 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3.

construct at all to show that what they make of her, as an affected, is untenable. Thus, “The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them.”⁶⁰ In this respect, K’s use of the word *pus* 膿 *umi* is significant because it also means *corruption, evil*. The corruption here is not one of “personal gain,” which many abject performances tend to become.⁶¹ K is more aware of the play of energy at work because it is manifest to her keenly as the wounding of pain. She wants to “keep the wound open, itchy and painful,” which she sees as the force of her de-compositional critique. Thus, K’s “corruption” is akin to decays sustained by mold, filaments, or, indeed, salt water. What K must avoid for her strategy to work is the fact that while decay is indeed a fact of energy—vibration is said to “decay”—this universal decay is also a relay of energetic give-and-take. The compositional (compost, dirt, filth becoming soil, the life of decay) is rejected such that the correlative quality of decay is emphasized, a decay which takes nothing of what it absorbs. Salt water is the “origin” of life. Thus: the fact that *pus* 膿 *umi* puns with *ocean* 海 *umi*. Become the ocean, the “mother of life,” but only in its correlative, corrosive, violent manifestation.

The *umi/pus/ocean* chain is indicative of a protest against the modern “Shinto” influence with its discourses of purity and its subjugation of women to that purifying role. The deeply conservative modern Shinto, with its illusion of a “returning” to Shinto, is influenced by modern, Western conceptions of Nature as a mother. After 3.11, afraid that the tsunami destroyed this romantic illusion, there were many Shinto proclamations that the tsunami was a “national purification” (*harae*).⁶² Again, these are widely criticized, by they also haunt (or indeed “bless”)

⁶⁰ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 15.

⁶¹ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 15.

⁶² Aike P. Rots, “Shinto Responses,” *When the Tsunami Came*, 23.

the governmental processions that act out similar rituals (as I described above). The vast majority of Shinto priests and Japanese ministers are men, but women most often act out the rituals themselves as dancers and with bells (in reference to the Kojiki in which it is a women god's purifying and erotic dance that has the sun goddess return to the world). There are also many Noh plays where a woman of great prestige is revealed to be a powerful demon who is subdued—the celebration of her power in the play is matched by the ease with which it is vanquished: a line spoken by a humble Buddhist priest. This is the “archaic mother” of Noh: before horror, not an amorphous creature, she was depicted anthropomorphically with an amorphous power, one that was often only hinted at but would work in the background its implicit corruptive power (as in Sesshōseki *The Killing Stone*, but the trope is common) ultimately abjected.

K is *corrupting* this. She *transgresses* it through a “misreading,” as Kristeva puts it. She takes up this roll only to break it down. She becomes the anti-dancer to bring back the dark. K blurs the “I am not your mother” and “I don't like the mother.” She mobilizes this sense of “I am not your mother” by attempting to re-enact cruelty. K wants to *become the hated mother*. She wants to be hated by the affirmative repression, she wants it to return to its fear of separation, she wants it to remember its “lack.” K takes up a constitutive refusal in an attempt to locate herself in what she experiences as being refused by the dominant order: violence, decay, death. K's work is taken up in this more subtle but more overtly violent act of negation against the presumptions and implicitly violent affirmations of repression. Melancholy and “woundedness”: the subject of abjection confers on itself an economy of pain that attempts to stop what it perceives to be a hemorrhaging of the wound, that is, an alien energy it must expel. Here, K is angry as well as melancholic: she attempts to submit herself to pain so that the other will perceive the

hemorrhaging of the “wound” of meaning. But, this is the tragic issue. She accepts the “archaic mother” as the horrible, amorphous, mold-like monstrosity that it often becomes in today’s horror films. She replaces the repression of lack with the fear of energy. In attempting to wield the wounding of energy, she herself reifies it. Reification remains taken up in the constitutive denial of the subjective element, of the human’s entrance into meaning. To “keep the wound open” reifies our “woundedness” as ordering beings. What is being “abjected” is “K,” too. Thus, there is something upsetting about K’s statement—precisely in its performed rejection to enter into a state of being formed by an outside once again. This ambivalence occurs throughout K’s work.

III

K’s blog was the site of all of this work, the web made by these strings. As a blog, it bears the problems facing contemporary online pseudo-interactive structures and their reactivity to the postmodern disintegration of a Master symbolic. In *The Plague of Fantasies*, Slavoj Žižek asserts that the “virtual worlds” of news and social media only reproduces the broader contemporary crisis in the virtuality of meaning, in the potential and efficacy of meaning to determine the shape of our personal and social lives.⁶³ As Jodi Dean helpfully summarizes this crisis is experienced in three interacting ways. First is “the loss of the binding power or performative efficacy of words. Words are no longer ‘subjectivized’ insofar as they fail to induce the subject to stand by them.”⁶⁴ Second, textual online space enables the immediate realization of symbolic (and reductive) fantasies thereby dominating and nullifying desire: a fantasy fulfilled is

⁶³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, New ed., The Essential Žižek (London: Verso, 2008), 153-163.

⁶⁴ Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 7.

no longer desired and this constant exhaustion of desire itself is exhausting. And third, the unconscious is neutralized, its far more subtle interactions with the Real (and the cosmic!) barred from any subtly.⁶⁵ The absolute and illusory “fulfillment” or filling-in of meaning itself *smooths* it too radically, threatening any patternings and gaps that in fact afford access to the real, those moments of pleasure in interacting with something that “feels right.” But “instead of eliminating the space of doubt, the filling-in occasions the loss of the possibility of feeling convinced.”⁶⁶ The key trap, the paradigmatic agential bind of the ideological, is the fact that these crises are also experienced as the *solutions*. The fact that the fantasies are reductive and fulfilled fuels both the drive for more fantasies and the cynical separation from the performance when one takes them up. The lack of belief in anything becomes a most reified belief that nothing is worth believing in.

Dean argues this dynamic plays a fundamental role in blogs: “The contemporary setting of electronically mediated subjectivity is one of infinite doubt, ultimate reflexivization.”⁶⁷ With blogs, this means there is always another page, explanation link, news event (and network of such “events”), comment sections, etc. to follow. As Dean argues, this is a product yet intensification of the anxiety concerning the impossibility of a totalized (idealized/repressed) meaning. However, it is not a sublimation of this impossibility, but a deferral of it; one never takes a position against or within this “wound” of meaning/ordering, never forms opinions and actions that would lead us away from deluge of negativity or the present inequalities. The impossibility of a totalized meaning is experienced too closely: “the Other is both missing and

⁶⁵ Dean again: “Instant gratification fills in the lack constitutive of desire. Hypertextual play enables the unstated subtext of any text to be brought to the fore, thereby eliminating the textual effects of the unsaid,” *Blog*, 8.

⁶⁶ Dean, *Blog*, 8.

⁶⁷ Dean, *Blog*, 6.

fully, overwhelmingly present.”⁶⁸ And yet, no actual relationship with the Other—energy—is achieved. For this, a slowing down is required, a style, a care. In many blogs, there is no slowing down. The (lack of style) of blogs *is* the frenetic and painful revealing of “secrets” and “thoughts.”

K’s “blog” is a performance of this hyper-reflexivity with a key difference: it slows way down. There are no links, no opinions, no commentary, no uproar. It is not merely an “everyday account” of her travails as an affected person. Although, as I will show, she does speak from the perspective that most blogs take, from the (un)assured, hyper-reflexive “I,” she does not speak as though she is giving a (non)commentary on “public events” or “conversations.” And yet two things are also very clear. First, the blog regards the trauma of her post-3.11 life. K is explicit that the blog would follow her as her family attempts to put the pieces of their lives back together. Second: there are no secrets revealed. The “content” is always expected and is bereft of “content,” both in terms of meaning but also in terms of “entertainment.” Each post is one of several formal encounters with the impossibility of totalization. Even this predictability is decomposed as one is never sure which of the series will appear—just that they will. In fact, she sometimes presents her posts as visual “art installation” pieces, assuring the performative element of the anti-performance. In this, there is a flick, a shutter, a wobble of an ordering, a relationship to the real (a non-direct yet engaged “sense” of something *there* in the work), but it is not clear that this wobble has further effects—and it seems to be designed that way.

Of her overall project, K writes, “The townscape and houses lost to the tsunami; once-familiar places.... Things look different and so memories fade. I record the tales of these places, but just in the moment without any real plan. I’ll gather together memories of my family and my

⁶⁸ Dean, *Blog*, 8.

neighbourhood like so many broken shards.”⁶⁹ She wants to *collect* these shards while refusing any attempt to bring them into a totalized *picture*. No plan; without any “real.” Keeping the wound painful, restricting healing, shards that cut. She wants to perform the breaking that the disasters’ violences imposed to prevent the “full pictures” of the disasters emerging around her. Recovery means that the pain of unacknowledged differences and the lack of closure concerning sudden death gets overwhelmed by the seeming impossibility to slow things down and attempt to make changes in relation to what occurred.

One of K’s most returned to topics or series on the blog is the open discussion of the antinomies in the act of online blog writing. In a key example, K writes, “Writing without addressing anyone is an act of self-reflection. It is to put in order, in one’s own way, feelings that no one else, often not even yourself, really understand.”⁷⁰ In the original, “self-reflection” is literally “staring at yourself.” K is taking up the hyper-reflexive medium in an explicitly hyper-reflective way. Speaking about speaking, blogging about blogging. But K’s strategy remains the shard or the mute: the attempt to break or absorb the reflection. Despite talking about self-reflection, it is not clear what is being reflected. In the end, she “doesn’t really understand” what she herself is organizing. K attempts to make the reflection on the self-fail so that the transference of identity of this blogging self to the reader also fails. The reader has no recourse to conceive of themselves in relation to the blogger: they cannot construct an idealization on which to base their own identity. K rather hopes to wound any identity. She hopes to *be* the wounding force by occupying the “I” that doesn’t reflect. She hopes to be *identified* as member of the

⁶⁹ 「震災で失われた町並みや家、慣れ親しんだ場所…風景の変容とともに、場所の思い出も薄れていきます。ふとしたきっかけで思い出される家族のこと、街のこと、記憶のかけらを拾って、それぞれの物語を記録していきたいと思います。」

⁷⁰ 「誰にあてるでも無く書くということは自分をみつめる行為だ。誰にも時々自分にもわからない気持ちを自分なりにわかっておくための整理。」

“affected,” which the blog is explicitly about, without offering any identity-based catharsis to those who seek it. She recognizes that as “an affected” she is the source of an anxious national search for purification. She refuses it.

She also is explicit about the “no one” that online pseudo-interactivity produces. K writes, “This blog is like a letter. A letter to whom? A letter to nobody. Some are addressed to my family members, but I get no replies. I felt I could take these letters and go out to meet whomever.”⁷¹ She performatively calls out the position of “no one” that is occupied by the reading subject. She does not even address them in this non-address. She does not speak to the reader directly to say, “you are the no one to whom I’m addressing this letter.” She says, “it could have been you, reader; it could have been anyone.” She is writing to manifest this “could have been” as a form of collective consistency. This is to say, K is attempting to manifest the malaise today that reacts to the breakdown of the “common account” that the nation-state so desperately attempts to cleave to. In a sense, then, K is mobilizing the sense that collectivity is born out of neither an essence nor a destiny (Jean-Luc Nancy, more on this below). But she nonetheless reifies the non-essence by naming this non-destiny *as* the destiny. The modern capitalist “recovery” demands progress on its citizens *without* producing a belief that this recovery points anywhere. This demand is therefore depressive and the post-3.11 cities like Ishinomaki are filled with it. And K, whose “whomever” is the city’s, attempts to perform it. But in doing so, constructs no alternative, constructs nothing.

Whenever there is writing on the blog, it is always in the form of these, if you like, anti-*koan*: Am I the subject of the blog or am “I” subjected by the blog. Who is it that writes from a

⁷¹ 「このブログは手紙のようなものです。 / 誰にあてているのか、 / 誰にでもない手紙です。 / 家族に向けたものもありますが / どの手紙も返ってくることはありません。 / この手紙を持って誰かに会いに行こうと思いました。」

“personal” perspective? But, of course, these *koan* lack the step-by-step program Rinzai Zen, the progression and application of *koan* to bring a student towards awakening and healing. The “perfect” reflection of Zen discourse resounds here in its refusal too. Japanese Zen speaks often about becoming like a mirror or waveless surface of water such that the self/world dualism disappears, such that the static and enduring perfection of the universe is reflected. K refuses these resonances of reflection by creating a self that she thinks nevertheless *reflects* the chaos of the energetic universe embodied by the tsunami.

K *performs* the infinite doubt of reflexivity—doubt taken to the extreme. But with no escape. Once again, she assumes this infinite doubt is *the answer*. She thereby occupies precisely the contemporary dominant order, which sees the failure of the symbolic but cannot respond. To respond means to enter the symbolic. And K attempts a response that nullifies that entrance as it is made. Who is reading the blog? Who is it for? No one. It is a tragic statement on its own lack of a collective impulse. This forecloses the possibility of an order aware of its investment in what exceeds it—aware of its non-essential *being of* that order.

IV

This is shown further in the next aspect of K’s practice: her relation to (depicting) death. K’s most pointed series is pictures of gloves on the ground. The series sometimes includes other items, but the gloves are the most prominently featured, and K identifies them with the series. Significantly, the practice bridges the divide before and after March 11. As K explains,

“These were items that might have turned up in the wind or maybe were placed in a conspicuous location so a searching owner could easily find them. I liked to imagine the intention of the person who had left them behind. And then, a day came when things

found on the ground were not just random things here and there, a day when the things left behind were no longer things just left behind.”⁷²

What K hesitates to state outright is that these items are likely those that belonged to the people who died in the March 11/12 tsunami. Japan’s army-in-waiting, the Self-Defense force, were tasked with finding and removing the corpses of the dead. An incredible assemblage unfolded, functioning ambiguously through efficiency and respect, in this activity. Any public/group witnessing of corpses was heavily policed. Processes of identification were of course done in private. And this private process re-created personal lineages and afforded mourning. However, a certain dissonance remained: the visual grouping of the dead was forbidden alongside two things: the immediate imaginal grouping of the dead; and the fact that the debris of the tsunami was left in some places more months. A lived dissonance occupied the spaces of memory and mourning.

The corpse is, of course, in modern societies, highly abject. It need not be this way. But is K moving beyond this abjection or functioning within it? Perhaps the latter, but, again, K mobilizes the abject in attempt to have it work against itself. K’s representation of the gloves throws us more closely into what the structure of abjection is. There are in fact no corpses depicted or come across, yet they signal, as in a force, the dead. But, precisely by their being enformed (literally in the form of) us yet “random” and discarded means they are much more

⁷² 「風にふかれてやってきたものもあれば、拾った人がみつかるようにと置いたものもあるでしょう。置いた人の意志がわかるものもあってもおもしろい。あるとき、落ちているものがふらりとやってきたものでなく、置かれているものがただ置かれているわけではない日がやってきました。」

Indeed, there is a fold here that I cannot attend in the chapter due to space. K blogged before the disaster, including taking pictures of gloves and her family house each her. She explains, however, that she never knew why. Once again, postmodernity as bereft of the ability to create new memories, *from within the structure of recording itself*, rears its monstrous head. K’s continuing to blog after the disaster, she implies, is the terrible reason in retrospect that she wishes she never had. But in this terrible reason that destroys all reason, I think, K finds the texture of seeking difference, of approaching what is barred: memory making itself.

than that to us too. Or, indeed, *not*. K also seems to assert that the abjection of the presence of these gloves and the possibility of their relation to corpses is mirrored in the impossibility of a more frequent and continual mourning for what has happened. She asserts the lived reality of suffering *as emerging from mere gloves* is being refused yet saturating the post-3.11 milieu.

K wants to mobilize the abject's force in a gesture that seems without force—merely a picture, the force of abjection perhaps rendered all the more, its force that comes from “nowhere” allowed its passage more openly. But it is precisely this re-application of the force of abjection that is limiting, i.e. is part of a subject's attempt to shift the world according to a certain experience of pain. The critical moment of this chapter returns again: this attempt to mobilize death is unlike and against what is more common, that is, to make the dead a substance, a destiny, a Superego—to make death *operative*. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes,

“Death is indissociable from community, for it is through death that the community reveals itself—and reciprocally. [However, the] death upon which community is calibrated does not *operate* the dead being's passage into some communal intimacy, nor does community, for its part, *operate* the transfiguration of its dead into some substance or subject—be these homeland, native soil or blood, nation, a delivered or fulfilled humanity, absolute phalanstery, family, or mystical body. Community is calibrated on death as on that of which it is precisely impossible to *make a work* (other than a work of death, as soon as one tries to make a work of it). Community occurs in order to acknowledge this impossibility, or more exactly—for there is neither function nor finality here—the impossibility of making a work out of death is inscribed and acknowledged as ‘community.’”⁷³

⁷³ Nancy, *Inoperative*, 14.

Community is a challenge which emerges alongside the subject's entrance into meaning, a call to be together within the impossibility of collective immanence. The death of the other signals this impossibility in the same moment that this death calls us to take up the challenge. Death is not something on which a community is based, but a limit from which a community is challenged.

But K is attempting to signal the impossibility of making death a substance/subject. K shows the gloves to reflect "the work of death," the negativity of death, the way it, constitutively, must show that to make community is to be in an inessential relationship. K wants to mobilize the excess of death. And yet, this is precisely the tragedy of the position: K wants to *put to work, to make operative* this inoperability of death. K wants this death to decompose itself, to attack the nation-state's appropriation of it. K therefore also assumes death, this excess, is a kind of substance, if a negative one. K's repetitive presentation of the gloves reveals the structural quality of abjection by locating abjection's forceful rejection towards something that in other contexts would not produce this reaction. K thinks the "work" of the community is the anti-communication. That the "work" is to "unwork" itself—but this is still an essentialization. K wants to signal a "community of sufferers" in the way these modern capitalist urban life makes it difficult to sublimate this relation to the incredible violence of the tsunami. But such a community still fails to sublimate its relation to time, meaning, and excess.

K continues to mobilize, precisely, the structuralization of the abject and its role in producing normative relations with death. The gloves are gloves. And yet, in its play with context and in the attempt to show "the context of death," the normative signifying chain is "negatively affirmed." This is hidden in her own comment: it was once the gloves of the living that were just left behind, but the dead *do not* "just" leave the gloves behind. Yet, this is precisely the case. Thus, K attempt to afford an agency, if a negative one, to the dead continues to strive to

have death *govern* life. K is therefore reproducing a signifying construction, a place of destitution that nevertheless affords the subject *a place to look* and be repelled. K does not see that it is in actuality the previous apathy towards life under capitalism, the “just leaving things behind” of the living that produces the sense that a death-saturated milieu no longer does “just” anything. So, here again, K, in acting as a kind of deteriorating force against the symbolic order, reproduces a rigid—and only apparently “open”—symbolic of her own.

V

I want to bring this critique, finally, to K’s field recordings of waves. The largest group of recordings appear in 2014. The recordings are made at the eastern bank of the mouth of the Jo River, where K’s home was affected. The Jo River is surrounded by an industrial and commercial harbour, which was heavily affected on March 11/12. On March 11/12, the harbour’s partial enclosures and the already present walls impeded the tsunami swells only somewhat. As had occurred across the eastern Tōhoku coastline, as has occurred since the formation of coasts and oceans on earth, the tsunami swells traveled quickly up the rivers.

The recordings I will discuss were taken on one of the massive tsunami walls built and re-built with a kind of vengeance across Eastern Tōhoku. The recordings last upwards of thirty minutes and are without any edits. The only sound is that of the waves crashing against the wall.

The tsunami wall, due to the earthquake and tsunami and the encroaching city, now has itself become the coastal marker. The walls are now the river mouth. A beach that was once there, a favourite spot among residents in the Kadonowaki area of Ishinomaki, no longer exists. The wall now prevents a new beach line forming, being built out and deep, and so waves now crash against it. The sounds of the waves are themselves greatly diminished in the Kadonowaki

area, diffracted and absorbed by the wall's stepped structure. K implies that is the absence of the beach that interests her, a symbolic absence. But I am more interested in the way this seems to be an alibi to stage an encounter with exposure to the waves, to the kind of energy unfolding there. It is a site where crashing waves are both created and then diminished by the wall. The site is the material registration of the spread of capitalist modernity, like choking points on life. No more coastal ecosystem is possible and any trace of relation with the coast that the beach may have afforded is also barred.

First, some comments on the walls. It is difficult to overstate the monstrosity of the walls. They are monstrous precisely in their effort to present a *clean break*—a clean and total separation, a clean shoreline, the clean break of waves. The walls are the manifestation of the modern drive to act under the illusion that the prevention of actions will lead to equilibrium. They prevent precisely what Stengers calls the relationship with the unknown. They are walls, the opposite of a tuning fork: they do not allow the unknown to resonate. The walls now stretch along some 400 meters of the Tōhoku Sanriku coastline at an average height of 13 meters.⁷⁴ The walls are the embodiment of an incredible *ressentiment*. As Nietzsche writes, the subject of *ressentiment* says “No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself’.”⁷⁵ *Ressentiment*, as discussed by Nietzsche and expanded on by Gilles Deleuze, is a particular relation of the subject to energy.⁷⁶ The subject borders in defense against itself, its own energy, and the way that energy arrives from the other that is the same, the cosmos. That is, horribly, the

⁷⁴ And at a cost of over \$12 billion U.S. See, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-disaster-seawalls/seven-years-after-tsunami-japanese-live-uneasily-with-seawalls-idUSKCN1GL0DK>>. Much of this money is pocketed by the owners of the monopolistic companies who built them.

⁷⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 36.

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, European Perspectives (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), 111.

walls manifest a topological subjective relation—pasting it onto the topology of Tōhoku. “The ocean” is both the manifestation and symbolic stand-in for energy in general across modernity, for a kind of freedom or line of flight. Indeed, Amino Yoshihiko argues modernity in Japan is synonymous with the privatization and forbidding of relations to the ocean. The walls attempt to complete that. One resident along the coast comments, “It feels like we’ve been surrounded, like we’re locked in.”⁷⁷ This is precisely the case. The walls impose a cookie cutter-place, a readymade nowhere shape, where the border that cuts does not lift!

Attempted acts of veneration now surround the walls—government officials “visiting” and bowing on them; disaster exhibits detailing their “strengths;” and singing on them. “Field trips” of the walls are given to middle and high school students. At one particular tour, the guide sings an anthem to the wall while everyone stands on it.⁷⁸ Students look understandably confused as the guide starts to sing. The song is put to words that speak the merits of the great protective behemoth. There is something perverse about the act. The waves crash below. The waves are appropriated into a symbolic/sensational order, lending a “gravitas” to what is sung. The singing, the appropriation of the waves’ crashing, the wall on which they crash, and the lyrics of the anthem—all are part of a modern ritual through which the boundaries of subject/object are remade.⁷⁹ Vibration is construed as an abominable violence even while the collective act of singing and listening relies on the energetic material intensity of vibration. It is as if they must be reminded of the violence of what the wall supposedly stops. A kind of twisting entrance is forged

⁷⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/foreign/the-great-wall-of-japan/13207460>; or on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8KQbZDatg0&ab_channel=ABCNewsIn-depth

⁷⁸ The following anecdote is shown in the following mini-documentary: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8KQbZDatg0&ab_channel=ABCNewsIn-depth, 1:58-2:37. It concerns the town Tarō in Iwate, Tōhoku.

⁷⁹ For Jacques Attali’s theory of music and economies of sacrifice/sacrificial economies, see Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 16 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

into vibration so that one can apparently come out the other side as an exit. The true terror is that this tour guide, as the tour continues, seems *critical* of the wall—and yet he sings this song. His desire to sing, I think, signals a desire to become-otherwise with vibration. This is an example of abject as, to quote Marcus Boon, “the violent organization or marking of sound in order to separate oneself from its more intimate and healing properties. From levels of the self that desire healing that register and remember trauma that repeat it as symptom, and through the symptom also express the desire for its transformation.”⁸⁰

But the walls work to prevent this transformation from happening. The walls are, to use Latour’s language, a modern hybrid, a massive change in the structural relation to the material world that should affect the cultural world but—because of modern forms of purification—this sense of this change is numbed and policed. In their purifying role, the walls secure the *ressentiment* that put them there. One final quote from Nietzsche on *ressentiment*: “One cannot get rid of anything, one cannot get over anything, one cannot repel anything—everything hurts. [People] and things obtrude too closely; experiences strike one too deeply; memory becomes a festering wound.”⁸¹ In other words, such a reactionary subjectivity is incapable of forgetting. The walls are an incredible attempt to *patch the wound: the wound of this memory but also the “wound” of meaning, its necessary relationship with alterity, the alterity that it “is.”*

K wants to *expose the wound*, to prevent the illusion that the nation-state’s “recovery” heals that more fundamental “wound” or fallibility of time and energy, its “complete incompleteness.” She goes to the wall to do this, to open the wound where the wound is made and ideologically closed. She wants to break the ideology *in the break*. As before, K attempts to

⁸⁰ Boon, ‘Abject Future,’ 27:00.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Morals*, “Ecco Homo,” 230. And, Kristeva writes, “Freud had, in enigmatic fashion, noted in connection with melancholy: ‘wound’,” *Abjection*, 55—likely after Nietzsche.

utilize the break of the waves, the decomposition of order, to make her move. She does not mark vibration to separate herself from its intimacy, but to leave it “unmarked” despite its “framing” in the recording. In fact, the recording is precisely what allows K to assume there *is no framing* at all—the speaker who does not speak; the death without the dead; a recording that appears to retrace nothing. The long duration is important too. The length itself attempts an exposure without any “exposition” (explaining) but also without, precisely, exposure too. To expose one would *mean*, therefore, precisely to take up a certain “framing,” a certain reciprocity, from within the subject. A certain structure from within which vibration can be expressed, precisely *as waves*. An “openness from closure,” to use Niklas Luhmann’s phrase (I return to the meaning of such a “frame” in the conclusion).

The only framing K allows is that which is there in the crashing of waves against the wall. It is not “the tsunami itself” that K looks to, but the hope that what is *there* in vibration enables a perpetual, repeated, recursive *dehiscence*—the failure for the two sides of a wound to reattach. The waves, the break, for K, continually enable this separation, this force that unravels order. The precision or shrinking and repetition of this movement from repeated wave shaping to repeated wave breaking emphasizes this disorder. Thus, while it is not “the tsunami itself” K seeks, it is nonetheless the repetition of the violence of the tsunami as enacted in the crashing waves. The waves slowly eat away at the wall, pound at it in a kind of threat. Whereas the singer marked the waves ambiguously as both outside and *as outside* a kind of glorious enemy (a worthy opponent), K, in making no order whatsoever, marks the waves as a forever painful outside that marks what is also painful from within (a worthless opposition).

K attempts to mobilize the force of abjection. As Kristeva writes, what appears abject is “A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing[; a] weight of meaninglessness, about which

there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me.”⁸² The attempted to create a frame-less frame is the attempt to generate this “weight of meaninglessness”—weight coming from a form—such that the supposed meaninglessness can *weigh on*, *worry* the listening subject, the Superego. She aims to present *the waves* to the authority that aims to control and abject them. The recording is aware of itself as descending into the relation that the post-3.11 superego aims to restrict. K in a sense taunts with something that taunts her with its haunting. K wants them to haunt, to say that the tsunami is an echo *of this constitutive break*. K is leveraging decomposition, for the many small breaks in the waves as they beat against what organize them.

Conclusion

There is *something* about the waves, but are the waves recognized as part of the energy of what makes listening occur as such? The ambivalence of abjection returns. The subject is reconstituted, through pain. The rejection becomes constitutive. One who rejects a part of themselves, and in so doing collects themselves (the blogging, the photographs, the wave recordings) to be *subjected to* (subject of) the fulcrum of what appears as an outside threat (i.e. the energy of the waves). K’s act is a *transgression*; it approaches a state not in semblance with a self-standing above and away; she forces herself into the break, terrifying and fascinating, disgusting yet magnetic. But to be “transgressive” in this way is to resurrect oneself in the shadows of the Law. It is to become a subject of one’s own denial, to subject oneself to denial. It is to become, as I stated at the beginning, the hated mother, re-reify this excess, re-activating what Kristeva calls the “primal repression” as a permanent force of rejection.

⁸² Kristeva, *Abjection*, 2.

It is important to stress: K is doing this because she desires transformation. Trauma is a repetitive act that responds to the loss of faith in a symbolic while it at the same time reifies, weaponizes the loss. The dominant order, with its performances that nobody quite believes in but that continue to function, is K's enemy. But she feels she must make a pact with the purely malevolent to do so. K misconstrues the sense that the force of energy is always only a violent force. She herself cannot forget but in a particular way: she prevents memory. This is another way of saying, K prevents the possibility of being en-formed again, of the unconscious and subtle exposure to the forming/unforming of the order of the cosmos: vibration.

Where is the thick now? Bruno Latour writes that, "The moderns have a peculiar propensity for understanding time that passes as if it were really abolishing the past behind it. ... Since everything that passes is eliminated forever, the moderns indeed sense time as an irreversible arrow, as capitalization, as progress. [T]he more they capitalize, the more they put on display in museums. Maniacal destruction is counterbalanced by an equally maniacal conservation."⁸³ This is the case with the disaster museums that dot post-3.11 spaces. It is a kind of *ressentiment*—an inability to forget without an ability to sublimate. And the disaster museum in Ishinomaki sports a particularly striking example of it. There is information devoted to the geo-politics of the region to both revere it and, in that reverence, sacrifice, neutralize it. I see this especially in the description of the mangroves that once covered the coastline of "Ishinomaki," which the museums openly discuss. There is information about the way mangroves once acted as "barrier" to the coast. This is true, but it also ignores that mangroves lived on waves. Their barrier was also their frame. The museum then describes the history of agriculture on the same land, of land "reclamations," orchards, etc. And then the growth of the city. The museum

⁸³ Latour, *Modern*, 68-69.

remembers all of this detail while absorbing none of it—exactly the opposite of mangroves. The mangroves were hit by more tsunami than we know, ravaged, torn and broken. But then they forget. The waves, the energy the mangroves required, came again and were absorbed as energy. The walls are precisely this inability to forget—to try and make memory frozen, delegate the memory of the tsunami to the walls. Trauma is difficult because it also creates an inability to forget, a constitutive pain. But perhaps it is important to learn that the barrier of the mangroves was also its frame—the inside and outside are one and the same.

I have begun with this chapter, then, to explicate an antinomy in contemporary subjectivity either the recapitalization to fanaticism (and the shadow of fascism) or the pain and apathy regarding the failures of those. Seeing the symbolic order as a sham, this subjectivity nonetheless attempts to make of itself a frame that frames nothing, that does not reverberate. But this is precisely what the subject is doing: reverberating with the energy it only seems to abject. Tragically, then, highly explicit articulation of disruptiveness that functions throughout K's work are not in the end disruptive—precisely because it is not in the *productive*. It refuses to do what energy is constantly doing: making field, being in fields, dissipating and emanating in throngs of consistency and difference. But I thank her for helping me see that. And I thank her for her perseverance.

K's approach is taken towards where the superego wants no one to go: the break. The break of the ocean is identified as the means to break the domination that marks her subjectivity. K refuses the logic of recovery, its paradigmatically postmodern inability to imagine a future that is not a nostalgia for a capitalist modernity prior to the modern promise that never happened. She attempts to go where the going no longer goes one discernible way—the break, where the wave turns against itself in its encounter with the shoreline that is her subjectivity—and is frightened

by what she finds there. She makes herself a student of the adverse reaction, becoming familiar with forced unfamiliarity, the terror in the waves, negating the intensive recursivity of the waves in the very effort to capture them. She wades into suffering, as deep as she can.

There are historical rituals that mirror K's practice. One thinks of the Tibetan as *chöd* (severing) rituals and their precedencies in India: rituals with skulls, performed in graveyards, or imagining one's own decomposition. In Japan, there is the oppressed history Tachikawa Ryu, a brief and vilified sect of Esoteric Buddhism in the ninth century, who performed rituals with skulls and sexual rites. These rituals arguably gradually release death from its abject force, from the subject's fear of its own death, and approach life with violent sacrifice. This resituates oneself in relation to one's own death, but precisely, I think, in this "unworked" or inoperative way that Nancy describes. Ideally, these rituals create a kind of personal collective, a community with yourself that is "unworked" too. They attempt to address the real suffering that can arise out of difference and violence.

I get something of the *chöd* when Kristeva writes, "Our eyes can remain open provided we recognize ourselves as always already altered by the symbolic—by language. Provided we hear in language—and not in the other, nor in the other sex—the gouged-out eye, the wound, the basic incompleteness that conditions the indefinite quest of signifying concatenations. That amounts to joying in the truth of self division."⁸⁴ A wound is a "self-division:" two sides surrounding a gap. K wants to *become* the opening, reifying it. There is, tragically, no joy there; static. It is what makes her work, arguably, not sublimational but traumatic, while remaining

⁸⁴ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 88-89. This is a deeply political position, the condition that necessitates ethical democracy in the sense of its meaning in ancient Greece, or the ethics of a post-first insight practice in the Buddhist lineage. It is also a condition that theory, as a general practice, attempts to inhabit.

powerful. The hope is to return to seeing that gap as a field, a resonant chamber. The hope is to not hope for a return to an origin that the very violence against you imposed on you.

Fred Moten's work on the black radical tradition speaks to this also and is especially prescient given its commitment to thinking through a particular history of violence. Moten theorizes the way the subordinated object (which is another term for a dominated "subject") resists through a mobilization of the force of its excess that is the mark of its exclusion without the attempt to recapture anything "originary" prior to that historical exclusion. Moten asserts that overcoming the bind between the reciting (reproducing) and repressing (disappearance) of a break seen as an "origin" is to confront the fact that "the *conjunction* of reproduction and disappearance is performance's condition of possibility, its ontology and its mode of production."⁸⁵

Both Kristeva and Moten speak to a kind of framing open to contingency: improvisation. Both speak about the potential for productive acts that function in relation to that which exceeds them, a form of meaning that neither attempts to abject nor fully subsume the maternal body.⁸⁶ This would afford a kind of transit, passage, or bridge between the relatively contained topology

⁸⁵ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 5, original emphasis. Moten is thinking of the ambivalence of the foundational quality of Frederick Douglass, his depiction of Aunt Hester's beating, and the black radical work, in this case the work of Saidiya Hartman, that struggles with this scene. To cite the quotation in its fuller context, Moten writes, "lingering in the psychoanalytic break is crucial in the interest of a certain set of complexities that cannot be overlooked but must be traced back to this origin precisely in the interest of destabilizing its originarity and originarity in general, a destabilization Douglass founds in his original recitation, which is also an originary repression. It's the ongoing repression of the primal scene of subjection that one wants to guard against and linger in. Douglass passes on a repression that Hartman's critical suppression extends. Such transfer demands that one ask if every recitation is a repression and if every reproduction of a performance is its disappearance. Douglass and Hartman confront us with the fact that the conjunction of reproduction and disappearance is performance's condition of possibility, its ontology and its mode of production," *Break*, 4-5.

⁸⁶ Susan Ingram's "Head Cases" helped me arrive at this formulation. See, Susan Ingram, 'Head Cases: Bettina Flitner's *Europäerinnen* and Annie Leibovitz's *Women*', *Drain Magazine: Online Arts Journal*, The Head, vol. 19, no. 1 (2023), <https://drainmag.com/kristevan-head-cases-bettina-flitners-europaerinnen-and-annie-leibovitzs-women/>.

of subjectivity to the topologies of energy that constitute it, exceed it, and frame it. It is a subjectivity attuned to the emergence of the unconscious without attempting to overdetermine what that emergence is—but rather *practice* in the relationship to it. It is a way of seeing consciousness as part of the ontology opened up by quantum physics: not of the particle but the field. David Bohm, theoretical quantum physicist, and an interlocutor for Christer Hennix, explicitly theorizes the results of this for speaking about consciousness, where consciousness is not an island in a sea, but is itself a wave in a field.⁸⁷ Consciousness is as a particular local folding, or “explicate,” in an ontological field Bohm calls the “implicate order.” Subjectivity—time and space, our sense of objects as static—bears a real consistency, as kind of material “abstraction,” that is also not *essential* to itself. It is a theory of energy that speaks precisely to the improvisatory and productive qualities of Kristeva and Moten. And this transit, passage, or bridge is precisely what Hennix calls a *topos*: an attempt to render a resonance with the unknown that is material, improvisatory, yet based on certain rules, certain operations. It is precisely this framing around the “frame” of subjectivity that allows for a resonance with the implicate order. A *topos* must be made and in its making the subject shifts, signaled by experiences that defy the normalized everyday experiences that we tend to inhabit which are the transcendental (subjective) structures of space and time.

What I have explored in this chapter is a field recording that, through a tragic pain and defiant anger, refuses to be ordered, refuses to create a *topos*. What it assumes is “outside” is actually an artifact of a subjective topology. The persistent dangerousness of the “outside,” the fundamentally antagonistic positioning of excess, belies the subject’s own fantasy of a return to

⁸⁷ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

totality. In the next chapter, I look to a field recording that arises from a similar context yet, I think, is demonstrative of the subtle work of generating a topos.



Image 4: Sato field recording in Carpe Diem Skatepark, Arahama. Photo by the author.

Chapter 2

The Field(s) of Arahama:

Sato Nami, Field Recording, and Vibrational Depropriation

This chapter goes to Arahama with Sato Nami who also turned to field recording and music to respond to her post-March 11 milieu. She has this to say about her album *Our Map Here* (2019):

“These are soundscapes of an area that was heavily affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, where the Tsunami washed my whole town away on March 11, 2011. Some people may say that those places are completely gone since the Tsunami. But we know it’s not true. There are beautiful new things born every day in this place that lost everything to the past, and I want you to know it.”⁸⁸

Sato’s circumstance resembles what was discussed in the previous chapter, however the tenor here is strikingly different: exposure not to a wound but to beauty. This chapter interprets what this beauty means and how it relates to the space that Sato engages. I will argue that the beauty Sato evokes is not only a description of this “we” fighting for its claim to the Arahama area. The beauty is also a brief evocation within Sato’s practice of what Karatani Kōjin calls the “pure gift.”

It is important to note first that this evocation occurs in the aftermath of the tsunami. Sato was born and raised in Arahama. Arahama was once a small seaside town of 750 homes and 2,100 people. It was about a twenty-minute drive from Sendai city’s suburbs in Miyagi

⁸⁸ The quote, posted in English, has been altered for clarity. I have, however, retained Sato’s capitalization of “Tsunami” since it signals each the significance, the singularity, and the ongoingness of the event. For the album and full liner notes, see: Nami Sato, *Our Map Here* (The Ambient Zone, 2019), <https://theambientzone.bandcamp.com/album/our-map-here>.

Prefecture, Tōhoku. Arahama occupied about two square kilometers sandwiched between rice paddies and a tree grove, beyond which was the beach. On March 11, multiple ten-meter tsunami surged inland several kilometers. By March 12, not a single house remained standing. About 190 people, eleven percent of Arahamians, most of whom were neighbourhood elders, were lost. One was Sato's grandfather. Many people, including Sato's cousin, found refuge on the roof of Arahama Elementary School, previously identified as the tsunami evacuation building and one of the only buildings tall and strong enough to provide safety. Unlike most tsunami-affected towns, the government decided Arahama would not be rebuilt due to its proximity to Sendai—a decision that was a surprise to many of its previous residents. The land would be purchased from the previous residents and sold off to companies. The debris was cleared by 2012 and a large tsunami wall was slowly erected. However, from 2012 to 2020 Arahama remained largely open land. Buying and selling was complicated and bureaucracy (in this case, thankfully) moved at its typically slow pace. When I visited in 2019, a major road and monuments had been built, but nothing else.⁸⁹

Thus, for about eight years, Arahama remained this way. Compared to the tsunami, this land was “opened” by a much more slow and pernicious violence, that of the state's. However, in this openness, the State's power was rendered visible, the National identity was rendered illusory, and a kind of opportunity was taken. A mode of exchange profoundly different from capitalist commodification tentatively and provisionally emerged. The open land became a source of a life

⁸⁹ Notice the resonance but difference of this circumstance with that of Ishinomaki's: urban vs rural destruction; open land quickly becoming residences and parks again in Ishinomaki vs the open land of Arahama; the quick and ambiguous reclaiming of space in Ishinomaki vs the long open space of Arahama; Ishinomaki's apparent “recovery” vs Arahama's ambiguous but coming second disappearance; and finally, but importantly, the tragedy of the elementary school in Ishinomaki vs the triumph of the elementary school in Arahama. These differences play out across the analyses of the two chapters, leading to different political effects.

lived otherwise. *Because of* or “*thanks to*” its articulation as a dark abject/sacred “wasteland” by the state and the general public, the land was otherwise ignored and a glimmer of a different kind of sovereignty strove to grow.

In this chapter I argue Sato’s field recording and music, in particular her album *Our Map Here* and the field recording that informs it, are not means of depicting or representation this potential; they are a material/imaginal manifestation *of* it. Sato says her work “is not quite music, not quite soundscapes.” The sounds that populate the album *Our Map Here* are the field recordings of waves, winds, local memorial events, laughter, snippets of conversations, and meandering walks all within the open Arahama area. These are organized to make a particular kind of music where background and foreground flip and blend, where voice and wave are horizontal actors in the composition, where weavings of the events, Arahama sounds, and musical organization gesture at a vibrational “sameness.” Sato then pumps this music back into the community. Not only does Sato’s work and Sato herself reach a sublimation (an active and dynamic ordering in relationship with the excesses of energy); Sato’s practice also enacts and affords an opportunity to attune to the way this sublimation is itself implicate in an ontology of vibration. Sato’s work registers the imperative this ontology “contains.” Sato’s practice/music *expresses* (manifests and translates) a collective sharing that acts “in the presence of” that which is both collectively shared and never collectively owned: vibration. Sato’s music creates a *topos*, a lived abstraction that allows translations between the topologies of the subject, a collective, and a space—all resonant folds within the unknown “implicate order,” to use Bohm’s phrase again.

My argument, then, tries to strike another topos: a bridge between theories of depropriative human communities and the cosmos as a vast exchange of energy. The former communities are explicate moments in an implicate field of energy and that, via practices of

music and decisions about what “is”, the former realize or celebrate in the “fact” of the latter. My thinking here is again indebted to Hennix and Boon. As Boon explains, depropriation names “various practices that render things unownable, that refuse the logic of property and that make such things necessarily part of a public domain or commons.”⁹⁰ Boon argues certain musical subcultures take up this “commons” in sometimes radical and sometimes ambivalent ways. In this chapter I will take up the theme, the style or expression, of “nomadism” as a form of collective impropriety enacted on Arahama land. This “nomadism” acts as the analytical bridge, the topos: it forms a key term in both Karatani Kōjin’s *The Structure of World History* as a “repressed” egalitarian impulse in human exchange and Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* as a term for speculative radical psychoanalytic attention to the dynamics of the nonhuman in human desire. For Karatani it is *the pure gift* and for Deleuze/Guattari it is *nomadology*. A topos is precisely the abstraction that allows us to witness the way they may be derived from the “same.”

Sato speaks about Arahama in highly depropriative ways while taking up an intensive, improvizatory, modal practice dedicated to the space. She enacts an intensive “nomadology” as a tentative expression of the pure gift of a-reciprocal “nomadic” exchange. To this end, I introduce the post-3.11 politics of Arahama and Sato before analyzing Sato’s recording practice and, finally, the aesthetic form of the album in terms of vibration, fields, and depropriation.

I

⁹⁰ Marcus Boon, ‘Depropriation: The Real Pirate’s Dilemma’, in *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South*, ed. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 136.

A flat open field of dirt with scraggly footpaths, wild grass and weeds. No “development” had begun in earnest when I visited with Sato several times in 2019. Walking in Arahama meant walking through grasses and over disintegrating roads, previously used rice paddies, and the foundations of houses. The pathways were a network leading to various hang out spots. From 2017-2018, when Sato recorded and composed *Our Map Here* some changes began. A main road, recently paved, cut through the open fields to end at a parking lot. At the side of the lot stands a small information center without any personnel. The road also gives access to various state-funded memorial structures: the Arahama Elementary School Monument/Exhibit; an outdoor preserved house foundations-cum-“exhibit”; and a Kannon statue whose hand marks the tsunami zenith at 13 meters. The road and field are stopped by the 14-meter tsunami wall, giant and grey. The beach is beyond, blocked from view, but the sound of the sea is ever present. There was also a small road off the main road that ended at Arahama’s ancestral graveyard, now refurbished.

Disaster produced a radical shift in the topology of the space. And the previous residents took to exploring what it meant, how to move through it. But the disaster does not automatically guarantee a shift in perspective. The radical shift is of course *there* but how it affects the unconscious structures in place and the interpretation of the consequent dissonance is a different matter entirely. This is especially true of the broader capital-nation-state imaginary which considers it necessary to “resolve” the dissonance by returning to the shape of the familiar. This is not only a matter of “momentum,” but of an actual “shape” of energetic desire, a topology of the subject, whose shifts away from a particular formal relation hold a great deal of psychic tension and therefore are prone to “snapping back.” This imaginary is itself twisted and reshaped, anxiously trying to retake its previous form. However, at the local level, the exploration of what

it could mean to be in this space was undertaken in response to a series of oppressive pressures by the capital-nation-state. A series of events made the violence of this pressure to return to a previous relation to space manifest, a tripartite violence mirroring the capital-nation-state.

In the months following March 11, mourning was undertaken alongside the slow and difficult work of clearing debris. In December 2011, after the debris was finally cleared and residents were talking of rebuilding, officials from the urban center informed the previous residents that, to their surprise, Arahama would be neither rebuilt nor relocated. Arahama, the officials said, was too close to the sea, so a large tsunami wall would be built, and close enough to Sendai that the problem of residency was already “solved.” People would be moved from their temporary housing to the Sendai suburbs effectively at random.

But why this decision was made without consulting Arahamians is not exactly clear. Sato suggests the lack of awareness of the decision-making process was because people like her grandfather, those running the neighbourhood association, had passed away. And indeed in other locations across the affected coast, it was often elders that made gains in asserting relative autonomy over decisions about tsunami walls and town locations. But the lack of an attempt on the part of the urban administration to ask Arahamians to first create a consultation group is alarming. The records of who came from where were there. Perhaps also the shock of near-total destruction of the town blocked such considerations. But it is likely that the proximity of the suburbs produced a decision based on pure efficiency—and a longer democratic process was abandoned. In other words, the reason may be (un)clear after all: this was a manifestation of what the modern representational democracy supposedly eliminates, what Giorgio Agamben calls the state of exception, when the sovereign power of the state flushes with unaccountability in times of real and imagined crises. In this case, whereas elected government is supposed to

“represent the people,” here it clearly mobilizes its power to make bodies adhere to a “good for all” end whose reason (“logos”) is ambiguous yet latent to the sovereign organ itself.⁹¹

The Arahamians were forced to begin selling their homes to the state. And so, this is the first materialization of the violence of the status quo felt by the Arahamians—the contradictions of “private ownership” were felt. The second violence came at the level of the imaginary, the nation. Arahamian identity was strongly linked to the town. A town named “Arahama” had been in that spot for centuries. It was established as a strategic outpost by the *daimyo* Date Masamune in the late 16th century. The house that the Sato family lived in was itself a refurbished vassal home. Sato was to inherit a living document showing that her family on her father’s side had lived in Arahama since the late Edo period—some three hundred years. The house and document were lost.

Part of Arahama pride must be contextualized in the modern national milieu. As is known, small peripheral towns are emptying, and people are moving to urban centers across Japan as the country experiences population decline and the precarity of capitalism. Arahama occupied a particular proximity/distance from Sendai city: it was agricultural, and then industrial, and then was able to support a mixed population of rural workers (industrial, agricultural, aquacultural) as well as urban workers. Those urban-style, capital- and city-oriented jobs were viable while still living in Arahama. Arahama was therefore doing well relative to its other “modern small towns.” These small towns carry an enormous ideological burden in Japan, what Jennifer Robertson calls the “*furusato* [*hometown*] ideology.”⁹² In a nutshell, the vast majority of

⁹¹ Giorgio Agamben writes, “the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference,” *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 40.

⁹² Jennifer Robertson, ‘Furusato Japan: The Culture and Politics of Nostalgia’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1988): 494–518.

people in Japan no longer have a non-urban hometown and if they do there is no sense of collective attachment to it. Yet *furusato* populate almost every facet of entertainment media and national discourse. Arahamians were proud that they could inhabit an “actualization” of this rarified fantasy.

Until 3.11. An incredible hypocrisy, a parallel state of exception, within the discourses descended on Arahama. An enormous contradiction (inherent to the nation-state) pervades its post-3.11. “Nation Recovery” is the discursive prerogative, but the state barred what was apparently this perfect materialization of “old and true Japanese identity” from being, precisely, “recovered.” This violent contradiction was not lost on Arahamians. The trouble was further exacerbated in 2017 when Arahama Elementary School was reopened as a disaster ruin/museum/exhibition. The School is a complex text, but effectively, it is narrated as each that which “saved the town” (ruin), that which stores the history of the town (museum), and that which promises *recovery* through the town’s land (exhibition). In other words, Arahama witnessed this ambiguous site of living memory get transformed into a reified site which utilizes their strong identity marker as a “perfect *furusato*” for the purpose of promising a future that the town Arahama will have no place in. Arahama “town” is cast as a *noble sacrifice* so that the true “recovery” can occur: a capitalist use of its land.

And thus, the final violence: capitalism. Their space would be given over to accumulative profit. For the eight years the land stayed open, however, while this capitalist future loomed on the horizon, Arahamians decided to find ways to assert and explore their relation to the land as it was. The context was always the tripartite violence of the capital-nation-state, registered to various degrees and combated it in various ways. Those who did own the land refused to sell.

And, barred from building houses, built small “public institutions” and pseudo-“businesses” instead.

One project was overtly political in that sense that it confronted and worked within the terms of the state: The Association for the Restoration of Arahama.⁹³ The Association attempted, through suing and personal messages to administration, to have Arahama returned to its residential zoning. There were apparently no legal grounds to sue. Eventually, the small makeshift headquarters of the Association became less a center for understanding and fighting policy than a place for previous residents to gather in Arahama. The organization dissolved in 2018.⁹⁴ The Association often used the language of Arahamian’s “essential,” blood and soil connection to their land.

Other projects are of a less overtly political nature but attempted to maintain a sense of “Arahama” space. One is called the Seaside Library.⁹⁵ Completed in 2014, the organizer, previous residents, as well as non-local 3.11-affected individuals built a small structure over which the organizer’s house once stood. The organizer envisions the small structure as “a place where people who feel they cannot begin again, who need help to take their first steps can come together and get away from the average everyday—a place to talk, to learn, to eat together; a place to rediscover our courage through good experiences; a place to construct a future to look forward to.”⁹⁶ The library received a grant from a Sendai library to hold books on permanent loan. The sense of the relation of these projects to “Arahama” seems to dwindle over time.

⁹³ 「荒浜再生を願う会」

⁹⁴ <http://www.asahi.com/area/miyagi/articles/MTW20180628041050001.html>

⁹⁵ <http://umibe.org/>

⁹⁶ 「何かを始めたいが、はじめの一步が踏み出せない人たちが集まり普段の生活から離れ、語り合い、学び合い、一緒に食事をし、楽しい体験を通じて自らの勇気に気づき、わくわくする未来を創っていく場」： <http://umibe.org/about/>

Young adult Arahmians had in fact taken to the area. The region was filled with everyday activities and art practices with the edge of the “taboo” in them. Skateboarding, public music, beach camping and bake-outs.... These locals find respite from dominant organizations of time and space in ways that the town—and contemporary urban life—don’t seem to afford. Their approach is not to the past, but to an admittedly vague but powerful future sense geared to exploring what life means. One location is Carpe Diem Park (CDP).⁹⁷ This park was also built out of the foundations of the owner’s home—a most tender brutalism. This skate park, basketball court, event venue, and general hangout spot has become one of the watering holes, as it were, of local Arahama space. I liked it there. Sato records here often and she can be seen doing so in the photograph that opens the chapter.

These buildings, groupings, and tendencies became dotted throughout the open Arahama space. By 2019 so did several monuments. I already mentioned Arahama Elementary School, which was there all along. No one could enter it and it stood there in its ambiguous and powerful presence. But in 2017 it opened as the “Ruin/Monument/Exhibit.” In 2019, an “outdoor house foundation exhibit” was opened—four foundations “preserved” with added concrete walkways across them—next to the school. And a Kannon statue was erected with its hand marking the 13-meter tsunami zenith. The statue is ambiguous. Is the hand not a reification of the bodhisattva’s care, a kind of reverence *to* the tsunami as well as to those who passed? Kannon (Chn. Guanyin; Skrt. Avalokitasvara), or Kanzeon 觀世音, means “the one who perceives the cries of the world,” literally “the one who sees the world’s sound,” connoting “the one who can perceive the woes of the universe,” the one who and attempts to convert this suffering into realization. It seems to me

⁹⁷ Information about the park can be found on the important online archive, Remembering 3.11, by Sendai Mediateque: <https://recorder311-e.smt.jp/movies/5876/>.

that the Arahama Kannon statue has been modified by a modern reduction. Kannon here articulates what was “uncompassionate” (the waves) and demands a finalizing and sacrificial “compassion” for those who passed. The sense that pain and pleasure are two sides of the same coin and Kannon embodies the hope to eternally modify the living’s relation to this fact is lost. The hand *indicating* something symbolic and “in our world” is without a doubt a modern addition (Kannon’s hands are usually performative gestures with specific symbolic meaning). Precisely by *pointing the tsunami out* the relations to the tsunami’s memory seems to *contain* (hold, bar) the violence as much as it *contains* (carries, repeats) it.⁹⁸ The preserved foundations seem cruel—destruction reified where people wanted to live. Nearby, we danced and played on the same foundations at Carpe Diem Park, but in the “preservation” of exhibits, violence is again, in the double sense, contained in a sacrificial sacredness.

And at Arahama Elementary School none of the projects, groups, or activities I just mentioned are named. On the contrary, the school repeats the state—>nation—>capital movement in its structure. Visitors enter at the preserved and cleared ruin of the first floor (embodying the necessity of state interventions against “nature”), move to the third floor to learn about Arahama history (nation), and then move to the fourth to learn about the various ways disasters will be “prevented” by walls to allow the “land’s” “recovery” through business there (capital). This is capped off with a cathartic move to the roof where there is an unconscious blurring between the imagination of the 3.11 rescue by helicopter and the “rescue” of land from its absence by the future of business. The pathos of the school is predictable: celebrated as both “brutal and lovely,” it partakes in the pathos of witnessing and accepting the intensive loopings of the capital-nation-state contradiction. Visitors frequently comment that, in the grasses and

⁹⁸ See, again, Dupuy, *Mark*.

trees, they see nothing and therefore the School is to be valued because it retains the “traces of the disaster” 震災の爪痕 *shinsai no tsumeato*, literally “the scratch marks of the disasters.” The devastation is frequently cited as due to the loss of a kind of perfect community. Despite the structures dotted here and there and pathways between them, the land *as it stands there now* is abjected/sacralized, and the contradictions only lend more energy to the looping. (Arahama School is ambiguous because, as I will mention in a moment, it also acts as a hub for state-funded “memorial” projects run by the Arahama people in collaboration with a state mediator—for which it is given a single, isolated room. And the public do not learn about these activities.)

So, for the Arahamians the bind of this capital-nation-state structure is loosened, its shape transformed—not only “by the tsunami,” but by the dominant topology of desire made manifest and shown to be not only conditional but violent. Sato experienced this personally with the ambiguous destruction of the objects that placed her in the symbolic History of “Japan”—the lineage document and the house—while that History is simultaneously flippantly denied by the state and appropriated by the nation. It is significant that, in this transformation and possible disorientation, Sato turns to field recording to find another way around the space—another modality of engaging its (and her; and the cosmic) *topology*.

II

Sato, like K, is part of the large population of non-professional artists who work, often in the service industry, full or part time to finance the artistic lives they lead. Sato was an early film student when 3.11 hit. But, influenced by figures like Yosi Horikawa, decided to turn to field recording and music to respond to what happened to Arahama. Since then, Sato has been financing her work through various institutional bursaries offered to the 3.11 affected as well as

through part time work. She also has a supportive family. She performs her work and runs music-related workshops in the Arahama area at memorial and community events (something I'll return to below). Sato has also been striving to “make it”—to enter the capitalist market, become popular, such that she can work as an artist/musician full time. To that end, she has performed at night clubs in Sendai and Tokyo, often with music developed from *Our Map Here*. She performed virtually for the popular Dommune streaming platform for the anniversary of 3.11. And she has performed at Red Bull festivals abroad. But Arahama is the center of her work, and the place-making ambiguities of her work often ring strangely in the more fantasy-dependent capitalist settings.

Sato told me, “I will never be able to approach ‘the whole community’ of the Arahama area through music. Music can only speak on an individual level. I’ve never thought, ‘Let’s unite our hearts and recover through music!’ In fact, I hate the sentiment.”⁹⁹ I hate the sentiment too—because it seems to poison a wholesomeness. The chapter also opened with Sato telling us she wants us to know of the beauty that is born in Arahama “every day.” While Sato says music “can only speak on an individual level” her music and practice is also all about composing an ensemble that is exposed to this beauty that is *there*. Sato’s practice, then, is precisely about what composing an ensemble is given the challenge of the enfoldedness of transcendental subjectivity. This composition is not about a perfect *human* (“hearts,” “recovery”) destiny but about a humble stretching out into the cosmos. Indeed it is about the *question or challenge* of *how* a human’s

⁹⁹ 「わたしが地域のコミュニティ全体に対して音楽によって何かをアプローチできたことは一度もないと思っています。音楽でできることは個人への語りかけのみだと思っている。なので、例えば「音楽によってみんなの心をひとつにしよう！」とか「音楽で復興を！」とか、わたしはこういう考え方がめっちゃくちゃ嫌い。」, personal communication, Sept 2022.

transcendental topology stretches to incorporate a sense of itself as (a part of the) cosmic. Sato is taking up a cosmic “women’s writing,” a “women’s composing.”¹⁰⁰

What does Sato do? There are various components, modalities, of her practice. First, Sato walks around Arahama’s fields and field records the wind, waves, her footsteps, the sounds of the beach. Second, she walks around with others or goes to hang out spots and records conversation, the sounds of stepping, play. Third, she records and participates in events organized by associations like the ones mentioned above. This is especially true for events organized through Arahama School in collaboration with the state mediator, whom I met and who, I think, cleverly manipulates the state’s stipulations for funding. Crucially, Sato’s album *Our Map Here* was “commissioned” by this mediator, who works out of a disaster-memory-dedicated institution nearby and was assigned to work with Arahama individuals. *Our Map Here* was conceived in collaboration between the two—Sato wanted to speak to the beauty born in Arahama and the mediator couched it to the state as a “destruction memorial/recovery” project for funding. Sato participated in and recorded memorial projects and public events from 2017-2018. Fourth, Sato adapts these recordings and composes them into music, both “ambient” and “structured.” This music was initially meant to play in the background of an exhibit in the mediator’s main disaster/memory institution—and it was. But the music also powerfully deterritorializes from that too. Fifth, she distributes and plays this music at Arahama events as well as wherever she can, including Tokyo and festivals in Europe. You can listen to *Our Map Here* online.

¹⁰⁰ As Hélène Cixous writes, “If there is a ‘propriety of woman,’ it is paradoxically her capacity to deappropriate unselfishly: body without end, without appendage, without principal ‘parts.’ If she is a whole, it’s a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that’s any more of a star than the others,” ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976), 889. I would like to add that such a “women’s writing” is not necessarily “female,” nor is it barred from masculine subjects. The point is such a “women’s writing” refuses the dominant phallic status quo—which itself does not have to be “male” either. These are categories to describe potentials.

A few key observations about each component. First: this is not about “soundmarks” or the will to deterministic “human” organizations of Arahama. Second: her recording is collective-oriented; she recorded with me, too. Third: the act of recording and participating is blurred; participation is a necessary feature of what is recorded. Fourth: events are opportunities; she draws from them the intensities of collective action beyond their “memorial” function while at the same time asserting a link to the specificities of that space (she names tracks after the locations she records them in and she injects them back to them). Fifth: she composes music, carefully mixing all of these elements together. I am interpreting this incredible mixture. I argue the music functions both as a “representation” and a *topos*; the music making is the creation of a formal vibrational abstraction through which to attune to the intensities and specificities of what being a collective is; the “land” is attuned to as a *field* given its participation in the music as a vibrational milieu. Sato’s *Our Map Here* is a profound, joyful modification and particularization of the terms of being in a space. Sato horizontalizes *and* historicizes.

In the openness that the tsunami produced and then the awareness of this openness that the failures of the capital-nation-state negatively imposed, opened the possibility of a positive awareness of what remains “there” in/as Arahama. What emerges appears to be *both* an intensive, microphysics of engaged activity as well as an a-reciprocal mode of exchange—Sato does one in/as the other. These both need to be explained, but, as a start, it is appropriate to say Sato comes to respond to the *imperative* of the space, to use Alphonso Lingis’s characterization.¹⁰¹ The openness after the tsunami and the failures of the dominant Symbolic appears to have created a circumstance in which this imperative to reciprocate with space, and in this

¹⁰¹ Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1998).

reciprocation become, becomes manifest. This allows for a general interpretation of the arrival of this imperative from all space in general.

Notice the terms here: a-reciprocal reciprocity, a gift that does not require something in return, but is *given* precisely in the sense that what is *there* is “given” too. Human exchange and spatial exchange merge. This givenness without burden is precisely what Karatani Kōjin calls the “repressed” form of human exchange: a society built on the “pure gift.” In *The Structure of World History*, Karatani argues human relations are best defined not in terms of modes of production, but modes of exchange. And Karatani sees four modes of exchange throughout history: “mode A, which consists of the reciprocity of the gift; mode B, which consists of ruling and protection; mode C, which consists of commodity exchange; and mode D, which transcends the other three.”¹⁰² Obviously, mode C is the current dominant mode and Karatani asserts it should be thought of as both a political and economic mode, a mode of exchange, rather than only as a productive mode that is strictly the “base” of our society—the production is imbricated in how society is lived, understood, spoken about, and organized. Marx analyzed capitalism in distinction to mode A. But Karatani continues to say that,

“it has been generally accepted that mode of exchange A (the reciprocity of the gift) is the dominant principle governing archaic societies. But this principle did not exist in the band societies of nomadic hunter-gatherers that had existed since the earliest times [and are organized by Mode D]. In these societies, it was not possible to stockpile goods, and so they were pooled, distributed equally. This was a pure gift, one that did not require a reciprocal counter-gift.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Karatani, *World*, x.

¹⁰³ Karatani, *World*, x.

Mode A emerges with settlement-based life where the gift is turned reciprocal to continue to prevent stockpiling and power. Karatani states that Mode D is both a more primordial and constant potential saturated with equality, and his study details its periodically and implicitly emergence across world history in both “communist” and ambiguous “colonial” formations.

Karatani does not speak of this in terms of an ontology of space, but then again, he does (in a sense the post-Marxist theory demands it). The nomadic mode of exchange is tied to a non-reciprocal relationship to the land: what the land gives is not, in a sense, “taken.” The societal structure is based not only on the equal distribution of goods (which the structure disallows) but also on the maintenance of the “equal distribution” of land (which the structure demands). Something is not taken more than the land or the animal can provisionally afford such that *its* autonomy is secured. The land is not wrought such that what it gives is “pooled.” The land is allowed, as it were, to retain its “own” non-reciprocal, distributed relation to “itself.” The hyper-efficiencies of Mode A sedentary agriculture, Mode B slave labour, as well as of Mode C capital are potentials that, in a sense, privatize (to varying degrees) this land-based autonomy just as they privatize (to varying degrees) forms of individual human autonomy.

It is also compelling that Karatani speaks of this in terms of the *topology* of the subject: Mode D marks an unconscious potential which, through either guilt or joy, bubbles up in the Freudian “return of the repressed.” There appears to be, then, a sense in which the topology of the land and the topology of the subject are *the same*. Each harbour a kind of ontological distributive potential as well as an ontological capacity to be formed. This ontological dynamism is either secured or exploited. *These capacities of formation and un-formation—giving, imbibing, and dissipating—are both descriptions of the ontology of energy.* The resonance of this appears

to be, for Karatani, built into the structure of the real—including both the subject and the land. Mode D exchange is parallel to the sublimating subject!...

Karatani hopes to understand how this Mode D can emerge in a “planetary” agreement. I map one of its emergences in a particular space (and indeed think that the performativity of this mapping can help to motivate the former planetary project). I think Sato, whether it is articulated as such or not, is attuning to this ontological, non-reciprocal gift. I think it is even present, although to a lesser degree, in the various “memorial,” “cultural,” and “everyday” organizations and activities that I described above—gathering what can be gathered, etc. I’m not saying an awareness of this non-reciprocal ontology erupted automatically in Arahama. I’m saying it requires a great deal of work to attune to and sustain. Why? Because the topology of the subject, and what is manifest to “us” *as subjects* is highly formed, specific, structured topologically such that its enfoldings of energy are organized as mere “presences.” In other words, the transcendental projections of time and space are effective. Sato’s recording and compositional work is all about creating a *topos* such that the subject’s space-time can “safely” yet compellingly loosen and be reorganized. What this means is also a “Mode D” emergence where Sato both engages a distributed collective acts while responding with her own distribution back into the space, place, people, and beyond.

Sato’s Arahama work especially resembles what Hakim Bey theorized as the provisional and local emergence of (what Karatani would call) Mode D societies in the contemporary milieu of surveillance capitalism, what Bey terms the Temporary Autonomous Zone. As Bey puts it,

“The TAZ is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere / elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. Because the State is

concerned primarily with Simulation rather than substance, the TAZ can ‘occupy’ these areas clandestinely and carry on its festal purposes for quite a while in relative peace.”¹⁰⁴

This latter statement is what I described above. The simulacrum of “Arahama past/present/future” that goes on around Arahama land allowed for this secret emergence to occur. Bey is inspired by pirate societies that pre-date capitalism because they took the accumulation of means that, precisely because of its accumulation and privatization, was difficult to obtain otherwise. Sato took up such an attitude regarding the Simulacrum-saturated state funding stipulations towards Arahama. As I learned, the longer time passed, the stricter the state administration became regarding what counted as “fund-able activities” in Arahama. More and more, if it wasn’t “about the tsunami” or “remembering 3.11,” funding was not given. Incidentally, the “grace period” the state afforded to activities itself speaks to a “return of the repressed!” In any case, Sato funneled this money as a means to support the collective effort to express, sustain, and legitimize the Arahama community’s presence in Arahama land. This is a manifestation of the “pure gift”: she distributed this wealth back into the events but also, importantly, into an energetic structure—called “music”—that continues to effectuate Arahama’s relationship to the space. She made herself a kind of “nomadic” trajectory—using the funding to support an activity of distribution, taking what was privatized (tax money that would be mobilized otherwise as capital) and injecting it into the energy of the place.

Is it not the case that Arahama is a brief and tentative manifestation of what post-Marxist medieval historian Amino Yoshihiko calls places of *muen* 無縁, *kugai* 公界, and *raku* 楽?¹⁰⁵

Amino argues that throughout the medieval period (1185-1603) what can be called, after

¹⁰⁴ Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 2nd ed (Brooklyn, NY [Great Britain]: Autonomedia, 2003), 99, original emphasis.

¹⁰⁵ Yoshihiko Amino, ‘Medieval Japanese Constructions of Peace and Liberty: *Muen*, *Kugai*, and *Raku*’, *International Journal of Asian Studies* 4, no. 1 (2007): 3–14.

Karatani, “Mode D” places emerged. *Muen* are linked with temples; *kugai* with areas generally associated with public and secularized spaces, such as a bridge or temple entrance areas; and *raku* with markets. But whole medieval cities or spaces, like Enoshima, could become such a *muen* place. These places historically sprung from fear of earlier authority, respect for merchants, labourers, and through Buddhists associated with the court, but these places gained their own autonomy. The rules of the dominant society, based on ‘private ownership’ (*shiyū* 私有) and ‘ownership’ (*yūshu* 有主) were supplanted in these places for what Amino calls societies of ‘non-possession’ (*mushoyū* 無所有) and ‘non-ownership’ (*mushu* 無主).¹⁰⁶ The growing dominance of the State eventually suffocated these spaces through law.¹⁰⁷ And other scholars also argue capitalism emerged through them. But Amino insists, like Karatani, that this shouldn’t disqualify the actual materialization of societies based on “non-possession.”¹⁰⁸ These places were

¹⁰⁶ What Amino finds about these places is the tendency for the rulings and vicissitudes of authority to be dissolved; effectively, the symbolic order would be suspended. Bannerholders representing opposing warlords could or indeed *would* not quarrel there; taxes were not levied, including when goods were exchanged; the borrowing and lending of money (and therefore the practice of gaining profit from fee) was suspended; slavery was banned; no capital punishment.... Amino argues what replaced the dominant order was an unspecified but cohesive, singular desire: not only the amelioration of the woes of the dominant world, but the manifestation of an equitable society. Decisions were made by a kind of democratic majority rules; associations developed; women escaping abuse were housed, fed, and engaging participants; those escaping the punishment of the law, whether physical or financial, were given sanctuary; traveling artisans were given free passage in and out.... See, Amino ‘Medieval Japanese Constructions’.

¹⁰⁷ Amino shows that the “unifiers of Japan,” the brutal authorities of that came to dominate the archipelago at the end of the Sengoku period (1467–1568), wrote into law the autonomy of these places while also, through the same laws, shrinking their influence. By the early in the Edo period (1600-1868), these places became isolated and stigmatized. See, Amino, ‘Medieval Japanese Constructions’.

¹⁰⁸ Amino writes, “There is no doubt that [private ownership] indeed is the end result, but...the theory [that privatization is inevitable] tends to overlook the principle of *muen*, which supported these activities. If one tries to explain all of these phenomena through the ‘theory of private ownership’ then it is no longer possible to understand in a single theory the numerous other qualities that characterize free cities and *muen* places. ...If we accept the theory of ‘private ownership’ (*shiyū* 私有) and ‘ownership’ (*yūshu* 有主) in such a fundamental way, then it seems to me that we are led to a view of history which equates historical ‘progress’ with the development, and entrenchment within society, of private ownership alone, and which implies that theories of ‘non-possession’ (*mushoyū* 無所有) and ‘non-ownership’ (*mushu* 無主) are backward, and should be surmounted,” ‘Medieval Japanese Constructions,’ 8.

“nomadic” in the sense that they acted as a network and dis-allowed accumulative social forms within their boundaries.

It seems that it was the changing ambiguities of sacredness and abjection that allowed these places their existence. And it seems to be the case with Arahama also. Sato actively supported this *muen* by inviting me to it, a “free passage” in and out, while of course negotiating with others on my behalf. And the people there were given a certain leeway by state and public, if in the sacred/object mode. But there is no reason the object/sacred should be its only manifestation. Amino stresses that “*muen* compassion” refers to the Buddha’s desire to save everyone from suffering without discrimination. But *muen* paradoxically comes to refer to someone who could not be saved, someone who was completely outside of the karmic cycle—a damning condition. This latter connotation won a terrible victory; *muen* became associated with impoverishment, the castes of “non-humans,” and the unidentified dead. The same happened to Arahama. What was sovereign but volatile about the equity impulse and the care with which it approached the ontology of action and reaction became *abject*.

Those familiar with contemporary Japan will recognize the term given its usage in what was, before “3.11,” the major subject of concern: *muen-shakai* 無縁社会, a society without bonds. People recognize the terror of the victory of “*muen*” as a state of deprivation. But is it possible to think this terror not in the continued and paradoxical attempt to “share in privatization” but in the reinvigoration of *muen* as a (com)passionate collective non-ownership? Does this not connect to *muen* as a fear of death and the necessity of changing death in relation to *muen* as a condition of the “unowned” horizon of political society and the cosmos? Certainly.

III

One of my favourite tells of Sato's practice—that which reveals she's dealing in the experimentation with the real—is that she does not record at any of the “sites” that have popped up in Arahama land. Arahama Elementary School is one, a preserved “outdoor exhibit” house foundation with concrete paths is another, and a Kannon statue is another. *Sato does not record at any of these sites.* The effects of these places are more symbolically rigid, and participants do not situate themselves at these sites in relation to the question and promise of Arahama. If Arahama Elementary School was not largely a monument of (and to) destruction that Sato may record there. But as it stands, Sato finds it deeply uncomfortable there. She doesn't go to the “preserved house foundations.” Note, again, that she records often at Carpe Diem Park, which is a hangout spot made out of preserved house foundations! She goes to Kannon statue but does not record there. And she doesn't make a habit of going there. She does make a habit of going to the *haka*—or “grave”—yard. But she doesn't record there either.

Sato describes her recording practice with the verb *yudaneru* 委ねる *to devote oneself to, to abandon oneself to* (for example, pleasure), or *to yield to*. This language just doesn't fit in with most discourse on field recording (soundscaping, acoustic ecology). I expect it would be mystifying. The issue is that those modern discourses never include what is implied in *yudaneru*: the *other*. Sato is speaking of what goes on when she records. She says this happens whether she's recording alone, with others at play, or with others more formally—although the yielding changes each time. She says this yielding is something that you have to allow to happen when you're in Arahama. In other words, she's not devoting herself to the sign called “Arahama,” but rather to something that happens through and by the practice in which “Arahama” emerges. Arahama has become a place for this yielding. She is devoting herself, abandoning herself, yielding to...the space.

Who/what is yielding, and yielding to what? It is not that “Sato” as a kind of acolyte or instrument of a transcendent “Arahama”—of course not. What is being “abandoned,” relatively, is the attachment to the transcendental space-time through which the subject normally operates. What is yielded to is the “shape,” the topology, the organized and shifting energy of the space. Sato is undertaking a devotion to the Other that is the space and emerging as a “self” in relation to it. The language here need not point to fanaticism. On the contrary, Sato thinks of and practices recording as a means of reorganizing and stretching the transcendental subject’s relation to its “others”—the non-transcendental (unconscious) psychic energy, the affects arriving from the collective, the topology of space, and the continuum of energy. There are translations happening, transformations in the recordings and listening, between the subject, the space, the energy it “contains,” and the implicate order—all in each stage and through each other.

What Sato is doing is trying to understand and act what it means to be in a space in the aftermaths of material and symbolic erasure. What this means is Sato is trying to find another way *to* space and she is trying to find another way *around* space, so to speak.

To space. Modern space-time is dominated by a Newtonian/Euclidean sense of space and movement. These are part of the Western tradition, but that makes their imposition in Japan all the more traumatic and present. As Martin Heidegger explained, this Newtonian sense of space arrived when Newton imagined an “ideal” space out of which to calculate the movement of bodies. This space became a “standard” and “neutral” plane in which bodies apparently moved. The irony is that this space was supposed to allow entrance to analysis via experience but that this ideal space was itself nowhere, not sensible, completely transcendent.¹⁰⁹ To be modern is in part to have the sense that one’s movement are neutrally undergone in an ideal and neutral plane.

¹⁰⁹ See Heidegger, “Mathematics,” *Basic Writings*, especially 288-289.

Around space. To borrow Deleuze and Guattari's "nomadological" language, Sato does not treat space in the Euclid/Newtonian way. Sato treats space as a *field*:

"a space of contact, of small tactile or manual actions of contact, rather than a visual space like Euclid's striated space. Smooth space is a field without conduits or channels. A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without 'counting' it and can 'be explored only by legwork.' They do not meet the visual condition of being observable from a point in space external to them; an example of this is the system of sounds, or even of colors."¹¹⁰

Sato is doing that "nomadic" legwork, becoming-spatial. But this "nomadism" is not a rejection of a relationship. And of course, it doesn't eliminate the subject nor the embeddedness of any recording event. On the contrary, field recording potentially enables an attention to the encounters within the space, removing the burden of a dominant symbolic order, and places them within the energetic and devoted "context" in which they are set.

Take the event informs/forms the track "Arahama:" a beach opening event, an *umibiraki* 海開き, literally "ocean opening." Normally reserved for when the coastal waters are warm and safe enough to swim in again, this *umibiraki* was rather particular. Prior to the 3.11 tsunami, the Arahama township funded and orchestrated the lifeguard supervision of the region's beach, called Beautiful Marsh Swimming Area.¹¹¹ This role was lost with the township. Sendai city, rather than assume the role, made swimming in Arahama illegal. Swimming of course continues. But swimming was "officially" made illegal in Arahama because no "evacuation center" had

¹¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 371.

¹¹¹ 深沼海水浴場.

been rebuilt. In the summer of 2017, the city, having finally re-established an evacuation center, hired lifeguards and opened Arahama beach for four days at a limit of 600 people per day. The evacuation center was Arahama Elementary School and the participant restriction was due to the School's capacity limit. Note, then, that this event was *not* condoned as an "Arahama" event *explicitly*. Arahama Elementary School was not allowed to function as a communal signifier that said "Arahamians have returned to their beach," but was contextualized "merely" as protective structure—a sign only of "safety" against a "threat," a piece of the logic of rezoning, and therefore a code written in authority. The beach event was open to "the public" through registration—not to "Arahamians." In other words, the event was couched in the logic of the capital-nation-state "public."

The symbolic constitution of the event preemptively countered a surge of communal belonging to erupt in the event. Yet Sato attunes to, repeats, demonstrates this surge in recording it. Sato re-territorializes on the vibrant organization that emergent in and through place. She is not in "marking" these events as "historical keepsakes" or "important for the record." She is rather attuned to the production of what is there through the events. She moves to show a broader ontological context, the way the sounds of collectivity break away from the conservative territorializations and on towards an attunement to the production of place, in *this* place, as such. She follows the depropriative potential inherent in vibration as well as the necessary embeddedness of any particular depropriative act. What is made there is there by those who make it through that which "gives" itself to the making; or, the reverse: the humans collected there give themselves to the making of the place, having been "given" this by the energy contained there. Sato takes up an act that strips the gathering both from the limited territorializations of an essential Arahama "identity" via an "automatic" relation to the land *and*

from the homogenizing sense of national recovery. The recording is sublimational in the way Kristeva says is crucial: the recording acts within an awareness of itself *as an act*, as a participation in the ordering of space yet a conditional one that does not subsume or determine what the unfolding of that space always is. The recording is a productivity aware of itself as necessarily creating explicate “pockets” from what is implicate, the other that is the same. The event occurred, and as an event both has the right to and must occur again. Sato’s practice itself sublimates her own productive/time-based relation to the other in its dedication while attempting to perform the way these events are also “sublimational.” They are events *of* Arahama, this place with this people, but never guaranteed, always made in acts.

This is a way of saying, Sato commits to an exploration of these explicate (enfolded) topologies’ relation to the implicate order, the cosmic topology. To find another way around the space means to enact a *transformation* of the topology of that space while the space remains “the same.” To enact a transformation thus means one’s psychic/embodied movements are “themselves” participating in the momentum that produces a shifting of the structure both for oneself but also, speculatively, for others and, even more speculatively, for the space too. This transformation of the “other” that is space necessitates an encounter with the cosmic “other”—the transformation is *lent*, as it were, the energy from the cosmic continuum. The energy for the transformation *of* the “other” that is space in fact comes *from* the space—and not (only) “us.” The space therefore “lends” its own energy *to itself*, which is also “lent” from the cosmic energy “lending” itself to itself. This “lending” is therefore in fact an a-reciprocal *giving*: as giving without a taking that is simultaneously collective and separated, as repeating as it is consequential, as translational as it is implicate. Topologies and transformations are being enacted across these “others”—showing that they are “the same.”

The practice and recording are ways of working up a *topos*, an abstraction that enables these transformations to occur. A topos contains “vectors” and “functors” that reveal common logics between different topologies. Whereas for Hennix a topos appears in the practice of listening and moving about the subtle relations within a justly intonated vibrational matrix, and for Boon a topos can appear in other vibrational formations that allow for transformations of the subject in the modification of the experiences of space-time, here a topos arrives out of continued and additive participations in a space. The movements Sato undertakes and the connections she makes via recording and composition create this potential for the experience of an abstract transformational bridge. In a sense, Sato is following and creating echoes of the space such that, like Alvin Lucier’s *I am sitting in a room*, a kind of spatial/subjective humming formation is achieved and “traversed.” It is “traversed” because it has a shape, rules or modalities it allows. This formation is the topos, and it can itself be traversed in multiple ways.

The music takes up various translations of this abstract “translation.” The music takes up various features of this topos, various similarities and movements that the topos reveals. The recordings are an important part of this process. The recording is neither a “limit” nor a “presence-maker” of this vibration. It does not “block” anything any more than it affords an absolute “entrance” into “Arahama.” The antinomy of the modern pervades this dichotomy: fears of “fetishistic representation” and fantasies of “pure presence.” What matters here is not that the recording will or will not “affect the representation” of what is recorded. What matters is what the recording does, what its effects are, and how it enables certain resonances to occur. What matters is that the recording device affords a place in which to explore these intra-actions between implicate and explicate orders. The recording device is *itself* yet another translation,

explicate pocket, of the implicate. And this fact is explored in the music, which, through particular structural mobilizations of this pocket, expresses the relationship.

IV

Artwork is cosmopolitical. The structure of something—visual or sonic—“works” to the degree that the subject’s transcendental structure is modified. Hardly arbitrary, what “works” in a work of art is a particular resonance, eruption, or capture of the forces of the cosmos. Art is in a dialectic relationship with human subjectivity such that one begets the other. Art becomes art when it modifies, acts politically, in relation to subjectivity. Art contains decisions about what it means, what it *is*, to exist. The reified harmonic progressions of most pop music, for example, works from the cosmos but only to reinforce a transcendental, often egoic relationship that the subject has with itself. Art is art when it challenges this subject. But something which may not exactly be called “art” lingers here too: where the challenge *of* the subject as a resonance of the cosmos is met—perhaps this is where art turns into practice.

Sato’s music making appears to be such a practice. But the album is also a cosmopolitical work; it stands as a translation of the sublimation that Sato practices. The work is *itself* a fold of the continuum, modifying how our implication in that continuum appears. Sato’s *Our Map Here* is an unfamiliar kind of music, which means it pushes what organizing sounds does. It is not quite “documentary” and not quite “song.” It is not “protest music,” which is often in ambiguous relationship to vibration, marking it with particular symbolic qualities, or of course mobilizing vibration’s power. It is not “documentation” of any particular “manifest” 3.11 content or violence. These are cosmopolitical choices. The album functions somewhere between the two, yet erupts out of that tension in a line of flight. This has (potential) consequences for the

subjectivities that listen to the album—one of course being rejection, misunderstanding, trivialization; but another being a reorganization of the subject's relationship to the way the world is organized and understood. I argue it functions under an attunement to the cosmic other that is “the same.”

Now, the music is harmonically “simple” and “song-like.” The music also sticks close to its harmonic tonic. It is not overtly “experimental.” There are long sections where two diatonic chords repeat, for example. But this is arguably a particular manifestation of a non-object relationship to being sutured to a particular tonal matrix, to exploring the richness of that “center.”¹¹² And the situation of Arahama appears to have demanded a *distributive* quality. The music is “nomadic” in both Karatani and Deleuze/Guattari's senses—the sounds are woven into a “tapestry” that is moved about without dominating a particular vibrational “region.” A “vibrant land” and a way of moving about it come to the same effect. Deleuze and Guattari write, “the artist opens up to the Cosmos in order to harness forces in a ‘work’ (without which the opening onto the Cosmos would only be a reverie incapable of enlarging the limits of the earth); this work requires very simple, pure, almost childish means, but also the forces of a people.”¹¹³ A great deal of music and field recording are caught up in this reverie. But what Deleuze and Guattari describe can be applied here: a dedicated, focused attention to the modalities of the harmonic structure while mobilizing the collective in the recordings. I'm interested especially in the formal features that negotiate between these aspects: harmony, wind/waves, voices—the way they worked within each other thereby expressing themselves *vibrationally*.

¹¹² It is significant that most contemporary pop music in the West relies on a particular harmonic machine: four chords from a particular scale but none of which are the “tonic” chord—the abjection/Real of tonal “center” is unconsciously part of how the music functions. In Japan, pop music usually goes through many much more complex yet often repeated chord changes while rarely sitting on a tonic—a different manifestation of the abjection and dependency on this Real is there.

¹¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 337.

Each track bears the title of the area in which the recording took place: “Arahama” relates to a “beach opening” (more on this below); “Fujitsuka” to a walk with the above mentioned exhibit designer to hear the birds and animals that have returned to what is now an open field; “Gamou,” to a two-pronged event where young *taiko* drummers are ceremoniously invited into a taiko club and where people came to climb the “shortest mountain in Japan,” which is in Fujitsuka, as a kind of playful and cheekily transgressive act given mountains’ place in modern nation-state “Shinto” discourses; “Sanbonzuka” to a meal, the title of the track, made in an area west of Arahama allowed to return but which involved Arahamians; “Shinahama” to a history walk, or rather a history ride in a boat, on a canal, and baseball game. This is immediately unusual for both music and field recording. What does it mean to name an instance of organized of sound in relation to a place? The place’s *imbrication* with the organization is emphasized. Unlike most music, the relationship of the vibrational organization to the place it emerges is built into the track. Each track on the album uses field recordings as the primary musical and textural material. And this relationship is made explicit in the titles. But these titles are also not “programmatic.” They don’t aim to suggest this is a “symbolic mirror” of the place—only one instantiation of an emergence that this place afforded. And unlike most field recording, the relationship to place is not expressed as a “presence.” That is, the sounds are clearly organized, interpreted, and made into a structure to be heard and repeated. Finally, neither the musical elements, nor the textural sounds of the spaces, nor the human-made sounds of voices and movement are given precedence—none are removed from the other while also being horizontalized.

I analyze each of these formal qualities in turn. First, rather than vocal melody occupying the “up front” privilege in the structure, voices taken on rhythmical role. Second, aspects of the

field recording that might be strictly “atmospheric”—wind and waves—are often “melodically” situated, with everything else revolving around them. Third, these two elements—voice and wind/waves—are interwoven. Fourth, all interact with harmony in ambiguous ways, where voices and waves are not given specific tones. Finally, *Our Map Here* dynamically engages these elements. The first three tracks are more ambient; the final two are more structured. And the second last track is the most structured, while the last track is a mix of ambient and structural elements. So, the album itself dynamically engages its own qualities. It undertakes its own movement into structure, as if working up to it in pain and joy, and then sublating the two at the end so that the “spatial” field recording elements and the “organizational” musical/rhythmic elements are finally considered together. The quality of the subjective relation to becoming-spatial is repeated as the music.

Each of these has cosmopolitical consequences. First, melody, as compositional theory conservatively tells us (and which is often true in practice), is structurally extrapolated from the human voice. The vocal quality of melody often reinforces the fantasy that “I” am the master of my discourse and affects. Vocal melody, even if just listened to, tends to repeat the double event of the languaged subject: in Lacan’s terms, the melodic expression enacts the “subject of enunciation” (the singing subject) within the “grammar” and “statement” of the melody, its structure and harmony (the symbolic structure the subject enters therein). But the melodic quality of the voice is barred in Sato’s *Our Map Here*, revealing an entirely different “subject of the statement.” Sato pushes towards a sense that it is not only a “grammar” that speaks in place of the subject, but an organization of vibration and, ultimately, the energetic congealing, stretching, and dissipation of energy “itself.”

The voices of *Our Map Here* are always enunciating but the grammar of those statements is often barred from “completion.” In the ambient tracks, voices are muffled. And even when the sentences are grammatically understandable, and this is often, they are just as often placed within the context of a group-based enunciation. In the structured tracks, voices are central, in the place of “melody,” but they are chopped up and articulated in quick succession with other voices. In the highly structured track “Sanbonzuka,” the voices are cut in the middle of phrases and callings. Or, as in the track “Arahama,” voices echo on and on. In the first case, the intensity *is* the “grammar” of the enunciation. In the second, the resonance is the “grammar” of the enunciation. The vibrational form *is* the “grammar” of the enunciation. Note what is not happening here: a total removal of the sense the enunciative. In electronic music, the voice is often decomposed, brought to its “purely sonic element,” such that it turns into a mere uncanny object. Here, the sublimation between enunciation and “grammar” is ongoing, exploratory, taking up the challenge that is subjectivity, the necessary “inside/outside” structure subjectivity has, rather than abjecting it. In the case of the structured songs, the pathos derives from a sense of the voices enacting vibrational weavings, calls to the other (people) that are “given” without reciprocation from the other (that is energy). And in the case of the ambient songs, the pathos comes from an appeal, the voices murmuring and dissipating together in long phrases, searching and orchestrating intensity through each other (people) *from* the other (energy).

Put theoretically, the “statement” here is not a language-based “grammar”, but a vibrational one. And the enunciation of the subjects is not ideologically erased. The “statement” is the production/dissipation of vibration, the way it orders and fades, and the enunciation is the riding of that production/dissipation. This formal quality of the music emphasizes that to be a subject means to incorporate the “ordering/grammar” of vibration, “becoming” always as an

explicate formalization of enunciation. The voices are the play of the subject taking up the energy *which it is* which *as energy* must always be traversed, produced and dissipated. Sato's vocal arrangements model the subject in a sublimational relationship to a *vibrational imperative*: to *be* energetic without sham or innocence, to become attuned to (one's) desire, arriving as it does from the unconscious "grammar" of the Real. Sato stages/makes instances of callings that are taking up this imperative, giving shape to it—without "essential feature" but with commitment.

I adopt the term *vibrational imperative* from the post-Kantian psychoanalytic tradition yet push to understand it in relation to a cosmic energeticism. Gayatri Spivak argues that even for Kant the moral injunction, rationalized as the categorical imperative, arrives not from the transcendental subject "itself," but as a supplement.¹¹⁴ In the last pages of *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Jacques Lacan argues this injunction is *equivalent* to desire.¹¹⁵ The Superego (the topology of the subject spinning around itself) feeds off the guilt at the subject's refusal to traverse this *equivalence*. As Slavoj Žižek argues,

"the unique strength of Kant's ethics resides in this very formal indeterminacy: moral Law does not tell me what my duty is, it merely tells me that I should accomplish my duty, i.e. it is not possible to derive the concrete norms I have to follow in my specific situation from the moral Law itself—which means that the subject himself has to assume the responsibility of 'translating' the abstract injunction of the moral Law into a series of concrete obligations."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

¹¹⁶ Slavoj Žižek, 'Kant and Sade: the Ideal Couple,' *lacanian ink* 13, Lacan.com, <https://www.lacan.com/zizlacan4.htm>.

Is it possible to think this “formal indeterminacy” alongside *equivalence*? Vibration, the implicate energy, does not have a particular “secret” order that the subject must “discover.” The subject herself must assume the responsibility of ‘translating’—i.e., transducing—concrete manifestations of energetic capture and dissipation in the particular spaces and situations she finds herself. She must manifest with care and with courage, in awareness of the conditionality yet effectiveness of choices, particular energetic enunciations. These enunciations arrive from the implicate (rather than “abstract”) energy that is energy, the field that is the “desire” of the cosmos. Energy *is* the injunction. Its wave/particle structures are enunciations too. And the subject is “equivalent” to that dynamic.

The injunction does not arrive from something outside of the abstract traversals that the subject performs. The inside and outside are one and the same. This becomes difficult to consider with collectivity—but the same dynamic is here: an enunciation of a statement, resonant across subjects, that nonetheless is never “essential” to the group.

Therefore, second, it is significant that Sato’s voices are never individual voices. The album is never “focalized” from a single perspective. Intensity arrives *across* collective enunciations. The calls and appeals themselves *are the “grammar” of vibration*—back and forth energetic giving and taking—as much as they are the enunciation of the group. Sato’s album takes up that rare aesthetic, ever-volatile cosmopolitical gesture of engaging a *people*—not as a “unified essence,” but as a “crowd” that is concomitant with the act of its emergence.¹¹⁷ The crowd is made by an affective play—a *topological intensive organization*—that arrives *through* the collective “moving around itself.” Sato’s rendering cuts out the “ideological” quality of group voicings. Individuals are never muddled out or made indistinct. Sato mobilizes the field recorder,

¹¹⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the “crowd” in *Plateaus*, 341.

in an aesthetic judgment and cosmopolitical practice, such that voices remain distinct while being implicated in the collective. The tracks do not seek a “single voice,” but the collective that arrives within the *production* of its becoming-collective, across and because of the appeal, which fades from the collective the same moment the appeal participates in the collective.

Sato is therefore rendering what is always *inoperative* in the collective gesture, to use Jean-Luc Nancy’s term.¹¹⁸ As discussed in the last chapter, Nancy argues community emerges not thanks to a human capacity to determine its own essence. Community names that which emerges with the productivity, the grammar, that the human is submitted/subjected to. Community is the challenge of collective organization, not its destiny. And yet community, as this challenge, supplements all interaction. I would say it is not clear there is an animal—or indeed, entity—not submitted to this challenge in some way. But it is certainly very clear that the human’s challenge is as considerable as it is distinctive, given how heavily subjected we are to production of grammars and orderings. Still: perhaps this challenge is *implicate* rather than only explicate. The challenge is “there” in vibration “itself” as a back and forth, emergent and dissipating force. In so far as vibration is ontological, then this challenge is ontological, too.

Finally, while Sato’s does not assume the neurosis of an individual perspective, it also does not take up the perverse sense that it speaks for the other that is the space. Various “spatial” features, wind, wave, and the echoing of the voices in the space—these features are not “backgrounded” in the music. The first track, “Arahama” begins with a fade in. The fade in is not sequenced so that one element enters after another. A tone, voices of children and adults, wave sounds, wind sounds, a reverberating echo—all elements fade in at once. Mixing and stereo effects give these elements a certain independence in the mix while the volumes of each are

¹¹⁸ Lingis, *Inoperative*.

relatively even. Truly, a “bloc” of sensations emerges, a “block” of vibration, a shape, topology.¹¹⁹ The track is a translation of the bloc of sensations of the event. These sounds are from a gathering on the Arahama beach in which people play a game: a child is given a stick to hit open a watermelon, but they are blindfolded and spun around, and then the crowd must direct them to success. A beautiful game, a productive ordering, which stages and allows for an energetic faith, as it were, in the collective—calling and responding—within the fallibility of what that means. The watermelon is the manifestation of the “gift” of that faith, consumed and disappeared after given/eaten. The sounds of the game are interposed with the sound of the waves at the event, but Sato also adds waves recorded at a different time. The electric tone throughout this piece acts highly abstractly, in a topos-like way: it provides a thread throughout the piece, a space turned into time, a glue, a demonstration of the bloc, the potential of a tone.

What this translates, performs, enacts, an audacious removal of separateness.¹²⁰ Each element—subject, collective, earth, art—are horizontalized without, at the same time, being refused. The music performs, in the mixings and separations of the vibrational aspect of each, a sublimational ontology. Each explicate order is implicated in each other. These challenges happen in this field, which is material-historical. The field is this coastline, a piece of the coast that was submerged in the tsunami. The field is the subject with this memory. It is the difference in the open field—the unfamiliarity of it and the challenge of it. The field is the Sendai region, the administrative pressure but also another source of identity and commitment, despair and excitement. The field is Tōhoku, with its history of subjugation and its commitment to difference, its actual differences, geographically and in terms of climate. The field is of course Japan, the symbolic and energetic strategies and tactics that this implies. But the field is the

¹¹⁹ See the introduction for the discussion of Deleuze and Guattari and the “bloc” of sensations.

¹²⁰ I borrow this phrase from Boon.

mountains, the ocean, the waves, too. All of this is there in the unconscious. All of it is there, in radically different ways, outside the unconscious. But this difference is the differencing of what is the same.

Conclusion

Our Map Here is therefore appropriately titled. “Our” is at once a defiant proclamation as well as an act that bars defining exactly “who” that “our” is (the music is never the autobiography of an individual or a people). “Map” is of course the area that was “removed from the map” but not only by the tsunami—by the state. And “Map” refers to the *mapping* of that space, rather than its *tracing* (to use Deleuze and Guattari’s distinction).¹²¹ The development of space is staged in contact with the energy of desire in the body and psyche and the energy contained in the space. And “Here” is again both defiant and indicative. Arahama remains a land of a people. Here and here again—here and here and here. It must be renewed as it is committed to. The relation must be demonstrated, without its demonstration what is there melts into the field; without demonstrating the subject melts into its field, which is treacherous.¹²² Sato is enacting a techno-social, sublimational becoming.

It is worth noting in closing what is arguably the central psychic motif of the album: laughter. Laughter features in every track. And it reaches a kind of pitch with the track

¹²¹ See Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*.

¹²² Here I am drawing from Claire Colebrook’s article the sense of space in Australian Indigenous notions of sacred land and the Dreaming. Colebrook writes, “A people is a people because of *this* land, and this land bears its affect, resonance, and spirit because of the dreaming of *this* people. At the same time, in accord with the positive reality of sense, the dreaming, spirit, or genius of space transcends present individuals and opens up into the future, requiring further creation and demonstration. ...Whereas western understandings of monuments use space to mark an event, and do so in order to call future humanity to recognize and retain its past, sacred land is both infinite—demanding recognition from others—and inherently affective,” ‘The Sense of Space: On the Specificity of Affect in Deleuze and Guattari’, *Postmodern Culture* 15, no. 1 (September 2004), <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/issue.904/15.1colebrook.html>.

Sanbonzuka. Tight organizations of laughter bouncing off each other—an older woman and a child, a group of women and a male teacher. They all play off each other, teaching the children how to prepare a “traditional” dish. This track is both the most ordered and the most laugh filled. Kristeva argues this is indicative of sublimation, when a subject does not become the “object” of laughter, but the *subject* of laughter. To laugh *with* yourself is to embrace the strangeness of making a gesture. For an embrace of this embrace of laughter to occur, a traversal of desire is required, a taking up of desire which, in its being taken up, is marked, structured, organized. The subject of laughter becomes its own productive flow. Laughter arrives from a kind of pain, from desire corrupting the order that binds it. But laughter can arrive from pleasurable too, arriving as it does from desire, to mark the absurdity and sensuality of making a mark. As Kristeva puts it,

“Every practice which produces something new (a new device) is a practice of laughter: it obeys laughter’s logic and provides the subject with laughter’s advantages. When practice is not laughter, there is nothing new; where there is nothing new, practice cannot be provoking: it is at best a repeated, empty act. The novelty of a practice...indicates the jouissance invested therein and this quality of newness is the equivalent of the laughter it conceals.”¹²³

The investment of jouissance: the attunement to desire, exploring the shape of its arrival, witnessing the arrival in a shape. It is subtle work and the investment’s subtly is felt in the artwork that honestly resonates with it.

This is what Sato means, I think, when she says: “Recording touches everything that cannot be controlled in this world. I can’t control other people, nature, an earthquake, a tsunami, the flow of a river.... Sometimes, you can’t even control yourself. Don’t fight it. The future only

¹²³ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 225.

comes from that which you don't fully control.”¹²⁴ Remember, Sato is saying this in the context of the tsunami. She is saying it as a musician. The future only comes from that which you don't fully control. The subject “only” experiences, interprets, and attunes. It is from the unconscious and the investments of desire, the resonances with the Real, the non-reciprocal gift of energy, what always exceeds and couches you, a flow that is a field you are already in, through the production of laughter, that the future arrives.

In closing I must gesture at a terrible arrival in Arahama: capitalism. As I mentioned at the outset, since 2020 or so, the sales of Arahama land to private companies have started being finalized. And since 2021, business buildings are being built. A wave of capital has swept over Arahama, a wave from the other direction, a wave which arrogantly and dangerously thinks it can stay at its crest forever. The open land is gone, privatized. The police would become involved. The TAZ is harder.

The winds that once blew whispers of a future into Sato's ears now blow through the skeletal frames of neoliberal businesses. The government documents, humiliating us, describe each purchase as contributing to “recovery.” The shopping center claims a “direct” relation between consumer and farmer; the park claims a “direct” relation to Nature; and sports center claims a “direct” relation to yourself. All of this directness is deadness. If Monuments problematically mark a destiny for a future humanity that must be followed, then what do these capitalist buildings mark? The businesses don't mark “nothing.” They appropriate the space too and mark a destiny without a future: an eternal present of indulgence, license to reject the other. Where is there space to mark the commitment to space here, temporally, spatially? It is there but

¹²⁴ 「フィールドレコーディングのおもしろいところは、この世界におけるコントロール不可能なすべてのもの。自分以外の他者、自然、地震、津波、川の流れ、時には自分自身ですらコントロールできない。自分がコントロールできないものの中にのみ未来はある。それらに対して抗わない。」
Personal communication, Sept 2022.

it is hidden. Sato says seeing Arahama now is far more difficult than it was when she saw it as a pile of rubble in March 2011. I conclude this not (only) to despair. I do it to hope. Because, given what I just analyzed above, we have a lot to gain, if only we accept that to gain is to give without expectation of return.

Interlude

The Resonance of What Broke Apart:

The Cosmopolitics of Caesium-137

In the previous chapter, Sato took up a form of composition with the Real. She works in relation to the compositional and dissipating forces of the Real as such, composing with the energy of desire as it translates the energy of space. Through that composition she creates a relationship with the making and breaking necessary to the subject, on the one hand, and the making and breaking necessary to the cosmos, on the other. The latter is the “alterity” that always exceeds the subject, yet through a topos, the subject composes itself in relation to that alterity. There is no wound here. Rather, the energy that arrives both through the subject and the implicate order are “the same.”

In the following chapter (Chapter 3), I unpack a semi-“masculine” field recording. A “wound” re-appears, but in this case, it appears in a “self-sacrifice.” As I will show, the field recordist, acting in the field of radiation, attempts to attenuate the dominant subjection of subjectivity by subjecting himself to the other in a kind of sacrificial drive. This sacrifice is different than the Girardian, Superegoic one. The field recordist attempts to impose on himself the responsibility to the other as a kind of example. He attempts to use himself as a conduit to bring into awareness what it means to be responsible to the “invisible” in space. As I will show, this carries a certain bravado that is not without its ambiguities.

I want to first set the terms of that discussion. In this Interlude, I discuss radiation in Japan—its history and implications and its material and symbolic manifestation in Fukushima

Dai-ichi. I want to discuss the cosmopolitics of radiation: radiation and the cosmos. In this chapter I also speak in terms adapted from Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory. However, rather than "actors" as individual objects on an endless chain of relations, I think of actor-network theory at the level of energy. It is an "explicate-implicate" theory where poolings of energy (the "actors") generate relations for the explicate objects (also "actors") caught in the former "pull." The idea here is that "energy wells" are fields that condition the emergence of actors within them and that the field and the actor are interplaying with one another. Radiation technologies have a profound "energy well." They are a complex and volatile explicate knotting.

Thus, this Interlude attempts a cosmopolitical interpretive act. In Latour's language, radiation—and *especially* radiation fallout—are *hybrids* that us moderns both make and attempt to ignore/purify. They are bundlings that, despite "the modern's" best efforts, demonstrate that "cultural" and "material" strata are "*the same*." Materiality affects the symbolic; and vice versa. In the language of cosmopolitics, this chapter attempts to disrupt modern capitalist nation states'/modern individualist subjectivities' refusal to give resonance to the unknown in radiation and obscure the conditions of its creation—both "ours" and the "cosmos's". It does this by first through a meditation on energy, and then nuclear energy as a cosmopolitical problem, the meaning of a nuclear facility on a fault line, the problems surrounding speaking of/for affected individuals, and the context of Hiroshima/Nagasaki for thinking 3.11.

I hope to generate a topos that allows and enables bridges of "experience" to witness the various consequences of radiation and its fallout.

I

Two of the most prominent “radioactive elements” that escaped the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Reactors following March 11, 2011, were iodine-131, with a half-life of 8 days, and caesium-137, with a half-life of over 30 years. These two particles and others like them were ejected into the atmosphere by hydrogen explosions and pressure releases. They then descended as “nuclear fallout” onto Fukushima and across the world.

What is “radiation?” The concept is a great deal like “vibration.” The similarity is not accidental. Both describe not a “thing” but the transferring of energy. “Acoustics” is defined as radiation: the transfer of energy through a medium. So, the reverse is true: all “radiation” is vibrational in that radiation describes the passage and exchange of energy across mediums. Energy itself, as physics postulates, *is* vibration. “Mass” is energy in tiny and mutually contained modes of vibration. To be is to be in oscillatory motion. As Einsteinian relativity shows: Energy=Matter. Matter and energy are modes—erupting in and through each other and navigating the topology of vibration. Energy is, in a sense, a less reified mode of vibration; matter is an “objectified” mode of energy. Suns, which is plasma (something in between energy and mass), create translations between these modes. Translating means reorganization and expelling of energy. The evolution of life is, in one sense, the unfolding of strategies securing the massification of energy, which requires processes of conversion, strategies of conservation, and tactics of release. The energy that begins this chain is the “radiation” from the sun. *All life on earth remains taken up the processes of energy.* Desire: the “conversion, compression, and expulsion” of radiating energy. Recent biological science surmises that animal and plant life evolved closer together than previously thought, thereby representing a dual emergence.¹²⁵ But

¹²⁵ Jennifer L. Morris et al., ‘The Timescale of Early Land Plant Evolution’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 115, no. 10 (6 March 2018): E2274–83, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1719588115>.

the bulk of energy conversion today comes from plants. Plants to plant eaters, plant eaters to meat eaters and omnivores. Heat is also the vibrational of energy—its storage, release, and transfer. Earth is in a highly specific location for this balance of heat and the conversion of energy into the temporary equilibrium as mass, as life, to occur. Humans are not separate from this process. And the “subject” is therefore one formation of vibrational enfolding. Our cultures’ exploration of vibration—from music to field recording—are frameworks within which we explore this enfolding. The subjective states that shift from and affect our experiences of space-time are proof of this.¹²⁶ Earth vibrations have their resonant effects, too. The earth is a giant ball of barely contained—barely “massed”—energy.

Thought in this way, lumping particular “radioactive elements” into one group and then gesturing at “everything else” is grossly inaccurate. “Ionizing radiation” is a band of “fast,” “tight” energy/movement/vibration/radiation, so tight that it cannot be felt by us. Ionizing radiation comes from an atom or reaction changing its state fundamentally, something which requires enormous energy or pressure. “Ionizing radiation” is an energy or the result of an energy capable of “ionizing:” the mobile energy/particle bumps out an electron of another atomic particle, causing the latter particle to take on a different and charged (positive or negative) version of itself (i.e., become an “ion”). Often the particle then balances, breaking down or changing in some way. A “radioactive particle” therefore in fact names a particular and intense process. We are also energetic processes, if of a very different form. But part of our “de/massification” is the gaining and release of energy experienced as bodily/psychic intensity.

In fact, this body is the trace of ionizing radiation. Our bones and blood evolution are a slow shaping in the context of the earth and the sun. The sun emits energy at an ionizing level.

¹²⁶ This is indeed the first and simple proof that Boon explores in *Vibration*: that music has profound effects on our psychic experience, moving away from the transcendental towards a relation with its excess.

Most is absorbed in the earth's atmosphere or diverted by the earth's magnetosphere. As I said, it fuels the earth. It also breaks DNA, causing issues in DNA replication and cancers. There are places on earth where the sun's ionizing radiation is greater than others. Skin pigmentation evolution is diffused based on sun exposure. Bone marrow is the center for blood production in boned bodies like ours—this is thought to be in part an evolutionary adaptation that kept blood production deep in bones to protect the process from the sun's ionizing rays. Recent paleo-anthropological research claims that one of the ways early humans collected enough energy for the shifts characteristic of our activities was brought about by the (cultural/physical) feedbacking processes when we began eating the marrow inside bones of other animals. Humans are in part “re-discovery” of these energy centers that condensed to “safely” re-appropriate the overwhelming energies of the cosmos. We are the product of our own enfolding. Our connection with ionizing radiation plays out in patterned counter-rhythms at the level of biological structures and relations.

Thus, one of the uncanny qualities of “radioactive particles” is the reversal of the massification paradigm. They let the resonating cat out of the massed bag. Energy can be converted into mass. But it can also be released from mass as energy. Neither are a “reversal,” although, we participate in the slow de-complexifying of the cosmos at a tiny scale. In any case, the forces necessary for the containment of energy are as strong as the energy in motion. Non-renewable fuel is an appropriation of this capacity of matter. Fuel is the exploitation of the “storage” (or semi-stabilization) of energy that is matter; it is the storage and use of “storage.” Gunther Anders argues what is striking about modern technology is its capacity to expend a flow of energy beyond what humans can imagine. But I think this is going on all the time with the psyche (and its interpretations of the body) too, which is constantly in a process of using,

converting, and storing energies in ways delegated to micro-processes and lifeforms and which we recruit in active and less active ways in the intensities of movement and thought. At least as far as technology is concerned, we today are stuck in a terrible Burkean sublime relationship to technological energetic processes—we are spell bound by their apparent gigantic authority. What should therefore be just as striking is the concomitant justifications or “purifications,” as Latour calls them, required to desensitize the proximity we have to these condensed energies.¹²⁷ But this smacks of the psychic abjection again too: where intensities of thinking and moving, loving and breathing, are subject to psychosomatic architectures of control. In both cases, there are strategies for purifying energy—of making the vast energy *that is* our lives appear neutral and trivial (on embodied and, through networks, technological levels, not to mention solar levels, etc.).

But Latour also argues that the patience for these purifications is running thin. We no longer have the luxury of ignoring the effects of these processes. The balances of life have gone through massive shifts across earth-time. We are in a new earth time—older than we think. The reflection of too much energy back to the earth is throwing the earth’s heat balance off since the industrial revolution. And radiation makes spaces unlivable for immense amounts of time. The waste of nuclear energy also lasts into an incredible timescale we purify from our concern—the unknown of time is abjected.¹²⁸

Coal is an organic material (like trees and dinosaurs) crushed into a compact matter under the weight of the moving earth. It is energy condensed into matter condensed again. This is also true of uranium, which is also “natural” and then condensed—this time by us. Uranium, in

¹²⁷ See the introduction to Latour, *Modern*.

¹²⁸ On this point see Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Posthumanities 27 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 120.

multiple “forms” or isotopic structures, is called a “primordial nuclide.” It was created during the beginnings of the universe and deposited in the earth throughout the earth’s long and violent massification. Uranium’s half-life is approximately as long as the age of the universe.

Technological modernity has reached two critical tipping points. First, coal is the condensation of energy of the death of earth-bound life. It is also, in a planetary “reverse potential,” capable of terminating life again, released as reflective carbon in the atmosphere. Uranium is the condensation of the energy of the creation of the universe. Its own reverse potential is therefore enormous. It has the capacity to destroy on micro and macro scales. When used as explosive weapons, it has the capacity to destroy the surface of the earth. Nuclear weapons are now even more destructive than those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Each of the latter bombs released approximately 80 terajoules of energy. The most destructive nuclear bomb dropped—by the USSR in 1961—released 210,000 terajoules. And it was a “theoretically tame” version of the bomb.

Both atomic weapons and nuclear reactors follow the same basic principles. There are differences given nuclear weapons are adding fusion elements—but I’ll leave that aside. In the case of uranium, the principle is simple: cause a chain reaction of the breakdown of the atomic particle. In bombs, this is an uncontrolled reaction. In nuclear facilities, it is *an always conditional* “controlled” reaction. What is this “reaction?” A fractional percentage of uranium on the earth (~0.72%) is uranium-235. This element must be processed; a great deal of the rest of the stabler forms of uranium must be removed for a reliable U-235 reaction to begin. What is left over is “enriched” uranium—a self-aggrandizing name. It is aggrandizing to whom?

To the category “human” that the industrialists who use uranium expect they are attaining. “Enriched” uranium is in a sense borrowing energy from those who mine and convert

it. This mining is handled by oppressed people all over the world—the mining is part of the oppression. Japan’s uranium came from Australia, Canada, Kazakhstan and elsewhere. Canada has a history of having Indigenous people mining and handling the uranium without knowledge of its radioactive effects. U-235 is stable enough that it breaks down very slowly and can therefore be mined, handled, and condensed into “fuel” pellets. But it is still radioactive. And it is unstable enough that it is also “fissile;” it can be forced into a chain reaction of destruction. This is what a uranium-based nuclear reactor is. When the atom encounters a neutron, it “bursts,” reconstructing into other atomic particles, releasing neutrons as remainders, and thereby releasing some of the incredible energy it has “stored” in/as its mass. These released neutrons impact other U-235 particles, which cause them to “burst” also.

As I mentioned, this chain reaction must be *controlled* in nuclear facilities. This element of control is obfuscated in descriptions of the nuclear plants for the public. This obfuscation is as socially oppressive as it is unconscious. Once some neutrons are fired into the collected U-235 within the nuclear plant, “control rods” are used to manipulate the reaction. *They prevent the reaction from cascading to such an extent that the heat released from the fissioning melts the uranium itself.* The control rods do this because they are filled with neutron absorbing elements (elements capable of absorbing neutrons without “bursting”). They “temper” the reaction. How is energy made and stored? The heat of the fissioning is “efficient”—it releases far more energy than is required to start the reaction. It boils water. Steam turns turbines, and the turning is translated into electromagnetic energy and stored in batteries or sent to the grid. Water is necessary to cool the solid, super-hot uranium fuel. Secondary processes and electricity to run them are necessary to maintain this cooling and the capacity to control the reaction.

On March 11, 2011, massive (multiple) tsunami, triggered by the massive earthquake, surged over the seven-meter sea walls meant to protect the facility. Science had determined that such supermassive tsunami were possible. TEPCO ignored this. The water flooded the reactors and damaged the buildings. The seawater also affected generators meant to provide electricity for back-up power. These generators were stored in the basement of the facility. This was a known design flaw. TEPCO ignored it. The facility's power went out. And the gas generators were flooded. Nothing was left to control the uranium reaction. The uranium began to melt. Extreme pressure from hydrogen (from the water) collected. Explosions occurred. "Controlled" pressure releases occurred. And seawater is pumped through the reactor cores in an effort to cool and contain the nuclear reactions within. The Fukushima Daiichi reactors sustained a "partial meltdown."

As of 2023, contaminated seawater is being poured into the ocean so that there is room for even more contaminated seawater. It is important to note that contamination follows and seems to be part of "normal" nuclear facilities, too.

II

What is a nuclear facility? My description above largely follows what Heidegger would call the enframed perspective. The nuclear facility *at its core*—in both terms!—is part of an attempt to enframe the earth as a collection of objects that *stand in reserve*.¹²⁹ En-frame/Ge-stell: to place into a collection; to allow, through an organizing mediation, what is to appear in such and such a way. To stand in reserve: to "inventorialize." Heidegger would say we are under the sway of this particular configuration of Being. The facility is the product of a drive (or "challenging forth") to

¹²⁹ Heidegger, 'Technology,' *Basic Writings*.

see everything as a mere object stable enough for exploitative use. Somehow, positing this “stability” also affords the sense that manipulation is neutral and appropriate. In the case of a nuclear facility, we exploit and manipulate uranium. For Heidegger, this particular enframing is the true danger. This or that atomic technology is the latest to be caught in this momentum of this enframing. In a sense, Marx says this in a different register: the modern capitalist seizes the means of production and sees “use value” in the body of the other and thus “labour,” “the labourer,” and a standing-in-reserve “workforce” are invented. We ourselves thus stand in reserve for the standing-in-reserve. Or so it seems.

Can uranium be so neutrally manipulated? Is our relation to it and ourselves also so mechanical? Certainly not. This supposed mechanicity is only one side of what Bruno Latour calls the Modern Constitution, namely the “purification” side. This purification is necessary because the same Constitution admits and seeks out a proliferation of mediators and networks. It seeks them out while hiding from itself the effects of these monstrous comings-together of earth, world, politics, and life. It is this double movement that Latour sees as constitutive of Moderns. And Latour argues Heidegger has only been convinced by the purification side. Heidegger misses the swirling world under his feet, perhaps disturbed by what is occurring there and thereby resenting the purification while also mobilizing it to turn from the worlds that are today made.¹³⁰

The nuclear facility is the double movement of what Latour calls the Modern Constitution: creating networks and purifying their effects. The cultural (un)awareness of nuclear facilities is thus *embodied*. The facility seems to tuck away its proliferating mediator deep into its secret chamber, and claims, gratefully, that it is only by necessity! It embodies its own

¹³⁰ See Latour, ‘Forgotten,’ *Modern*.

purification. Missed is the massive networking meshwork, the threads leading to that chamber cast everywhere, that constitutes everything from the location of the site to the globe itself. In pre/non-modern societies these threads were highlighted, made explicit, cared for, feared, loved. Modern culture pretends they aren't there. This pretending *is* a particular structure of the subject.

The Fukushima Daiichi Facility embodies this purification/proliferation. The facility is “simultaneously marginal and sacred,” as Latour puts it (*Modern* 4). It straddles two municipalities, Ōkuma and Futaba. This made local oversight more complex. It was also celebrated as affording economic benefits to two poor areas. However, the areas are poor because of the concentration of power in centers like Tokyo and in the monopolies like TEPCO situated there. “Power” means here both the concentration and consecration of the status quo consumer cultural life as well as the state power that is situated within, regulates, and perpetuates it. Massive subsidies are given to countryside towns to house nuclear facilities.¹³¹ Networks of capital, “duty,” power dynamics are both out in the open and hidden. These areas are poor because of a longer history of exploitation of Tōhoku. That is, the nuclear facility piggybacks onto a longer history of exploitative “energy production.” This is itself linked—in at least two incredibly open and hidden instances—to WWII.

The first, rice. Tōhoku was forced under total war mandates to produce rice. This was modeled on policies imposed on Japan's wartime colonies. These mandates were used as guidelines for the post-war economic system. Monoculturalization and/or agricultural hyper-specialization is the proletarianization of the north. It is the invention of the “workforce.” It is the system which forces people to buy back the products they make and supply energy for. Now, there is not a total mobilization for war, but for capital itself (capital being the ultimate marginal

¹³¹ Oguma, ‘Hidden.’

and sacred “thing” today). The monoculturalization of Tōhoku stretches into the prewar decades also. This itself stretches deeper into history...all the way to the conquests of the early Yamato state.

The second, nuclear energy. The Japanese state and intellectuals were attempting to develop their own nuclear weapons. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are themselves hidden and revealed in the nuclear facilities. The “Americans” stupendously dropped the bombs on Japanese citizens as a show of force. The power of the facilities is made possible by the research that developed the bombs. The utilization of nuclear facilities is post-war accumulation of energy as power instead of its release as power—two sides of the same coin, 表裏一体. They remain co-implicated. The Daiichi reactors are American designed. And critics of nuclear weapons now designate Japan as a *de facto* nuclear weapons power: Japan is allowed to store its spent uranium and plutonium from its nuclear facilities; these can be re-processed into nuclear weapon fuel. The generation of electric power is in part the securing of a stockpiling for a nuclear weapons arsenal. All our daily lives are implicated in this standing-reserve. The purification/proliferation of this connection to America, the bombings, to sacrifice, to duty, to money, to poverty—all are also radiating from the broken Daiichi reactors.

Put bluntly, the tsunami smashed that topology apart; or it snapped a particular relation which caused the rest to wend and stretch before being reconstructed and re-modelled. The topology—that purification/proliferation assemblage—was announced in its breaking and stretching. The whole system became “uncanny.” The tsunami is part of the same radiation—waves—that make life in oceans possible. The tsunami partially broke the core open—in both senses of the core! This means much more than “it destroyed the factory.” The tsunami released the uranium organized as the standing-in-reserve in the facility’s reactors. What is leaking from

the facility is nothing less than standing-reserve-ness. Exposed to the world are the invisible threads that kept the facility under wraps. We should also feel these threads as they knot around the production of energy in nuclear facilities and coal mining elsewhere, too.

The shaking of the web revealed—yet again—that we are not the spider at its center; there is no center, no spider. We are the ANTs of this actor-network, as Latour calls it. But we are not “just” toiling within the webbing, and making the networks in our toiling, with the machines that make the web in our hands. We have to realize we don’t know what we’re doing with those things in our hands. But that what we’re doing is what we are. Is it possible to embrace such a position? Is it possible to think that the pleasure is that we don’t know what we’re doing while also therefore being more careful with what we do? Not only possible, necessary. Hope for and fear of the unknown makes us more careful because we know the unknown is unknown: it will come and cause equality and harm all at once in ways unimaginable. As abject as it is to suggest, the tsunami may not only have been destructive but also in part an energy through which we can hear a demand, a new way of situating ourselves in our world that is not ours.

III

As I mentioned, what has arrived on this actor-web is extremely ambiguous. The nuclear facility embodies the purification/proliferation duality of the Modern Constitution. However, what it produces is something else altogether. Early modern technologies could perform the proliferation/purification in relatively unperturbed ways because the risk of materiality defying its categorization as “Nature” was lower. This is broken today. As Latour put it in the early ‘90s,

“So long as Nature was remote and under control, it still vaguely resembled the constitutional pole of tradition, and science could still be seen as a mere intermediary to

uncover it. Nature seemed to be held in reserve, transcendent, inexhaustible, distant enough. But where are we to classify the ozone hole[,] global warming or deforestation? Where are we to put these hybrids?”¹³²

Where are we to put nuclear technology’s wayward ionizing radiation?

I return to the “radioactive elements” spewed across Fukushima. As I explored above, a nuclear facility is a hybrid that barely conceals its status as such—that is, it is an entity that, while organizing the material/social collective simultaneously purifies its role in that collective. *This makes the radioactive elements and their ionizing radiation hybrids of this hybrid.* The ionizing radiation occurring from the broken reactors is akin to ozone thinning, which is slowly reversing. And global warming, which is as of today on course to reach a boiling point. It is much more difficult to place or cut exactly where these “objects” stand. They break the Constitution. They are effects of hybridity that cannot themselves be enframed as standing-reserve and therefore are much less easily purified. Their mediations are not “productive.” Their narratives are much less easily written. Pinning down their ontological status perturbs us. This perturbation should point us to what is ontologically truer: they cannot be pinned down.

This refusal of the pin seems to manifest in the discursive ambiguity that surrounds radioactive by-products of enframed and “de-enframed” fission reactions. As I explored above, science defines ionizing radiation as a particular energy state, above the visible spectrum of light. Particles are “radioactive” because their own “decay” (re-structuralization) send out particles or energy capable of triggering and/or destroying other particles or structures. Cells are damaged and even tiny DNA strands can be destroyed if it encounters such an particle or energy intense enough. Again, “radioactive particles” must therefore be thought of as a broader process, rather

¹³² Latour, *Modern*, 50.

than only an “object.” And “process” is only peek into the matter too. The restructuralization, which means the transformation into a more stable element, is unpredictable. “Half-lives” are statistical probabilities. This opens a broader window into something ontological: radioactive particles are part of a vast chain of causes without being a “final or first cause.”

Part of what the Fukushima Daiichi partial meltdown retrospectively reveals is the deep ambiguity and occlusion these hybrids occupy. Part of what the breakdown shows is also that this is the case with atomic technology *in general*. Remember: the “purpose” of an atomic weapon is the initial and incredible explosion. This explosion is itself a chain reaction of an unstable “fissile” element, like uranium or plutonium, packed into the weapon. The consequent “fallout,” the spread of other radioactive particles that are themselves atoms split from their parent atoms—these particles were not “intended.” A failure of imagination, an unwillingness to accept the consequences of life-bound processes, a grossly horrific violence: we can call it any and all of these things. Really, it is a lack of care in relation to the unknown. Some people who were close to the explosions without dying died soon after because their bodies were shot through with atomic particles ejected by the products of uranium (Hiroshima) and plutonium (Nagasaki) restructuring. These people were often maimed such that their bodies could not handle more breakdown and stress. They died within weeks. Some people were further away and developed “radiation sickness,” which means complications arose due to cellular breakdown and irregular duplication. Some died from this sickness.

Some recovered, though many who recovered were weakened. Many who recovered lived nearly as long as what is statistically average for the general population. Few who lived developed cancers. I mentioned this because “hibakusha” are othered in Japan. The challenge is to see these aspects of ionizing radiation, accept the terror (weapon) and risk (nuclear facility) in

its usage without othering those affected—a challenge I will return to in the next chapter. Note this is also true of those who are “hibakusha” in America exposed to the “fallout” from the many American tests. At some level, given that the plutonium from these many tests from American and the USSR has spread everywhere, everyone on this earth, animals and plants included, are hibakusha. And while it may not be appropriate to refer to the following situation as involving “hibakusha,” we are always already exposed, even before technologies could manipulate them, to ionizing radon and potassium that circle the earth in tiny percentages. What I mean is: those affected should not be othered, because everyone, at a certain scale, was affected too. And, moving from this, the injustices that the victims of un/intentional fallout bear must be then addressed.

The same ambiguity, not surprisingly, surrounds nuclear facilities. Like the control rods, the “products” of nuclear fission (i.e. of U-235 breaking apart) are hidden. “Hidden,” again, means a kind of unconscious purification. At worst, it is an intentional obfuscation. And this goes on in the state-energy industrial complex: there are whole histories in Japan, the U.S.—everywhere there’s nuclear—of discourses of companies and the state promising the “freedom” that nuclear energy will secure. Of course, the following is never spelled out: every moment of a nuclear reactor’s functioning is also a moment where some new fission-produced, ionizing-capable particle is born. The chambers where the reactions occur are filled with them. They enter the water and the concrete of the reactor. *They are a perpetually uncontrollable element of the reactions.* In some sense, on 3.11 these uncontrollable elements were merely set loose (I almost wrote “set free”), which is to say that the lie of the absolute controllability of nuclear facilities was realized outside the core (i.e. this lie is manifest inside the core, whose radiation is fundamentally always a little out of control).

Some of the most challenging particles that spewed out are iodine-131 (I-131) and caesium-137 (Cs-137). I-131 is problematic because it mimics materials that enter thyroid glands. Its decay is “alpha decay;” it shoots out a collection of particles when transforming. Thus, I-131 is most dangerous when ingested. It has a half-life of 8 days. The longer it sits and decays in the thyroid, the higher the probability of cancer. Recall, Cs-137’s half-life is about 30 years. Its decay is different: it emits “gamma radiation.” This is pure energy that shoots right through the body, impacting atomic bonds in cells along the way. Ingested, it enters bones and decays within them. Ingested or not, though, it is dangerous. But does this fully describe Cs-137? These descriptions are at best one appearance of Cs-137’s ontology. Cs-137 is not a single object. Is it not a cluster, at least? It does not “itself” release energy, either. Complex interactions occur for the release of energy. These occur in unpredictable ways. It also does not name the energy it releases, which re-enters the universe in tight, micro-energetic waves. It appears to be moving, phasing. What *we* encounter of Cs-137 is precisely what it is *through* our encounter with it.

IV

My point is not to repeat the truism that nuclear disasters are difficult to manage because they are difficult to measure and track. That is certainly the case! But this should alert us to what this means. My point is quite different: something else about these releases are hailing us in ways unlike the push to measure. A vibrational ontology is announced in the difficulty of tracking and perceiving Cs-137—from its vast cloud, to the fact that it “is” a process. The releases, as energy injected into a system that *is* energy, *announces* something: that energy is ontological. Latour stresses that perhaps the only reason he can outline the modern Constitution is because those of us living it are beginning to notice it fray. *It is precisely something like post-nuclear radioactivity*

that accomplishes this fraying, that is, which gestures at the dangerous workings of the Constitution and its failure to capture what the world means among these hybrids. Cs-137 is never quite purified because it is not anticipated by the Modern Constitution. Cs-137 is part of the eruption of meaning—both as a cracking explosion and as a sudden proliferation. It is part of a vast cloud of hailings, ideas, movements, fears, nightmares.... The fear of it is in part related to fears of death (which are themselves complex and not straightforward fears). But also fears of what our interactions with “whatever Cs-137” is. The fears are abjections towards what Cs-137 reveals about objects and our encounter with them. Cs-137 is, in Timothy Morton’s term, a hyperobject, something like Latour’s hybrids of hybrids—global warming, de-forestation, ionizing fallout—that just don’t fit into the Constitution. They do not allow the sense that material and symbolic realms are separate; or—they do not allow a symbolic order, a human artifact, to dominate. Abjection also points to the symbolic orders failure in a reactionary way. Cs-137 problematizes the modern sense of “me over here, this over there.” They cannot be purified of *their* “worlding.” We are “in” them. *But therefore they are also “in” us.* We do our best—through *abjection*—to avoid encountering this fact. But living in Fukushima meant living this abjection while being in what was trying to be abjected—no Cs-137 “itself,” but the sense that “our lives” were now brought into a modality that Cs-137 demanded.

Thus, Morton argues gamma radiation exemplifies the non-essential, non-“present” yet effective ontology. Morton writes, “Radiation provides us with an evocative way to think what all beings are—not metaphysically present, that is, not constantly ‘there’ under the watchful eye of a god or of me, the measurer, not composed of or validated by some more real thing.”¹³³ Evocative, controversial—especially when discussing 3.11. Of course, the counter-reaction to

¹³³ Timothy Morton, ‘X-Ray’, in *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 315.

such a claim is justified: everyone knows radiation is a real thing. It pollutes homes in eastern Fukushima. It populates the lives of those who live there. People have died fleeing it. Suicides are way up in Fukushima and the tsunami-affected areas also (in a country where suicides are already a major happening). Measurement has been a necessity. Who could disparage it?

However, such counterclaims should note two things about what Morton says. First, Morton did not say radiation is not “real;” he said it is not “metaphysically present.” In other words, ionizing radiation tells us something about what “real” means. To be “real” means to not be “present.” Note also that in the above Morton quote, the “more real thing” is posed as “me,” the measurer. The “more real thing” is what the modern subject reserves for itself: the one who measures, who measures up the world and in encountering the world as “objective” finds it lacking. The correlate is that the subject is stable enough to do the measuring, the knowing—i.e. that the subject confers a presence derived from itself. This all implies a neutral interaction too. The modern subject formation is *part of* the ultimate purifying mechanism. The modern subject rejects all the myriad ways their world impinges on their perspective. The modern subject is subtly aware of this gambit and the contemporary reactionary culture hegemony satirizes and trivializes this awareness, wallowing in the contradiction rather than seeking out what it means.

Recall that for Attali accumulative and repetitive consumptive musical culture redirects what was once a social sacrifice towards the self. Dominant musical listening somehow affords a catharsis, an abjection, for the modern subject; music here allows the structural lie to continue precisely through its repetitive encounter. Music “contains” the shutting off of the sense of non-presence. Is something like this not also going on with the absolute focus on radiation measurements? Is there not a kind of accumulation of use time to never be used in the reporting of slowly decreasing numbers? Is there not a sense that “we get time back?” So then, where did

“time” go? It went away, a little bit, when Cs-137 demanded we act in a translation way on its terms of time. The “more real measurer” position is itself the product of technological and cultural forces that couch and sustain it—precisely because some sense of the fallibility, even failure of this position is felt. The subject is “itself” ontologically effective yet not present; like any object, it is there but what we perceive of it is not “it.” “It” does not fully perceive itself either while being taken up in particular space-time formations—and we’re like that too. It is *real* insofar as: a structure appears; it is unstable. But modern subjectivity assumes it is stable; its knowledge is complete.

However, there remains instability in this position. Morton writes, “This instability is accompanied by a necessary violence in the experimental and social realm, as correlationism tries to justify the impossible, to square the circle: a violence all the more violent for being seen as ‘mere’ measurement, as ‘mere’ perception, free from the tyranny of the old metaphysical truisms.”¹³⁴ To be in Fukushima meant to be subject to this violence, to the assumption that a position of the *measurer* is “recoverable.” The measurements around Fukushima do not only attempt to secure safety; they also attempt to secure the faith in the subject as measurer of the world! Suicide is up not “because of the disaster itself.” Suicide is a response to this instability being abjected and the purification of Cs-137 being undertaken *in the midst of Cs-137*. Far from occupying a site of pure otherness, a site of the purely abject, a suicide, in all its tragic finality, may gesture at an individual’s overwhelming suffering of being surrounded by collective actions that seem hellbent on justifying the impossible, namely its own presence. The measurement necessity is as prescriptive as it is descriptive: a deep violence in the attempt to contain not just “radiation” but a much broader and more intensive announcement of ontology.

¹³⁴ Morton, “X-Ray,” 318.

Spelled out, it is impossible to get “a full picture” of Fukushima’s radioactivity. The corollary: it is also impossible to secure the subject position that would secure this picture. The politics of measurement are ambiguous. The means and ends of measurement are never neutral. Has the seeking of information not taken over and become a hegemonic drive? In attempting to tame the hybrid, has the measurement paradigm not accomplished another purification?

One commentator states that those in Fukushima have had to “seize the means of perception.”¹³⁵ As many have noted, the radiation measurements provided by the state were either inaccurate despite being presented as accurate or withheld. We should certainly do more than shudder at the terror of this fact. Many studies rightly follow grassroots measurement practices and lines of cooperation—most often between concerned mothers, Geiger counters, sympathetic scientists with high-tech labs, and local officials. But the links between them are never quite set—once again, science is *here* and “everyday people” are *there*, radiation *over there*, and political decisions *way over there*. What does it mean to think these together? This can be asked in a different way: what is being seized? Is it not the case that the state *had no clear data*? Is it always the case that these grassroots programs *had clear data*? I am not disparaging these efforts, but I am trying to analyze the conception of the framework. What is apparently seized from the state is not something the state ultimately had any “immediate” means to itself. In these discourses of seizure and measurement, is it not the case that a desire for the “stable, modern subject” resurfaces? Are the positions—promises of measurement and calls for “better” measurement—not part of an antinomy that perpetuates the Constitution? I may be splitting hairs, but I think perception was not “seized” but *realized*. It is our perception already. Perception is a matter of control. If we have to seize perception itself, we really have lost to postmodern

¹³⁵ Kath Weston, *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech, Ecologically Damaged World* (Durham: Duke University press, 2017), 81.

consumer technoculture. “Seizing the means of perception” implies we just take up the production of information. But as Gramsci critiqued Marx: this does not automatically mean we are no longer capitalist subjects. I think, rather, the collective capacity to create equal assemblages was realized. People moved towards what Marx called “general intellect”—the capacity to share and exercise knowledge relating to technology and the capacity for the senses to be expressed in and through prosthetics.¹³⁶ This describes not a *presence*, but a commitment to care for a productive finitude.

Measurement signs act as semiotic signs across all of Fukushima—as an actor-network—as Geiger counters posted everywhere. This network has a *counter-hyperobject*—a kind of reactionary hyperobject in its own right. Has “good measurement” been achieved? If so, how does the fight for measurement remain a fight against the status quo? If “good measurement” remains unachieved, then why the continued calls for “better measurement?” Are the prefecture-wide Geiger counters not an attempt to recapitulate a previous world and its reliance on “standing-in-reserve”ness? Yes, but in a peculiar way—*policing the relation to radioactive elements*. Again, measurement “itself” is not the issue, the constellation of another actor-network that self-purifies, re-stages, and re-situates the modern Constitution is. These particles cannot stand in reserve, so there is a new modern mode to deal with them: *standing-aside*. Standing-aside is Latourian purification. One of the horrors of 3.11 is not strictly “the disasters” themselves, but the shape of the response. 3.11 has demonstrated that, with the increase of technology, there are new terrifying forms which attempt to rise to the level of the hyperobjects they attempt to purify: the tsunami walls are one; the prefecture-wide Geiger counter system is

¹³⁶ Karl Marx, ‘Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy’, Marxists.Org, accessed 26 May 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/>.

another. They are the standing-aside attempts. This means they also take part in a *policing of the subject*.

The counter-hyperobject is a grid of radiation detection meters, radiation level postings, and digital radiation information. The grid forms a set of organizational constraints on what kinds of movements and durations are recommended within Fukushima. This grid therefore affects what it means to be in Fukushima—on the style of being in Fukushima. It is at once a description of radiation in Fukushima which says, “do not go here, do not spend time there, go here” as it is also a prescriptive dimension on treating the problem of radiation on a calculative grid. The radiation meters, in the vernacular of the state, secure safety. But they also secure a calculative relation to place. They prescribe a self-regulatory relation to ontology. Their hegemony restricts the problematization of radioactivity in the ontological sphere. In this way, the meters promote a return to a transcendental and contemporary shapes subject, a faith in the measurer. It is a description/prescription demanding the return of the national citizenry, the working citizenry, the economic subjects in Fukushima. The meters say, “the earth is handled so get on with the work”—but such a separation from earth and the labour is precisely the violence at hand.

Against this broader Geiger counter network, the “personalized” Geiger counter was often hailed as most “appropriate” to radiation because it sonifies the reading and “liberates” an individual to make more micro-informational observations. Should we so quickly celebrate this personal freedom to measure? Is this supposed freedom not the violence of the imposition of a governmentality (a governing rationality) on our daily lives?¹³⁷ Again, this seems to be a

¹³⁷ Michel Foucault, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell, 1. Picador ed, Lectures at the Collège de France (New York, NY: Picador, 2009), 144.

pernicious return of the hegemonic mode under the guise of a so-called progressive liberal individualism. Often, these Geiger counters become yet another purification machine: the thing appears there, measured, seen, made into an object.

What is the counter's sonification? Is it so clearly related to radiation or even to "readings"? It is forgotten that a Geiger counter's click-scape is an extraordinary aesthetic configuration. The sounded "click" is a translation of a reading that itself translates a series of subatomic translations.¹³⁸ What is "heard" has little to do with radiation "in itself." Or rather—what radiation *is* is also part of these encounters. Put differently, sound in the Geiger counter offers itself as an aesthetic (ideational/material) translation of the presence of wayward energies that are themselves translations. Sound translates this onto a disturbance in the air that can be heard. It is an aesthetic relation to radiation that conditions how it appears to us, thereby also conditioning what it *is* to us and how we engage it. A Geiger counter offers nothing more than an aesthetic encounter—but also nothing less than that. This implies other aesthetic encounters are possible and urgent.

This individualized Geiger counter is implicated in producing the power-saturated subject called "the average person." I think this figure, "the average person," is a humiliating category that we should fight against. Yet, Geiger counter is often hailed as "giving science to the average person." Who is this person? Who is giving what to them? The Geiger counter often accompanies a celebration of "citizen science" which flies across academic discourse. I find the

¹³⁸ The measuring mechanism of a Geiger counter is a tube saturated with uncharged noble gas atoms. An unstable radioactive particle "decays" and releases one of its atomic elements, like an electron, into the air; or it releases energy. These latter effects are powerful enough to effect other atoms, which defines them as "ionizing." This electron/energy enters the tube and potentially knocks one of the gas atom's electrons out of its orbit. These now two wayward electrons hit other electrons, and so on, causing a cascading effect. The electrons are attracted to a positively charged rod in the middle of the tube. They follow the charge of this tube to its source, triggering a "counter" which registers the pulse. What is measured is the frequency of this pulse. The measurement of radiation comes from a translation of a prior translation—of how frequently a wayward electron causes this cascading effect.

term somewhat pejorative as if the “average person cannot “normally” “do science.” The “average person” is *made* and *held* as such. The term “citizen” also rings strangely when those in Fukushima after 3.11 experienced a horrible state of exception of this “citizenship.” A peculiar deference to the hegemony resounds here, a theorization within the terms internalized by modern subjectivity—that is, it has internalized that “the measurer” is the goal of the human, the way of no longer “being average,” a kind of “object.”

Often, “citizen scientists” are “farmers.” They are also often said to represent “the average person’s future” in a toxic world. But often what is meant appears to be that they already live in a world where they have to make measurements to get by. Even in these apparently progressive and critical discourses, those in Fukushima are used to capitulate to hegemonic scare tactics. “Our future” today is always so quickly dystopian. We are to “pity” them, having arrived too soon. In this respect, they are also othered: look, they are out of joint, living in a time we will (hopefully not) live in. Have we not heard that: *time is out of joint*? Paradoxically, the Fukushima farmers also somehow *justify* the modern subjective mode: look, a time when analyzing things as objects are actualized as the truth. In other words, there is a catharsis in this narrative that they live “our future.” What it means is that they seem to be *justified* in living the anxious present that Moderns face. The discourse does not offer *how* one encounters and embraces a toxic life, a life which is not “in the future” at all and cannot be delayed into this romantic realm of future (non)action.

Forget this term: “the average person.” They don’t exist. The scientific paradigm has been incapable of rendering the significance of this event. Some other politics is necessary, one that no longer relies on a “fully informed” Other and its “gracious” manifestation in “the average person.” It may be more revolutionary to assert: we already have the means of perception of

radiation—if in an uncanny, finite, and perplexing register. Or, put in a speculative revolutionary paradox: *we already own the means of perception; and perception is never our own!* This means requires practice. What does it mean to instead face finitude, which is really another word for plenitude?

V

When I first lived in Fukushima from 2011-2014, on the cusp of the 80km restriction circumference, I was then able, along with others, to “go about my day.” But the “going about our day” was itself an agreement to witness yet reject a fear, a social fear. This agreement was traumatic because it was hidden in plain sight. To go about the day was to proceed as if there was no social agreement—that was part of the agreement. But the anxiety of adhering to this structure remained. This fear and anxiety are not only coping mechanisms; they are the symptoms of a prolonged enforced abjection of radiation’s thereness. To live in Fukushima is to live under a violent logic producing a suffering that detects but cannot overcome a severing of (a particular) self and (a particular) world. It is to live in a world that crosses out its own worlding and is, in a sense, at a loss as to how to bring this difference demanded by the disaster to bear on the present. It is a world in which all the matters of “tradition (the modern past)” and “progress (the modern future)” are brought into an announcement that demands their reconsideration while that announcement is muted. And yet, in some ways, living among this hyperobject is also instructive. It requires subtle analysis of everyday compassion when one is aware of a collective threat.

I have up to now discussed several layers of the problem: ontological ambiguity; fallout; the “standing-reserve” shattered across a prefecture and the world; the attempts to make this

breaking “stand aside;” the ambiguity of measurement. But these are part of the appearance the modern Constitution imbibes; they are the capitulation to suffering under a viscerally abject instability. They play on the surface or attempt to hide, to abject, the ontological instability. It is time to lean into this *instability*. In other words, it is time to analyze what “radiation’s thereness” means. What does a cultural formation that leans into instability *sound like*? What does it mean to say, when I lived in Fukushima and did my fieldwork, I found that for myself and for others “radiation altered the appearance of the world?” Only the compassionate gestures at the ontological.

What is abjected here? Is it only Cs-137, or is it something much broader, of which the energy that Cs-137 is only one part? Ionizing radiation is not itself “the bottom” of what energy is; nor can its tracking be reduced to this or that cause. *A broader experience of energy exchange, of the alterations and adaptations of a subject as it is altered and adapted to a shifting topology, is part of the abjection.* Following Kristeva’s re-orientation of the abject (from “there is an abject” to “I am abject”), what is abject across Fukushima is not “radiation itself,” but rather this sense that to be a subject is to be taken up in these exchanges of energy that break away from normative capitulations to essentialist performances and technological enframings. Thus, one of the most difficult aspects of fallout ionizing radiation: it is an energy exchange manifesting instability that we cannot “hear;” it is an exchange that requires risky organization; it is the struggle to create a resonance with an un-resonance.

My goal here has not been neither to argue against the measurement efforts but to question the continued deference to them, to point out their hegemony. I think it is only possible to begin to internalize, as it were, what has occurred when we “denature” the purifications that have, along with the fallout, descended on Fukushima.

IV

In conclusion, I want to briefly compare two responses to the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings in Japan. That of Kyoto School philosopher Tanabe Hajime (1885-1962) and activist Moritaki Ichirō (1901-94). Both of the following discourses reference a Zen-inspired “bodhisattva” discourse in a secular register. I do this to show that, on the one hand, the discourses of suffering and punishment, of abjection and speaking *for* the other that I explored in the introduction, are repetitions of what occurred in Tanabe’s discourse on the atomic weapons. And to show that Moritaki, while utilizing Tanabe’s language, is more critically engaged in the historical present.¹³⁹ And finally, Moritaki’s efforts echo that of the field recordist in the next chapter.

Tanabe is one among few influential intellectuals who attempted some form of public “repentance” for his support for wartime militarist fascism. He also directly addresses the nuclear question. Indeed, the two became related. Post-war, Tanabe turned to a “philosophy of repentance” that faces evil and death within what Tanabe then terms *the century of death* brought about by the atomic bomb. In other words, Tanabe, following his own philosophy, seeks a critique of the present. Tanabe famously criticized Nishida on the a-historicity of the latter’s work—a gesture that many say began the Kyoto School. Tanabe, in his 1946 work outlining his “philosophy of repentance,” writes, “Since the absolute, as nothingness, must act as an absolute mediating force, it presupposes relative being as its medium. In contrast with the doctrine of the creation of the world maintained by the theist, or the theory of emanation propounded by the

¹³⁹ I am indebted to the critical summaries of Kazashi here and use his translations in this section, found in Nobuo Kazashi, ‘Metanoetics for the Dead and the Living: Tanabe Hajime, Karaki Junzō, and Moritaki Ichirō on the Nuclear Age’, in *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Contemporary Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Michiko Yusa, Bloomsbury Research Handbooks in Asian Philosophy (London New York (N.Y.): Bloomsbury academic, 2017).

pantheist, [for] historical thinking the absolute and the relative, nothingness and being, are interrelated each with the other as indispensable elements of absolute mediation.”¹⁴⁰ Tanabe is saying something reminiscent of what I have been arguing—and yet there are significant differences: I emphasize the production/concrescence/dissipation of energy as the engine of historicity; Tanabe paradoxically substantializes “nothing” as a kind of limiting, decaying force.

Tanabe stresses that the mediation of being via absolute nothingness is always negative. Tanabe is here working from Kant’s notion of the “radical evil” that is human productive nature; what Freud would the death drive. Tanabe argues the subject must internalize the “evil” of this structure and live in acknowledgment of the necessary antimonies of *any* rational system. In order to be on the lookout for the death drive, we must be in a constant state of “repentance,” what he calls a constant metanoia. This is from the Christian “repentance,” which means a transformative change of heart. He is explicit that this insight comes from his experience of supporting the war via an apology in the introduction to *Metanoetics*. The subject, he claims, must be in a constant state of self-repudiation, repenting its organization. But if such a thing were possible the subject qua subject would disappear—actual death, stopping, a black hole. Death drive is therefore *privileged* here: a productive system aimed to destroy all systems. Tanabe wants the subject to *become* the “nothing.” This is a to what K in Chapter One is working through. Tanabe’s “repentance” is an “impermanence” affirming the subject’s merging with an impossible, absolute unconditioned. That *order* is part of the cosmos too—this is denied. And in its denial, once again, a Big Other arrives, an ultimate Order.

¹⁴⁰ Hajime Tanabe, *Philosophy as Metanoetics*, Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 23.

This is seen most conspicuously in Tanabe's comment what he calls "the nuclear age." Tanabe chose to proclaim this century as "the age of death" in an essay written for a 1959 collection celebrating Martin Heidegger's seventieth birthday. Tanabe writes,

"The nuclear age is...the "age of death." [We] are facing the end of the life-centered modern age with its faith in the almighty power of science and technology. The teleology of life, which is the seedbed for science and technology, cannot possibly control science-technology in order to avoid death as long as it remains in its idealist stand. To follow the contradiction to its bottomless bottom[:] to die is life's fate, and, at the same time, to rejoice in getting converted-resurrected at eternity's moments, and furthermore to realize-prove it integrally in the simultaneous collaboration with one's own beloved others; this would be nothing less than the welfare of absolute security going beyond the teleology of life. *...Even if a collective death of the species occurs as a result of nuclear war, there will still remain a possibility that a few people would escape death and survive.* In such a case, we cannot say that it should be impossible for bodhisattva-acts by one or a few persons to realize the above-stated collaboration union of the human species. Of course, this does not mean to affirm the genocide by a nuclear war; we must doggedly oppose to it and endeavor to eradicate war. But there is neither guarantee nor promise that such efforts would bear fruits."¹⁴¹

Statements like these open a view into the "bottomless bottom" of a thinker: a subject-constructed bedrock appears, the shape of its ideology revealed. I'm not sure which is part is the most absurd: the celebration of the seedbed of life outside of technology while claiming it is only

¹⁴¹ My emphasis. This translation is from Kazashi, "Metanoetics." 112-113. I have trimmed the translation somewhat for space and clarity. This is not the fault of Kazashi's translation, but of Tanabe's writing. See Kazashi's article for other effective translations of key passages from Tanabe's oeuvre.

out of destruction that a self-present union grows; the faith in a “boddhisattva” while cynically saying there is no hope; the notion that life is disposed to the other while claiming “one” (or maybe a few) persons can reach an individual transcendence. But certainly, the most absurd of all: Tanabe says this after Hiroshima/Nagasaki, his cynicism is therefore applied to the present moment in a perversion that more of the same will lead to a difference.

For Tanabe, our fate is led forward by a pure negativity revealed to a small, reincarnated group of “average people” becoming “extraordinary.” For Gunther Anders, *we must act as if the nuclear holocaust has already happened and do everything to prevent that fate*. Sun Ra: “It’s after the end of the world, don’t you know that yet?” We must have the simultaneous conviction that it has already happened and do our utmost to prevent it. Tanabe’s “post-civilization community” is as naive as the “pre-civilization states of nature.” Tanabe sees death as transcendent success and Tanabe grotesquely parrots an Institutional Zen Buddhism notion that death equals enlightenment (and therefore a line of enlightened patriarchs is always maintained). As Hubbard puts it, “Tanabe’s thought is thoroughly colored by the Absolute—the Western notion of an Absolute as well as a Buddhist notion of an active, unified, consistent original purity.”¹⁴²

Of course, the West also has an ongoing gnostic tradition—which includes “critical theory.” East Asian culture has its cosmopolitical traditions.

Moritaki Ichirō had just finished his dissertation on British ethics, in the milieu of the Kyoto School, when he experienced the atomic explosion at Hiroshima. He was working as a teacher in a school and shipyard. He was preparing boys for battle abroad. He experienced the

¹⁴² Jamie Hubbard, ‘Tanabe’s Metaneotics: The Failure of Absolutism’, in *The Religious Philosophy of Tanabe Hajime: The Metaneotic Imperative*, ed. Taitetsu Unno and James W. Heisig (Berkeley, CA: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 1990), 377.

explosion there. A piece of glass flew into his eye turning the explosion. His sight in that eye never returned. And he survived his others wounds through the care of the students. In response, Moritaki interlaced life and protest. He became a staunch critic of nuclear weapons, penning essays and participating in protests. Moritaki is said to have participated in four hundred and seventy sit-in protests around the world.¹⁴³ He would give his is symbolic presence and embodied presence to sit ins protesting tests and sit ins attempting to have members of state make good on their promises in meetings regarding nuclear weapons. For most of his life, Moritaki saw in nuclear facilities a hope for a peaceful use of nuclear technology, a way, to put it in a Bataillian way, to direct the excess of the nuclear away from violence and towards its capture and expulsion as an energy source. Near the end of his life, Moritaki renounced this position.

Note the similarities and differences in Moritaki's language in describing his position.

“Having arrived at the apex of power, we are now finding ourselves in the destruction of power. Only after facing the crisis of self-destruction, we seek the principle for its salvation in what transcends our self's power. If the working of negating oneself and letting others exist can be called love, what negates itself absolutely must be absolute love. The place of nothingness, which is absolute nothingness itself but letting all beings exist, is, as it is, the world of absolute compassion.”¹⁴⁴

The quote should render the burden Tanabe/The Kyoto School's language imposes on the post-nuclear weapon discourse in Japan. Moritaki is wrestling his own belief into the Kyoto School's discourse. Here again “absolute love,” if it arrives via “absolute negation,” seems to me would

¹⁴³ Nobuo Kazashi, ‘Our Kōan—How to Be Mindful in the Nuclear Age: Engaged Zen in Japan (From Hakuin to Moritaki Ichirō)’, Oxford Public Philosophy, accessed 26 May 2024, <https://www.oxfordpublicphilosophy.com/turn-three/east-asian/nobuo>.

¹⁴⁴ Moritaki, *Kaku-zettai-hitei*, 103, translated in Kazashi ‘Metaneotics,’ 118.

then hope for a total ideological disappearance of the subject. The “self’s power,” its transcendental production of meaning and space-time, is denied and replaced with this “absolute” in the face of destruction. But the key is the twist from “absolute negation” to “absolute compassion.” In part it is a key because it appears as if from nowhere; it arrives from outside the discourse.

Moritaki understands his sit-in as a manifestation of this compassion. And, where Tanabe seems to accept a death of the human, Moritaki became identified with the title of his 1979 article: “The Human Species Must Live On.” Moritaki also conceives of this project in terms of a “zazen,” sitting meditation. And Moritaki seems especially to see his sit-in protest in terms of the paired down and determined style of Japan’s Buddhist Sōtō school. “Just sit,” the motto of the Sōtō school, is taken up by Moritaki in terms of protest. “Just sitting” in meditation produced an encounter with the mind, its conditions, and eventually the reality of its emergence in the “empty” real, allowing for merge of internal and external. Moritaki translates this into a social and individual merging, where his “just sitting” produces a forced encounter with compassion, allowing policy makers to witness the context of their acts—the other.

Reflecting on the reason for his sitting protest, searching for whether it is effective, Moritaki wrote a poem in English: “Chain reaction of spiritual atoms / Must overcome / Chain reaction of material atoms.”¹⁴⁵ Moritaki rejects a guerrilla-style sabotage of nuclear tests (i.e. preventing them from happening) as the only other means. And redoubles his belief in “just sitting.” I would qualify this in the following way. The “chain reaction of spiritual atoms” must also recognize that the protest is not only a means to a “product” of the reaction. The chain reaction of spiritual atoms *is* the human collective condition, volatile, productive, and eruptive.

¹⁴⁵ Moritaki quoted and translated in Kazashi ‘Metaneotics,’ 83. Originally written in 1984.

This eruption/production only overcomes the use of atomic energy (the chain reaction of material atoms) if it recognizes itself as part of *the same*: i.e. that *neither the human nor the atomic chain are governed by strictly by “use” while each participate in collective give-taking of energy*. The end of humanity, what makes our species “live on,” is not only sitting in protest as a means to an end. This sitting also expresses a type of end—a becoming responsible. We must seek relations around the technologies we mobilize, producing organizations that relish the energy required for the attunement to that organization. We are always reliant on chain reactions of atoms as a species that never just “lives on.” Nothing only “lives on.” Beckett: I can’t live on; I must live on. Energetic practices are everything. “Sitting in protest” is part of what it means to “sit in contemplation of” or “dance on the precipice of” the unknown in our reactive chains. Moritaki’s protests are a catalyst for that realization without substance, for hearing the call of the other.

Both Tanabe and Moritaki represent two sides of a masculine politics, the sense of a noble sacrifice that would catalyze a radical change, dancing on its own precipice between useful (sustaining energy) and eruptive (productive attunements, compassionate energies). There is this sense in the following chapter too—the field recordist is a Moritaki figure. The recordist dances on the precipice of radioactivity—or he stand on it, hoping in Fukushima it is enough to “just listen.”



Image 5: A collage of photos taken by Nagahata in the “Forest of Birds.” Used with permission.

Chapter Three

Recording Radioactive “Silence:”

Sacrifice and Reverence in Nagahata’s Field Recording and Archive

In the “Interlude,” I discussed how radiation’s toxicity was responded to by the capital-nation-state and the debates regarding measurement. I suggested discourses surrounding protection have overdetermined all considerations of what the radioactive fallout means. In other words, I explored the non-cosmopolitical responses to radiation. While the radioactive fallout has produced re-evaluations of energy monopolies and the role of the state, I implied that these responses still abjected the question of how to give resonance to the unknown.

In this chapter, I follow a field recordist who, I argue, tentatively gives resonances to the unknown in the fallout. Nagahata and his family lived in Fukushima on March 11, 2011. In the immensely stressful days and months after the Dai-ichi reactor explosions, Nagahata and his partner decided to move their home north of Fukushima.¹⁴⁶ However, Nagahata continues to work as a professor in the Department of Human Support Systems, Faculty of Symbiotic Systems Science at Fukushima University. He teaches acoustic ecology, noise abatement, and urban sonic inclusivity. Field recording has for a long time been part of his work as documentary examples.¹⁴⁷ In May 2011, about two months after the radiation release and still in the depths of fallout ambiguity, Nagahata began recording at symbolically and materially important locations

¹⁴⁶ This information is from Nagahata’s public article: Koji Nagahata, ‘What Should the Soundcape Community Do When Listening to the Soundscapes of Fukushima?’, *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 12, no. 1 (2013 2012).

¹⁴⁷ This information is from his website: Koji Nagahata. ‘Fukushima Soundscapes (After 3.11).’ Accessed May 26, 2024. https://www.sss.fukushima-u.ac.jp/~nagahata/fsp_311/index-e.html.

in and around Fukushima city. When measurements became clearer, he then began recording in known “hot spots” in those same areas. Nagahata began collecting these recordings into what he names the “Fukushima Soundscape (After 3.11)” archive, posting simultaneously in Japanese and English.¹⁴⁸ The archive now has over six hundred entries spanning several significant sites: Fukushima city’s city hall, streets, parks and squares; surrounding areas like the banks of the Abukuma River, mountain parks, a “forest of birds”.... His most-engaged areas are Mt. Shinobu, a once sacred mountain turned leisure area that the city surrounds, and Fukushima University, especially areas around the university used for irradiated soil storage. On one level, the archive is a record of places of concern across the Fukushima city area with some observational and critical commentary by Nagahata. On another level, I argue Nagahata’s recording work reflects a registration of the radical shifting in the symbolic order—the topology of the subject and its relation to space—that ionizing radiation imposed without abjecting the experience of this shift.

Compellingly, Nagahata accomplishes this through an apparent paradox: he goes to radioactive places and field records there *without “sonifying” radiation*. He doesn’t take a measurement or translate radioactivity into “sound.” In other words, he strives to avoid the pitfall of what a sonification approach can imply: the attempt to force the unknown back into an ego’s reassured sense of space-time. He doesn’t attempt the conceit of translating radioactivity’s “thereness” into *an experience of presence*. This humble yet radical act seems to clash or “dissonate” with Nagahata’s early nationally inflected commitments to a highly conservative, nation-building “acoustic ecology.” And yet, Nagahata’s work prior to 3.11 was increasingly political in the traditional humanistic sense of attempting to secure a state formation perfecting rule-based equality. He also worked on cultural projects for cultivating the ability to identify

¹⁴⁸ Nagahata, ‘ (After 3.11).’ Accessed May 26, 2024.

local fauna by sound and also on ways to make the city more accommodating to those who are deaf. This politics, I think, experiences a kind of shock in 3.11, surrounded by the polysemic use of the term “silence.”

This chapter, then, concerns Nagahata’s “silent” practice, its implications in the symbolic/energetic topological shift in Fukushima after 3.11, and, finally, whether Nagahata’s archive strives to create a “topos” through which this cosmopolitical relation can be attuned to. Ultimately, I find Nagahata’s “silent” practice strives for a relation to the cosmic in its alterity; but it also strives to sustain this absolute alterity in its “reverential” quality. In this, I also find that his 3.11 Archive sputters in its attempt to make this “silence” political and public precisely because it refuses, through *his* final “silence,” to translate his performed relation to vibration. To make these claims, I discuss Nagahata’s early work, his archive, and his “silent” recording practice in turn.

I

I first met Nagahata on a warm evening in March 2019. We spoke for some time in his office at Fukushima University. We then recorded in a radioactive grove behind the university. The grove had been the recent storage site for bags of removed topsoil that contained ionizing radioactive particles. The center of the grove had been prepared to fit the number of bags. Trees had been cut down, shrubbery removed, the ground filled and flattened so that the bags could be piled up. The bags had been recently transferred elsewhere and a layer of soil in the grove had itself been combed and removed to mitigate this spillage. The ground was brown and still lined with the pattern left by the combing. Eight years on, this prefecture-wide labour continued. Bags are filled, transferred, stored, transferred again.... The bags often rip open—torn by a twig, cut by a

stone, punctured by a hydraulic skid steer machine—and topsoil containing ionizing radioactive particles falls out. There is no guarantee some particles have not been left behind.

Nagahata and I discussed several things in his office before entering the grove. He claimed that, as an acoustic ecologist, he was only interested in the “human audibility spectrum.” We spoke a little about Jonathan Sterne’s *The Audible Past* on Nagahata’s shelf. I felt Nagahata’s deference to the “human audibility spectrum” would be threatened in the context of the book given how forcefully Sterne insists there on the historicity of that “audibility.” But Nagahata insisted. And we had, of course, discussed radiation before we left. Nagahata spoke eloquently about the limits of “safety.” He spoke against the nation-state’s assumption that the marking of radiation meant life returned to normal. He implied radiation was “silent.” When the conversation reached something of a conclusion, Nagahata asked me if I wanted to join him on a recording session. Before we left, in a humble, careful, yet electric way, Nagahata said that what we were about to do was “nothing special.” I think this statement functioned simultaneously as emotional cushioning and an attempt to preemptively protect against any problematic response that me, his guest, might have. Solidarity can be easily taken advantage of. “Special” is another word for “ideological;” and what we were doing could easily be misconstrued as a false horizon or a selfish spectacle. One final layer of cushioning: we ostensibly left his office because he wanted me to hear construction noise around the university (unrelated to radiation). I had hoped we would “record radiation” instead. I myself was trying to understand what “recording radiation” meant—I knew something about the dominant nation-state approach wasn’t right, but I hadn’t seen much opposition to it when I lived in Fukushima from 2011-2014 despite the anger I also saw. Nagahata was aware of my hope and was likely cautious with it. I was grateful to find that the construction workers had left for the day. Dusk was on the horizon.

We went to the grove instead. He described what it was—a recent storage site—on the way. He described the way these storage sites were tearing up small woodlots across the prefecture, part of the scant habitats left to birds and bugs. We walked away from the university grounds towards a small forest, trudged up a small path with the track marks of the machines, through some shrubbery, and into a clearing in the trees. The clearing was where the bags had stood—a massive circle in the grove. We stood on the combed earth, near the edge. He brought out his recorder, flicked it on. We listened. Sometimes he looked up at warblers darting overhead. Most of the time we stood together and looked straight ahead or at our feet and the likely radioactive soil underfoot. He made no effort to sonify or convert into a reading the ionization levels. Perhaps 10 minutes passed. The event felt like a secret revealed. It felt sacred in a way that defied any transcendent sense of the sacred. We were not worshiping anything—but we were taking the time to bring into resonance being together with what was there. We were taking the time to inhabit the resonance of a profound violence. We were taking the time to consider the implications of a radioactive fallout storage site and its material affiliation with the university even and especially when those affiliations are purified. And expose ourselves, to some degree, to the trace of what was there: ionizing fallout—and, now I think also, the vibrational topological shift of the space. I was moved and challenged by it. I also knew ahead of time it was something I wanted to do—I knew it was a political act, but I was also drawn to the act because it seemed to function in relation to vibration. I was myself was searching for a relation to what I would now call the cosmic. Nagahata seemed moved also. I think it was the first time someone had joined him in a “radiation soundscape” session. We walked back to his office and agreed to remain in touch. Some weeks later he introduced me to Sato Nami.

II

I can begin showing the folds of ambivalence in this work, the way that there is both an intervention and a capitulation, by contextualizing Nagahata in his own early work.

Nagahata's first (co)publications were released in 1996 and are likely an "acoustic ecological" justification for the 100 Soundscapes project (which I introduced in Chapter One), released also in 1996. Nagahata works with the SAJ. The publications judge that "the Japanese sensibilities" are fading in Japan. The "proof" was a statistical decline in sonic "season words" used in haiku. "Season words" are traditionally required to "complete" a haiku poem. I will comment on these again in a moment. But notice the poetical is being translated into the statistical—a terrible violence. The poetic is understood as nothing poetic, merely deterministic indication of an identity-based essence. This is one of the faces of modernity at work. Stripped of their complex role in the potentially sublimational play of language, season words became not only mere descriptions of "reality;" they become a *governmental quantity*. The terror: *season words only describe reality insofar as it adheres to the underlying nationalistic truth*. That season words describe reality is somehow both taken for granted and beside the point; that national truth is the imposed as the problem.

Nagahata et al. predictably conclude that it is necessary to "re-train the population" to hear season words (or rather...to hear the seasons as they adhere to poetic convention...the ideology is not consistent; but the sense is that the season words somehow capture the real of the seasons). The inclusion of all sorts of "noisy" sounds in contemporary poetry is disparaged. On the one hand, these "noises" are disparaged because they cause "ordinary people" to not hear its national presence. On the other, they are disparaged because the sounds make it into the poetry and therefore change the nation. The contradiction works together. Many of the disparaged

sounds are in fact the machinery of the proletariat rice farmers. Many are in Tōhoku!¹⁴⁹ The blame for the fading of the national attunement to the nation falls on those who suffer the capital-nation-state the most—under the guise of caring for those suffering. It is the “wrong” sacrifice. It is a typical bourgeois reactionary fantasy. There is no sense in the publication that the inclusion of the noises of machinery are in fact an intervention by the proletariat who do not only suffer them but protest them, work with them! The sounds of the rice farming machinery in haiku are also the proletariat writing their worlds—but Nagahata et al. do not hear it that way. They hear “noise,” that segregationist word, as Michel Chion calls it. The articles are a mystified response to a real capital-nation-state problem, i.e. the deterioration of the potential of social space.

It is important to here describe the “100 Soundscapes” project’s archive because, in fact, Nagahata’s Fukushima Soundscapes Archive resembles it in an uncanny way. “Acoustic ecology” has nothing to do with alterity (as one might assume from the word “ecology”) and everything to do with the wish for sounds that will *deterministically make and administer decisions for us*. They want to find some key sounds or frequencies that will automatically make human life function in a certain way. The discipline almost completely ignores the problem of subjectivity. It is, in other words, a hegemonic modern discourse: “acoustics” is that reductive modern rendering of sound; “ecology” is that hope for a pure balance that brackets any human action.

A collaboration between the Soundscape Association of Japan (SAJ) and the governmental Environmental Agency (now the Ministry of the Environment), the title in Japanese is literally “The 100 Soundscapes We Must Leave Behind.” The “100 Soundscapes” project inherits responds to modern white Vancouverian “roots” in its national proclivities but

¹⁴⁹ See the previous Daiichi meditation.

differs in the strategies and meanings, hinted at by the more literal translation. Whereas the Canadian strategy involves the representation of a national mosaic unfolding in present harmony that is undefined yet real, the Japanese strategy involves a national destiny that can be seen in particular natural/symbolic couplings preserved throughout time. Of course, there is a melancholy to the Japanese title too: the archive emerges out of the 1992 bursting of Japan's investment speculation bubble.¹⁵⁰ But it adheres to the modern capital-nation-state sensibility, inheriting from the 1927 "100 Landscapes of Japan," established by the state and two prominent newspapers as a travel itinerary. Effectively the 1927 collection declared that the recently modernized national citizenry should go on a pilgrimage to admire its own presence. Karatani Kōjin canonically argues haiku were part of the contested ground over which this modern "landscape" appeared.¹⁵¹ The poetical was repressed and the haiku, at least in the hegemonic consciousness, was territorialized as a purely descriptive document of an enduring Japanese national awareness of its place.

Inheriting from this, the 1996 100 Soundscapes project presents 100 sounds—birdsongs, waterfalls, clock tower bells—within short, approximately seven-second clips. This reductively translates the quantitatively short length of haiku—missing the qualitatively poetic, echoing durationality of the form. The clips of sound in time are less durational than the haiku in language. The clips are promised to have been recorded from across the national territory, north to south—a totalizing presence. Nothing (post)industrial, scientific, spoken, protested, or consumerist is added. No pachinko parlours. No red light district. No factory sound. No play

¹⁵⁰ This bursting bubble is itself often narrated moralistically—"it was the overzealous speculator that caused the bubble and burst"—which is at best simplified at worst wrong. Japanese state policy baked into the economy the inevitable shape of the bubble—not to mention capitalism itself necessarily functioning through a seemingly never-ending series of bubbles and bursts.

¹⁵¹ Karatani, *Origin*.

either. Each sound is a small enframed object. They are purified, separated from the vast network that brings them into being *as* objects. The objects are enframed—inventorIALIZED—so that the cultural world *itself* is an inventory to be used. The list is a stockpiling of a vibrational field, which Attali argues is the mark of hegemonic musical listening and distribution practices today. It is the accumulation of use-time never used, which Attali links to an anxious reactionary sublimation of death.¹⁵² Hence: “*we must leave this behind*”—we must cheat death by securing a destiny.

Nagahata’s 3.11 archive is similar in form with important differences. The clips Nagahata presents are also short. Some are about seven seconds. Some are a little longer. However, there is usually not a clear “focus.” Nagahata often talks about specific things at the recording site—birds, rivers—and what the site means to contemporary city life. Thus, the recordings do not enframe things in the same way. Therefore, the differences. First, Nagahata includes a great deal more “ambient” sound. This or that reified “object” is not the goal. Second, Nagahata records over and over again at the same sites. An accumulative, repetitive orientation to a space is

¹⁵² See, Attali, *Noise*, 45. Much of what Attali critiques in music can be shifted to “acoustic ecology.” Attali: “Pulverizer of the past, he displays all of the characteristics of the technocracy managing the great machines of the repetitive economy,” *Noise*, 113. The similarities to Attali’s analysis continue because acoustic ecology is part of the modern capitalist purification paradigm. Scientistism: no criterion for truth except acoustic objectivity; Imperial Universality: a provable language in which recording expresses everything and nothing; Depersonalization: the soundscapist always demands their own removal from the recordings; Deconcentration and Manipulation of Power: the simulacrum of non-power, which is in fact the organizing power. Acoustic ecology orthodoxy adheres to a strict definition of sound as the “audible spectrum.” Perhaps they would avoid ableism by also suggesting there is a “sensible spectrum” where sound is felt. There is an urge to be empirical, but the empiricism posed is yet another grossly reductive modern humanism: the human is reified as a mechanistic standard through which the world merely appears. “Humanism” is much more profoundly like “ableism;” it aims to inflict a reduction on the cosmos (which is never ultimately reduced). The attempted reductions go further: acoustic ecologists are concerned with “noise.” Some sounds within the “audible spectrum” are rejected on the basis of an implied hierarchy. Acoustic ecology often implicitly aims to shape a bourgeois world of “calmness, comfort, and leisure.” The call of sound is abjected and the world is chained to a final mechanistic cause. Making a street, a café, a museum quiet: what is attempted is the perfection of the capitalist city scape—nothing to disturb the smooth waterways of capitalist efficiency with “abhorrent” vibration. *The world becomes an acoustically sealed, sound deadened recording room such that the recordist may have “transparent fidelity.”*

emphasized. Third, Nagahata is always clear these sites are implicated in changes that are not readily apparent. Radiation and the meaning of the sites are a problem; the sites do not “resist” the radiation in some way.

Now, to a certain degree, that these are “political” interventions is clear. Nagahata acts in protest. Nagahata responds to an incredible violence imposed on the city. The sites are affected by radiation, and nobody is there. As we shall see, Nagahata refuses to believe that low-yet-risen ambient radiation has not affected society more broadly. First, then, the “ambiance” of the sites renders an ambiguous violence; they render the violence in its ambiguity. Second, the repeated recordings mark a protest, a performative gesture that shows the problem of radiation should not be abject. Third, Nagahata refuses the reified place relation. The recording sites are contested; the meaning of what being there means has changed. Indeed, and this will become important again in a moment, Nagahata records at a site that was part of the 1996 100 Soundscapes project: a place called “the forest of birds.” Thus, to stand there is to make a kind of sacrifice “for the greater good.”

The question is if these formal qualities also gesture at Nagahata reaching for a *cosmopolitical* intervention. That is, the “politics” I just described, “the sacrifice for the greater good,” might be a reactionary hope for a return to an imagined pre-radiation presence, to the return of the status quo with its relative but “manage-able” flaws. However, the features of the recordings hint at a Battailian “sacrifice,” an expulsion, an attempt to take up the necessary release of energy into one’s personal practice. But is this sacrifice itself cosmopolitical? I am compelled to say, “no,” but why that is is important. Again, first, the recordings include more “ambient” sound. The transduction of the moving energy in a collection of sounds *as the site* is there. There is an attention, if a very tentative one, to a kind of field. Second, Nagahata records

over and over again at the same sites. There is a sense that the repetitive recording attempts to not only “depict” a field that is “there;” the repetition attempts to layer listening sessions such that an implicit field is rendered. The goal appears to be a different sense of the “thereness” of the field. Third, then, radiation demands this reorientation, that demands this attunement to the subject’s alterity *with respect to energy*.

Whereas the modern masculine subject is somewhat reinforced in the “political” gesture above, here there is a kind of masculine sacrificial gesture of a more “sovereign” kind, a hope to bring upon oneself the burden of changing everything yourself, becoming a kind of scapegoat that hopes to set off a constitutive recognition in the symbolic order. The sacrificial hope here is that the sacrifice will act as a machine, taking upon itself the excess of energy in its act and in its memory. While this acts in relation to alterity, it *remains* a limited act: *the act cannot in fact guarantee the reorientation for the other; it cannot become a stand in for alterity for the human other and it does not create a field with the energetic other*. There are nonetheless hints here of a cosmopolitics: I will show Nagahata is attentive to a field of alterity that is nonetheless resonant given it participates in an energetic exchange on the level of subjectivity. However, the collective remains an imagined other (made into a reified form). A kind of collective exploration, a modal configuration of the subject’s relationship to energetic alterity is barred. A cosmopolitical practice appears when it is disposed to the human other without assuming it can solve the problem of alterity for that other, when a collective exploration is afforded. Nagahata strives to take on that burden entirely—to break the symbolic order without offering a sublimated ordering in its stead. His topos is, at best, a personal one.

Thus, does Nagahata include the cosmic in the political act, a sublimational mobilization of energies in/as alterity; or does Nagahata attempt a more closed political act, which attempts to

re-secure a modern horizon that strictly aims to purify alterity? In other words, how does he read the topological shifts in the real that radiation imposed? Does he lean into that shift in the way he seeks a durational radio-spatial-becoming? Or does he act in the name of replacing the topology, helping to “recover” the modern subjective horizon? He hates the “recovery” discourse; but why? Because a return is not ontologically viable, or because the current return promised by the state is a lie? The former opens to the unknown and strives to work through it; the latter wishes a human presence could return. Does Nagahata attempt the impossible—leading to a flash of insight? Or is the impossible disdained—leading to the shadow cast by the flash? I think...a bit of both. The ambivalences come from the modern subject “itself.” The ambivalence is demonstrated in both paradox and sacrifice. The ambivalence can first be read in Nagahata’s polysemic use of the word “silence” to describe his own work.

III

The paradoxical use of the word “silence” in the context of field recording seems to hint at the flash; but the contradictory polysemy also betrays a certain symbolic anxiety. This section, then, describes how Nagahata describes his work, displaying as it does this ambivalence.

Nagahata explains these “silences” in the flagship (English) acoustic ecological journal, *Soundscapes*. First, Nagahata uses “silence” to discuss the way knowledge of its toxic effect does not register in experience. Nagahata names this *radiation silence* and states the term derives from Rachel Carson’s “silent spring.” Carson’s “silent spring” initially referred to her experience of the absence of birdcalls in meadows, thickets, and woodlots that surrounded pesticide-ridden agribusiness crop fields.¹⁵³ Carson’s achievement—the book *Silent Spring*—is matched by the

¹⁵³ Birds were dying. What was supposed to be a mold and insect deterrent—chemical pesticides, especially DDT—was revealed through this “silence” as a deadly hybrid. Birds were eating poisonous insects, seeds, and

sense of how difficult it is to urge people to take up the responsibility they have to themselves, a collective, and to the earth. Carson's book is in some ways a lament calling for a reorientation of what it means to be a self and a collective.

Because these crises do not “in themselves” produce a change; they do not automatically reorient the subject's topology! This is precisely what I'm trying to discuss. What would produce change? Of course, the situation is not the same for two important reasons: radiation's present toxicity was not producing immediate death; and yet the threat of that death was immediately imposed on humans. And Nagahata attempts to accommodate this difference. But the two senses of that difference become mixed. Nagahata writes that “radiation silence” comes to also mean “a lack of human sound from a certain soundscape caused by fear of radioactive exposure, although other sounds from nature exist as usual.”¹⁵⁴ My interpretation of what Nagahata means is that he is recording spaces where human activity has been barred because of the radiation. That is, even in places deemed “relatively safe,” a fear of radioactivity prevents people from going there. Nagahata is critiquing the state and attempting to present a violence imposed on Fukushima's population. The state says, there is no threat to the social order because the radiation numbers are “safe.” Nagahata is saying people think otherwise. He aims to prove that the state's discourse is violent by going to these places and recording “the lack of human sound.” In other words, the state's discourse blames people for making a choice about how they will deal with toxicity, about

parts of the plants contaminated with the poison. The chains of causes the hybrids installed were in some sense by design—although the chain was purified until Carson chose to listen, to bear the hybrid's chain. Carson then decided to name her landmark and de-purifying 1962 study, *Silent Spring*, after this experience: Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, 50. anniversary ed., 1. Mariner Books ed (Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002). Part of Carson's purpose in the book is to call out the chemical industry for privileging efficiency—and therefore profit—over life. She also calls out elected officials' willingness to believe and/or peddle the industry's narratives about chemical pesticides. She critiques contemporary power. She also therefore calls *to* a public to emerge in thinking of itself *as* a public and witness the way its everyday life is the purified result of hybrids producing death. Death without life is the goal of efficiency.

¹⁵⁴ Nagahata, ‘Soundscape’, 19.

how they will express fear. The state blames people in Fukushima for not acting like citizens, for not following the prescriptive command hidden in the descriptive term “safety.” Nagahata, I think, by recording, is taking up a refusal to be commanded; he negates the refusal of the people to be in these places by going and being in these places, hoping that through this negation an affirmation can happen. He performatively enacts the way it could have been even worse—total evacuation of the city. But this negation is in part the issue. Is it possible to bring in a difference through pure negation?

And it especially doesn’t explain the recording Nagahata and I did in the grove since this is not a previous “public/sacred/leisure” space. Thus, the next “silence:” Nagahata argues he is not “being silent.” Nagahata references the late musician Sakamoto Ryuichi who, during a significant anti-nuclear protest in Tokyo, said, “To keep silent after Fukushima is barbaric.” Sakamoto and Nagahata are misreferencing a statement Theodor Adorno made in 1949 in relation to the Holocaust: “To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”

The misreference is instructive. To show why, one (if only) need only read the rest of Adorno’s statement:

“In the open-air prison which the world is becoming, it is no longer so important to know what depends on what, such is the extent to which everything is one. All phenomena rigidify, become insignias of the absolute rule of that which is. The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.

Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation.¹⁵⁵

This statement continues to be deeply relevant. What Adorno is saying is that modern capital-nation-state, bourgeois hegemonic society is a society of totalizing reification. The conditional yet effective, violent and entrenched line of causes our societies rely on appear natural and unproblematic. The bourgeois position, the one from whom the productive relations of a capitalist society are the most occluded, is the dominant position. Even those who are aware of the terror of our circumstance and attempt to discuss it face the wall of this reification. The nuance is important: it is not that the awareness of doom is not heard; it is that this awareness becomes tokenized as a bourgeois fantasy, a fetishistic denial that says, “Oh, how horrible, but...”

What Adorno means is that even the productive, sublimational act of writing and sharing poetry has been reduced to repeating the reifications of our present circumstances. Poetry is no longer productive; it no longer deals in desire; it no longer goes out to meet the unconscious; it does not create a mode with which to make the unknown resonate. It is not that “Auschwitz was so terrible that to do anything beautiful and sweet is an offense to Auschwitz’s memory.” Right in the next line, Adorno *laments* that poetry has become impossible to write today. Adorno is not saying: “we must stop writing poetry to honour Auschwitz.” He’s saying, “if only we could still write poetry, then maybe another Auschwitz could be avoided!” Poetry is a stand in here for productive meaning in relation to alterity. The irony is that the abjection of the context of

¹⁵⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, in *Prisms*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholzen, 1st MIT Press pbk. ed, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought 4 (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), 34.

Adorno's statement—the move to remove the poetic productivity of the statement and extract a single tokenized prohibitional catchphrase—is precisely what Adorno's statement warns about!

The more reification dominates the more paradoxical the effort to escape it. But this means in paradox there is a glimmer of hope. It signals a desire to do the impossible: to record “the silence” of radiation with a field recorder. And that this is not “being silent.” So, Sakamoto's statement is a misrepresentation that aims to speak only about *protest*. Nagahata takes up this meaning. But missing Adorno's meaning, reducing it to “pure protest” is another tragic trivialization. It is certainly true that protest potentially refuses to reify in important ways. But therefore, there is a tragic irony in the statement “to keep silent after Fukushima is barbaric.” It is important to give voice in protest. But this statement, precisely in abjecting the complexity of Adorno's statement, assumes that the opposite—“letting your voice be heard”—is automatically *enough*. The barbarism is reduced to “keeping quiet.” In other words, a faith in a perfect neo-liberal democratic drive, a drive that in part makes our societies so reifying, is re-affirmed when the statement erases the *poetical*. I would say the “keeping quiet” and “giving voice” struggle is only one struggle on the plane of struggles, one fold on the broader struggle of bringing the poetical into modern culture. The fact that the protest was orchestrated around a single claim—no nuclear—is as important as it is partial. As Karatani said to the protesters: we protest also in order to become a society that protests. What Karatani is saying is that a frequent, open willingness to protest would mark a society that became more open in general to the poetical, to the unfolding challenge of collectivity, not to a “perfect voice.”

It is not only a representational politics that is necessary, one that sees itself only on the human subject's horizon; it is a cosmopolitics that is crucial. As I said, the question then becomes—precisely in its paradoxical drive—does Nagahata's archive strive for this poetical,

cosmic opening to alterity? Does Nagahata's recording and his archive produce a circumstance in which the poetical is re-attuned to? Put simply: does it de-reify?

There is one more comment Nagahata makes about his archive: he wants you to hear the changes in the soundscape. Is this "change" Nagahata wants "heard" the process of de-reifying the social field? Or, is this "change" symptomatic of the reification-based ambivalences of the modern subject? Nagahata mobilizes paradox in the clearing. So, does he de-reify? Yes and no. I think, as paradox, it is reaching for a difference. But precisely in the way it clings to this paradox, it bars a sense that this difference makes a difference. He faces alterity and creates a paradoxical mode through which this shift is registered. But it is doubtful that this mode is itself translated into a broader modality of relations with the other—both the other person and the other that is space.

IV

What is the significance of this grove, this *clearing*? How can we think of this clearing cosmopolitically?

As is well known, Martin Heidegger uses the term "clearing" as one of several "topoi" in his work.¹⁵⁶ In my understanding, "the clearing" is the particular historical, human arrangement of what appears as the world. All clearings are "shapes" of Being. Heidegger's work in part attempts to sketch a topology of the modern "clearing." In making this sketch, Heidegger also hopes to bring into awareness the sense *that worldings are clearings*, thereby clearing the way, as it were, for another clearing in which humans would incorporate the sense that any arrangement

¹⁵⁶ May argues the word "topos" is applicable to defining several of Heidegger's key terms. See Reinhard May and Graham Parkes, *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996).

of world *is* precisely that—a clearing aware of itself as a clearing. This event would allow our being to become ad-adapted to Being, what Heidegger calls *Ereignis*. Being would re-emerge attuned to its fundamental relationship to The Nothing, as Heidegger calls it. My understanding of the Nothing: it names the non-substantive inevitable sway of any one particular arrangement of Being. The Nothing nothings, as Heidegger says. Heidegger called some of his lines of thinking *Holzwege*, literally “Timber tracks,” paths once used by loggers to search deep into the forest for trees appropriate for cutting. The paths become unused, their way confused and difficult, often reaching dead ends. But they might have prepared the way into new clearings. However, Heidegger never makes clear the relation between labour and destruction, on the one hand, and the revealing of Being in the clearing on the other. In other words, what is the cutting’s relationship to Being, Nothing, and the clearing? Or rather—how is the “fuel” of the earth, and humankind’s relation to it in turn, related to Being?

In East Asian traditions, there is another sense of a “clearing.” Indeed, Reinhard May convincingly argues Heidegger drew from this sense.¹⁵⁷ But there remains key differences and a key gap. The “clearing” is related to the translation of the concept *śūnyatā*, emptiness, as 無 *mu* (rather than 空 *kū*). *Mu*, *wú* in Chinese, existed as a character before the influence of Buddhism in China, but the resonances, the enfoldings, of history mix the meanings together; or, they provide an opportunity. The 無 *wú* character derives from the ancient “oracle bone script” pictograph of a human figure adorned with long sleeves. As Chinese reference dictionaries

¹⁵⁷ May’s *Heidegger’s Hidden Sources* aims to unpack Heidegger’s work via a comparison of his work with the East Asian traditions that Heidegger was working through during his writing. It implicitly argues some of what made Heidegger’s work so impactful on the Western tradition was its inherent borrowing of an East Asian critique. I find this compelling. And May shows convincingly various areas where concepts were adapted. I disagree, however, with May’s conflation of the Being-Nothing-clearing-Open, which May seems to bring closer in order to make the comparison to East Asian traditions seem more direct. Thus, I disagree with the possibility of the “compete and direct” adaptation of these concepts too.

explain, the pictograph is of a person, likely a woman, dancing in ceremonial dress. Where does the sense of “negation” come from? This is a powerful question. The dictionary’s consensus is that the character came to be associated with “not” (simple negation) in language because, on ceremonial days, *there would be no work*. “No” here mixes with a profound “yes:” the sense that manual labour, the act of conservation and sustaining life, is stopped when one *celebrates*, when one expends and revels in the surplus energy that life contains. This is a sense of ritual common to many archaic societies and my interpretation here draws from Bataille’s interpretation. Bataille argues modern societies abject the pleasure of the “effort” that is the expulsion of excess. We have no “not labour.” More on this below, as Bataille becomes important in terms of thinking the meaning of Nagahata’s sacrifice.

What does this have to do with a “clearing?” The character 無 *mu* became adapted to it. The character 蕪 *wú* in Old Chinese means i) overgrown with weeds; and ii) disused cropland; thickly-grown grassland; weed-choked land. The 蕪 *wú* is 無 *mu* underneath the grass radical 艹. It came to mean, in other words, *a place where the trace of labour for sustenance was disappearing*. This carries an implied meaning, important for resonances of *śūnyatā*. This implies, namely, that what was “not” this human labour of sustenance was returning to something other than “Being”. The “not” was “nothing-ing,” to put it obtusely. The sense here is land that was once trees, which were cut down for farmland, which was then left to disuse so that grasses began growing. Thought of with the previous meaning, it could be construed that the *excess* which the labour tried to contain and sustain—*that which exceeded “labour”*—was being demonstrated again. There is a link between ceremonial land and overgrown land: both represent excess.

Thus, the differences. Heidegger's "clearing" is related to a human logging, a cutting away and molding, a mobilization of the energy of labour to *construct* a clearing—this clearing is the work of human labour, a kind of consistent clearing that, despite what moderns believe, was susceptible to the shifting of shadows and time. In other words, the sense of excess, of energy, appears ambiguously if it appears at all. The temporal ex-stasis of meaning humans are subject to seems to always only construct, harness, and in that construction move away from itself. The Nothing is a facet of Being like the clearing is its conditional manifestation.

The Daoist, East Asian Mahayana Buddhist clearing is what seems opposed to human labour as human meaning and the construction and sustenance of the dominant (symbolic) order. The overgrowth comes to negatively show that the order—that construction/defining work of humanity—is always vacated, only a temporary influence on space. The excess is separated from human meaning and given its own autonomy. Human meaning is not made in a clearing in this case, but is made *despite* the always-already overgrowing "not" that negates this meaning.

In Heidegger's case, the Nothing is coterminous with Being and the earth is taken up in this process, whether we realize it or not. In the Mahayana Buddhist case, the overgrowth hints at a cosmic non-essence hidden behind our attempts to assert our presence on the earth.

In *both* cases, the element of ceremony and pleasure, *of human's own participating in excesses beyond "instrumental labour" and "sustenance"* is occluded. This leads to certain abjections enfolded into the approaches of both "clearings." For Heidegger, a reverence of excess pervades his language regarding Being while his language nonetheless esteems a world built purely around the practices of sustenance and instrumental labour. For the Mahayana Buddhists of Daoism and Chan/Zen, there often seems an attempt to return to a present relationship to this non-presence, a perfect union with the overgrowth, such that the human mind becomes "present

to” the overgrowth. Both do not work: both miss the excessive, productive, and explosive quality of human becoming *and* the movement of the cosmos too. The cosmic overgrowth somehow reaches a point where it “stops overgrowing,” reaches a balance that can be attuned to, a perfect lattice, a perfect mirror. Where does the energy of “poetry” come from for Heidegger and where does the energy of “overgrown” go for the sketch of East Asian 無 *mu*? What is lacking is plenitude, the enduring sense that the poetical overgrows while also taking shape in structures.

They miss the forest for the (lack of) trees. They both miss that the clearing, whether an “arrangement” or as a “destitution,” is in fact a forest of vibration. The excess is also implicated in the arrangement; and the destitution is also implicated in the excess. The overgrowing energy is also what binds our arrangements. The binding arrangements also condition the entrance to the overgrowing energy. Arrangement is also a destitutional act. Destitution is also a binding of arrangements. What is lacking is the sense that to make and expend is part of the poetical unfolding of the cosmos. Thus poetical cosmopolitics: the giving resonance to the radical alterity that is one and the same with the subject. The dancing feminine returns.

V

I understand Nagahata’s modern, secular practice unfolding from what, after Yuk Hui, I would call a fold within the Japan-based cosmotechnical horizon.¹⁵⁸ Hui argues relations to time, technicity, and the earth fundamental to humanity unfold differently in different cultures and that these differences are interpretable when comparing activities, discourses, and cosmological mythic narratives. Cultures have their own forms of technics, their own ways of making and

¹⁵⁸ Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, Third corrected edition, Mono 003 (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2022).

breaking worlds. I cannot delve into Japan's mythos here—and Susanoo would be an interesting cosmotechnical figure to analyze in his ambiguity—but 無 *mu* deeply influenced that cosmology and its cosmotechniques. There is no doubt that Nagahata's practice can be thought of within the horizon of this syncretic cosmotechnical history in Japan. And thus a *cosmopolitics* may unfold from there also.

Thus, the sense of “clearing” as a kind of oppositional overabundance against the illusion of the constancy built into the human symbolic and subjective orders is relevant to analyzing how and whether such a *cosmopolitics* emerges here. I think Nagahata's practice is resonant with meditative practices involved in achieving a “balance with what is there” (a “perfect reflection of such-ness”). This is what is both compelling and uncertain in Nagahata's work—compelling because these meditative practices are historically committed to transforming one's experience of being a subject; uncertain because there remains an opposition to form, to being en-formed by the other, and a desire for a “flat” reflection.

Of course, Nagahata does not identify as anything but secular. But this is the opportunity: Nagahata faces radiation in way that hints at resistances to modernity and towards a reorganized “post-secular” relationship with alterity. Where the Buddhist discourses of 無 *mu*, however, were explicitly about an “other” to the human (with all its ambiguities, struggles, and affordances), Nagahata's “other” is not clear and yet it is *there* in his reverential (anti)transductions. There is reaching/recoiling ambivalence here, a sadness and gladness, an anger as well as a courage, a wanting to break away from modern secular individualism and into something aware of itself as part of the other.

If above I unpacked some background hues of 無 *mu*, it is to enrich its more overt connotation: that everything is an *emanation* out of the interaction between a lack of presence

and the production of temporary form. Everything emanates out of and is immanently implicate to a primordial *śūnyatā* as an inter-impacting, energetic field. This resonates with recent radical science like Bohm's understanding of an implicate out of which all matter explicates. My own thinking considers emanation a key idea. However, again following Kristeva, a proclamation of a relationship to that which emanates must be "uttered without sham innocence or modest self-effacement." One must say "I am also an emanation," my subjectivity is field-making and breaking, I am a field in a field in a field; I come from a field in a field in a field. I am a psychic becoming with a particular form, potential, and dynamics. Note that Bohm aims to think through this also; he calls the explicate consciousness "memory."

Crucially, "emanation" is also a key notion in the history of radiation. Here the notion was meant descriptively and locally, but descriptions are prescriptions, and there is a telling moment in why "emanation" never caught on. At the turn of the century, Ernest Rutherford identified what he called particulate and energetic "emanations" emerging from ions of uranium and thorium, respectively.¹⁵⁹ Transmutation was the word Rutherford's collaborator, Frederick Soddy, used to describe what occurred to an unstable particle as it disintegrated and released ionizing radiation. But Rutherford rejected the term as sounding too "alchemical."¹⁶⁰ Of course, "alchemy" relates to the study of *prima materia*, the formless aether out of which everything emanates. Rutherford abjects the concept—a trace fear of the subject requiring its borders be policed. However, Aristotle describes *prima materia* as the *potentia* common to all actual form, what explains why changes in form are possible. And Bohm, in the 1980s, calls it the "implicate." Bohm argues space and time cannot alone explain quantum-level phenomenon.

¹⁵⁹ See Bill Griffith, 'Radioactivity Discovered,' Royal Society of Chemistry, October 31, 2008, accessed May 26, 2024, <https://edu.rsc.org/feature/radioactivity-discovered/2020216.article>.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted from Griffith, 'Radioactivity Discovered.' See previous footnote for weblink.

Space-time only emerges with the objects, appearance, phenomenon, which are “expressions” of space-time, but are not reduced to it. In terms of the subject, then, Cartesian systems of observation at best describe what is being expressed intra-actively as the subject’s space-time. But this space-time is not determinant of other space-times, nor does it explain the relationships and emergences. Bohm makes a powerful case for a vibrational ontology: vibration is precisely what is first to emerge out of the implicate; or the implicate is an “empty” and dynamic, non-essential give-take energetic waver on which vibrational explicates emanate. Emanation is subtly different from “emergence” because the implicate order remains implicate in all explicate manifestations; each emanation bears a relation to the implicate via *vibration*—all the way down, all the way up.

What I’m saying is that radioactive particles, precisely in their disruptive eruptions, appear to compel us to consider this non-essential, emanation-based ontology. I’m not saying the word “emanation” holds a transcendence-accessing key; I’m saying Rutherford’s drive to “de-alchemize” is really Rutherford’s drive to *de-poeticize* the relationship these particles appear to express between phenomenon, decay, and affectation. That is, the poetical’s ability to hint at the Real is here abjected precisely in the moment that an observation of something hinting at the real is made. “Radiation” appeared to be a “more neutral” word. But radiation, too, is about emanation. The word “radiation” arrives out of this refusal and connotes itself within the field of modern anxiety. As was seen from Timothy Morton in the previous chapter: transformations and radiations are what it means to be. These transformations and radiations produce effects across explicates. Ripples are ripples—enabled by the implicate, resonance emerges out of the “empty” ontology.

Now, what does this have to do with Fukushima? Everything. Because a similar drive to disdain poetical, gesture-based, unconscious-mobilizing interactions with radioactivity dominates, which is what I strove to show in the Interlude. A similar refusal to create modal practices that attune to transformations rippling across the implicate is occurring. A deferential deferral to an “objective” solution is dominant. Again, it is not that measurement is not accomplishing a kind of translation of the threat of radioactivity. It is important when lives are at stake. But this measurement is only one, highly conditional aesthetic translation. And the symbolic weightiness of history and modernity means this measurement effects a massive purification. Because measurement does not even secure what it promises—a “full picture”—and everyone knows it while continuing to defer to the information.¹⁶¹

I argue Nagahata, in the radioactive “clearings,” is tentatively searching for a transformational, poetical, modal act while following the political imperative he sees. Nagahata’s act is highly political. He records in the spaces deemed “off limits.” The limit there is not only a political limit; it is a cosmopolitical one. The state-based discourses and policing of these spaces is in part the drive to continue to hide the necessity of the cosmic in our politics. The limit is a limit of safety, but this limit is also folded into attempts to perform a modern subjective purification: that we can ignore what is there and what is affecting us materially and imaginally. Politics is never only about a human-only domain. Thus, maybe the particular shape of Nagahata’s act—*precisely in its effort to de-shape*—is hinting at the public acknowledgment of the cosmic—the unknown—in the political and the necessity of political acts giving resonance to this unknown. Because what is generally understood to be the *relative* safety yet *recommended*

¹⁶¹ As David Cecchetto puts it, we’re living in the “afterlife” of data. David Cecchetto, *Listening in the Afterlife of Data: Aesthetics, Pragmatics, and Incommunication*, Thought in the Act (Durham [North Carolina]: Duke University Press, 2022).

avoidance of 3.11's radioactive fallout in and around Fukushima city is taken up by Nagahata as an *opportunity*. But also his refusal to *re-shape* is a closure.

Paradox, statements inhabiting the impossible, and incredible images, visions that generate what appears to be impossible, are part of East Asian Buddhism's strategy to trigger realization. Paradox and fantastic images are attempts to stop the subject from looping around itself, attempting to tie a knot around itself to secure itself to itself. The paradoxical aims to show the looping is constitutive of our explicate structure. And that this structure emerges from an implicate alterity.

Take Hakuin Ekaku's (1686-1769) famous *kōan*: What is the sound of one hand clapping?¹⁶² The *kōan* is the first in a *kōan* program standardized by Hakuin and used in many Rinzai monasteries since. It is meant to help produce "initial insight" (見性 *kenshō*) in the student. In a letter, Hakuin gives an explanation of what this *kōan* is meant to attune the student to by way of a quotation. Hakuin quotes Zeami's Nōh Yamanba, "'From the depths of the empty valley a voice rises, / Wavering like an echo over the trees, / Silently peeling forth its tidings, / Leaving the valley ringing in its wake'—this too conveys the essence of the matter."¹⁶³ Yamanba is about an old "ghoulish" woman who is in fact a spirit demanding travelers to take up a dance as part of a hidden ritual necessity. The old woman figure is both sacred and abject. But Hakuin's

¹⁶² In fact, this is likely a reworking of a passage from *The Blue Cliff Record*, the Chinese *kōan* collection, which was compiled 700 years earlier and which Hakuin was surely familiar. Not that this is a bad thing! On the contrary. However, I mention it here because Zen "patriarchs" are separated from the history of their practice in contemporary popular discourse. See, Yuanwu, Xuedou, and Thomas F. Cleary, *The Blue Cliff Record*, BDK English Tripiṭaka 75 (Berkeley, Calif: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1998).

¹⁶³ From Hakuin's letter to an inquiring acquaintance about the "One Hand" *kōan*, the translation into English from a translation into contemporary Japanese being found in Ekaku Hakuin, 'The Voice of the Sound of One Hand', in *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on Zen Koan Introspection*, ed. John Daido Looi, 1st ed (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 215. Zeami Motokiyo (世阿弥 元清) (c. 1363 – c. 1443) is the influential Nōh theorist and actor.

re-contextualization is incredible too. The depth is the cosmos, the Dharma, which is an “empty,” essence-less implicate order coming from “within” the open valley. The implicate is the deep opening of valley’s deep opening. The implicate is “silent” yet it comes to “speak” in tidings of the formation of the Real. The valley rings in its wake; the valley *is* the wake-like ringing of the Dharma.

Hakuin is unequivocal: “The Sound of One Hand is not a sound you hear with the ear.”¹⁶⁴ As David Cecchetto puts it, “to listen is to attend to the effects of a reality the cause of which can never be singly determined: the proverbial sound of one hand clapping is not the limit case of sound but its basic enabling condition.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, the *kōan* is not meant to argue there is a “limit,” not just a “mediation.” The modality of listening is not something you hear in the heard; but to listen is to try to become attuned to that modality; listening arrives in a mass of resonant and non-deterministic relations that are only later experienced through this or that sound. But we could also say that “listening” here is a modal practice, the abstract logic of which cannot itself be heard, but that participates in the unfolding logical potentials of the implicate. It is to try to attune to the voice arising from the empty valley, to the way it arises here. To do this is to formulate a tactic that attempts to itself be generated by the Real, to take up an epistemological standpoint and explore its conditions in a practice. To listen is not a “limit,” but a particular articulation of the implicate. Recording is too.

Is it possible that Nagahata is taking up a *kōan*-like strategy? “What is the sound of radiation in the grove?” Hakuin’s re-contextualization of the Yamanba quotation then reads like an incredible directive for field recording: try to record such that, from the depth of the empty valley, a voice rises. The voice that rises would be different depending on the modality of the

¹⁶⁴ Hakuin, “Hand.”

¹⁶⁵ Cecchetto, *Incommunication*, 99.

recording practice, the acts and decisions made; and what rises is a different modality of that space, a modulation of how it appears afforded by a different abstract engagement that renders actual encounter; and it would rise because “the depths” are implicate, allowing for translations, resonances between “the same.”

But Nagahata’s paradox is reminiscent of that “first step” *kōan* where the goal is an *internal* topological shift. One tries to make an inner topos, a means of shifting one’s relation to one’s own consciousness. This inherits from the meditative quality of *kōan* study, where students repeat to themselves the *kōan*, not only contemplating its repercussions, but attempting to attune to the resonance of the unknown, to the opening to psychic dynamism that these phrases afford. They are arrows, functors, which attempt to set off an awareness and then a practice of attuning and accepting more of what was revealed. Meditation in East Asian traditions is articulated as this kind of challenging and eventually pleasurable inner revolutionary, inner sublimational act. One plays with one’s own psychic dynamism.

The way in which this is secured is by the confrontation with the paradox. The paradox forces an imperative re-orientation. The paradoxical formation is “itself” a tiny topos, an abstract formulation that shows bridges between linguistic paradox, conceptual paradox and the consequences—the refusals, attempt to explain, reaching, sitting, noticing, reorientations. These tiny topoi are explicate formations that hint at the implicate given they embody a certain non-dual performative; they don’t follow the logic of the excluded middle, and neither does the implicate, which manifests many different realms, logics, topologies that are in contradiction with each other in conditional rather than essential ways. Meditative acts in relation to a languaged paradox are about showing this. One must take up the modality of the languaged

paradox without necessarily trying to alter its (il)logic. I think Nagahata is also trying something similar “in the presence of” the paradox of being in radioactive sites.

The knowledge of radioactivity—scientific, etc.—and the inability to perceive it is a kind of lived paradox. Like the *kōan*, it is not a purely solipsistic act: the radioactivity is *there* without it being sensible; one must attune to that subjective fallibility. The field recorder “not recording” the radiation intensifies this position. The knowledge and understanding of radiation’s destructive effects on one’s DNA without the experience of that knowledge creates an uncanny dissonance (and this dissonance is part of what the *kōan* hopes to instantiate at first too). This uncanniness points to a broader uncanniness in the perception and knowledge as such. What is known about radiation is not present to perception; and the knowledge itself arrives from perception and testing; but therefore, radiation is not reduced or fully explained by that knowledge and perception. What is “radiation” is a particular imaginal and translational modality of an encounter.¹⁶⁶ “Recording radiation without hearing it” is like contemplating the *kōan* without modulating the grammar or presentation; it’s about becoming attuned to what is “unheard” in these formulations, to the processes that these paradoxes set off, and what they point to.

Nagahata’s durational listening in the clearing appears to be like this bringing oneself to a paradox without attempting to modulate that paradox. It seems to be about sustaining and intensifying that paradox so that the imperatives “within” the paradox, the potential for insight, are intensified also. As in meditation, there is a psychotropic quality. With meditation, the subject’s space-time becomes, potentially, radically dissociated and, with care and guidance, a relationship to that untethering can be “instructive,” healing, and productive. In the grove, it felt

¹⁶⁶ For the epistemological inquiry into this, see the Interlude and the references to Timothy Morton.

a lot like this. The perception of the space is forced into perceptual difference. In other words, the psychic dynamism is slowly attuned to within the shifting perceptual qualities of the space. Depth perception shifts, colours sit next to each other differently, the location of sounds become ambiguous (they are right at the ear; you can no longer tell for sure where they are coming from). One experiences the fact that one's experience is like a topological structure; one's attunements act simultaneously and subtly to both shift that structure and modulate the way one navigates that structure. The fact is this can happen in any space; it is a psychic shift. The trouble is this shifting can lead to "black holes," as Deleuze and Guattari call them, an inner psychic disorientation such that the disorientation comes to carry an incredible momentum and the possibility of return to the subject's usual space-time and the possibility of attuning to the resonance of what is there through modal interchange is barred. But, first, the paradox comes to insist on this shift.

And second, as Alphonso Lingis and the Buddhist literature shows, imperatives emerge in this attunement. And Nagahata's politics, I think, is in part fueled by what the psychic dynamism, but also, I think the dynamism is translated, interpreted, orchestrated again into a symbolic that tries to create boundaries, symbolic "explanations" for the openness that emerges there. One also sees certain "psychic" imperatives emerge too to translate the subject to become attuned to what emerges in the dynamic. But it is perhaps these psychic/translational imperatives that are missed in Nagahata's work. In other words, there is no modality offered as a bridge to the other. The question remains how does one make perceptible the modal translations of space one undergoes? How to render that space differently "for" space as other and for human as other? Thus, Hennix's musical practices where one listens to a justly intonated vibrational matrix, sinks into the "psychotropic" stretching of the subject's space-time, but then also attempts to perform intra-active encounters in this state—one tries to play music. One tries to act in a state where the

unconscious is allowed its agency, performing its translations and opennings, but in a way that is somehow also noticeable to the subject in a form of extended attunement to this attunement. As Boon describes, it is like a “waking dream.”

I’ve been arguing field recording necessarily comes into it a different way, via repetitions in the transductions of a space, resonant amplifications and abstract translations, that allows for a different and engaged experience of a particular space to appear. And yet, Nagahata’s is hinting at a kind of sovereign gesture that sublimates death differently than the reactionary one discussed by Attali. There is a Bataillian quality to Nagahata’s being in the grove, a kind of sacrifice. The sacrifice here is not exactly a Girardian one. That is, Nagahata is not striving for a mimetic privatization (i.e. “I see the other and I want (based on my own projection) what they are/what they have”). Rather, Nagahata’s sacrifice’s attempts to imbibe the excesses of energy onto himself. This is the meditative act remaining meditative. He wants to sacrifice himself *for* the other. Being in a (relatively lightly) toxic radioactive grove means to accept one’s death; it means to strive to do something with one’s life for the other “in the presence of” of what is always absent to you—your death. Nagahata enters what is supposedly “abject.” He mobilizes his own sublimated “abject-ness”—his being a temporally constructing being—to de-abject the trace of this violence on Fukushima. He strives to make himself and others not appear symbolically abject. He blocks the violence of a symbolic that refuses to see itself as “abject.” He tries to cross out *meaning making and breaking*, standing there to do something by “doing nothing” so that others affected will not bear the burden of being considered symbolically abject. But, again, this is partial: precisely by trying to block his own meaning/order making-and-breaking-ness, he enacts a subtle abjection. His refusal *for* the other in the end remains a kind of refusal *of* the

other. I will reference a poem by John Giorno: unlike so many, Nagahata goes to the “bad tree.” But rather than eat from it, he thinks it best to only sit next to it.¹⁶⁷

This is what makes Nagahata’s practice both performatively productive and curiously solipsistic. It is significant that I was the first to record with him. And one thinks of a man sitting in isolated meditation on a mountain...while taking a recording of himself there. But again, the fact that radiation is included by Nagahata as part of that assemblage means a performative element remains, a gesture that whispers with the resonant unknown without articulating what arrives from it. The practice, as occurs in many religions, attempts to express an attunement to the unknown while reverentially refusing oneself the “audacity” of affecting it, of being with it in a more intimate, erotic, energetic way. Of being “it” too.

VI

I think this is what is being struggled with. And it is significant therefore that Nagahata records on a (once) sacred mountain, Mt. Shinobu 信夫山 Shinobu-yama, Glorious Devotion Mountain—significant because what occurs here speaks to the broader historical ambivalence. The mountain is paradigmatically materially available to the symbolic sacred gesture: it is a, inselberg (German for “island mountain,” also known as a monadnock (from the Eastern Algonquin Wôbanakiak for “isolated mountain”). It rises out of the Fukushima basin. The rest of the basin was once softer material and erosion exposed the harder rock of the mountain. And now Fukushima city populates the basin and surrounds the mountain. The city is itself then surrounded by mountains. Mt. Shinobu has the most entries on Nagahata’s Fukushima

¹⁶⁷ John Giorno, ‘The Bad Tree’, in *Subduing Demons in America: Selected Poems 1962-2007*, ed. Marcus Boon (Brooklyn : [Berkeley, Calif.]: Soft Skull ; Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008), 360–67.

Soundscapes (After 3.11) archive. In the early entries, he goes to recently re-opened areas and records there. He also records at temporary radioactive topsoil storage sites. Accepting that Nagahata is not “staying silent after Fukushima,” does he also *become poetical* after Fukushima? Does he participate in de-reifying the Fukushima city “soundscape?” Not quite. But it is important to understand why not.

Mt. Shinobu is a veritable sacred symbolic palimpsest. All sacred symbols are. But what defines the hegemony in Japan’s secular urban spaces’ relation to this sacred is a “modern” archival purification: what makes the mountain “sacred” today is how richly it was sacred. It is “sacred” because it is an historical palimpsest. Admiration replaces (or “crosses out,” to use Bruno Latour’s term) worship. Mt. Shinobu is discussed alongside the folk tales, historical events, and religious practices that *once* made it important. That a place can have so much history to draw from and associate with is mystifying to a white colonial Canadian. But these tales, narratives, practices in contemporary Japan effectuate a supposedly “neutral” history of the mountain leading to Japan’s present. The tales are demonstrative: the tale of the mountain as a prize for the “triumphant” colonial destruction of the “Emishi” (pre-state Tōhoku) people can be told alongside folk tales that show a once “deep history” of “the local people’s” relation to their space. Stories of a giant worm being kicked out of the basin come next to stories of abused animal spirits finding solace in the mountain.¹⁶⁸ I’m not saying these contradictions have to be resolved—what I’m saying is they *are* “resolved” by the hegemonic modern attitude that sees these stories as part of a history that is both celebrated as the past and, within that celebration, coded as celebratory for a secular present. In other words, these stories narrate a rich tapestry that leads to a *national* unification.

¹⁶⁸ See synopses of these tales (in Japanese) here: <https://www.adpro-group.co.jp/shinobuyama/guide_05>.

This ambiguity about the present is in some ways secured by the illusory modern image of a Shinto “re-emergence.” “Shinto” shrines embody this modern ambivalence. Shinto re-emerged precisely when spirituality was being destroyed (during the Meiji). It re-emerged as a guiding principle precisely to destroy others (in Showa aggressive terror). Shinto is a kind of ejected modern spirituality. “Shinto” is both (not quite) “Our Past” and yet (not quite) “The Present.” *Kami* are both necessary yet not real. Mt. Shinobu has three Shinto Shrines on it, each in reference to a set of sacred mountains further north in Yamagata called The Three Mountains of Dewa (出羽三山 *dewasanzan*). The Mt. Shinobu Shinto shrines were not always Shinto. One of the main shrines was once a prominent Buddhist temple (violently converted in the Meiji). This violence is neutralized by applying the heterogeneity of the past onto this totalizing, reifying crossed out spiritualism: Shinto as the “pure” religion that never was.

Given that Shinto embodies the modern-nation-state’s simultaneous “return to our religion” and its secular “departure from our superstitious past,” the relations with alterity at the shrines is itself ambiguous. The shrines are primarily used to secure the justification for the utilitarian machinery of the modern capital-nation-state: marriage, new year’s holiday, and school success.¹⁶⁹ The mountain is also associated with the festival activities performed in the city. Festivals themselves are ambiguous: in an effort to reinvigorate cultural activities, local governments are taking up an initiative to ask musicians, dancers, and fashion designers to re-design and standardize festival activities. The ambiguity is the dances and music are called both “new” and “old.” They are “modern interpretations of deep traditions.” A “folk” reification is promulgated in their conception and distribution. Dance movement and songs are learned by

¹⁶⁹ In the temple-turned-shrine has a stone tablet about 1.8 meters high erected in 1624 in memory of a governor. At the top there is a carved circle, an 円相 *ensou*, representing the cosmic Buddha, the embodiment of the “empty” principle of the cosmos. Students put their heads on it so they will pass exams.

work and social groups in the city. A kind of prescriptive command to adhere to the standardization is there. The “culturalization” the state is “giving” to “its people” is in fact a non-reciprocal giving, a taking that has people become citizens, subjects of the nation (and therefore distinguish oneself from the other). Not everybody knows who designed the dance, dress, and music. The same ambivalent modern secular position is secured: I know I didn’t create this movement, but I know someone else did, so that I know I also don’t have to become absorbed in it too much; the movement is only a token of what is now lost, a shadowy facsimile. The relation with alterity is barred precisely in its “celebration.” This ambiguous “modern Shinto” quality of the festival is secured and standardized. As is commonly reported, when asked why shrines are prayed at or why festivals participated in, the answer is often “I’m not sure but it’s what we Japanese do.” Relations with alterity have been reified.

And yet there is a profound urge for a different relation to emerge. Mt. Shinobu is cited as what inspired the lyrics of the popular children’s song for the Miyazaki film *My Neighbor Totoro*. The lyricist, Nakagawa Reiko, spent part of her childhood in Fukushima city. *Totoro* is a “modern sacred” tale. And the capitalist consumerist repetitions of the “Totoro” embody the grammar of trauma. Mt. Shinobu-like meaning is repeated across many mountains in Japan, which is repeated in the grove that Totoro emerges from. That this place was irradiated has profound symbolic and topological effects: it stretches the imaginal topology.

It only sounds abject to say: a kind of challenge must be taken up to recognize why and how this topology shifts—*that* it shifts and that radiation shifts it. The consequences of the shift must be acknowledged. I think recording the “sound of silent radiation” in the sacred space is a reaching for a way to acknowledge and attune to this shifting. Within the space of the sacred—the social space “for” the relation with alterity—a radical alterity has appeared again. This

radical alterity is itself radically other to dominant sacred topologies. A profound wounding to the modern ambivalence emerges: where can the nostalgia for a lost sacred totality, one which constructs the contemporary secular totality, go? We must instead acknowledge that to be human is to be “wounded,” as Kristeva says, and “joy in the truth” of that. Radiation might show that to be anything is to be “wounded” in the sense of always enacting transformations within energetic modulations, reverberating, and affecting others in translational and unpredictable ways. To be is to be an “other” within “the same.”

But Nagahata’s statements in the archive and the form of the archive itself maintain a reverential distance, such that the modern ambivalence is renewed in a new way. In the entry “Mt. Shinobu: 30 September 2011,” for example, Nagahata simply writes,

“Finally, decontamination work at Mt. Shinobu started. / During the day, many workers mowed grass around the Mt. Shinobu Park. Mowed grass and fallen leaves were gathered and stuffed into plastic bags. Those bags were stacked at several places. / Most of the workers were older men. Many cars parked in Mt. Shinobu Park were put marks which show the car is driven by a senior driver. Autumn crickets sang at the tuft where mowing was not done.”¹⁷⁰

There are two recordings that accompany this entry: the sounds of the men working as they mow away irradiated grass; and the sounds of those autumn crickets. Matter of fact.

Phenomenologically, nothing happens. Because matter-of-factness is precisely the problem.

Nagahata seems to want to secure a way in which repeated this matter of factness will lead to the differencing he (might) feel in the spaces he records. But this belies a limitation which stems

¹⁷⁰ Quote slightly modified (based on Nagahata’s Japanese version) for clarity. See the entry in the ‘Fukushima Soundscape’ here: <https://www.sss.fukushima-u.ac.jp/~nagahata/fsp_311/shinobuyama_110930/index-e.html>.

from the recording situation, too: what is happening in the grove is not a “matter of fact;” it’s a matter of the abstract. Nagahata’s recording practice seems to perform the way the subject cannot rely on a “matter of fact” rendering of the space. The durational quality seems to break into a spatial quality where simply standing there and witnessing “more of the same” (i.e. the factual thereness) does not actually lead to a better rendering of that “factualness.” The sameness of what is there erupts into something quite different.

Yet this is missed in the recording archive precisely because the archive is not understood to itself be another abstract translation of this experience. Nagahata’s archive certainly positions itself against the state (i.e. it says the state’s discourse that a material change should not lead to a cultural change is oppressive). But is it against the *national* and *neoliberal* modalities of today? If so, only tentatively. Nationally, Nagahata’s archive represents a kind of critical haiku project, but might rely too heavily on a nostalgia that “sound words” represented a once-captured totality. The ambivalence of the sacred in the modern neoliberal subject remains, too: what is there is compelling yet frightening; I profess my belief while expressing my disbelief. The archive, then, does not create a topos, an abstract translational encounter, in which the ambivalences of the modern subject are threatened. “Just present what’s happened:” this belies the fantasy that the subject is not itself a kind of abstraction, an explicate organization, i.e. that it has the power to “just present.” Nagahata’s archive clings to a certain mean-to-end framework: what is specific to the medium and its translation of an abstract circumstance is not explored; what is instead in the archive is a kind of pseudo-information that says, “this then this then this.” It tells us we should listen without opening us to its listening.

Again, an opportunity emerges here—away from worship and towards a cosmopolitical becoming. There is an opportunity to render with a public differently, to create an abstract

construction that would situate listeners differently vis-a-vis the other that is energy, the other that is the same. How this could be done within Nagahata's preference to *not* transduce radiation remains, then, an open question. Because it is not the case that attempting to render the radioactive levels "themselves" in a "factual" way would create a topos either. Sonifying measurement levels often leads to the fantasy that this "translation" is getting at something "more concrete." This fantasy says that the knowledge activated in measurement makes the thing *more real* to and for us. The "sound" is offered as a presence that we can pretend we understand better.

Conclusion

It is compelling that Nagahata refuses this gambit. But still, in Nagahata's different "matter of factness," a different fantasy appears. To borrow from Slavoj Žižek's assertions, the circumstance creates the potential for Nagahata to render in an abstract translation the *real of abstraction*—radiation problematizes the reification of the symbolic order. It is possible that these recordings could proceed in such a way as to render the excessiveness yet resonances of energy. They could render the fact that all "concrete" symbolic/material objects are themselves implicated in withdrawals, resonances, and abstractions of the implicate field out of which energy emerges. Radiation problematizes the perceived unity of the archipelago under the modern capital-nation-state "Japanese" system of totalized meaning (a totalization that is itself historical and full of contradictions, "totalizations" being really "partializations" that hide from themselves their abstract conditionality).

At the same time, Nagahata's practice clearly inherited from this system—but this is the potential. There is potential for an iteration of a techno-subjective cosmotechnics that is

“reconciled” with its own meaning making and ordering process, with the fact that it must create situations of reconciliation—that there is no “outside” a perpetual ethics of reconciliation. The “abstract” (constructed) yet “concrete” (effectual) historical unfolding that Nagahata’s practice finds itself in would be reorganized with itself. The practice would have to be a practice: a local organization inheriting from but incapable of rendering a historical totality while creating particular arrangements of world. A practice of engaging and being ethical within the alterity of space may emerge.

I return to the problem of abstraction, the topos, and the work of Slavoj Žižek in the conclusion as a means of showing what my own arguments have been. The cosmopolitical implicate/explicate dynamic is somewhat different than Žižek’s Hegelian sublimation of negativity. But before the conclusion, I turn to a final example that moves away from the very specific case studies and towards two situations that consciously attempt to act at the level of the “national” in the wake of 3.11. In each case, it is not the field recorder that transduces vibration; it is the piano.

Chapter Four

Piano as Field Recorder:

Or, To Abject or Transduce the Trace of Waves?

This final chapter argues that field recording with a microphone is in fact one example among possible others “field recordings.” There are potentially many practices that “record a field” in the sense of rendering, transducing, repeating, re-organizing the conditions of appearance of a vibrationally topological socio-political milieu. This chapter explores two pianos that are used in this way to contrasting ends. Both pianos were affected by the tsunami. One was carefully repaired to the extent that the damage can longer be heard. The other was left in its tsunami-affected state and mobilized in a networked artwork. Here again, disaster produces a difficult circumstance in which the piano is re-interpreted not as just a maker of vibration but a “holder” of it too. Disaster, in a difficult way, announced that the piano is a “field” that produces and is produced by a field. Here again, the vibrating earth is part of what makes that field (il)legible via disastrous flashes into what *is*. The “field recording” here also exhibits choices to reconstitute, intervene in, or abject the threat or presence of vibration, its fundamental role in the field, and its capacity to announce, shift, or reproduce itself, including in the subject. The “repaired” piano is taken up in an enormously energy-intensive abjection. The “un-repaired” piano participates in a topos, an abstract organization that renders a space, a self, a vast and local vibrational organization differently.

It is significant that the piano “itself” acts both mimetically and, I argue, *ontologically*, like the subject. The ways the piano is taken up in both cases is not only the subject attempting to

understand the piano but the subject attempting to reinforce or change a relation to itself. The drama of the subject *is* enacted within, through, and “by” the piano. The miracle piano repeats a sense of the subject as an isolated, perfected topology. The non-repaired piano renders the subject in all its networked, construction building, withdrawing, resonating abstractions. Field recording, *broadly understood*, shows that the earth, the subject, desire, socio-political structures are all taking part in complex and ongoing vibrational exchanges, shifts, and reproductions. Field recording broadly understood shows that vibration is fundamental to understanding the topological quality of the real and therefore the means of understanding the way that real is reproduced or intervened in.

This chapter begins with an anecdote. I discuss the difficulty of “being affected.” This becomes important again in the chapter’s conclusion. I then introduce the piano as an instrument already implicated in a complex historical field. I then discuss how this piano field unfolds and dominantly reinforces the subject. Finally, I discuss the “un-repaired” Tsunami Piano, its topos creation and the ambivalent way it is approached by the late Ryuichi Sakamoto, who was central to the piano’s conception.

I

I was told something early in my 2018-19 research that helped solidify my resolve to seek out those most affected by the disasters and understand what makes their experience seem so isolated and isolating. It helped in my resolve to act as a *resonator*, as translator and intensifier, as “diplomat” as Stengers calls it. To be a resonator means one carries a structural similarity with the vibration that is acting upon you and then be open to the adjustments to that structure that begin to occur: response-ability. I also wanted to understand what I had gone through in

Fukushima. And this maybe amounts to the same thing. What I was told took the form of an anecdote. And a secret.

Through the Japan Foundation and my supervisor at Waseda University, I was invited to events with some of Japan's significant literary figures. At one such event, I was speaking with one such figure, whom I'll call O, and whom I deeply admire and admire all the more for having shared this secret. I first shared with O a secret: my intention to work with affected people in Tōhoku. O said that he and his community of writers had, like many others, organized public events to put on free shows for people in the affected regions, mostly Fukushima. Many such public events occurred across the spheres of the arts, both critical and less so. Poetry and literature readings, plays, concerts...all performed by the who's who of Japan's art worlds. O said that, at one such event in Fukushima, something happened which only confirmed their feelings all along. An older man approached O one night. The man had led a village coordination group—a *tonarigumi* or Neighbourhood Association—before 3.11 and was still identified as a leader among the people of the affected village. He said the following: "Thank you very much. What a wonderful event. But, you know, we aren't here for us. We're here for you."

A shock. There it was. Out in the open. O told this to me in a hoarse whisper. It was a secret. A terrible secret. He was silent and wide-eyed after telling it. The other artists knew. He felt I should know too, intending as I was to take up research. I had felt it all along, but I was surprised and encouraged to hear the taboo broken, if in this furtive way. The older man, and the group he represented, came to the events out of sense of obligation. It was *their obligation*. They felt they were playing a role. What was being read or performed was not *for them*.

This screams into the terrible hole, despite good intentions to fill it, across from which many affected come to feel they stand. I am not disparaging either the art or the good intentions

of the many of the figures who went to the region to perform these support events. Nor can I speak to all of them. Indeed, O seemed to not only be at a loss but also to desire some alternative. He was saddened that this was the case. He felt the power of his position and was unsure of what it meant. Thus, I rather want to render the terrible isolation felt by those affected. I want to show that there is something missing in contemporary capitalist culture that allows for a more healing encounter.... There is something problematic about the idea, inherited from capitalist culture, that to heal others always means to have them absorb the productions of aesthetic authorities. There is something problematic in the way that what is presented remains privatized and separated from those it is being presented to. There is a deep ambivalence in the cultural industry, which I think is felt by the critical figures in the industry like O, who try to subvert it from within. But inherited from that industry is the sense that all text and musics and artifacts will translate seamlessly across all contexts. The disaster—which is nothing, I have argued, if not the *energized announcement* of context (and its often-consequent breakdown, which echo together)—is itself such a context where these problems can be heard.

Of course, as a cultural critic and comparatist, I would be a hypocrite to argue that this presentation of culture across contexts can *never* be productive. Indeed, I am arguing and hoping for precisely the opposite. What an opportunity vibrational recording and the digital spheres are—where the danger is the saving power grows! I have tried to present a set of productions that themselves present the potential for a topological attunement to these problems, productions that aim to carry something of the context with them and the announcement they heard bellow in their ears. I have tried to act as a conduit in a reversed flow of energy—*actually*. I have tried to bring some of the energy of the announcement that shocked and destroyed lives into the more macro contexts to announce and shock and destroy and hopefully reconstruct those contexts, too,

especially to the much contested “global” context, if there is such a thing. I have tried to act as a resonator, as I said, of the way some affected try to turn that flow outward in productive ways. I have tried to follow those who work to make the announcement they experience *re-announce itself*. What is hegemonic among onlookers, even in sympathy, is to try and to direct and form that energetic and dangerous context through their own art and send it back to the affected. This is a perilous act that can go wrong even with care. Doubling a vibration can lead to either “dead zones” in the vibrational field or massive and violent amplitude spikes.

Certainly, the older man’s opinion, and the opinion of those he represented, are their own. But I suspect this is a pervasive feeling. It certainly bears on my experience of post-3.11 Tōhoku, both in 2011-14 and 2018-19. And I don’t have to suspect. As I have tried to show, all three individuals related to the three case study chapters feel abandoned and often reject even the most well-intentioned acts. The older man brought the secret into the open, threatening to breakdown a certain charade, which somehow just barely functions, while wishing for what might change or function differently. I intended to also. It is in the nature of a secret to reveal something that is both threatening and commonly known. A secret, as Derrida puts it, is negated in its keeping and necessarily shared.¹⁷¹ It seeks an alliance. Rules beneath the rules...spoken and perhaps broken. What of new rules? Perhaps one new rule is to say that some secrets of the disaster are kept.

If this problem of receptive proportions exists among the critically oriented and well-intentioned, among those who sense the ambivalences and ambiguities of their positions, how much more, and how much more dangerous, of a problem it is among those *who do not seem to sense the ambivalences even within good intentions*. It is dangerous precisely when the subject is

¹⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, ‘How to Avoid Speaking: Denials’, in *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, Irvine Studies in the Humanities (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 25.

not aware of itself as participating in a field. I then discuss the “repaired” piano, called the “Miracle Piano” and its use in a large televised 2011 event, arguing this event culminates in a energetically networked, nation-wide abjection.

II

The “recorder” I am discussing here is the piano. What is a piano if not a transducer of vibration? The strings sit taught, waiting to be struck. They are struck by the mallets triggered by the keys. They are muted by the dampeners to cease a particular organization. The cavities of even the smallest pianos are meant to create resonant spaces for such vibrations to be heard. The wood is a body which is constructed to resonate and project what is played. The piano is a student of vibration. But this makes the piano also carry the “frequencies of a place” as part of its organizational announcements. The qualities of a piano make it just as tuned to the place as it is responsive to how it is being triggered. Indeed, both aspects are important simultaneously. The piano is a massive set of strings that inspire and predate the bands of the microphone. The *bands* that are the strings are retrieved, as McLuhan would say, via the technology of the microphone, as vibrational bands attuned to various frequencies in the socio-vibrational field.

Proof that the space in which the piano resides is just as important as the responsiveness of the player is seen in the piano’s development. The classical milieu in which the piano developed attempted to treat that space in a sealed and controlled way. The piano embodied the attempt to cut off any “noises” from the player such that an “unmediated” contact was possible. But this is in fact not a cutting off at all, nor an “unmediation,” but a subsumption, absorption, into a particular space. In part, this organization is necessary to an ontological topos to emerge. However, in the case of the piano, space was sutured so strongly to the socio-technicality of the

piano that proceeding space in which a piano was to be played bent to the will, with the bourgeois changes, of this preceding space baked into its form. Indeed, as Max Weber puts it, “the development of the piano, one of the most important technical elements in the development of modern music, and its spread among the bourgeoisie, had its roots in the specifically ‘indoor’ character of Northern European civilization.”¹⁷² Its spread among the bourgeoisie in Japan, along with Western musical forms, has harmonized, as it were, with Japan’s emphasis on indoor space, too. But Japan’s “indoor” spaces include mediations of the “outdoors.” The contemporary “indoor” Japanese space, with its pianos, often retains an “outdoor” simulacrum enfolded within the “indoor” space. Gardens within the home; statues to the gods and the dead; even air conditioning and heat in single rooms only.... But what happens when that “indoor” space is violently broken open by the earth? *What is considered of the worth of the piano when that space is violently breached? What is considered of that breached space? What is considered of the breaching earth? How would the piano sound if something of that breach was not abjected but retained? The inside and outside are one and the same....*

Such questions bring us back to the problem of the *field*. The field is once again “3.11,” although, this time it is a broader, more overtly dialectic, macro-oriented field—that *between* Tokyo and Tōhoku as this “betweenness” is actualized, negotiated, decided on. This field captures the complexity of the inter/intra-actions (and therefore the hailings and resistances to those hailings) occurring between “Tokyo” and “Tōhoku.” The piano, whose space was breached in 3.11, is therefore a field recorder *par excellence*.

Japan is a highly musically “literate” nation-state. I worked in a small high school in a small city in southern Fukushima. The city is not known for music. Nor is the school. The school

¹⁷² Max Weber, ‘Value-Judgments in Social Science’, in *Max Weber: Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman, trans. Eric Matthews, Reprinted (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 95.

had no less than seven pianos. One medium grand in the music classroom, one baby grand in the music teacher's office, four uprights in four sound-proofed practice rooms within a larger practice and storage room, and a living room grand in the auditorium. There were hundreds of such grands in hundreds of auditoriums across the Tōhoku coastline. Many were affected by the tsunami.

This conclusion takes up a tendency to “recover” 3.11-affected pianos and proposes a means of culturally analyzing the approaches. That such a tendency occurs alone shows a Japanese cultural concern with vibrational disaster. It also shows intense cultural concerns for vibration and music. But again—as stated in the introduction—this is as much a challenge as a boon. That is, I think the affected pianos and their treatment cause a radical revealing concerning how music is involved in earth-bound and also cosmic vibrations *at all times*. More specifically, the conclusion analyzes two disparate approaches to 3.11's tsunami-affected pianos. One approach has occurred multiple times: retrieve a tsunami-affected piano and painstakingly restore it. Another approach has occurred, as far as I can tell, once, by the late Sakamoto Ryuichi and a team of artists: leave the piano in its tsunami-affected condition. It appears, at least in the contemporary moment, the former approach is violently appropriated to re-actualize the capitalist status quo, linking the activity of “restoration” to that of socio-economic “recovery.” The latter approach, I will argue, threatens the status quo. Both approaches can be read as structural abjections, the former acting through a reactionary catharsis, the latter flirting with a revolutionary breach of the abject of capitalist culture today: the earth's vibrancy. In an Attalian way, then, the latter portends the two potentials facing “us Moderns” today in facing the climate crisis: either, progressively, the exploration of modes of production and culture feedback into depropriative relations with the earth's energy or, in a reactionary way, the repetition of modes of

contemporary capitalism will bump up against the climate crisis and create what Stenger's calls the coming barbarism of catastrophic times, a vicious exacerbation of the current capitalist oppressions. This may not be an "or," either. We must perform the latter while the breakdown occurs.

III

It is first important to note that, even without any supposedly "direct" relation to tsunami water, the piano is linked to a significant post-3.11 socio-political topology. Even in ways that supposedly do not touch the vibrations of 3.11, the piano is used as a means of sublimation, that is, as a means of organizing energies. The piano is very much a "field recorder," even when it supposedly has no relation to the field. It is, indeed, precisely because it appears to have no relation but in fact actualizes vibrant/affective organization that the piano is so linked with power (and with scandals when the piano is used "not as intended"). It is no wonder, then, that popular forms of the threnody surround the piano.

I have consciously sought to avoid analyzing threnodies, elegies, dirges. I have done this for two simultaneous reasons: there are much more subtle affective/vibrational structures that populates the intra-active fields of contemporary socio-political life; and two, the threnody is often used in a highly reactionary way, even with good intentions—that is, the threnody often acts to overdetermine the subtle affective battles, the mirco-physics of power, that occur after disaster. Note that the dirge is rejected by Sato Nami, for example, who readers will recall from Chapter Two, whose entire village was violently destroyed and who lost her grandfather. Sato's first album, which I did not analyze, is something like an elegy. But she quickly abandoned the form. The supposed subjects of the dirges, or at least those who are directly related to the

subjects, reject the form as a means of responding to and intervening in their own struggles. By contrast, the dirge form seems driven to repeating that “initial,” “essential” moment of death. Why? This is an open secret related to the one divulged above. Who holds the means of production of these dirges? Who holds the means of their exchange? Who holds the cultural capital to produce and show them?

There is something in a dirge that both approaches and rejects what a disaster announces. These forms, *these topologies*, trigger a profound *catharsis*. Kristeva links catharsis with abjection, and therefore also with power, the law, the sacred, boundaries, and transgression. It is a kind of *purification* via its careful approach and control of the abjection (i.e. of that which disrupts the Symbolic Order but which is also contained in the movement of that Order). Kristeva writes that us Moderns have translated the sacred purification into a *poetic purification*—“an impure process that protects from the abject only by dint of being immersed in it.”¹⁷³ Discussing Aristotle, Kristeva links this catharsis with language and that which language is embedded in, i.e. sound. Kristeva writes, “Through the mimesis of passions—ranging from enthusiasm to suffering—in ‘language with pleasurable accessories,’ the most important of which being *rhythm* and *song* (see [Aristotle’s] *Poetics*), the soul reaches *orgy* and *purity* at the same time.”¹⁷⁴ The poetic language mobilizes that which exceeds it; it plays with that which contains it. The mimetic passions are themselves structures of enunciation. They appear to the subject as “their own” but are in fact derived from a response to a structure. The collective experience of this passion itself contains both a recognition and abjection of the collective quality of this mimesis.

¹⁷³ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 28.

¹⁷⁴ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 28.

However, working from Boon's working from Kristeva, the musical and sonic are not "purely" un-organizing either. Or, unlike language and sound (which seem to oppose each other), the dialectical approach/abjection happens simultaneously *within* vibration. Neither song nor rhythm capture this dynamic. Song, which attaches lyrics to music, is an abjection of the vibrational force of sound. And rhythm, too: rhythm experiments with vibrational soundings and mutings; it, too, approaches and abjects vibration in micro-physical ways. It seems that Kristeva herself has abjected sound, or rather vibration, in the analysis. Of course, vibration itself is palpitating. The point here being that, even without lyrics, the sonic organization of music is synonymous with various strategies of abjection.

Such is the case with the threnody. While containing the potential to navigate or signal within itself this dialectic of the abject, very often the threnody performs a social *purification*. And, Kristeva asserts, "Purification is something only the Logos is capable of."¹⁷⁵ Kristeva is referencing Plato, which Aristotle hoped to supersede. Kristeva writes, "Plato has kept only, as we all know, the very uncertain role of poets whose frenzy would be useful to the state only after having been evaluated, sorted out, and purified in its turn by wise men."¹⁷⁶ Who are the "wise men" today? It is not a who but a what. The "wise men" that Plato dreamed of would be not only the political but *economical* beneficiaries of their system. They would be the "kings" over the "everyday people." How to create an egalitarian wisdom that destroys such categories...? Today, a similar politico-economic "king" exists—capitalism. And it very much has its connection to the nation-state. As Attali argues, in a kind of parallel to Kristeva, music is linked to sacrifice. Under capitalism, that sacrifice is undertaken on the self *by* the self through repetition. Thus, the

¹⁷⁵ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 27.

¹⁷⁶ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 28.

“evaluation, sorting, and purification?” This occurs within the subject, acting on itself as the Superego.

The piano in part contains this evaluation and sorting; the affective urge to abject vibration delegates part of its work to the piano. The drama of power descends on and erupts from the piano. And it is on the piano where the most hegemonic post-3.11 music is played. Take the popular, especially in the West, “Elegy for the Victims of the Tsunami of March 11, 2011” composed and performed by concert pianist Tsujii Nobuyuki. Tsujii premiered it in the West. Why this mediation through the West? The piece is a two-movement piano solo. There is nothing adventurous about it. Each movement utilizes the Western feature that codified harmony to tell two “feelings” at once. Each movement appeals to pre-organized harmonic worlds. The pathos of a pre-constructed, reified duality is itself a kind of *containment*—a kind of approach and rejection—of the vibrational events. The first movement is tragedy mixed with a hint of heroism; “death.” The second movement is hope with a hint of tragedy; “survivors.”

But these structures are so rarified, they have little to nothing to do with those I have worked with and discussed. And worse: the tragic heroism of the dead so quickly slips into nationalist martyr-making; or romantic other-making. The tragic hope of the living quickly slips into a patronizing “every person.” Kristeva again,

“Rhythm and song hence arouse the impure, the other of mind, the passionate-corporeal-sexual-virile, but they harmonize it, arrange it differently than the wise man’s knowledge does. They thus soothe frenzied outbursts...by contributing an *external* rule, a poetic one, which fills the gap, inherited from Plato, between body and soul.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Kristeva, *Abjection*, 28.

The harmonic clichés are these external rules. They arouse the impure *of mind also* by subjecting it to organization. It matters that this threnody is popular in the West, which indeed seeks to fill the gap, inherited from Plato, between the body and soul. The “victims” are sublated the moment they are worshiped in this Western classical form without a consecrated sacred. The sympathy for the other is used up. One comes to act as if one has offered something to them, one’s pain in turn, except that this pain is concomitant with the harmony and its history, with the piano and its form. The audience is allowed *its own* catharsis, the sense that *they* have faced the danger too, when actually the danger, the disaster, has only thus been put away.

When the piece is performed in Western style amphitheaters in Tokyo, too, in the piano it is “Tōhoku,” not Tōhoku that is brought up. The piece attempts to perform “Tōhoku” *as an kind of translatable, referenceable, place that one can speak of, to, or for*. What is brought up in the music is a kind of topological ghost. Or, a topology of a place that is more a generation of a set of terms that are part of the *Tokyo* topology. All we are hearing in this piece, all that is being revealed and “brought forward in the socio-political mix,” as it were, is the way a romanticized Tōhoku is part of what makes Tokyo *Tokyo*. We are hearing Tokyo in the “Threnody,” not Tōhoku. *The impulse to evaluate, sort, purify and perform them as the threnody is part of the pleasure of the listening*. The impulse to organize away, to reconstruct a border, by gesturing at what breaks it—this is part of the “orgy” and “purity” simultaneously.

And this is not even mentioning the way Tsujii himself is taken up as a kind of sacred “text,” a figure who is given the right and burden to perform the purification. Tsujii lost his sight to disease as a boy. The relation he has with music is, predictably, essentialized and romanticized. The hint of truth exposed by blind musicians’ relation to vibration—to the truth of living a life with vibration—is overdetermined. The figure of the “blind musician” resonates with

a long historical structure connecting non-sightedness and music, healing, and otherness/purification. Tsujii is treated in complex and different ways as a sacred figure in both Japan and the West. He is both infantilized and venerated. He himself becomes an object of implied worship who can perform the necessary purification, who can approach the abject vibration that music represents through the threnody and thereby purify it. There is a complex retrieval of a pre-1300s institution in Japan of having a caste of people delegated to purification of the “unclean” yet sacred. Before this caste was vilified, it was considered other yet powerful. Today, somehow, a capitalist version returns, where the act of reception itself is sufficient for the sacred. It is the modern sacred without consecration, as Kristeva calls it, the crossed-out God, as Latour calls it. Tsujii is taken up as a catharsis machine, a delegated figure for our fantasies and beliefs in “the power of music to heal,” which only abject what it is that music does that can be called healing. The apparent disaster of music’s healing, and why it is treated so cautiously, is because it is precisely in its power to generate an erotic play and drastically shift the terms of the topos.

IV

But “Threnody” is not nearly as popular in Japan as another piece that Tsujii did not compose but was selected to first perform. The piece is called “Flowers Will Bloom” (*hana wa saku* 花は咲く). I will return to the specifics in a moment but notice a subtle shift in the relation to “impermanence” here. In times of desperation, the “impermanence” of flowers flips: from falling to blooming. Thus, note again the ambivalence with which we must read Jean-Luc Nancy’s praise of the “sakura viewing in Japan” as a de-propriative act. If the hegemony in the West privileges catharsis (and its manifestation as threnody) as a means of containing vibrant disaster,

the hegemony in Japan privileges a kind of pathos. Aristotle links pathos with pity and fear, but also with argumentation. In Japan, pathos is linked with the network of discourses and sensibilities of “impermanence.” Japanese aesthetics is filled with this sensibility, from the first Zen-inspired though secular treatise on aesthetics by fourteenth century Noh play writer and theorist Zeami Motoyuki, to various codifications in waka and haiku (*haikai*) poetry, to the philosophical and nationalist conceptions of “mono no aware” in Motoori Norinaga in the Edo period. All of these theories use flowers as a primary analogy for “impermanence.” In Chapter One I argued “impermanence,” far from its apparent focus on ephemerality, often flips into a reverence for an “unsubstantialist” absolutism. This absolutism, this “permanence of impermanence,” occurred in Japan with piano music, nationalism, and the piano instrument itself.

As I mentioned in the section two of this conclusion, there is a tendency in Japanese musical media circles to gather up and restore tsunami-affected pianos. How much more enthusiastic, how much more orgiastic, more purifying an organization is required when it encounters the “recording” of the violence of the tsunami within the piano itself, when the field of vibrancy is made more (un)apparent in its traces and reproduced in a sounding instrument.

There is one piano in particular that has garnered extreme focus and has served as model for the rest. It is called the “miracle piano.” The sacred title is not surprising. Although the word “miracle” contains a Christian connotation, the actual word, with its characters in mind, rather carries a Buddhist flavour. The word here is *kiseki* 奇跡 literally “strange trace” or “odd site/remains/relic.” Buddhist relics are “parts” of the Buddha. And prayers, practices, and consecrations are said to create miracles through the cosmic Buddha’s reality. Thus, this “miracle” is created out of an individual’s act, materialized as the thing. And indeed, the restorer

is part of the discourse of this piano, they are not themselves “hidden.” It is not a work of God, as in Christianity, but the production of a ritual object which itself then embodies and has the power to initiate wonders. But it is a secular miracle without consecration again: the “miracle” abjects the actuality of the violence contained within and care in the retrieval of the instrument. *The piano is used as an instrument of this abjection, with its “restorer” acting as a kind of healer.* The very “cosmic” quality of the Buddha is sent in against itself.

Of course, the work of the restorer is not necessarily essentializing. The restorer is named Endo Hiroshi. He runs a piano shop in Iwaki, Fukushima. Iwaki is south of the compromised Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Plants and was not affected by the bulk of the fallout that rode the northwesterly winds. Iwaki was affected by the tsunami. The piano was retrieved from the gymnasium of a junior high school that sat along the coast. The tsunami surges reached upwards of seven meters. The gymnasium was breached by the tsunami and filled with churning salt water. The piano was thrown about inside the gymnasium. Endo found the piano and decided to restore it.¹⁷⁸

The initial restoration took six months and in fact must be continually performed. Salt saturates the wood and absorbs moisture from the humid Iwaki air, creating a constant flow of damaging expansion, contraction, and friction. But the restorer *does* perform a kind of dance with death. There is tactile translation of death, an encounter with the largest and smallest effects of the ocean waves’ vibrational incursion that can be contained by the affected tsunami. In initial stages a cleaning of debris—both inorganic and organic.... The collection and disposal of life turned muck, of protective walls turned projectiles. Then the resetting of the wooden frame. Balancing, resetting, reworking. The setting of new keys. But what about the mallets, muter, and

¹⁷⁸ Photos of the piano prior to restoration can be seen here: <http://www.fm-iwaki.co.jp/shinsai_report/20111007.html>.

strings? I cannot find any information on the specificities of the restoration; it is hidden behind closed sacred-like doors. But the strings are all important. They were likely the first things to be removed, clinging to the piano, bending the wood, after having been yanked by materials and sounded by impacts in the churning of the gymnasium.... Endo must have listened to the strings' sounds as he detuned and removed them, the small accidental hits ringing the ocean waves' breach. The degradation of the saltwater on the metal in the buzzing and lowered sustain. And the last thing he likely did was put on new strings. Even here, the strings resounding in the refurbished and reset wooden body would sound odd to his trained ears. The new strings would bring out the difference within the piano that remains and therefore the new strings would resound as ghosts of the old ones.

After restoration, the piano began to appear in many local "recovery" events. At some point, and very quickly, Japan's national broadcasting corporation caught wind of it. The piano appeared on the 62nd annual NHK *Kōhaku uta gassen* (Red & White Song Contest), which aired on December 31, 2011, part of a hugely popular New Year's television program. The *Kōhaku* is the capital-nation-state materialized. The "contest" occurs between a gender segregated (women/red team vs men/white team) collection of top earning celebrity singers. Of course, 3.11 was incorporated in the "contest." In his cogent critique of Japan's immediate post-3.11 musical scene, Scott Aalgaard writes, "for all of [the *Kōhaku*'s] emphasis on the events of 3.11, the 'unity' and 'community' conjured by NHK that evening were not outcomes of the triple disasters of Japan's dark spring at all, but [derived from] a supposed 'original reality' that was understood as having *pre-dated* the crisis [that] demanded restoration."¹⁷⁹ *Restored* is a key word here.

¹⁷⁹ Scott W. Aalgaard, 'Summertime Blues: Musical Critique in the Aftermaths of Japan's "Dark Spring"', in *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating Nuclear Disaster*, ed. Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, First issued in paperback, Routledge Contemporary Japan Series 63 (London New York: Routledge, 2018), 40, original emphasis.

Aalgaard's article then discusses popular musicians that openly critique the power entrenched in 3.11. And yet, while Aalgaard's references Deleuze and Guattari and music's relation to "becoming," Aalgaard, like much musical analysis of 3.11, then turns to song lyrics. The forward force of vibration and becoming, and the abjection of restoration that aims (impossibly, painfully) to counter it, is itself abjected in the analysis.

The *Kōhaku* is not only a discursive construction. It functioned as a means of re-articulating, purifying, and containing, over speakers across the nation, the equally pervasive and nation-wide echoes of vibrations of 3.11. It is an attempt to constitute the topos *actualized*. One of the most egregiously "ideological" musical acts involved the explicitly named "miracle piano." In an only-too apt irony, the piano was played by a singer from the hyper-capitalist group Arashi—meaning *storm*. Violence sublimated at every level. The song the piano accompanies is simply called "Furusato." Jennifer Robertson calls the network of meaning and commodities associated with "*furusato*/hometown" the "furusato ideology."¹⁸⁰ The key affective aspect of *furusato* is *nostalgia*—that is, "impermanence." And again, the absolutist flip of impermanence is here seen: in contemporary capitalist society, the *furusato* is always something everyone will have left behind. *Furusato* reifies the unrootedness of capitalist life, its *general equivalence*, and purifies it as a pleasure-through-pain nostalgic dream. The Arashi song was not composed with 3.11 in mind—it didn't have to be. It was in fact debuted at the previous (2010) *Kōhaku*. It was sung in the 2011 *Kōhaku* with a new second verse—nostalgic repetition, the internalized

¹⁸⁰ Robertson writes, "the ubiquity of *furusato* derives from the manifold contexts in which it may be appropriated, from the gustatorial to the political economic. My general thesis is that the ubiquity of *furusato* as a signifier of a wide range of cultural productions effectively imbues these productions with unifying--and ultimately nativist and national--political meaning and value," "Furusato," 494. For another way in which "furusato ideology" influenced Fukushima, see Tom Gill, 'This Spoiled Soil: Place, People, and Community in an Irradiated Village in Fukushima Prefecture', in *Japan Copes with Calamity: Ethnographies of the Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Disasters of March 2011*, ed. Tom Gill, Brigitte Steger, and David H. Slater (Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 201–34.

sacrifice and stockpiling of forever unused time that Attali identifies with economic contemporary power and music but built right into its performance. The song would later be part of Arashi's 2015 album. The repetitions are manifold. The Arashi song is a clear repetition of the 1914 song of the same name. The latter became a mandatory part of the national elementary school musical curriculum. In the early 1900s, the development of the capital-nation-state discourse caused people in these newly identified "hometowns" to lose them immediately; the people had to incorporate the affect of having already lost where they are and seek the lost object in commodities.

Such is the violence of the song "Furusato" sung on December 31, 2011, the "3.11" *Kōhaku*. Lyrics ring out concerning the perfection of a past home, with a "perfect self" and perfect memories, while many along the coast were just coming to face the reality that they will never be able to move back to the towns let alone the areas they knew. Sato and the Arahama community were notified in December 2011 that Arahama would be rezoned light commercial. Nagahata and his family no longer live in Fukushima. K will never return to a city that is not saturated by an awareness of death. But it is not only the lyrics. It is precisely this death, this confrontation with vibration, that is abjected through vibration. "Furusato" was sung by Arashi member Sho Sakurai. I can only surmise that Sakurai came into the capitalist music industry nepotistically via his father, former vice-minister of Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. Sakurai's insipid and often flat voice sung over the equally insipid and largely diatonically major "Furusato" song, which itself rang out on the "Miracle Piano." The characterlessness of the sounds, the way they struggle to reject the actual vibrations occurring, actualize a dominant subject. This massive eruption of conservative sentiment is needed to contain—control and utilize—the abjection that is the act of playing a tsunami-piano.

This is the case *because* the “Miracle Piano” was already offered up to the *Kōhaku* purified. The labour of reconstruction and the tactility with death had already been hidden in and through the piano. But this purification—alongside what it appears to constantly counteract, i.e. the sonic remnants of destruction that the piano cannot fully hide—is precisely what is meant to ring out. The known impossibility of moving backwards in time alongside the urge to actualize a topos that functions *as if* this is possible is at work here. The simultaneous approach and rejection of vibration is at work. The resonance of the tsunami in the piano and the work of the restoration are simultaneously at odds: the trace of the tsunami and the “trace” of the “miracle” of the restoration can only occur through this tension. The absolutist “permanent impermanence” is actualized in this tension.

Permanent impermanence: the always-already gone *furusato*; the flower will bloom. The hint of something true in these—the Being in time, the revealing of the flower—is somehow both opened and barred; the movement becomes halted in this form of national(ist) veneration. “Flowers Will Bloom” has become nothing short of a nation-state-capital anthem. It was commissioned by an NHK 3.11 fundraising project. The second line, of course, is “I am nostalgic.” The music was composed by Kanno Yoko, musical darling of the Japanese anime and gaming world, herself born in Miyagi, Tōhoku. It has been played *ad nauseam*, year after year, at a thousand events each year. “Flowers Will Bloom” has become the quintessential case study in Attailian repetition and music. The stockpiling of time never to be used for anything but its own accumulation—a feedbacking profit-inspired sacrifice performed over and over; the pleasure principle manifest in a musical gesture. Pop concerts, TV programs (memorial and non-memorial alike), classical music concerts, children’s choirs, adult choirs, electronic concerts, acoustic concerts.... The song has spread abroad, too. China, Indonesia, Malaysia, France, Germany, the

U.S. “World” editions for NHK World (which is actually NHK English), where “ethnic musicians” sing the song in a tokenized mosaic. “Flowers Will Bloom” is also pasted all over the Internet. Millions upon millions of “views.” The song is carefully adapted to fit whatever reified genre it might serve while retaining its essential features. It is nothing less than an arm—the machinic energy—for the vast “soft” power network coiling around the capitalist entertainment network that Japan has entwining the globe. The song is sung in Japanese abroad or sung in lyrics adapted to local languages. Whatever has the most purifying impact in the context it is presented, that is, whichever is more effective in purifying context. The creative energy of capitalism is on display: it takes anything sovereign to us and grinds it into oblivion. All in the context of 3.11. 3.11 is mentioned, in offhand and patronizing ways, in these performances. A great global ritual in vibrational abjection.

Of course, the song found its way to the “Miracle Piano” through an “influencer” pianist hoping to capitalize on the affective abjection money train (which I will not link to). The song was written for piano, of course. And for those still in doubt about Attali’s Girardian insistence on the link between music, violence, and institutions of power: the late Abe Shinzo himself played the piece on a piano.¹⁸¹ 7.6 million views on YouTube. The poster child of the plutocratic pseudo-democratic “Liberal Democratic Party” of the post-war Japanese capital-nation-state playing the song, humbly simplified, in a small practice room on a small grand with a final double message to “the many foreign nations” and “the Japanese” urging the latter, in the typical patronizing and absurd way, to show their “enduring spirit” to the former in the wake of 3.11 and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCUldo98d5o&ab_channel=あべ晋三チャンネル>

¹⁸² The “Miracle Piano” is not the only one. More recently, in February 2021, a “Recovery Airport Piano” was unveiled at Sendai Airport. Again, the piano acts within a particular capitalist field, enabling the smoothing of the sense of the earth, making the earth appear as something available to capital again, in the airport. A kind of

How to compete with such global rituals? Make different ones.

In January 2012, ten months after the onset of 3.11, the late Sakamoto Ryuichi visited Miyagi Prefecture. It is likely Sakamoto had heard of the “miracle piano” of the previous month’s *Kōhaku* spectacle. He may have heard it on the live broadcast. It seems he wanted a miracle piano of his own and he received a tip about another tsunami-affected piano. Sakamoto’s personal media company had already decided beforehand to make a short documentary film about it. Sakamoto’s first encounter with the piano, his subsequent impressions, his setting up of what would become known as the “Tsunami Piano,” and the parallel impressions of a student that attended the school were made into a documentary film. This film is now inaccessible, stuck in an NHK black box. The installation that would come to include the “Tsunami Piano” is, I think, quite striking. It, too, however, is, at least in part, ambiguously attached to the privatizing author function that is “Sakamoto.” More on this below.

As I mentioned, Sakamoto in a striking and beautiful way at some point decided he did not want a “miracle piano” and decided to leave this piano unrestored. In culmination (and in collaboration with other often unnamed artists), the “Tsunami Piano” becomes part of broader, compelling art installation series called “Is Your time.” installation.¹⁸³ Only the finger board was replaced: the keys and the mechanisms that trigger the mallets to strike the strings. Neither the mallets nor the strings themselves were replaced. Everything else about the piano was also left as

climate abjection ritual in the movement of the airport. See this news article, in Japanese, for information: <https://www.aviationwire.jp/archives/221088>.

¹⁸³ A mini-documentary on the installation at NTT InterCommunication Center (ICC), an arts center and museum owned by the semi-private/semi-public NTT telecommunications company: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onNBysMf9WM&ab_channel=NTT%BC%5BICC%5D

is. In one installation, the piano is input into a remarkable feedbacking twist. Over the keyboard is attached a line of pistons, one per key (black and white), which are themselves connected to a computer. Each piston is assigned its own MIDI channel to communicate with the computer. The MIDI channels are themselves linked to a system which translates data. The data is from various globally accessible seismic data feeds. This data is of course produced by mechanical translations of readings connected to seismic meters across the globe transducing the vibrations of the earth. The seismic data is translated and allocated to the various pistons. Certain data values (perhaps translations of amplitude) are mapped to the various MIDI channels. In an incredible series: earth shifts and vibrates, seismographs transduce it and translates it into measurements, which is translated into data, which is sent across the Internet; the data is accessed on site via the computer/Internet, which is translated into groupings in a computer program, which trigger the corresponding MIDI channels, which trigger the corresponding pistons over the piano keyboard, which hits the corresponding key, which triggers the mallet, which hits the tsunami-affected string, which resounds in the tsunami-affected piano body, which sounds in an installation room, and the piano itself is a series of transductions which go back to the earth shifting. A constant stream of hits occurs in the room—sometimes rarely, sometimes in quick successions, sometimes close together on the keyboard, sometimes far apart. Some strings resound more than others. All retain the traces of their damage and change.

The piano takes the “main stage” of the series of installation artworks that make up “Is Your Time.” Sometimes the piano is used as an instrument and is triggered by a computer score. One moving installation is called “disintegration,” where four “zones” of the piano are chosen, and each zone is sounded based on certain (perhaps random) parameters and each note within the zone are also triggered based on (perhaps random) parameters. The piano is amplified. Strangely,

Sakamoto decides to put a kind of metronome over the whole thing. And the link to the earth is less dramatically made here. But there is one installation in particular, called “Zure,” which has the piano triggered in the way described above. In this case, Sakamoto also has a series of electronic/synthesized sounds, a kind of “hit” and two chords, which are also triggered somewhat randomly. The two chords, to my ears, suggest the fourth and fifth of a diatonic scale, leaving the tonic implied but effectuating a sense of restful unrest. The piano sounds are somewhat difficult to hear in this configuration. Note also that there is a light installation, designed by collaborator Takatani Shiro, founder of the incredible collective Dumb Type. But again, in “disintegration” the lights follow the amplitude of the piano—an incredible vibratory connection. But in “Zure” they do not; the lights there follow the chords. The result is striking—dark room, white flashes, sounds of the piano—but sometimes some of these disconnections or impositions onto the piano leave me uncertain.

Regardless, something significant is playing out here. I think Sakamoto’s “Tsunami Piano” outlines a different relation to the field of 3.11’s vibrations and, more broadly, the perpetually ongoing earth-scale vibrations. In particular, Sakamoto attempts, as problematic as it may at first seem, a kind of erotics with said vibrations, an attempt at an encounter that refuses to abject the vibrations as pure other. It aims to partake in that honesty that Kristeva spoke of, the way in which “there is an abject” must be translated into an “I am abject.” The encounter aims to help bring into being a localized but globally significant cultural institution, as it were, a kind of post-ritual, and indeed post-*satori/meditation*, artistic and collective praxis of attuning to this abject, this being organized, and the necessary erotics with it (this being organized) and the earth. Sakamoto does this trepidatiously and through many parallel abjections, but I think it’s there.

The piano belonged to a high school along the Miyagi coast. This particular piano had been locked in the gymnasium's stage storage room on March 11. It had likely floated, buoyed by its large inner cavity, on the salt water that filled the room, hitting against the walls and other objects, until finally settling down again on storage room floor. It was moved from the room and onto the damaged gymnasium's stage for Sakamoto's first encounter with it. This is itself a significant moment. The musician in modernity remains delegated to the role of the negotiator of the violence and erotics of vibration.... In the documentary, Sakamoto says, "It's a piano corpse." He proceeds to sit at the piano and play. The piano is somewhere between resonant and muted.

Approach, sit at, and play the piano corpse.... Sakamoto recognizes the life the piano is capable of inhabiting, wielding, being. And yet it is also capable of wielding death. In deciding to leave the piano as it is, he therefore also decides to let the corpse speak, as it were. In this decision is a flash of something appropriate to vibrancy. The piano returns as a re-animated corpse. And yet, it is somehow less corpse-like than the "Miracle Piano." Rather, the piano embodies something truer about resonance, about time, space, and revealing, precisely by not aiming to return or restore an imagined wholeness, by bringing to presence the more-than of all things and subjects. The piano is allowed to *be hauntological*. It is allowed to speak from this sovereign place of movement that has been touched by the enduring vibration of the earth. Its Buddha-nature has been somewhat exposed. Its emptiness, its dependent arising, is allowed to announce itself.

And therefore our own! How is it announced through the piano? Sakamoto seems ambivalent about this. Sakamoto says it is a "piano made through nature's tuning; a piano

released from tuning by nature's power.”¹⁸⁴ First, nature's tuning is this chaotic vibrational impingement. Yet it is also this chaos that sustains and destroys life, that coalesces in “actual occasions,” to use the Whiteheadian, like us, and their disintegration. Second, to be released from tuning implies the piano is freed from its human tuning, which must be “artificial.” A sympathetic reading might suggest Sakamoto aims to attune us to something in which we humans sit. Yet, Sakamoto also implies the gesture to leave the piano unrestored is meant to speak to human hubris—our silly tuning systems. But I think the piano announces much more than our hubris. Indeed, the hubris of tuning is a means of abjecting what is sovereign in tuning, what is brought into topological announcement by the very difficult and particular practices of co-resonance. Why are we barred from accessing this chaotic “nature-tuned” piano? Why must it show us our hubris rather than something sovereign? Of course, contemporary “in-tact” pianos are “equally tempered” so that each note is equally “out of tune” with each other note. This is a dominant Western system, attached to the growing middle class in Europe etc.... And I expect Sakamoto has equal temperament in mind.

Sakamoto, in an interview with a recording magazine, also puts it this way: “It is a piano, but the tsunami has revealed it again to be an object.... Nature has made it into a mere object again. Nature has returned the piano—this product of modern thought, this refined perfection—to its original objects: wood, iron, ivory. It's been tuned by nature, so to speak. I wanted to use the sound for its symbolic value.”¹⁸⁵ Like much “acoustic ecological” discourse, Sakamoto moves too quickly from vibration to symbolic value. The “value” is removed from the *fact* of the

¹⁸⁴ 「自然の調律によって作られた・自然の力で調律から解き放たれたピアノ」 *Sound & Recording Magazine*, June, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ 「ピアノではあるんですけど、津波によって物に返されてしまった…自然が物に返したもののなんです。近代的な思想の産物、最も完成された産物であるピアノは、本来は木だったり鉄だったり象の牙だったと。いわば自然が調律したということで、とても象徴的でしたのでこの音は使いたかったんです」、『サウンド&レコーディング・マガジン』 *Sound & Recording Magazine*, June, 2017.

vibration!¹⁸⁶ Other vibrational ambivalences are present here. Considering the “equal temperament” I just explained above, equal temperament is arguably more accurately described as “refined imperfection,” a kind of vibrational compromise. Does the Tsunami Piano not also exhibit another compromise—with the earth and *with the “actual occasion” of the tsunami*? But Sakamoto suggests the Tsunami Piano embodies the way the tsunami took something from us—the “piano” itself—but also *gave* something to us: “mere and original objective materials.” Is this another, hidden, perniciously hidden, *restoration/recovery* discourse? I think so. It assumes materials aren’t themselves energetic fields in the implicate with histories. It assumes these materials of the piano do not participate in precisely what the artwork appears to value: namely, the fact that the tsunami remains as a trace in the fabric of the piano’s materiality.

In attempting to explain the power of the Tsunami Piano, Sakamoto appears to fall back on a modern dualism, privileging what was once the “negative” side of the binary rather than re-imagining it. Instead of saying “subjects are primary; objects are secondary,” he says, “objects are primary; subjects are secondary.” Sakamoto simply now says subjects are isolated, nonpresent, and objects are present to themselves. In this discourse, there is again a “means” posited: that the piano is there to show us our arrogance and withdraw from us; the piano becomes a kind of means that erases the end it supposedly secures. Again, this is merely a dominant modern subject pseudo-critique: it merely reinforces the idea that by “removing the subject” we can become “more present.” And that the “object” of the piano is always-already essential and present to itself. This binary, this topological knot, must be twisted around in a new way. It is too abject, instead, to suggest that the Tsunami Piano does *not* take something from us

¹⁸⁶ Lingis, “Discourse in terms of means and ends is parallel to the discourse that separates facts from values. For this discourse, it is not that perception sees directive in things and in the levels upon which things are found; it is that once ends are projected or posited by the agent, the intervening things are seen as means, routes, or obstacles,” *Imperative*, 4.

but has enfolded *us* in into a transduction? Nothing was given or taken—or at least, nothing *essential* was given or taken by the tsunami or the piano. And everything was always-already partaking in a subtle give and take. This might appear materially uncomfortable yet, but if approach voluntarily, it is topologically re-organizing. This is precisely what is striving to become attuned to in that room. This is the claim I would like to conclude with.

It is possible to say instead: *through the piano*, the tsunami and the earth and their relation to the subject are rather brought into relief. *What if subjectivity is like an object and objects are like the subject?* Timothy Morton is explicit: what Kant uncovered about the subject applies to all beings in general, including what is normatively called “objects.” In this sense, the subject is a kind of “object.” However, Morton’s work remains, in a sense, a subject- or at least actant-oriented ontology if we flip the emphasis and call everything vibrational topologies, structures capable of auto- and intra-affection as well as states of consistency and re-organization—not to mention decay and disorganization. These are all states of what can be variously summarized as “energy.”

This includes the piano. When is it not “iron, wood, ivory?” The point is rather, how does “iron, wood, and ivory” retain in them history, enfold micro-becomings like transductions? When are these things not announcing something about themselves and something about ourselves? They are never not these things, these histories. The topological structure of the piano certainly becomes reified to the extent that what the piano produces becomes naturalized, a means of entertainment, consumerist pseudo-pleasure. But do we need to move from “just music” to “just sounds?” This is reification, too: taking what is resonant and relational to be a single and enduring essence. Sound is not more or less vibrational than music—but this is what Sakamoto is implying. Sakamoto seems to assert that the disruptive quality of the tsunami piano occupies

something like a “first step” of a critical meditative praxis—one attempts to de-reify one’s relation to objects in the world including the self. But Sakamoto re-reifies them by suggesting anything is “stripped” from them. The point is to see these things as non-essential, nondual aspects of a field.

To quote Adorno again,

“The allergy to aura, from which no art today is able to escape, is inseparable from the eruption of inhumanity. This renewed reification, the regression of artworks to the barbaric literalness of what is aesthetically the case, and phantasmagorical guilt are inextricably intertwined. As soon as the artwork fears for its purity so fanatically that it loses faith in its possibility and begins to display outwardly what cannot become art—canvas and mere tones—it becomes its own enemy, the direct and false continuation of purposeful rationality.”¹⁸⁷

Is it not the case that these elements—guilt, literalness, hidden purposeful rationality, fear of aura—are all at work in saying the piano “returns to being a mere object?” Some of the artwork installations the tsunami piano is central to do indeed seem to be anxiously hoping to break any aura by becoming “mere tones.” While Walter Benjamin was right to say that retained in artwork was a deference to an imagined authority, the solution to de-contextualize everything may in fact have been taken up far too problematically. The lack of aura becomes an anti-aura. Is it not possible to think situational transductions and their subjective transformations as the “aura” that must arrive in and through the art, and not link “aura” strictly with authoritative power? I think so.

¹⁸⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Semblance and Expression’, in *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 103.

What I hear in the installation is not what is taken away by the tsunami, nor what is given as a gift (which Superego gives such a gift?) but what is in a sense *forced*—an aesthetic encounter. Calling the tsunami piano a “mere object” is the other side of the antinomy that wants to “fully restore” the piano—both seek a presence restored to itself, whether that presence is “human” (with the Miracle Piano) or “Nature” (Sakamoto’s reading of the Tsunami Piano). In my estimation, the tsunami is a vibrational energy which forces an announcement by vibrating various energetic topologies and shifting their relations. The Tsunami Piano is remarkable because it was designed to perpetually announce this announcement of earth-scale waves. It attempts to create an abstract translation, a bridge, for these earth-scale events to be rendered locally. It attempts to create a relationship to emanation, to the production of reality via vibration. It attempts to create a *topos* where these translations are made present, translating the subjective topology. What does it mean to have to face and attune to the vibrational status of the earth in the vibrations that unfold in space? The tsunami piano translates, abstracts this fact of being space-bound. The piano embodies the intrusion of Gaia, too, to use Stengers’s phrase, the way that the human moment is perpetually shot through by energies it can never fully predict or render. It *incorporates* this actualization via the trace of the tsunami into performative cultural moment. The piano abstractly renders being coastal, being spatial, being a transducer of energetic waves that exceed. The piano is the hauntological: the way our energies are dependent on the non-essential yet actual fields of emergences of which we are part. It creates an opportunity for *us* to steel ourselves into that intrusion. It is a cultural event attuning to its coming to be as an emergence of vibration, organizations of vibrations that are transductions of contained space, a-reciprocally given by the earth’s heat-based (energetic) movement and waves.

The tsunami piano is remarkable for the way it *retains* a profoundly material, energetic yet historical event—not because it sloughs anything off. The fact that earthbound vibrations come to be “parsed” by *it* is a kind of performative material doubling. *The energy of the earth arrives to repeat its own history*. The encounter of earthbound energies shows that *this is always the case*. The explicate organizations of our historical fields are only and forever “rung,” made real, made “audible,” through the energetic network that “powers” them. Our lives are fields, topological organizations of vibration being “rung out” by the energies that arrive externally from them. To experience is to *act like a sound*—it is to be like a sound...to be a sound.

The tsunami piano embodies a recording of a field which is then re-expressed by energy that is not and yet is “it,” that field. It therefore produces a field in which these transductions are felt. It embodies the sense that a field is made by the structures that impact and shape it and that this shape is then historically plastic *by enacting such a field*. The shape is a historical topology, which can then be re-shaped by the energy that comes into it. The piano is like the glass of early gramophones or the vinyl of a record, or like a subject—all “are what they are” based on etchings and formations of vibration. The “record” the real, if they are allowed to be reorganized, in a topos, in that way. The installation demonstrates this “non-reciprocal giving,” this chain of energy, implicate to culture. A clearing (etching, formation) in a sea of waves, emerging from the implicate. The challenge, the topos, that the installation attempts is to give an experienced translation of this. The piano has within itself the “recordings” of the tsunami and then this “recording” acts as a modulation of other recordings.... The piano is a “field recorder” also in the way it “records” the field of its emergence as a work of art. It is a “field recorder” also in the way it holds the potential to reverse that field back. It transduces the field onto itself, it is it itself, so that energy may be borrowed and brought forward again to resound that field. That energy is

borrowed from the earth itself. And also the subject itself, the energy that is contained in the body and brought out in the activity of the mind itself requires the appearance of the topos. The mind borrows energy from the earth, too.

The installation is a localized transduction of the earth vibrating, including from the piano, including in the listeners. The installation does not present the “mere objectivity” of the piano, nor does it merely point to the hubris of the subject. These reactions are also abjections. The installation is an opportunity to enter a topos that translates between topologies at different scales and with different embeddings. It is an opportunity to subtly rework the subject in relation to those transductions. It is a form of response-ability—if we let it be.

The tsunami piano installation is brought forward out of a very different topological relation to abjection. It is a space where abjection is explored. I place to realize the way *we are abject*. And also: everything is simultaneously borrowing and withdrawing from everything else. The installation aims to attune us to the depropriative quality of the cosmos. It is not owned by anyone. And we live on borrowed energy. We live on energy that seeks to *be energy* and in that seeking congeal and dissipate, produce and in the production destroy as it seeks itself. Put differently, the tsunami piano installation is akin to Joanna Macy’s “radiation shrine.” The radiation shrine houses a protected piece of radioactive metal. It would be placed in city centers that rely on nuclear energy and would hopefully create a topological relationship by which a response-ability to the way we are unsympathetically (sympathy being a principle of resonance) borrowing and appropriating energy is internalized. The tsunami piano installation is that too. It was in Tokyo. Imagine a room, like a critical meditation room, where anyone in Tokyo could go and listen to the vibrations of the earth on a piano that is supposedly abject....

The “Is Your Time” installation series is now indeed being installed elsewhere. This has great potential. China, it seems, is especially interested. But one must navigate the author-function of these mobile installations, too. Sakamoto sometimes implies the revelation about “mere objects” comes from him alone; or that his rejection of the CD in favour of the installation is a private revelation in some way. This simply cannot be the case. One thinks of Akio Suzuki and “things” or Gordon Mumma and earth vibrations and the piano....¹⁸⁸ One encounters Sakamoto’s image pasted everywhere around the advertisements for the installation. And “the earth” or “vibrations” are re-generalized in descriptions, eschew from comment all the worlding that the tsunami piano is involved with. But the installation is remarkable still in reorganizing the object and producing worldings elsewhere. It has the potential.

One of the proofs of this potential, I think, came from a tsunami-affected person. As I mentioned, the mini-documentary about the makings of the “tsunami piano” has a parallel story where a tsunami survivor and student of the school that the piano was borrowed from is told of the developments of the piano. The student is invited to the finished installation. She cries after exiting the tsunami piano room. She cries out of *gratitude*. She says, “Thank you for not Disneyfying 3.11.” I think this is one of the only times I have witnessed someone affected crying from gratitude at an installation made by those coming from outside of Tōhoku. I think her gratitude, however, remains “I am not here for me; I am here for you,” but in a new way. The gratitude seems to say, that, “I am here for you to say that, finally, in this room, you are here for me.”

¹⁸⁸ I cannot find any comment regarding which artist or precedence influenced the decision to keep the tsunami piano unrestored. For a critical explication of Mumma’s work, see Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (Berkeley (Calif.): University of California press, 2013), 153.

Conclusion

I must admit: the studies presented far more tentatively embody the cosmopolitical hope that I sketch out for field recording in the introduction. In Chapter One, K engages in a subtle form of traumatic abjection, defending herself from the same thing she tries to put on the offensive. In Chapter Three, Nagahata's practice in some ways mirrors K's. Nagahata opens to an alterity that he also decides must not be touched if it cannot be "heard." I think Sato in Chapter Two appears closest to what I envisioned in the introduction. She takes up a "woman's composing," creating fields out of fields of energy. Her practice is a sublimational desiring-machine. She creates a topos in repeated listening and composing activities, taking up the making and breaking that, I think, is not only constitutive of the subject but of the cosmos. And in Chapter Four I showed that the momentum in dominant forms of listening restricts a public from becoming open to cosmopolitical questioning.

Space remains the litmus test here. Are the contours, affectations, framings of space—the field that is its historicity—attuned to or not? Is space attempted to be rendered beyond the Euclidean experience of the transcendental subject or not? Does space emerge in these encounters from its alterity to translate the subject's topology or not? For a cosmopolitics of space to emerge, the subject must be willing to give resonance to the unknown in/as space—both "subjective space" and "spatial space." A cosmopolitical field recording has the subject embark on a challenge to render this alterity through itself, redefining what "the subject" and the "space" are. When this emerges, a topos does too—one *is* the emergence of the other.

Field recording is potentially a means of making provisionally and mediationally "present" those cosmopolitical actors—large and small, hyperobject and intra-hyperobject—that

play significant roles in political structures of reality. A cosmopolitical field recording would seek to render and then follow decisions about what is. This decision would then organize the demands we render for ourselves, the actions which we take. Cosmopolitics understand that any action occurs within certain constellations or worldings. Normatively, space is often willfully ignored, or perhaps a recalcitrant uncanniness. Field recording attempts to find a means to make what is normatively ignored or only recalcitrant resonate. But, the thing is, we remain “human”—therefore field recording potentially participates in various aesthetic practices that render for us in “aesthetic” ways the often large, small, and ambiguous presence of these actors. Humanness remains a mediator, a “resonant unknown” for ourselves. Presence is never a simple thing. The “unknowns” operate in ways other to that the “human” apparatus, but in ways affecting our perceptual and phenomenological apparatuses too. This process of translation and affectation might be the case for everything, not just “us.” Often, the most “direct” attempts of field recordists (and cultural or artistic work in general) fail to render the complex and ambiguous “thereness” of these objects. But to make ontology resonate—ontology being the “ultimate” unknown—what appears as indirect must be engaged. Because I have also argued that vibration/energy is *the* cosmic actor and matter is a modality of energy.

As Jonathan Sterne writes, “Because of its roots in audio-technical discourse, soundscape is much closer to ‘the dominant space’...of our societies than we might first imagine. It may well serve as a platform for critique, but it only offers this critique from a dominant auditory perspective.”¹⁸⁹ This bears on what I have analyzed. In all cases, field recording is taken up as a form of critique. But the politics of that critique remain in “the dominant space” of a frustrated

¹⁸⁹ Jonathan Sterne, ‘The Stereophonic Spaces of Soundscapes’, in *Living Stereo: Histories and Cultures of Multichannel Sound*, ed. Paul Théberge, Kyle Devine, and Tom Everett (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 79-80.

humanism. This contemporary humanism tries to reproduce out of its perceived failures a success; its critique attempts to reintroduce the self-present and totalizing hope for our sense perceptions precisely through arguing they fail to do that. The critique seems to reproduce what it is rallied against. However, rather enact another totalization in my own critique of their critique, I have tried to show that within this frustrated humanism is something necessarily different to it. To put it in Buddhist terms: the suffering of this humanism points to something sovereign. Suffering indicates that what is taken as “real” is not convincing even to the subject that tries to take it. The other side of suffering is the acknowledgment of flux. And yet, “flux” here also means that which resonates. In suffering is not only the refusal to be formed, but to take a particular formation so as to refuse further de/re-formation from the other. I have tried to witness the contours of this refusal in the space of the subject in the analysis presented here in order to show within it tentative relations with the alterity that is also the same. I have tried to show that the other already “is” you.

Before offering some further conclusive clarifications of what this means, I must say that this dissertation is a trace of a topos of thinking that has been immensely transformative of my own relation to myself. I know that its tentative quality mirrors my own tentativeness when I first approached the topic. I hope, however, that by engaging seriously and (I hope) compassionately the ambivalences of those whose work and practices I analyzed, I can contribute to overcoming the antimonies of our time.

There is a Zen saying: “Before practice, the mountain is a mountain and the river is a river. Once practice begins, the mountain is no longer a mountain, the river no longer a river. Upon first awakening, the mountain is again a mountain, the river a river.” I think this applies to the subject, too, in relation with the mountains and rivers but also as “a mountain and river.” And

it applies to ideas. In his “The Sūtra of Mountains and Rivers,” Dōgen writes, “Mountains lack none of the virtues with which mountains should be equipped. For this reason, they are constantly abiding in stillness and constantly walking. We must painstakingly learn in practice the virtue of this walking. The walking of mountains must be like the walking of human beings; therefore, even though it does not look like human walking, do not doubt the walking of the mountains.”¹⁹⁰ And do not doubt the walking of humans. I have tried to walk that walk by talking this talk. To say “I lack none of the virtues with which I should be equipped” but also that “I abide in both stillness and movement” is profoundly healing. It is a validation that never stops, that can never stop. It is like saying one “joys in the truth” of vibration. There is not lack, but plenitude, and I abide in it, both as a “still” sound and as a “moving” vibration. Leaning into this means constructing topoi. Topoi are the expression of this validation. One is recognized in and through the other. Something other than the ego is validated here; and yet the ego transforms itself, seeks this validation, and rises to its imperatives. It is a challenge and a joy. It means to take a step, knowing when you land the step you die, but isn’t it amazing that you have all this time to enjoy the fall. It has a million million facets. It requires practice.

While writing, David Cecchetto told me, “Writing is the field recording of the mind.” That certainly seems to be the case. Therefore writing need not only be a “searching,” but topos-making “poetical,” affecting building. To write is to strive to make your own mind an end to itself. This Kantian statement tries to go further: I must not only treat the other as an end and not a means; I am also the other that I must treat this way. To write it to take up a meditative practice, a slow yet transformative re-organization of one’s relationship to one’s own (one’s other) psychic

¹⁹⁰ Dōgen, ‘Treasury of the True Dharma Eye Book 25: Sound of the Stream, Form of the Mountain (Keisei Sanshoku)’, trans. Carl Bielefeldt, *Soto Zen Journal*, Dharma Eye: News of Soto Zen Buddhism: Teachings and Practice, 31 (March 2013): 21–29. “Treasury of the Tru Dharma Eye Book” is commonly known by its Japanese title, Shōbōgenzō. This fascicle is from volume 1.

organizational energy. Writing is potentially a Taussigian space of death for writers and readers alike: an intensive transmutation where something in a sense “dies” or is let go, transformed, so something else can live, latch on, be taken up. In this dissertation I have tried to transduce what I have transduced in my encounter with those affected by 3.11 who have made choices to transduce their experiences in field recording. To say “space” remains the litmus test in field recording is also to say “space” is the litmus test of writing, whether writing engages the unconscious “space.”

To say “writing is a field recording of the mind” is to use a comparison to bring into relief how expanded field recording can be used as a topos of thinking and acting. Therefore, I want to finish with two things. I first want to qualify my tentativeness by giving a few words on what kind of field recording has not been undertaken here. And, second, I want to spend a few more words discussing how the “The inside and outside are one and the same” achieves a topoi of ontological thought and action. While the introduction set off on thinking “the other,” I want to conclude by saying “the other” is “the same.” I want to return to thinking with the phrase: 表裏一体 *hyōri-ittai*. I have argued this is the case in various moments throughout the dissertation. I position the statement in the debate of what a “post-secular” “sacred” means. Do we need “god without the sacred,” as Slavoj Žižek asserts, or do capitalist subjects have the historial potential for “the sacred without gods”? I lean towards the latter (without barring gods from their disclosing/undisclosable work in other social contexts). I’ll try to briefly explain why.

First, I offer a brief and general critique of what I consider two sides of the same antinomy in most mobilizations of field recording. In other words, these sides, despite their lively and sometimes bitter debates, have not broken out of the bind of modernity. They have not

acknowledged that there are fundamental double binds; or that, a double bind is a vibration. They are not taking up the cosmopolitical question.

Field recording practice is burdened by the legacy of John Cage. I see two post-Cagean trajectories. One is the sono-sociology of R. Murray Schafer's "soundscapes." As I already hinted above through Sterne, Schafer's soundscapes are implicated in the modern paradigm of acoustics. These soundscapes are re-articulations of the fantasy of the neutral subjective auditor. In this case, attendance to space follows an unconscious drive to homogenize space based on an imperialist conception of the "right" forms of sound. This is another way of saying that a white, colonial, masculine subject that appears "neutral" to the soundscapist is at work in the recordings. The neutrality of soundscapes often slips into the quintessential capitalist/imperialist experience of spatial ownership: one gets to claim "the social" and its representation without any participation in it. This bears out in Schafer's problematic relationship to the Indigenous peoples in Vancouver. As well as the problematic relationship to "origins" in soundscape's history, which, again, completely ignores that Canada's "origin" is based on a terrible violence, not a completeness elsewhere but a breaking here.

One can see the burden of this humanist/imperialist determinism refracted in the work of, for example, Janet Cardiff's "audiowalks." These "audiowalks" have—I'm not sure what—visitors, consumers (?) witness a space by listening to a recording "about" that space. In this case, it is not clear how the space is involved in the audition at all. Often, the audio tracks that participants listen to merely impose symbolic narratives on a space, perhaps allowing for a catharsis in which space is kept at a distance.

The other trajectory is the "sound in itself" school, which absorbs Pierre Schaeffer's Husserlian *objet sonore*. If the post-Schafer post-Cage school is about seeking socio-sonic

determinism, then this post-Schaeffer post-Cage school is interested in a totalized “absolute music”—i.e., a musical situation that supposedly transcends all context. This area celebrates field recording as the most absolute of absolute musics. It releases itself of the burden of musical history/context in general. This makes the categorical error that context is necessarily a human “thing.” It misses that the music participates in a field. A profound historico-cosmic field. Here, one finds a different guise another masculine subject: sound stands in for the isolated man; both are pure timbre without world, pure particularity. A pertinent example is that of Francisco Lopez.¹⁹¹ Lopez’s tracks often perform the Cagean “closing of the piano fallboard” in order to listen to “pure sound.” Lost is the sense that this closing is an opening to another set of barriers—that is, to broader as well as subjective containers in which waves bounce.

In each of the above cases, there is an assurance that the *subject*—as a neutral and powerful seat of present rational awareness—is what can and must be mobilized. In each case, the modern subject takes itself up in a surplus enjoyment as it finds ways to impose itself on the practices of listening that supposedly threaten it. That is, the modern subject finds ways to fool itself into thinking it is not imposing anything so that it can impose itself on itself. In each case, a world understood as a particular topological configuration arriving within, between, and beyond the subject is lost.

Perhaps my conceptualization is closer to Alvin Lucier’s *I am sitting in a room*. The resonance of the room performatively bars the subject who “speaks” and yet also reveals the subject as a participant in a room. But this introduces the problem of what the recording as a

¹⁹¹ Lopez reproduces a Cagean argument when writing of composition and “artistic freedom”: “A musical composition ([based] on soundscapes or not) must be free of action in the sense of not having to refuse any extraction of elements from reality and also in the sense of having the full right to be self-referential, not being subjected to a pragmatic goal such as a supposed, unjustified re-integration of the listener with the environment,” ‘Freedom,’ from his blog: <<https://www.franciscolopez.net/schizo.html>>.

medium is doing. Lucier's position regarding the audience is ambiguous. The recording seems to reify the very act of resonating, of de-reifying. Because, the one listening is not participating, but observing a kind of thin slice of what occurred.

There are field recordists who push against this deadlock. That is, the subject is seen as a problematic to be engaged. This seems to *also* lead to the sense that the medium is one material realm in which this engagement can be performed. Often this push back comes from within the two post-Cage "schools." Hildegard Westerkamp is one of the most compelling "soundscape" field recordists. Her work takes seriously her subjective role in the perception of Vancouver as well as in the potential of the formal qualities of her creative medium. Take her incredible "Kits Beach Soundwalk" (1989). She offers a Godardian soundscape narrating its own re-construction. She modifies and tells the listener she is modifying the soundscape of Kits in both subtle and extreme ways. The recursive feedbacking and transformations attune to that which occurs in the subject through the medium. She allows sound to act as a form, a moving topos, which she recognizes is part of subjectivity. She states at the end of this piece that the city is a monster which she must play with to face. An incredible statement. However, the piece ends before the urban play really begins. Indeed, the politics of her work is not always clear. Westerkamp, like many of the "acoustic ecologists," champions quietness, which, in terms of a politics of vibration, constitutes at best a niche intervention and at worst is symptomatic of the liberal humanist privatization of public space, i.e. the smoothing of space for capitalism, the making of a "space for everyone" which really means the urban "no one" as people are allowed to move to and from labour. "Being quiet" is often a way for the subject to assume it is more present to itself. It often assumes the narcissistic position that says being formed by the other is abject.

The “sound in itself discourse” is hugely influential in Japan. Or rather, “sound in itself” discourse is used as a translational discourse that Japanese sound artists respond to in order to couch what they do in a “Western” legitimizing discourse, despite often doing something rather different. In this case, “noise” often stands in for what “the sound in itself means.” And, while it would require more qualification than I can give here, “noise” in Japan seems to me to reify abjection. One thinks of K here. K may have been reifying abjection, but in order to do something political. Whereas a lot of “noise” artists assume that they are participating in something cosmic, while barring in some way both the cosmic and the political. The fact that it is “noise” hints at a kind of enjoyed marking of the other as separate.

The fundamentally modern position of the subject vis-a-vis art is predominantly reinforced in the contemporary field recording boom. There often a drive, on the one hand, towards “fidelity” and “realism”—i.e. the supposed capacity for a subject to present a place neutrally to itself—and, on the other, a drive towards “impressive” or “rare” sounds—i.e. the way the subject is mystified by its own intensive relations to the world. In other words, field recording expresses the antinomy of the modern subject position, as analyzed by Heidegger. I am thinking of the work of Sugai Ken, whose subject is often “the Japanese subject” and who asserts one must separate “music and field recording” first.¹⁹² Or Yosi Horikawa, who Sato cites as an influence, but whose field recordings of “rare” and “isolated” places merely reinforces the misperception that the way out of our world is in “secrets” hidden in “undiscovered” places rather than in the secret mysteries of worlding, concealment and unconcealment, as such.

¹⁹² See an interview with Ken here: <<https://www.ableton.com/en/blog/sugai-ken-the-shibui-of-field-recording-and-electronics/>>.

Pushback against the “sound in itself” school is found in the work of Tsunoda Toshiya 角田俊也 who nevertheless almost always leaves his field recordings untouched. Tsunoda has been hugely important for Japanese field recording. And he is also driven by “the relationship between phenomena and perception.” He states,

“Listening to a recording should be a subjective experience.... Everyone gives importance to hearing. But I think it’s not the core problem. Hearing is like an entrance. If everybody thinks field recording work is only a strange kind of music, it might be so. However, I do not think so. I have my doubts about trying to listen to field recording only for the pleasure of the sound. For me, the sound is not necessarily important in field work.”¹⁹³

This crossing out of “sound” opens an attunement to a *field*. His phenomena/perception/place approach echoes Kūkai’s tripartite vibrational ontology: the “field” of listening comes from/through a vibrational topos, which includes all three parts. Tsunoda’s most influential releases are the *Extract from Field Recordings Archives* (1-3 in the ‘90s, and 4-5 for a 2019 re-issue). The “archives” are a massive vibrational case study of the ports, often abandoned, along the Miura Peninsula in Kanagawa where Tsunoda grew up—the very same Kanagawa as Hokusai’s print. Memory, place, and vibration co-emerge.¹⁹⁴ Hearing, i.e. a conscious appearance of this emergence, is therefore a “gate” to this field. One recalls the 1228 Chan *kōan* collection *The Gateless Gate* (important also for Japan’s Rinzai Zen).

¹⁹³ From an interview, <https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/quiet-storms_toshiya-tsunoda>.

¹⁹⁴ Tsunoda’s work deserves more space than I can afford it here. Tsunoda is explicit about vibration, stating of his Archives, “By using small microphones and contact microphones, I tried to detect vibrations that were integrated with the presence of the place, like the vague images existing in the lowest layer of our perception,” from the re-release liner notes, which can be read at Bandcamp. “Gap between ship and pier—air vibration” or “Solid vibration from the concrete pavement of a pier where the fish market used to be held”—track names—should give a good impression of the push for vibrancy here. However, there is a refusal also in the way vibration is sought in the places it apparently only reveals itself.

However, the private “enlightenment” of Zen also echoes Tsunoda’s strong assertion that listening *should be* a subjective experience. Blocked suddenly is how a field, *as a co-condition*, emerges across subjects. Other traces of this problematic Zen can be found in music-oriented field recordist, Horikawa Yosi, for example, who states: “I would like to float in the air, in a place that has no reflected sound from the ground, walls, ceiling. The place where there is total, complete silence. It might be one of the ideal acoustic places.”¹⁹⁵ Of course, working from Kristeva, the desire for complete silence is a form of abjection.

Despite both the above field recordists’ insistence and need to record something “as it is,” the “is-ness” they record is bereft of any sense of place; their “is-ness” is without *suchness*, as it were, the Buddhist term for there-ness. Suchness, *Tathātā*, is the “it” of space for Buddhism, the implicate emptiness and the emergences therein. I argue field recording blocks “it” in the hope to present “it” neutrally. There is no re-action, little organization, no structure that opens to the vibrant real, which is itself perpetually re-active. There is no *appeal to the other*. Field recordings are often so many reductive, self-assured/ing auto-biographies. Field recording is often a means of returning to these modern positions under the guise of a more “direct” access: the exoticized field recorder (and certainly not the *eroticized* field recorder). These field recordings attempt *to prove that the recordist is there* in various acts of denial. Prove through denial. The abjection of the subject. How is proving also (often) a form of denial?

What has this dissertation “proved?” What has it said of space? It participated in saying there is no point in proving you are there in (“internal, external”) space...because you are not there in any sense that is “provable” by you. If you keep finding a “smaller” condition to “prove” the larger emergence is there, you just find another emergence. You see smaller and smaller

¹⁹⁵ From an interview, <<https://www.thewildcity.com/features/14088-i-would-like-to-float-in-the-air-yosi-horikawa-on-shaping-sound-spaces-borrowed-scenery>>.

emergences until you “see” the implicate emptiness. Each emergence is actually an emanation, and the the “levels” of emanation are only relative to each emanation’s perspective. “Proving” is not in tune with the ontological. Proving is an artifact of the transcendental modern subject. While you “prove” you actually destroy or ignore the emanation you’re trying to prove—by moving away from it, by stifling its emanation under the illusion that another emanation—*you*—will fully explain it. Rather than prove the space is there, one must be in space. The space is there in the sense of being an emanation, set to being-there by the resonance of its energy. And in order to emanate, it must resonate in a particular historical form which has “absorbed” the structure of its precedence. But it does so in ways that can never be “fully accounted” for. The cosmos is an incredible shifting multidimensional lattice; we have to accept that we have no idea how reality is expressed to everything real. Time and space are completely different for...everything else. Time and space for “us” is different across time and space!

Thus, a humbler act: in order to be there, one sets the space ringing. One *rings in* the space in both senses of the term: one ushers space in; and one is made to ring by the space. One participates in its thereness. To render a space as there one participates. To prove is at best one act of (only sometimes necessary) participation. One’s participation is the translation of space—internal and external. Because I am also an emanation. To find out about it, I must set myself (to) ringing. I must find out about myself—but I don’t have to *prove* myself; it is not a competition or test. There is a joy in articulating my formation as a subject with the formation of space. Space, internal/external, is like a singing bowl. It’s a form that rings; a singing bowl is always ringing. One rubs the bowl, translates one’s energy, and the ringing form is allowed to ring out. What rings is both of you, your energy in your body and mind, the bowl, its form and the energy, and the air, its field and energy. The open center of the bowl is the implicate. Internal and external

space are in fact *the same*. They are both like the bowl. The implicate, as a give and take form, enfolds and rings. The opening is the implicate from which everything—me, the bowl, the air, the socio-historical field—emanate. That’s why singing bowls have a Buddha cast into the hole. It is cast there, as an emanation, a form, a translation of the implicate emptiness.

To participate in the space, to “find out about myself” there, often holds radically difficult breaks and confrontations with what I thought “I” was. Thus, this is not, again, a narcissistic “finding out,” but an attunement to how one’s thereness is affected by and affects the field. So, an ethical participation in the space, allowing the ringing of the space to ring out, can mean “not participating;” not overstepping, not dominating the space. One must become exposed to the radical suffering that occurs in the field of our cultural horizon without assuming one can completely understand or “prove” the essence of that suffering. One finds that one’s suffering is in fact part of the field. One’s symptoms are one’s own because they are not at all “mine.” One’s suffering, my suffering, bears a trace of the other, but only a trace. My suffering is an iteration of a broader, systemic suffering. But my suffering is therefore “the same” as others’. To attune to suffering is to attune to the suffering of the unconscious, of the other. It is also to witness how suffering is multiple, that there are many forms of historical suffering that I am part of. To ring in space is to try to sublimate this suffering too.

This of course does not foreclose mathematical “proof” or methods of access. Rather, both of these must be understood as participation. Intuitionism argues this is what the mathematical is—the mind’s unfolding of structures and logics, the subject translating the real. And distributing methods are ways of trying to translate and replicate means of participation. As Boon states, discussing Henri Flynt, “recording is important because it’s proof of a method, a way of making something happen, that points beyond the framing of music as product, or even

art, to an entirely new way of philosophically understanding and inhabiting the universe.”¹⁹⁶ *Our Map Here* is that I think. These “proofs” are also “ways,” modes of resonance.

Žižek argues the problem of our time is the privatization of commons. This is in part due to the framing of recording as distributing a product. Boon argues that, under late capitalism “the most useless, sovereign aspects of our lives and being are precisely those that are most rigorously commodified and packaged as ‘useful’ forms of withdrawal from a ‘stressful’ system.”¹⁹⁷ The challenge is to wrangle these back—which simultaneously means to bring them back into the commons. In other words, the challenge of seeing the “dislocation” of the subject and the “location” of commons is a very difficult and subtle one. I think vibration helps here. And field recording intervenes in debates about what this *depropriative commons* means.

Thus, the inside and outside are one and the same. 表裏一体 *hyōri-ittai* in fact has another meaning: “parallax,” when one object appears to occupy a shift between two different perspectives revealing that the object is ultimately irreducible to either perspective. In response to Kōjin Karatani’s *Transcritique*, Žižek in *The Parallax View* argues the way beyond the capital-nation-state is not to assume it creates a consistent totality. This lack of consistency, for Žižek is immanent, as it were, to the subject. Žižek explores the fundamental fracturing (a light metaphor) at the base of subjectivity. The fight for the future present must be fought on each of the fractured terrain. Politics is approached on multiple fronts with this incompatibility in mind (with this mental incompatibility to itself). Thus, for example, while changing the economic status quo is most crucial, such a change is only possible through an intervention in political reality.

¹⁹⁶ Boon, *Vibration*, 67.

¹⁹⁷ Marcus Boon, ‘To Live in a Glass House Is a Revolutionary Virtue Par Excellence: Marxism, Buddhism, and the Politics of Nothingness’, in *Nothing: Three Inquires in Buddhism*, ed. Marcus Boon, Eric M. Cazdyn, and Timothy Morton (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 30.

And yet Žižek also implies that this fracturing is constitutive of something beyond the subject; fracturing is part of a broader process of “abstraction” from energy. To be abstract means to be fractured. And “matter,” plants, animals, animal minds, and subjects are all more abstract partitioning of energy. Psychic abstraction is highly, intensely fractured. Thus, on the persistent abstraction of subjectivity and the consequent inevitability of its Hegelian sublational process, Žižek writes, “humanity is ‘reconciled’ with nature when it realizes that its own antagonisms, its own estrangement from nature and its processes, are ‘natural,’ that they continue in a higher potency the antagonisms and imbalances that define nature itself—in short, man is united with nature precisely in what appears as its estrangement from nature, its disturbance of natural order.”¹⁹⁸ This, of course, has significance for thinking disaster. And Žižek states something like we must then “joy in the truth” of our self-division. But is it possible to think, then, that everything is participating in a kind of collective estrangement? To participate is to enact, potentially, a commons or collectivity that is attuned to this intensive abstraction. If energetic disturbance is ontological, is not *form* a particular organization of this disturbance? Are formal abstractions not only “our” unconscious, but the unconscious of all form?

Žižek argues that art must today reattune us to the disturbances of abstraction, writing, “The persisting unfreedom, uneasiness, and dislocation in a modern formally [i.e. discursively] ‘free’ society can be properly articulated, brought to light, only in an art which is no longer constrained to the ‘realist’ representative model. The modern uneasiness, unfreedom in the very form of formal freedom, servitude in the very form of autonomy, and, more fundamentally, anxiety and perplexity caused by that very autonomy, reaches so deep into the very ontological foundations of our being that it can

¹⁹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, ‘Hegel with Beckett: The Persistence of Abstraction’, *International Journal of Zizek Studies* 13, no. 1 (2019): 152.

be expressed only in an art form which destabilizes and denaturalizes the most elementary coordinates of our sense of reality.”¹⁹⁹

I generally agree, but I don’t think this destabilization has to be perpetually disturbing. The “cure” of anxiety may not be more anxiety. As Lacan argues, the task of psychoanalysis is to try to make the unconscious come into an awareness of this feature of itself. The subject that ignores this and suffers and the subject that “knows” this as a kind of informational knowledge—this is not enough. Žižek argues our strategies for destroying transcendence do not take up the task in the realm of the unconscious—we are all too ready to proclaim the nonexistence of the transcendent by pointing out God, for example, is not “real”, but our acts reveal that we still unconsciously defer to a Superego, a kind of Godhead. A symbolic activity that retains the sense of its instability and disruptiveness at the level of the unconscious is needed. But does this today only require the disruptive? Does it only have to convince the unconscious the subject’s structural antinomy? Can the unconscious be molded in a different way wherein the subject recognizes itself as partial yet effective? Can the subject not act, in a sense, as a participant?

This is indeed what Boon and Hennix argue. To quote Boon at length:

“Jouissance...has an at least double meaning in that it relates both to sexuality and the gendering of sexual pleasure, of how men and women (normatively are said to) come...but also to another kind of enjoyment that operates at the level of the articulation of subjectivity itself, such that a subject can be said to ‘enjoy’ his/her/their self-articulation as a subject. In Lacan’s formula, masculine jouissance is a kind of fantasy or illusion, or enjoyment of illusion, while feminine jouissance may be said to actually consist of a subject-annihilating ecstatic occupation of the place (topos?) of the real—but

¹⁹⁹ Žižek, ‘Abstraction,’ 158.

one that the person occupying this site, presumptively but not definitively feminine, cannot, according to Lacan, know anything about. Music, or at least the music [Hennix] wanted to make, is a trans-feminist vibrational practice of the unconscious—and going all the way back to her interest in epistemic art, Hennix was tuned in to the possibility of an epistemic feminine jouissance that decoupled from discursive (masculine) misrecognitions and phallogocentrism through mathemes, intuitionist choice sequences, devotion, and vibrational practice. Subverting gender norms, this practice offered the possibility of being both fully immersed in the real while at the same time capable of choice sequences in that state—choice sequences that bypass the pitfalls of linguistic or discursive error. In that state one could both ‘know’ and ‘be.’ And come.”²⁰⁰

In other words, energetic practice might come to know something about “the Real”—not only the Real as the gap in the symbolic that the subject fills with itself; but the Real that is vibration.

Again, this is not a metaphysics of presence, but a profound anti-essentialist ontology that nonetheless enables a horizontalizing recognition: the inside and outside are one and the same. Tactics of attention here, practices of being in a space, attunes the subject to “its” energetic ontology, too. The subject is “itself” an energetic explication. Such an attunement and practice attempts to make sublimation a perpetual act while the practice is occurring. This is a process or resonance of energetic formation, in the same way Kristeva sees sublimation functioning in the symbolic. The process of attuning to this fact, of “convincing” not only the self but the unconscious, is an erotic process. Indeed, this goes beyond “convincing,” too. The jouissance in the act of practice is potentially commensurate with how openly the subject allows a resonance with this non-essential, moving, intensive ontology. Jouissance here is indeed a long state of each

²⁰⁰ Boon, *Vibration*, 116.

being, knowing, and coming. And this is not “all ontology,” either, even if this points to what is “ontologically all.” A particular just intonational matrix, a particular set of protocols, a particular set of frequencies (like Hennix’s fields tuned to the frequencies that are “contained” in the hydrogen atom!), or indeed particular spaces—each would create their own imperatives for attunement. These would unfold in the unconscious but would nevertheless allow the subject to enjoy this attunement. Indeed, it is possible for the subject, Hennix implies, to recognize and respond to its own energetic impositions onto and within the field.

In closing, then, I return to the traumatic symptom I sustained in my own life. I see that what made my family life traumatic was not only “itself,” but that its embeddedness in contemporary historicity gave it its particular violence. My subject is unfolding as a field emerging from this difficulty, but I see in it now an opening to alterity. The trauma is that I recognized this opening but could not effect a form which allowed it to be sustained. I see now that by translating and forming *myself* I can act within an ability, responsibility, joy, and challenge to translate this opening into a topos. As I hope I have done here.

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