Echoes From the Other Side: Gender, Space, and Psyche in Contemporary Japanese Genre Fiction

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ECHOES FROM THE OTHER SIDE:
GENDER, SPACE, AND PSYCHE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE GENRE FICTION

by

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract

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Echoes From the Other Side: Gender, Space, and Psyche in Contemporary Japanese Genre Fiction
Dissertation directed by Professor Janice Brown

This dissertation explores the fantastical landscapes in which Japanese genre fiction routinely unfolds as subversive spaces for the elaboration of subjectivities that undermine conventional discourses on gender and identity. Through analyses of four texts representing the genres of horror, science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction—Suzuki Kōji’s Ringu (Ring), Ueda Sayuri’s Zeusu no ori (Cage of Zeus), Kirino Natsuo’s Joshinki (The Goddess Chronicle), and Tobi Hirotaka’s “Jisei no yume” (Autogenic Dreaming)—this analysis seeks to illuminate how writers working across disparate popular genres have adopted and adapted historically constituted gender paradigms in order to elaborate visions of identity that are radically transgressive of humanist notions of subjectivity. The chapters that follow focus on a number of key features that link the works named above, and most importantly the deployment of feminine- and queer-coded characters and landscapes to explore issues of traumatic memory, affect, and relationality. I contend that the psychoanalytic modes routinely deployed in analyses of genre fiction are limited owing to the elusive, often invisible position allotted to feminine, queer, and maternal subjectivities in considerations of both psychic life and the sphere of language. My readings are thus guided by feminist psychoanalytic critic Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger’s concept of the matrixial borderspace, which figures the womb not as a site of violent rupture, but rather as a supplementary paradigm that exists alongside the dominant phallic order, and which engenders forms of relating that transcend notions of individuated subjectivity. This
dissertation foregrounds the interconnected issues of gender, space, and psyche through a consideration of the work of two key critics, Karatani Kōjin and Tsuruta Kin'ya. From there, it explores spectrality, virtuality, and the feminine uncanny in Ringu; outer space and queer economies of desire in Zeusu no ori; mytho-historical landscapes and maternal subjectivity in Joshinki; and database assemblage as matrixial process in Tobi Hirotaka’s “Jisei no yume.” By expanding my discussion of unmapped psychic landscapes in these works into a consideration of the cultural topography of contemporary Japan, I also examine how each of these texts engages with present-day debates concerning everything from the breakdown of established gender roles to the growing visibility of fluid sexual identities, the perceived decay of traditional aesthetic values to the proliferation of technology.
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Introduction

This dissertation explores how authors of post-bubble Japanese genre fiction have deployed gendered landscapes to elaborate new configurations of subjectivity in a period that has been widely identified as a scene of crisis. By focusing on a selection of fictional works representing the genres of horror, science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction, this study seeks to illuminate how texts belonging to disparate popular genres similarly adopt and adapt historically constituted gender paradigms in response to recent Japanese cultural developments. Over the course of completing this dissertation, I have identified one especially interesting feature that links the works considered here. Namely, each of these texts reveals itself to be concerned with trauma, and more specifically with the potential for the affective transmission of traumatic memory to engender paradigms of experience and modes of being that are at once radically transgressive of humanist notions of subjectivity and congruent with ongoing developments in the local and global social, political, and aesthetic spheres. As such, the chapters that follow will explore the role of trauma in genre narratives, devoting particular attention to what I view to be an overarching emphasis on female and gender-ambiguous bodies and the fantastical spaces they inhabit as sites inscribed with traumatic memory.

Psychoanalytic thought has revealed itself to be an incredibly useful tool in the area of genre fiction analysis, and this is especially true among scholars seeking to account for the imaginative spectrum of gender imagery to be found in genre literature, as well as among those interested in the theme of trauma that pervades popular Japanese narratives. This dissertation will likewise draw on psychoanalytic criticism; in the interest of enlarging
our understanding of the potentialities presented in each of these texts, however, I will endeavor to move beyond the discursive limitations of traditional psychoanalysis—and especially the rhetoric of repression and return so commonly deployed in considerations of female representation in genre writing—by invoking a series of thinkers who expand upon and challenge the frameworks established by foundational figures such as a Freud and Lacan. In particular, my readings of each of these texts will be guided by the work of Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, who in The Matrixial Borderspace endeavors to rethink the womb—the original site of traumatic rupture—as a supplementary paradigm that exists alongside the dominant phallic order and facilitates trans-subjective encounter. I will also draw on a broad range of other thinkers, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Judith Butler, Sudeep Dasgupta, Jonathan Balcombe, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Brian Massumi, and Azuma Hiroki.

Sites of Crisis: Situating Genre Fiction in Post-Bubble Japan

The 1990s have been widely identified as a critical turning point in the history of modern Japan, where a confluence of local and global developments produced a precipitating sense of unease surrounding the future of a nation-state whose fragmentation had made itself evident across the social, political, and economic spheres. As Yumiko Iida explains, the 1990s in Japan witnessed

a multiple breakdown of political, economic, and sociocultural orders and induced a visible shift in the mood of society reflecting an end to the glorious age of Japanese economic success on the global stage. The decade saw a burgeoning political instability, the Heisei depression and financial crisis, and the so-called burst of the bubble economy, developed in the midst of the dramatic international geopolitical restructuring that followed the end of the Cold War.¹

¹ Yumiko Iida, “Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine and the
Economically speaking, the collapse of the bubble economy led to the pronounced downswings of the real estate and stock markets, with high estimates placing the total loss between the years of 1989 and 1992 at 800 trillion yen. More recently the nation has witnessed a gradual breakdown of Japan’s lifetime employment system (shūshin koyō 終身雇用), a process that has initiated a decline of job security and further contributed to the rise of precarious and part-time labor. A growing demand for cheap labor in this period also led to the displacement of a considerable number of jobs to China, while simultaneously a massive influx of technologies into China engendered concerns that Japan might lose its standing as the leading East Asian producer of new technologies. These and other factors gave birth in the 1990s to what is known as the “China economic threat theory” (chūgoku keizai kyōiron 中国経済脅威論). Domestically, the 1990s in Japan witnessed the influx of a substantial population of South Asian and South American laborers, many of whom were nikkeijin 日系人, a term used to refer to Japanese emigrants and their descendants. As Kenji Kaneko notes, this development gave rise to pronounced political anxieties owing largely to a widespread investment in the myth that Japan constitutes an ethnically homogenous society. This period also witnessed the entrance of a


substantial sector of previously unemployed women into Japan’s labor force, a shift that has engendered both domestic and public tensions situated around the breakdown of traditional gender roles. Concerns about the collapse of the Japanese family unit have been further exacerbated by an increase in the number of women and men who delay or altogether abstain from marriage, a trend that has also been cited as a contributing factor to the problem of Japan’s aging society (高齢者社会).

The economic circumstances outlined above contributed to and coalesced with troubling developments in other sectors of Japanese society, as well. One extensively cited marker of dramatic cultural change can be located in the emergence in 1990s Japan of a unique formulation of youth culture that sociologist Miyadai Shinji 宮台真司 has identified not merely with the breakdown of collective values, but also with the rise of an alarming culture of indifference and asociality. Against the backdrop of the rise of a new youth culture there transpired also a series of high-profile events that would come to be understood as further evidence of the disintegration of conventional institutions and moral paradigms. These included the 1989 arrest of the so-called “Otaku Murderer” Miyazaki Tsutomu, the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō gas attacks on the Tokyo subway, and the 1997 Kobe child murders, perpetrated by a fourteen-year-old boy widely referred to as Shōnen-A. Andrea Arai identifies the latter of these events as especially significant, noting that Japan

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5 Miyadai Shinji, Seifuku shōjotachi no sentaku: After 10 Years (Tokyo: Asahi shinbun, 2006), 275.
in the 1990s witnessed the emergence of terms such as "kodomo ga hen da 子供が変だ" (children are turning strange) and "gakkyū hōkai 学級崩壊" (collapse of classrooms), both of which served to situate the child—a site of unknowable potential—at the crux of a grander discourse on social crisis and collapse. “This unknown/unknowable area of the child has echoed back on the problems of its nurture,” Arai writes, “and from here to that which is naturally supposed to emerge as the end result of this process of development, the adult subject, and from there to a national subjectivity.”

One of the most powerful pieces of evidence of the anxieties that emerged in the 1990s, and which have continued into the present day, can be located in ongoing political discourses surrounding Japanese national identity. As Marilyn Ivy observes, the continued use of the term “sengo 戦後” (postwar) to describe Japan suggests that the nation’s war defeat “is the foundation of the contemporary state. Sengo repeats, compulsively, Japan’s point of departure; haisengo (‘after defeat’ or ‘post-defeat’) discloses this compulsion.” Moreover, Ivy explains, neo-nationalist rhetoric in Japan seems to compulsively return during moments of crisis to the issue of war—“the previous war (saki no sensō), wars foreclosed by the constitution, future (im)possible wars, wars to end all wars, and, conversely, wars without end”—in an endeavor to “reinvest the Japanese nation-state with substance.”

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8 Ibid., 169.
Minister Abe Shinzō employed a cabinet decision to reinterpret Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution—commonly referred to as a “pacifist constitution” (heiwa kenpō 平和憲法) owing to its prohibition against the use of arms—in a highly contentious move that reinstated the Japanese Self-Defense Force’s ability to take up arms in order to aid allied nations in times of warfare.

The evolving cultural climate of post-bubble Japan has also had important ramifications in the realm of contemporary Japanese aesthetics. Prominent postmodern critic Asada Akira 浅田彰 has famously described the 1990s as a decade marked by the “Return to J” (J kaiki J回帰), a reference to the rise of J-pop, J-literature, J-criticism, and other popular artistic and intellectual movements that, he argues, seek to distance themselves both from “traditional Japan” and from global trends. Asada has been deeply critical of this new aesthetic and scholarly trajectory, writing that the Return to J, which he believes to be rooted in a poorly disguised mode of nationalism, represents “a cultural rebellion against the wave of globalization to which Japan was exposed during the economic slump of the 1990s.”

I would argue that Asada’s negative appraisal of Japanese pop cultural developments in this period is somewhat lacking in nuance. In particular, I believe that his accusation overlooks the myriad ways in which global artistic developments have been deliberately interpolated into recent artistic configurations of “J” identity. A number of Asada’s contemporaries have likewise criticized Asada for this reason, as well as, more broadly, on the basis of his snobbish dismissal of Japanese consumer culture. Nevertheless,

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in those cases where Asada’s comments hold true and in those where they do not, the phenomenon of the Return to J reveals an intensifying artistic concern with representing, rectifying, and rethinking the fractured quality of subjectivity and of the Japanese nation-state in the contemporary period.

Japanese artistic endeavors beyond the sphere of “J” likewise reflect a strong propensity to engage with questions pertaining to the breakdown of the individual and national bodies. In my view, it is in contemporary Japanese genre fiction that some of the most potent expressions of the anxieties and possibilities engendered by the developments outlined above can be located. In the contemporary period, horror fiction, which represents one of Japan’s most enduring genres, deploys the trope of haunting to explore a number of paramount social issues. Perhaps most notably, spectral narratives produced over the course of the past two decades are deeply concerned with the erasure of marginalized bodies (which in turn reveal themselves in an array of imaginative spectral forms), as well as with the increasingly undeniable and wholly uncanny presence of technology within every nook and cranny of the domestic and public domains. The realm of Japanese science fiction resonates strongly with horror in many respects, and especially in its use of visceral corporeality in the exploration of shattered subjectivities. Exposing the susceptibility of the human form to mechanical and evolutionary whims, the images of the cyborg, the alien, and the disembodied being alike suggest that the discrete subject has no place in the future world. Perhaps the most diverse and most understudied field of contemporary Japanese genre fiction is the fantasy genre, which deploys first- and second-world settings to revitalize mythical events, historical battles, and systems of magic. In doing so, many such works illuminate the abiding presence of phantoms of a forgotten past within the
psychological landscape of contemporary Japan. It is thus that while genre fiction continues
to be governed by the distinctive features that mark certain works as belonging to the
sphere of horror, others to that of science fiction, etc., disparate realms of Japanese genre
writing are also strongly connected by their mutual concern with elaborating new
configurations of identity.

Beyond this broad commonality, there surfaces across the spectrum of genre
writing also a specific pattern of representation that lies at the crux of this study. One of the
most visible features of Japanese genre narratives produced in the post-bubble era is their
tendency to deploy landscapes as topoi for the exploration of psychological domains. In
truth, this quality is not unique to genre fiction, nor is it lacking in historical precedent. In
*Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* 日本近代文学の起源 (Origins of Modern Japanese
Literature, 1980), Karatani Kōjin 柄谷行人 undertakes the ambitious task of establishing a
framework for understanding the early development of Japan’s modern literary history.
Key to Karatani’s discussion is *fūkei* 風景, or landscape, a concept whose emergence he
situates within the third decade of the Meiji era. During this period, Karatani explains,
literary and artistic representational trends shifted away from the transcendental
metaphysical paradigm Usami Keiji 宇佐美圭司 ascribes to what are now referred to as
*sansuiga* 山水画 (landscape paintings), and which Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 recognizes in
the poetry of Matsuo Bashō 松尾芭蕉. Instead, Karatani writes, representation became
increasingly contiguous with a European principle of perspective, according to which
“position” encompasses “the totality of what can be apprehended by a single person with a fixed point of vision.”

Karatani explicates this shift in psychoanalytic terms, writing that the concept of landscape in modern Japan emerged out of an “inversion of consciousness” initiated by the trauma-induced redirection of the libido inward. Out of this process (itself repressed from cultural memory), Karatani argues, interiority emerged in simultaneity with abstract thought and language, giving birth also to an awareness of the external as external, that is, of a new relationship between human sensibility and objects. Echoing Kobayashi Hideo’s 小林秀雄 comments on modern Japanese selfhood, Karatani proclaims the impossibility of shattering the domain of self-consciousness: “Kobayashi describes no one as having transcended the confines of this landscape. I myself, in writing this essay, do not seek to break away from this ‘sphere.’”

The landscape outlined by Karatani has been explored by a number of scholars seeking to account for the internal focalization of much modern Japanese literature, and especially works belonging to the thematically and linguistically diverse genres of shizenshugi 自然主義 (naturalism) and shishōsetsu 私小説 (I-novel). This paradigm has also been expanded to engage with a wide breadth of Japanese fiction produced from the early years of the Meiji era through the present day in sundry attempts to account for the privileged yet ever fluid concept of “self”—referred to, as Tomi Suzuki writes, by a “cluster of terms such as jiga, jiko, jibun, kojin, and watakushi [自我, 自己, 自分, 個人, and 私]”—in

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11 Ibid., 34.
modern Japanese fiction. While amidst such discussions a number of common threads emerge, one of the most remarkable trends identifiable within Japanese literary history is a gendered paradigm within which male subjectivity achieves its development in part by virtue of encounters with women inhabiting markedly feminine spaces located at the margins of everyday reality.

In his own discussion of this phenomenon, Tsuruta Kin’ya 鶴田欣也, like Karatani, identifies the significance of landscape in the process of subject development as depicted in modern Japanese fiction. Through an analysis of Izumi Kyōka’s 泉鏡花 “Kōyahijiri” 高野聖 (The Holy Man of Mount Kōya, 1900), Tsuruta draws attention to a narrative model that he terms “mukōgawa 向こう側” (the other side). According to this model, the male character crosses over into a realm in which,

from a temporal perspective, regression occurs. The individual experiences a return to the womb, and, on a communal level, to the roots of his culture. Spatially, a process of self-dissolution takes place—be it a momentary loss or a sustained period of crossing-over. Moreover, women initiate this ego-dissolution, principally by directing it toward the natural space she governs, though there are those occasions on which it is directed toward a community, as well.13

In addition to “Kōyahijiri,” Tsuruta identifies a number of other works of modern Japanese literature as belonging to this genre: Kōda Rohan’s 幸田露伴 “Tai dokuro” 対髑髏 (Encounter with a Skull, 1890), Natsume Sōseki’s 夏目漱石 Kusamakura 草枕 (Grass Pillow, 1906), Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s 芥川龍之介 Susanoo no Mikoto すさのおのみこと


(1920), Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s 谷崎潤一郎 “Ashikari” 芦刈 (The Reed Cutter, 1932), Kawabata Yasunari’s 川端康成 Yukiguni 雪国 (Snow Country, 1948), Dazai Osamu’s 太宰治 “Urashima san” 浦島さん (Mr. Urashima, 1945), Abe Kōbō’s 安部公房 Suna no Onna 砂の女 (The Woman in the Dunes, 1962), and Furui Yoshikichi’s 古井由吉 Hijiri 聖 (The Monk, 1962).

The model outlined by Tsuruta also materializes in a variety of imaginative ways across the sphere of Japanese genre fiction. One of the most iconic examples of this trope is the image of the female ghost, which represents a seemingly impossible convergence of life and death, past and present, absence and presence. As Susan Napier notes, the association of women with specters and metamorphosis has a long history in Japan, “encompassing everything from the Nō and kabuki theaters to the woodblock prints of the early nineteenth century and even the post-Restoration era.”¹⁴ In contemporary Japanese fiction this figure takes on myriad shapes, functioning at times as a relatively non-threatening presence (often a child) who emerges from the spirit realm in a quest for understanding or companionship; in other instances, the female ghost, driven by a desire for revenge, engages in the relentless haunting, possession, or murder of the living. In doing so, she demonstrates not only the fragility of the boundary separating the so-called real world and the expansive spirit realm, but also the potential for traces of the past to unexpectedly emerge from even the darkest chambers of the individual and cultural unconscious.

Science and speculative fiction, too, are saturated by an abundance of imagery aligning the feminine with forces that exist beyond the masculocentric domain. Cyborg

narratives, for example, pose a challenge to humanist visions of the discrete body, often through the use of sexually charged depictions of the transmutation or incorporation of male characters into techno-bodies endowed with stereotypically feminine traits (see: womblike cavities, umbilical cord-like protuberances). Stories that transpire in cyberspace frequently operate in a similar manner, depicting the act of plugging into the network as a kind of return to the womb, a movement out of the discrete body and into a dreamlike sphere of interconnectivity in which the distinctions between the real and the virtual, body and psyche, self and other fade away. Other science fiction stories center around the appearance of an alien race, a trope that inevitably calls to mind real-world anxieties surrounding the potential for foreign powers to irrevocably transform the physical and cultural landscapes of Japan. While alien imagery, especially in apocalyptic narratives, is frequently aligned with traditionally masculine or hyper-masculine domains—for instance, those of technology and warfare—the alien body is also commonly depicted as one endowed with so-called feminine features: gender ambiguity, the capacity to transform at will, abundant reproductive potential, unchecked eroticism, or other qualities that threaten to destabilize the male body and gaze.

Japanese fantasy narratives likewise demonstrate a strong tendency to associate female characters with extra-cultural spheres, and most commonly those of the natural and supernatural realms. Forest-dwelling witches, Shintō priestesses, mythological goddesses, and magical girls, for example, are widely visible across the spectrum of historical and futuristic fantasy writing. Such characters are at times frightening in their feminine excess; at others, they are wholly pure or transcendentally maternal. Quite often the fantastical female is ambivalently situated somewhere along the spectrum of these two extremes,
revealing herself to those who enter her world as a dangerous yet seductive passageway linking the past and present, nature and culture, life and death, and individual psyche and communal memory. In my view, an especially interesting and increasingly visible trend in the sphere of fantasy fiction is the deployment of female characters as vehicles for the exploration of historical and mytho-historical events from perspectives that have been excluded from mainstream literary and artistic representation.

I will explore in further detail, and with reference to specific textual examples, the variety of ways in which gender is interpolated into the landscapes in which genre fiction unfolds in the chapters that follow. At this juncture I would like to outline some of the dominant trends visible throughout genre fiction scholarship, as well as to introduce the principal analytical framework that will inform the analyses presented in this dissertation.

Repression and Return: Psychoanalysis and Genre

Critics of Japanese genre fiction have focused heavily on the idea of the “return of the repressed,” a concept that originated in Freud’s 1915 essay “Repression” and which has since become a guiding principal in considerations of the gender dynamics of Japanese popular writing. Scholarship in this vein frequently identifies expressions of femininity with the slew of specific cultural crises outlined at the beginning of this chapter. The fantastical feminine imagery that pervades genre fiction has also been more generally understood as reflective of collective anxieties concerning the possibility of the collapse of traditional cultural values, socio-political hierarchies, and humanist notions of identity. Sharalyn Orbaugh nicely articulates this view in her analysis of sexually charged imagery in a selection of Japanese science fiction anime, writing that “as the imagined social body has
become increasingly more perfect and controlled—more closely fitting the modernist model of (male) autonomous subjectivity—the likelihood of the eruption of the repressed body, in all its abject, excessive, imperfect, uncontrolled, boundary-challenged ‘female-ness’ increases.”

In order to demonstrate how psychoanalytic rhetoric has informed both artistic representations of and critical engagements with gender, I would like to introduce here some of the fundamental premises of Freud’s work, as well as to touch on some of the ways in which Lacan’s writing draws on Freudian thought. Freud elaborates his vision of human psychic life through a description of five stages of psychosexual development: the oral stage, the anal stage, the phallic stage, the latency stage, and the genital stage. The first and third of these stages are especially key to understanding Freud’s conceptualization of the role of the feminine in the organization of the unconscious. During the oral phase, the child experiences an investment of libidinal energy (referred to as “Besetzung” and often translated as “catheisis”) in the mother, whose body provides the child’s sole source of nourishment. In his 1925 *Autobiographical Study* Freud describes this mother-child bond as a source of erotic satisfaction:

The process of arriving at an object, which plays such an important part in mental life, takes place alongside of the organization of the libido. After the stage of auto-eroticism, the first love-object in the case of both sexes is the mother; and it seems probable that to begin with a child does not distinguish its mother’s organ of nutrition from its own body.\(^\text{16}\)

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After passing through the anal stage of development (during which the child continues to experience erotic satisfaction), the child arrives at the vital phallic stage, in which he or she comes to identify the genitals as an erogenous zone. The hallmark of this stage is the development of an Oedipus complex, in which “boys concentrate their sexual wishes upon their mother and develop hostile impulses against their father as being a rival, while girls adopt an analogous attitude.”\(^{17}\) In due time the incestuous impulses that drive the male child’s libido toward the maternal figure are subject to repression, enabling him to identify with the father and achieve a partial alleviation of his castration anxiety.

In the post-Oedipal period the maternal body continues to function as a central organizing principle in psychic life. Freud frequently touches on the phenomenon of adulthood womb phantasies, linking them to the desire to return to an undifferentiated state of total comfort: “Our relation to the world, into which we have come so unwillingly, seems to involve our not being able to tolerate it uninterruptedly. Thus from time to time we withdraw into the premundane state, into existence in the womb.”\(^{18}\) Being eternally foreclosed, however, the mother’s unexpected appearance in the realm of representation may also arouse a sense of dread owing to her seemingly impossible association with both life and death. Freud elaborates this connection in his essay on the uncanny (\textit{unheimliche}), in which he implies a connection between the desire for the maternal body and death:

To some people the idea of being buried alive by mistake is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy which had originally nothing terrifying about it at

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 22.

all, but was qualified by a certain lasciviousness—the phantasy, I mean, of intrauterine existence.19

Lacan diverges somewhat from the anatomical model elaborated by Freud to focus on the child’s transition from the pre-linguistic sphere into the Symbolic realm of socialization. In doing so he inserts into Freud’s paradigm, which hinges on relations between the mother-child pair, a third conceptual party: nom du père (the name of the father). This formulation serves to link the figure of the father in the Real to that which he represents in the Symbolic—namely law. For Lacan, it is the Symbolic paternal, and not the father of the Real, that facilitates the dissolution of the child’s relations with the mother (a form of castration of the pre-linguistic and pre-social sphere) and subsequent entrance into the domain of language and culture.

While Lacan divorces the process of subject formation from Freud’s biological model, the phallus remains the central organizing principle of his paradigm. Male access to the privileges of the phallus necessitates the renunciation in the Imaginary of penile attachment in the Real, as well as the repression of desire for the pre-Oedipal mother. Women, on the other hand, desire to “be the phallus” (through masquerade)—that is, to take on the semblance of the object of the other’s desire—and are thus framed in terms of a kind of double-lack, having not the phallus, yet aspiring to “be” it, which is lacking. Women in Lacan’s writings are thus located prior to language—which is constitutive of the subject—and their desire is figured as so elusive that it cannot be articulated:

A man is nothing else but a signifier. A man seeks out a woman qua—and this will strike you as odd—that which can only be situated [emphasis mine] through discourse, since,

if what I claim is true—namely, that woman is not-whole—there is always something in
her that escapes discourse.20

Psychoanalytic thought has thus revealed itself to be an appealing framework for
thinking about the gender dynamics of Japanese genre writing, which is saturated by
scenes of the traumatic rupture of elusive forces into the masculine-coded bodily, psychic,
cultural, and linguistic domains. Although this dissertation will outline some of the
limitations of conventional psychoanalysis for thinking about Japanese genre writing, I
would like to note that this line of analysis holds justifiable appeal for a number of
important reasons. Japanese literary history, and perhaps especially popular Buddhist
narratives, demonstrates a strong propensity to situate female characters as objects of
male fear and fantasy. Moreover, psychoanalytic thought had a formative influence on both
modern Japanese literary developments and broader cultural discourses on gender
beginning in the early Shōwa period, during which the nation witnessed both the
translation of two collections of Freud's works into Japanese (an effort headed by literature
scholar Ōtsuki Kenji 大槻憲二 and University of California, Berkeley-trained psychoanalyst
Yabe Yaekichi 矢部八重吉) and the emergence of a number of journals dedicated to
psychoanalysis.21 Finally, while I am not convinced of the universality of the psychic
mechanisms proposed by many working in the discipline, it is the case that a variety of the
feminine archetypes that psychoanalysts (and most notably those working in the Jungian

20 Jacques Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: The

21 For a timeline of the history of psychoanalysis in Japan, see Keigo Okinogi,
“Psychoanalysis in Japan,” in Freud and the Far East: Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the
People and Culture of China, Japan, and Korea, ed. Salman Akhtar, 9-26 (Lanham: Jason
Aronson, 2009).
tradition) have identified as belonging to the collective unconscious—the mother, the wise old woman, the goddess, the animal, the witch, and the specter, to name a few—are as visible in contemporary Japanese fiction as they are in the Western sources to which psychoanalysis frequently refers.

That being said, I also contend that the line of thinking outlined above can only take us so far. More pointedly, it occurs to me that the model of repression and return commonly deployed to explicate female representation in genre writing may represent but one side of the coin. It is certainly the case that gender in genre writing frequently operates in these terms—that is, in accordance with the expectation that masculinity and femininity will be treated as dichotomous constructs representative of emotional stability, circumspection, and social order, on the one hand, and psychosis, indiscretion, and communal fragmentation, on the other. On the other hand, however, it is my observation that notions of sexual difference as expressed in many works of contemporary Japanese genre fiction also operate in a somewhat different way—and specifically, to elaborate modes of subjectivity that transgress modern notions of selfhood. Moreover, in the works I will explore in this dissertation, feminine-coded landscapes set the stage for radically subversive forms of alliance, ones that resonate powerfully with postmodern currents by transcending established linguistic, psychic, and corporeal boundaries. In light of Japanese genre fiction’s enduring focus on the potentialities embodied by feminine psychic life, I contend that psychoanalysis remains a fruitful mode for broadening our understanding of works in this vein. In the interest of exploring gender in genre beyond the phallocentric schema of conventional analytics, however, this dissertation will draw on a series of thinkers who have challenged traditional psychoanalytic approaches to gender and object
relations. For this purpose I have identified especially fruitful potential in the work of artist and feminist psychoanalytic critic Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, whose theory I will elaborate below.

**Into the Matrix: Rethinking the Feminine**

Born in Tel Aviv just three years after the conclusion of World War II, Ettinger has become a highly regarded artist of the New European Painting movement and a prominent theoretician working at the intersections of feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and aesthetics. Ettinger’s most important contribution to these dialogues is her concept of the *matrixial borderspace*, which challenges the rhetoric of repression and return that is key to conventional psychoanalytic thought by focusing on the potential for the feminine to reveal itself as a trans-subjectively experienced recurrence of the affective traces of an event.

Owing to Ettinger’s deep concern with affect, I would like to qualify this term before delving into her theory. As Brian Massumi notes, the concept of affect should be distinguished from that of emotion, the latter of which he describes as “qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning.” By contrast, affect describes

a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another . . . The autonomy of affect is in its participation in the virtual. *Autonomy is openness.* Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is.

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23 Ibid., 35.
I will further explore questions of affect (as well as its relationship to the virtual) in the chapters that follow. For now, I would like to emphasize Massumi’s characterization of affect in terms of synesthesia, openness, potentiality, and excess.

Ettinger develops her concept of the *matrixial borderspace* with reference to the late prenatal period of fetal development, that is, to a moment prior to the infant’s denial of the maternal womb. Like Lacan, Ettinger identifies this phase as one in which the subject-to-be, uninhibited by incest taboos, is affectively linked to another, with whom s/he shares the status of part-subject, part-object, and onto whom s/he inscribes traces of her trauma, phantasy, and desire while being inscribed with the m/Other’s same. Yet while conventional psychoanalytic thought conceives of the infant’s passage into culture in terms of a break with the maternal, Ettinger contends that this state persists as an affective paradigm which

concerns the subjectivizing process of several partial-subjects who cannot be entirely thought apart from their encounter as subject-subject, rather than as only subject/object, and in a way that it is impossible by definition, and not only as a result of any previous assumption, to reach absence without presence, presence without absence. Under the matrixial dimension of subjectivity, severality is originary.²⁴

For Ettinger, the artwork embodies especially great potential to engender matrixial forms of encounter in that the aesthetic constitutes a privileged point of access for affective experience and exchange:

The enigma of femininity touching on the originary repression of the Thing—the primordial m/Other and primal scene connected to sex and death beyond/before the separating line of castration, beyond/before the threshold of language—is foreclosed in the phallus. But in the matrix, it is emerging and fading-by-transformation. Something

of this co-emergence and co-fading in the Real is delivered to the Symbolic’s margins by way of covenants hidden in art. Something is interwoven between several entities into a fabric whose connections may become accessible through art.\textsuperscript{25}

In certain respects Ettinger’s project resonates with other attempts to rethink the place of the feminine in the organization both of psychic life and of art beyond the schemas outlined by Freud and Lacan. In particular, the \textit{matrixial borderspace} resembles Julia Kristeva’s semiotic \textit{chora}, a heterogeneous space that is organized around the maternal body, and which preconditions the subject of meaning. According to Kristeva, “the very practice of art necessitates reinvesting the maternal \textit{chora} so that it transgresses the symbolic order; and, as a result, this practice easily lends itself to so-called perverse subjective structures.”\textsuperscript{26}

Ettinger’s theories also bear similarities with the work of Jacques Derrida, whose concept of \textit{différance} (a combination of “deferral” and “difference”) refers to a multiplicity underlying unity. \textit{Différance} is concerned specifically with the idea that textual production is governed by a dynamic web of relationships that perpetually defer meaning through the interplay of differences among signs. In one interview, Derrida suggests a connection between \textit{différance} and the feminine, commenting that

Each time that a multiplicity of voices has imposed itself on me in such a form that I tried to present it as such, that is, to distribute the voices in some way, to act \textit{as if} I were distributing voices in my text, there were always women’s voices or a woman’s voice. For me, the first way to turn speech over, in a situation that is first of all mine, consists of recognizing by giving passage to a woman’s voice or to women’s voices that are \textit{already there} in a certain way at the origin of my speech.\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{27} Jacques Derrida, “Passages—From Traumatism to Promise,” in \textit{Points...Interviews},
\end{flushright}
Connoting fluidity and play, the concept of différance has been adopted and adapted by a number of feminist thinkers (among them Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray) as a means of reevaluating the feminine in terms other than those conventionally deployed.

Ettinger is also deeply engaged with the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in an effort to fuse psychoanalysis with their anti-Oedipal model termed schizoanalysis. An analytics of desire that challenges the reductionist tendencies of conventional psychoanalytic thought, schizoanalysis is concerned with desire as a mechanistic force that, rather than deriving from lack, is itself productive. Moreover, schizoanalysis operates on the premise that so-called “desiring machines” are interconnected in a vast web of reciprocal exchange and transformative relationality. For Ettinger, schizoanalysis represents a promising point of departure for developing her own theory in that it conceives of the Symbolic not as a codified structure, but as a domain that is itself structuring. Other Deleuze-Guattarian concepts, including the rhizome and the Body-without-Organs, likewise resonate with Ettinger’s work. I will elaborate these connections throughout the chapters that follow.

While Ettinger is indebted to all of these thinkers, her theory is distinct in a number of respects. Perhaps most importantly, her notion that “becoming-together precedes being-one”28 departs radically from established models of object relations, refiguring the womb not as a site of violent rupture that is henceforth foreclosed, but rather as an affective paradigm of encounter that remains available to the post-Oedipal subject. In this way

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28 Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, 72.
Ettinger explicitly rejects the negative terminology (expulsion, abjection, psychosis) around which many of Kristeva’s writings are organized in favor of a more affirmative understanding of feminine sexuality as site of becoming. In doing so Ettinger also develops a more nuanced vision of the role of the feminine both in the organization of psychic life and in the sphere of art than those offered by others who are similarly interested in questions of ontology and aesthetics beyond the scope of conventional analytics.

For Ettinger the *matrixial* has implications not only on an aesthetic plane but also on an ethical one, owing to the impossibility of not sharing within this paradigm. The *matrixial* requires a suspension of subjectivity in order to participate in a differentiation-in-co-emergence, a form of knowing a non-I without being either completely fused with or entirely distinct from it. Ettinger writes that the borderline that emerges from this type of encounter is a fluid one, affected by “caring and empathy and fascination (as well as antipathy and horror), and uncognizingly known.” The *matrixial* is thus ethical in that it counters an exclusionary model of becoming with an insistence on the possibility of becoming-vulnerable to that which lies beyond the contained self. This transgressive shift from the phantasy-driven phallic order into a *matrixial* paradigm marks a movement into a space whose fluid walls reverberate with echoes of historical events which, as Griselda Pollock writes,

breach the limits of representation, not because of their inherent sublimity, but because their atrocity or extremity are without historical precedent. Beyond even our imagining, these events fall outside the existing terms, words, concepts, images, representations which we might use to make sense of them, even while their affects are registered everywhere. Thus the movement from phantasy or the imaginary to the real of trauma marks a historically generated crisis in the relations between representation (our form of knowing) and that which having happened has none the less no immediate image or

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29 Ibid., 145.
concept to represent it. Innovation in aesthetic form seeking to negotiate the abyss precisely since the aesthetic, according to Rancière is “an economy of affects.”

For Ettinger, then, aesthetic encounters might give rise to a sense of responsibility to what she describes as “events without a witness,” that is, to a sense of one’s ethical obligation to acknowledge the trauma of the other.

An Israeli citizen, Ettinger is heavily concerned with the communal trauma of the Holocaust, a historical rupture that has been widely cited as the moment that, to quote Massumi, everything ended: “writing, art, feeling, even and especially history.” In my view, the question that Ettinger’s work seeks to answer—the question of how trauma might be carried into and worked-through in the post-traumatic era—is relevant also to contemporary Japan. The traumatic imprint of the Second World War remains visible on a number of levels, and, as noted earlier, perhaps especially in the realm of political discourse. The series of developments outlined at the beginning of this introduction have likewise left an indelible mark on the Japanese national psyche as the consequences of economic breakdown and globalization continue to play out across the private and public spheres. All of this is to say that the specter of an increasingly distant war, coupled with a series of more recent reminders that Japan has been and will continue to be irrevocably transformed, have lent themselves to the construction of a cultural landscape inscribed with traumatic occurrence.


31 Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 68.

Japanese popular culture engages with trauma in a variety of forms, frequently deploying female-centric imagery both to grapple with the elusive sense of loss that continues to shape discourses on Japanese national identity and to explore modes of overcoming seemingly shattered communities and selfhoods. Moreover, in many contemporary genre texts natural environments and spectral dimensions that have long constituted a type of “other side,” along with more recently conceived virtual and interplanetary environments, are constructed not only as sites of traumatic rupture, but also as settings for the forging of alliances through the transmission of traumatic memory. Admittedly, at present this distinction may appear to be a somewhat hazy one. As I argue in the chapters that follow, however, genre fiction’s intensifying focus on the possibilities opened up by interconnectivity offers a counterpoint to the pessimism that saturates modern discourses on the fragmentation of subjectivity and national identity. It is for this reason that I have identified Ettinger’s work as holding highly significant value for this project.

On a final note, while the vast corpus of scholarship dedicated to Japanese popular culture demonstrates a tendency to isolate disparate genres, I have elected to explore texts spanning multiple spheres of writing for a number of reasons. Firstly, while the concept of genre represents a convenient means of distinguishing narratives that are organized around different sets of literary conventions—hence the ease with which we might assign a tale of ghostly revenge to the category of horror and a cyborg narrative to that of science fiction—it is also the case that these classifications can serve to conceal the many representational tendencies that texts belonging to disparate genres share in common. In the interest of illuminating these connections (and in the spirit of Ettinger and other
thinkers I will draw on here), I will emphasize how works of fiction across the spectrum of genre writing similarly deploy feminine and queer-coded imagery and landscapes.

Moreover, in my view this far-reaching approach to reading Japanese popular fiction has an increased potential to reveal the desires of readerships in contemporary Japan. As I will stress throughout this dissertation, each of the works explored here reflects a concern with the limitations of conventional modes of expression and relation, and it is thus that their authors conceive of an array of auxiliary landscapes in which articulation and encounter are not bound by existing paradigms. This being the case, I contend that it is imperative at this juncture to consider the possibility that the appeal of genre fiction can be located, at least in part, in its tendency to grapple with that which eludes representation—that is, with events that have been experienced as traumatic, and which may only be affirmed and worked-through, albeit intermittently, imperfectly, and frustratingly, via the act of collective witnessing.

Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, “Uncanny Returns: Traversing the Screen of Ringu,” I will examine Suzuki Kōji’s 鈴木光司 1991 Ringu リング (Ring), a novel that has been largely overlooked by scholars in favor of Nakata Hideo’s 中田秀夫 1998 film adaptation bearing the same title. I have identified Ringu as a starting point for this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, Ringu constitutes a monumental force in the contemporary revival of Japanese ghost narratives, whose enduring appeal, I contend, has much to do with their suggestion that the past remains a vital force in the present, however much we might yearn to leave it behind. Moreover, by merging the historically constituted trope of the vengeful female
ghost with the more recently conceived motif of technology gone awry—a problem that emerges here in the form of a haunted and haunting viral videotape—Suzuki elaborates a deep connection between the more archaic image of the monstrous feminine as a site of male anxiety and desire and the fears that have accompanied the infiltration of technology into every facet of Japanese life. In a related vein, *Ringu* also employs the image of the techno-specter to explore questions of affect, and specifically the perils and potentialities of bearing witness to others’ memories. Finally, the novel represents one of the most notable pieces of contemporary Japanese genre writing to challenge modern Japanese novelistic concerns with the individual psyche by presenting subjectivity as a process of encounter. In this analysis, I will argue that Suzuki constructs the virtual sphere as a kind of “other side” that, rather than constituting a concrete boundary separating subjectivities, expands into a threshold from which and into which the uncanny antagonist Sadako and her viewers inscribe into each other resonances of events, rendering them vulnerable to one another’s trauma via a series of encounters that entail both psychological and ethical implications. I will also employ this chapter as an occasion to elaborate Ettinger’s theory of the *matrixial borderspace*. On the one hand, readers who are familiar with contemporary currents in psychoanalytic and feminist theory may find this unnecessary; on the other, this dissertation represents one of the first English-language endeavors to integrate Ettinger’s work into the study of Japanese literature. This being the case, I feel compelled to devote more attention than I might otherwise to elucidating early on the particulars of her work.

In my second chapter, “Queering (Outer) Space: Sexuality and Subjectivity in *Zeusu no ori,*” I will examine Ueda Sayuri’s 上田早夕里 2004 novel *Zeusu no ori* ゼウスの檻 (The Cage of Zeus). The narrative unfolds in a future in which humanity, in an endeavor to
expand its program of space exploration, has genetically engineered a species that is psychologically and physiologically capable of navigating the harsh conditions of deep space. The plot revolves around the tense relationships between members of human society and these more recently conceived beings, who are characterized by their possession of male and female sexual organs, alluringly androgynous appearance, and psychological interdependence on other members of their community. Ueda’s novel is an ambitious one, touching on everything from contemporary Japanese gender and sexual relations to questions of biodiversity. My analysis will thus draw on thinkers working in and across multiple disciplines, inclusive of psychoanalytic criticism, queer theory, animal behavioral science, and evolutionary biology. Ultimately, I will argue that Ueda elaborates a posthuman vision that radically transgresses humanist models of subjectivity, and in doing so imagines a future in which the underpinnings of private and public acts of violence are replaced by a heightened sense of ethical obligation to others.

In my third chapter, “Unspeakable Confessions: Joshinki,” I will examine Kirino Natsuo’s 梶野夏生 2008 Joshinki 女神記 (The Goddess Chronicle), a mytho-historical fantasy novel that re-imagines the eighth-century Kojiki 古事記 (Record of Ancient Matters) story of the ancestral deities Izanami and Izanagi. In this chapter I will focus on the intersecting stories of the novel’s two central figures, a young priestess named Namima, and the goddess Izanami. In particular, I will explore Kirino’s rather unrelenting focus on female corporeality and desire—specifically as they pertain to pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood—through a matrixial lens. In doing so, I will argue that Kirino attempts neither to reify nor deny the influence of socially constructed notions of sexual difference, but rather to give representation to a paradigm of encounter embedded in a space-time
ontologically prior to sexual differentiation, and which enables one’s convergence with others-as-subjects in the sharing of traces of trauma accessible only through the co-emergence of memory.

In my final chapter, “Toward a Co-poietics: Decoding ‘Jisei no yume’,” I will explore Tobi Hirotaka’s 飛浩隆 2009 short story “Jisei no yume” 自生の夢 (translated into English under the title “Autogenic Dreaming: Interview with the Columns of Clouds).” A work of speculative fiction that combines elements of the psychological thriller, a slew of science fiction tropes, and experimental narrative form, “Jisei no yume” unfolds in a futuristic virtual landscape that closely resembles today’s world wide web. In my analysis, I will explore Tobi’s construction of the virtual domain as a feminine-coded site of subversive aesthetic and psychic activity. In doing so, I will focus on the story’s use of the familiar trope of the virtual virus—a concept that is central also to Ringu—as a locus of affective contagion. This chapter will draw on the work of Ettinger and Deleuze and Guattari, as well as on feminist theorizations of the body and philosophical explorations of virtuality. It will also engage with the work of contemporary Japanese cultural critic Azuma Hiroki 東浩紀, whose discussions of aesthetics in the age of database postmodernity can inform our understanding of the manner in which Tobi’s story engages with the virtual sphere as an emergent technology of artistic representation.
Chapter 1
Uncanny Returns: Traversing the Screen of *Ringu*

*You will be eaten by the dead.* The characters expanded, chasing the black from the screen. The transformation was lackluster, from black to milky white. The uneven, cloudy hue couldn’t be called natural, and it began to resemble a series of concepts painted on a canvas, one superimposed on top of another. Wriggling, worrying, seeking an exit, an unconscious set to come hurtling forth—or perhaps the throb of life. Thought possessed energy, bestial, gorging itself on darkness.¹

As the video continues, this montage of color, movement, and concepts gives way to a seemingly unrelated series of audio-visual images. The first of these is a scene of volcanic eruption, and the brief sequences that follow showcase a pair of dice, an old woman speaking in a dying dialect, a newborn baby, a crowd of human faces screaming accusations, a television set, the visage of an unknown man, and an encroaching blackness that forms the shape of a ring. Periodically, and according to no immediately perceivable pattern, this procession of images is interrupted by brief moments of darkness.

The kaleidoscopic scene described above represents the sequences of images that comprise the iconic video recording that lies at the center of Suzuki Kōji’s 1991 novel *Ringu*. After linking the videotape to a series of mysterious deaths, the novel’s protagonist, journalist Asakawa Kazuyuki, traces the origins of the film to a woman named Yamamura Sadako. In the course of his investigation, Asakawa learns that Sadako, who had possessed exceptional psychic abilities, had been raped and thrown into a well to die a slow, agonizing death years earlier. He also discovers that the scenes in the video represent a series of Sadako’s memories, psychically projected onto the film from the depths of her watery grave—and fatal to any viewer who fails to copy and show the tape to another person.

within seven days of viewing it.

A multiple award-winning horror author and prolific writer of critical works on the subject of fatherhood in contemporary Japan, Suzuki is a master of socially conscious popular fiction. As noted in my introduction, Ringu’s publication corresponded with the unfortunate confluence of social, political, and economic developments that mark the 1990s in Japan as a scene of cultural crisis, and has been widely read as reflective of two particular developments that transpired during this period. The first of these concerns the perceived emergence of a new configuration of the shōjo 少女, or adolescent girl, a phenomenon that Valerie Wee describes as follows:

One of the sites of Japanese ‘everyday life’ that appears most threatened and vulnerable is that of the traditional family, and one of the most vulnerable victims of this destabilization is the young (female) child. Consequently, prevailing female adolescent identities have further fragmented, spawning more negatively inflected (stereo-)types.²

The second factor in question is the breakneck pace at which Japanese society has integrated new technologies. As reflected throughout the grander corpus of modern Japanese literature, this process has been addressed with considerable unease from the Meiji period onward. That being said, it is undeniable that the rapid proliferation of digital technologies throughout the public and private spheres in the 1990s not only transformed the relationships of Japanese citizens with one another, but also made immense strides toward collapsing the distance between the island nation and the rest of the globe.

While I will address these and other key thematic components of the novel in this chapter, the following analysis will concentrate on a series of issues that in my view have

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yet to be sufficiently explicated in existing *Ringu* scholarship. More pointedly, this chapter will consider the interconnected concepts of affect, haunting, and technological proliferation in *Ringu* beyond the conventionally gendered lens that has informed other readings of this text. I will begin my analysis with a consideration of artwork and affect in the novel, focusing on Suzuki’s depiction of the television screen as a point of synesthetetic perception and psychic connection. From there I will transition into an exploration of what *Ringu* can contribute to ongoing discussions of how the trope of haunting has been deployed in pop cultural representations of the landscape of contemporary Japan. Finally, I will attempt to shed new light on *Ringu*’s central theme of the viral videotape in order to expand this reading into a consideration of the novel’s implications on an ethical plane. This analysis will draw on the work of a selection of important thinkers working within and across several disciplines, including philosophy, psychoanalytic theory, art and literary criticism, and feminist theory. Moreover, because *Ringu* deals explicitly with issues of aesthetics, trauma, and traumatic witnessing, I will also employ this reading as an occasion to elaborate the theories of Bracha Ettinger, whose writings on femininity, the artwork, and ethics in the postmodern era will inform each of the chapters that comprise this dissertation.

**Tuning In: Artwork, Affect, Encounter**

In his own reading of *Ringu*, Davide Panagia nicely explices the significance of visuality in the text through an examination of the moments of darkness that punctuate the video recording. Noting that these disturbances represent periodic blinks of the filmmaker Sadako’s eye, he writes that each of these cuts represents a moment of “haptic visuality that
differs in important ways from mere ‘seeing.’”\textsuperscript{3} Drawing on the art historical and art critical writings of Louis Marin, Michael Fried, and Gilles Deleuze, Panagia elaborates this distinction, noting that

whereas in ocular visuality, distance matters so that the separation between viewer and object viewed is a buffer that supports the certitude of subjectivity itself (in that one remains certain that one is a viewer viewing an object), haptic visuality relies on that distance in order to collapse it, to bring the body closer to the point of . . . actually entering the painting.”\textsuperscript{4}

Continuing on to an investigation of Gore Verbinsky’s 2002 English-language film adaptation of the novel, Panagia asserts that Ringu’s narrative engages in an inversion of the dynamics of absorption in modernist art. “If the beholder cannot be absorbed into the work of art, and thus collapse the partition of the sensible established by the frame,” he writes, “then the work of art will force its way through the partition in order to enact that collapse. In both cases, however, an eradication of spectatorship occurs.”\textsuperscript{5}

While Panagia’s analysis makes an important contribution to the corpus of scholarship produced on this text to date, his reading both elides over and brings to light a number of important questions. Is Ringu’s preoccupation with the process of viewing, as Panagia argues, truly sufficient to conclude that the text negates potential allegorical readings? If, as I contend, it is not, how might we incorporate into a consideration of visuality in the novel an engagement with the particular subject matter of Ringu’s cursed videotape, whose audience is forced to relive the traumatic memories of its creator, the


\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 43.
murdered Sadako? Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, does Ringu truly present a kind of one-way enterprise in which the viewing subject is forced to contemplate, only to be subsumed by, the image? Alternately, is not Sadako’s video the work of an artist, one that possess a gaze of her own and who, rather than merely rendering the spectator a singular witness to her suffering, implicates the viewer—through the incitement of passion and repulsion, compassion and anxiety—in the assembly of traumatic memory?

As I have noted, criticism devoted to both Suzuki’s novel and its film adaptations reveals an overarching concern with what scholars have identified as the theme of the return of the feminine repressed. In her analysis of Nakata Hideo’s 1998 film, for example, Colette Balmain writes that “through the video virus, Sadako returns to wreck her dreadful revenge against the world of the living, and the restraints of the patriarchal society that demanded the repression of her ‘otherness.’”6 In a comparison of Ringu’s Japanese and American film adaptations Wee echoes Balmain’s reading, asserting that through the figure of Sadako Ringu “exaggerates the selfish, irresponsible connotations of the shōjo to monstrous extremes . . . Sadako’s seeming arrogance, and her refusal to respect patriarchal representatives and structures, hint at contemporary Japanese society’s growing anxieties and concerns regarding the rise of the shōjo [young woman].”7 In his ambitious study of Japanese horror cinema, Jay McRoy argues in yet another analysis of Nakata’s film that “to break a contemporary cycle of literal (within the film’s diegesis) and figurative (socio-cultural) fear, tragically and historically repressed woman must forever be acknowledged,


their silenced voices perpetually recognized if never fully understood.”

In an endeavor to rethink what might be called the problem of vision in *Ringu*, I would first like to briefly revisit the work of Lacan, who writes that the gaze is “presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety.” As Lacan’s lacking gaze approaches the sphere of consciousness, it evokes a sense of the uncanny, an affect that in Freudian terms is linked to the return of the repressed, and which in the work of Lacan likewise rests upon the appearance of a phallic ghost, which in art is constituted by the painting’s object. In my view, it is within this discursive framework that critics such as Balmain, Wee, and McRoy, consciously or not, are led to identify the virtual specter of Sadako as a kind of instance of uncanny allusion: an embodiment of total “otherness,” the “monstrous,” and the “tragically and historically repressed.”

Yet described as “the throb of life [*sei no yakudō 生の躍動*],” the dynamic filmic canvas of *Ringu* seems to challenge the possibility of its own foreclosure, at moments seeping beyond the limits of the screen to touch the viewer to the core, while at others disappearing into itself. How, then, might we move beyond an understanding of Sadako as merely a “phallic ghost,” an unattainable object excised from the Symbolic and the imaginary alike? I contend that the key to unlocking *Ringu* is located somewhere between aesthetic and psychoanalytic considerations of the personal and political implications of

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viewing. Panagia’s aforementioned reading provides a fruitful starting point for such an analysis, while presenting a considerable problem: Can we reconcile a Deleuze-Guattarian framework—which assumes that psychoanalysis is “taking part in the work of a bourgeois repression at its most far-reaching level”\(^{10}\)—with psychoanalysis in order to link the aesthetic sphere to both the psychic plane and historical reality?

Ettinger’s work provides a compelling approach to this conundrum by rethinking the so-called repressed in entirely different terms. Within the phallic paradigm, the viewer, though threatened by the possibility of annihilation vis-à-vis the object’s emergence on the screen, nevertheless occupies a privileged position of object-mastery through visual apprehension. Ettinger views this mode of seeing as one embedded in a “fixed eye,” whose split from the gaze is “constitutive of the subject” and precludes inter-subjectivity.\(^{11}\) To counterbalance this phallic gaze, Ettinger conceives of a matrixial one:

> In the passage from the phallic gaze to the matrixial gaze, we leave the zone of desire for an object, caused by a missing object. We move away from the question of phantasy, into a sphere where desire is for borderlinking and the “object of desire” is not an absence or lack but a process of disappearance whose basis is a traumatic encounter.\(^{12}\)

A “floating eye,” the matrixial gaze likewise threatens the subject, yet at the cost of diffraction constructs a desire to link with a disappearing (distinct from lacking or absent) object and, in doing so, to participate in “a drama wider than that of our individual selves.”\(^{13}\) Moreover, the matrixial gaze is not purely visual; rather, it disturbs visuality by

\(^{10}\) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 50.

\(^{11}\) Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 152.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 146

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 153.
penetrating and altering the scopic field, which is “inseparable from other unconscious dimensions of the psyche and informed by different sources of sensation (changes in pressure, movement, touch, sound, etc.), and also connected to the unconscious of others.”

Ettinger’s matrixial gaze offers unique insights into Ringu by providing an unconventional framework for thinking about the novel’s concern with the lingering effects of viewing. In the text’s opening pages, the sensations experienced by the videotape’s first victim, Tomoko, are casually linked to her earlier encounter with the dynamic scenes imprinted on the videotape. This suggests that traces of the film’s images remain etched upon one’s psyche even long after the immediate effects of viewing have subsided. “It was strangely humid, although it hadn’t rained in several days,” the narrator writes.

Sweat seeped from her body, and a nearly imperceptible dampness hung in the air of the room. Tomoko unconsciously slapped at her thigh; yet, when she moved her hand away, no sign of a smashed mosquito could be found. She felt an itch concentrated at a point atop her knee, but maybe it was just in her head.

As the scene continues, the surrounding atmosphere grows increasingly saturated with indicators of Sadako’s presence:

The scent of flesh, decayed and sour, infused the air, enveloping her. But it couldn’t be anything material . . . The sinister chill that had washed over her shoulders now expanded to her back, creeping down her spine, ever lower and lower. Cold sweat soaked her T-shirt. Pure and simple, these physical changes were too strong for it to be just her imagination.

Tomoko is subsequently possessed by a desire to turn around, and the chapter concludes

14 Ibid., 124.

15 Suzuki, Ringu, 8.

16 Ibid., 11.
with her implied death.

As *Ringu*’s plot progresses, the sheer power of Sadako’s film to inscribe itself into the viewer will become a major focal point of the novel. In Asakawa’s own initial encounter with the videotape, for example, the journalist is depicted as experiencing simultaneous feelings of horror and fascination, the latter of which compels him to continue his viewing even in spite of his fear. “Amazingly, he felt no desire to press stop,” writes the narrator, interrupting the scene described at the outset of this chapter. “Not because he was unafraid of the dead, but because this intense stream of energy felt good.”

Here *Ringu*’s protagonist is not merely caught up in his own libidinal energy, riding an unconscious drive toward a lost object only to reach an impenetrable wall in the field of representation. Rather, as the scene’s continuation reveals, Asakawa, like Tomoko, is implicated in a form of exchange that transgresses the purely scopic sphere to expand into a multi-sensory dimension jointly constructed by his own psyche and that of Sadako:

On-screen, he now saw hands embracing the baby . . . His gaze fixed upon the screen, Asakawa found himself holding his own hands in the same position as the person in the image. Its birth cry was audible directly below his chin. Startled, Asakawa withdrew his hands. He had felt something. It was warm and wet—amniotic fluid, or blood—and the weight of a small amount of flesh . . . An odor lingered. The faint smell of blood—had it flowed out from the womb, or . . . His skin felt wet. But in reality, his hands weren’t even moist. Asakawa restored his gaze to the screen.

Soon thereafter the scenery on the screen transforms, this time into the image of a single word: *Sada*, the first of the two characters that comprise Sadako’s name. “The character grew agitated, distorted,” writes the narrator, “and as it transformed into another—*kai*”

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17 Ibid., 86.

18 Ibid., 88-89.
— it began to fade. It disappeared entirely, like chalk on a blackboard wiped with a damp rag.”

For Ettinger, the *matrixial gaze* represents a passageway into a paradigm of encounter that, as noted in my introduction, is modeled on the unborn child’s pre-natal linkages with the mother—that is, on a moment in which both parties are participant in a process of simultaneous becoming and differentiation in and through one other. It is in this way that Ettinger develops her theory of the *matrixial borderspace*, an affective sphere of encounter that at once co-exists with and transgresses the limits of representation. The image presented in the first of the two scenes described above represents not a projection of Sadako’s pure memory of the birth of her deceased younger brother, but rather a jointly constructed memory of the infant’s entrance into the world. In this exchange Asakawa fulfills those roles which the artist alone cannot, engaging with the image of the infant through sound and touch and thus contributing to the film itself a synesthetic dynamic that is practically unavailable to the artist. This expansion of the screen beyond its own physical limits suggests a kind of *matrixial* encounter, a moment of participatory witnessing that necessarily transcends the psychic domain of any one discrete subject in order to arrive at a glimpse (if only momentary) at that which cannot be articulated through conventional forms of representation.

The second of these scenes, in which the character *Sada* appears intermittently, distortedly, on the television screen, likewise opens itself up to an Ettingerian reading. Central to Ettinger’s model are the concepts of disappearance (as distinguished from lack)

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19 Ibid., 90.
and becoming, which are conceived not as oppositional processes but rather as parts of an event that is transformative not only to the viewing subject, but also to the artwork itself. Here the character for Sada—vacillating between visible and invisible until it is all but effaced—plays on detective fiction conventions, providing an enigmatic yet vital clue in Asakawa’s journey to discover the hidden origins of the cursed videotape. At the same time, however, this scene offers also a unique spin on genre convention by emphasizing not the spectator’s desire to recover an event that has been irremediably lost, but rather a dimension of viewing guided by trans-subjectivity, which is requisite to the re-assembly of Sadako’s fragmented memories. Significantly, this relationality is referenced at multiple other junctures in the narrative, often in a manner reminiscent of Ettinger’s concept of “co-fading,” in other words, in a way that emphasizes the necessity that each subject surrender a piece of the self in order to create space for the partial emergence of others. In describing Ryūji’s climactic death scene, for instance, the narrator writes, “His sense of reality was growing remote . . . that was Ryūji’s impression. And as reality parted, Ryūji’s body was surrounded by an empty space, in which an unfamiliar spiritual presence drifted.”

In this way Ringu employs the television screen as a stage for illuminating the simultaneous functioning of both the phallic and matrixial planes of the psyche. As such, Sadako’s spectral return may be understood as an uncanny one on two planes. The first is in a Freudian sense—that is, in terms of producing an anxiety akin to that experienced by Nathaniel in E.T.A. Hoffman’s “Der Sandmann” (The Sandman, 1816), a story which for Freud plays out an Oedipal tale in which the fear of losing one’s eyes (both literally and figuratively) stands in for the threat of castration. Expanding this into a Lacanian model, we

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20 Ibid., 300.
might also say that the film’s viewer is thrust into a space of anxiety owing to an inability to attach the image before him—gazing back at him—to a signifier, and is thus reminded of a lack at center of the Symbolic. While the memory of Sadako is indeed symbolically foreclosed, however, the ghost also eludes its own repression, revealing itself in the form of a haunting—and, importantly, jointly constructed—affect through the borderspace of the artwork. The uncanny in this sense is relational in a non-Oedipal fashion, concerning itself with links with an unremembered other that is not yet an Other.

**In and Out Sadako’s Well: Rethinking the Phantom Feminine**

If, as I have argued, *Ringu* seeks to illuminate a shareable dimension of the psyche whose point of access is located in the aesthetic, what might Sadako’s spectral return contribute to grander discussions of the contemporary Japanese cultural landscape? In a related vein, how might the novel be said to conform to and/or deviate from other Japanese pop cultural engagements with gender in relation to the perceived boundaries demarcating the limits of the “real world” and the “other side”? As noted in my introduction, modern Japanese literature frequently operates within a heavily gendered framework according to which femininity is aligned with extra-cultural forces that offer solace from the so-called “real world,” on the one hand, or pose a risk to masculocentric domains, on the other. In her study of the fantastic in modern Japanese literature, for example, Susan Napier, like Tsuruta Kin’ya, notes that Japanese writers of the prewar period frequently constructed female figures as modes of escape, as fantasy women “whose luminous maternity in the pages of a Tanizaki novel or a Kyōka story offered a refuge from the turmoil of the real
world.”\textsuperscript{21} Expanding her discussion into a consideration of later texts, Napier points out that prewar literary constructions of femininity evolved considerably in the postwar years, during which a growing sense of despair in Japan contributed to the proliferation of fictional women who “do not seem to offer opportunities for either vengeance against the modern or escape from the modern. Instead, women seem to have become increasingly Other, unreachable, even demonic.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Ringu} thus belongs to a vast web of Japanese narratives that situate the feminine at the axiom of a landscape seemingly located outside of the realm of the everyday. And, as noted in the outset of this chapter, the novel has commonly been read as participating in the types of discourses highlighted by Tsuruta and Napier, presenting the figure of Sadako as a kind of otherworldly threat to hegemonic masculinity. It is true that Sadako possesses certain markers that identify her, in various ways, with the diverse lineage of representational trends identified by Tsuruta, Napier, and others. Through her associations with the spectral realm, on the one hand, and the technological one, on the other, Sadako is an embodiment of the unfamiliar. She also possesses powerful psychic abilities—inherits from her mother—that are represented as unsettling at best, and motive for the destruction of women at worst. Finally, Sadako is constructed both as an object of desire and a locus of abject horror, a beautiful but deadly threat to the psyche and bodily integrity of the viewer.

That being said, \textit{Ringu} also complicates a number of the dichotomies—real and unreal, this side and the other, masculinity and femininity—upon which Japanese genre

\textsuperscript{21} Napier, \textit{The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature}, 13.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 57.
narratives are commonly perceived to rely. One of the most conspicuous ways in which this is achieved can be located in the construction of Sadako’s body as an intersexed one (a plot point that is omitted entirely from Nakata’s film adaptation) that in its ambiguity represents both an embodiment of “power and beauty [chikara to bi 力と美]” and a site that serves to undermine the male gaze (on the part of both Asakawa and Sadako’s rapist Nagao) by generating the uncanny feeling of “doubting one’s eyes [me o utagatta koto 目を疑った事].” Because my next chapter will be dedicated largely to exploring the sexually fluid body in Zeusu no ori, I will not expand upon this issue here except to acknowledge that what we encounter in Ringu is a largely ambivalent vision of Sadako that is both predicated upon and transgressive of popular assumptions concerning the intersexed body. More pointedly, the novel’s construction of Sadako’s body as such is perhaps one of its most contentious elements in its casting of the intersexed body as, to borrow from sociologist Morgan Holmes’s analysis of Anaïs Nin’s short story “Moufaka,” “deliberately and willfully confusing.”

With the hope that my subsequent chapter might offer some retrospective insight into the ambivalent figuring of the intersexed body in Ringu, I would like to point out that the revelation of Sadako’s sexually ambiguous status would appear to be designed as a means of reinforcing the novel’s almost obsessive engagement with the concept of nonduality. Upon discovering that Sadako’s rapist is the last smallpox patient in Japan, for instance, Ryūji explains that “viruses wander the border between the living and non-living. Some even say they were the original basis of human genes. But we have no idea from

where or how they emerged.” In a later scene that links Sadako’s infectious videotape to the reality that she had been raped by a smallpox victim, the narrator writes, “It is said that in the distant past God and the Devil, cells and viruses, male and female, even light and darkness had existed as one and the same, with no internal contradiction.”

This same concern with non-duality is explored in a more nuanced fashion through the mechanism of Sadako’s spectral return. The abstract images that comprise the videotape in the scene described at the outset of this chapter represent a long series of traumatic events in Sadako’s life: the death of her infant brother, her humiliation before a crowd of scientists demanding that she display her psychic powers, her rape at the hands of a trusted physician, and, finally, her untimely and violent death. Interestingly, however, it is only through her re-birth from the well and into the form of a virtual ghost that Sadako is freed from the constraints of the human form, and thus enabled to tap into the full potential of her affective power. In this way, Sadako’s transition out of an enfleshed form and into a virtual one serves to challenge our privileging of the discrete mind and body over the radical interactivity that comprises the virtual domain.

I would like to postpone a discussion of the full implications of Sadako’s re-birth as a kind of techno-body in order to linger on the question of what her ghostly return can contribute to our understanding of the pervasive theme of haunting in contemporary Japan. In exploring this topic, it is important to acknowledge from the outset the reality that Japan, like many other regions across the globe, is haunted. Not only in a figurative sense—that is, by ghosts of the past or specters of the future—but also, it would seem, in a literal sense.

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25 Ibid., 294.
one. To be sure, folklore in Japan, as elsewhere, functions as an allegorical tool, providing a means of thinking through national trauma, historical change, and cultural anxieties. Beyond this, however, the maintenance of traditional Buddhist festivals such as Obon (a tradition dedicating to honoring ancestral spirits), the continuing practice of visiting shrines and temples to pray to *kami*, the belief among many in such phenomenon as *kami-kakushi* (mysterious disappearances attributed to supernatural beings), the persistence of a variety of spiritual therapies dedicated to communicating with and/or appeasing the spirits of guardians and deceased loved ones, and the longevity of pet memorial rites as a practice in contemporary Japan (to name but a few examples)\(^\text{26}\) suggest that within the Japanese cultural imaginary, ghosts themselves are alive and well.

The landscape of Japan has likewise been imbued with ghostly elements throughout the modern period via the continued oral and written transmission of a wealth of supernatural tales. In “Yamakaji” (Forest Fire), one of many essays that comprise his 1972 *Osanaki hi no koto* (Memories of Childhood), Inoue Yasushi relates his memories of children gathering to listen to their parents recount *obake no hanashi* (stories of ghost or goblins). And, similar to that of *Ringu*’s protagonist, Inoue and the other children’s experience of these stories as frightening would appear to have been somewhat tempered by their fascination. “While these tales were

scary,” he explains, “they also aroused our curiosity.”

Also important to an understanding of the role of supernatural literature in modern Japanese culture is the work of folklorist Yanagita Kunio, in whose stories Melek Ortabasi identifies an attempt to cast the phenomenon of haunting as a kind of collective form of material and psychic interaction:

The externalized psychology that Yanagita conveys in *Tales of Tōno* clearly differs from the internal, mental, and highly personal representation of reality that his realist literary peers favored—and the rationalistic (and yet romantic) view of nature that resulted from this attitude. Reality for the citizens of Tōno, as Yanagita portrays it, is not simply what each individual feels about his or her own experiences or surroundings. Rather, it is a physical/spiritual ecosystem, populated by a variety of natural and supernatural beings who find themselves in mutually affective relationships.

In contrast to Yanagita’s work, Ortabasi highlights what I perceive to be one of the primary functions of supernatural literature in contemporary Japan. As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Karatani Kōjin writes that in the modern period Japanese literary conceptualizations of landscape became increasingly aligned with a European principle of perspective, in which “position” encompasses “the totality of what can be apprehended by a single person with a fixed point of vision.” Yanagita’s debut work, published in 1910, challenges such an understanding of the task of modern literature. Through the retelling of folk legends from the past, in other words, *Tōno monogatari* attempts to revitalize a worldview according to which humanity 

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27 Inoue Yasushi, “Yamakaji,” in *Osanaki hi no koto; Seishun hōrō* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976), 188.


intricately and intimately connected with supernatural beings, be they ancestral spirits, deities, or specters of a catastrophic past.

This figuring of the modern landscape as a kind of ecosystem inhabited by both natural and supernatural beings is sustained in many contemporary Japanese narratives. And while some works in this vein, like Ringu, seem to push the limits of the imagination, others impress the reader most strongly in their matter-of-fact approach to the possibility that ghosts maintain a strong presence within the everyday. Yet another of Suzuki’s novels, Esu エス (Edge, 2008), relies heavily on this assumption: surprisingly few of its characters express doubts when a psychic is commissioned to aid in the investigation of a family’s mysterious disappearance. In Ayatsuji Yukito’s 綾辻行人 2009 mystery novel Anazā アナザア (Another), an entire middle school operates according to the belief that at least one student each year is a specter returned from the grave. Higashino Keigo’s 東野圭吾 award-winning 1998 novel Himitsu 秘密 (Secret, translated into English under the title Naoko) depicts a man who is disturbingly undisturbed by the revelation that his eleven-year-old daughter Monami’s body has been possessed by the spirit of his deceased wife Naoko.

Returning to Ringu, Suzuki’s use of the well as a topos for staging the female specter represents one of the text’s most explicit modes of transposing Japan’s long history of supernatural narratives onto the contemporary landscape. Throughout early modern Japanese fiction, instances of haunting frequently transpire in close proximity to bodies of water, which are heavily associated with both the pacification of spirits and the theme of ghostly return—and perhaps especially the image of the ubume 産女, a ghost associated with pregnancy and childbirth. On the early modern kabuki stage, bodies of water also
served to enhance the spectacular visual components of a performance, providing an oppor-
tunity for actors to leap into and out of the water while performing the roles of female characters returned from the grave to seek revenge on their persecutors.\textsuperscript{30} As many critics have noted, \textit{Ringu}'s Sadako is loosely based on one particularly famous well-dwelling ghost: Okiku, who is featured in the Edo-period tale \textit{Banchō sarayashiki} 番町皿屋敷 (The Dish Mansion at Banchō). After refusing the advances of her \textit{samurai} employer, Okiku is falsely accused of the crime of breaking a precious household plate, and is subjected to the punishment of death. She is thrown down a well to die, and each night her voice cries out from the depths of her watery grave, tormenting her cruel former master.

Yet while \textit{Ringu}'s well is commonly viewed as a referent to one principal work of Edo fiction, this image should also be considered within the context of the modern Japanese cultural imaginary. This is not to suggest that \textit{Ringu} bears no relation to pre-modern Japanese literary traditions; rather, it is to say that this novel embodies the potential to tell us something about \textit{why} the haunted landscape of old Japan continues to be resurrected in a variety of innovative forms throughout the modern period. Significantly, wells and similarly enclosed, watery spaces are prominently featured in a considerable number of modern Japanese supernatural tales. In “Yamakaji” Inoue gets to the very heart of this matter, describing in his discussion of \textit{obake no hanashi} something akin to the ecosystem cited by Ortabasi: “What was truly scary was not the ghosts themselves,” Inoue writes, “but rather the feeling aroused when one traveled alone to a waterfall, a pool of deep water, or

\textsuperscript{30} For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Satoko Shimazaki, “The End of the ‘World’: Tsuruya Nanboku IV’s Female Ghosts and Late-Tokugawa Kabuki,” \textit{Monumenta Nipponica} 66.2 (2011): 209-247.
the like. This gave rise to the notion that aside from myself, no one else is here. There is no one present but me—and yet, I am not alone. While not visible to the eye, something else is here. There are ancestral spirits in the waterfalls, ghosts in the deep pools of water.”31

Contemporary Japanese fiction, too, has imaginatively deployed water imagery to signify the spectral realm in a variety of ways. Suzuki himself is particularly fond of this trope, which appears not only in Ringu, but also in “Anagura” 穴ぐら (The Hole) and “Fuyū suru mizu” 浮遊する水 (Floating Water), included in the short story collection Honogurai mizu no soko kara 仄暗い水の底から (From the Dark Water). Wells likewise appear as an important trope in other contemporary texts—perhaps most notably in Murakami Haruki’s two novels Nejimakidori kuronikuru ねじまき鳥クロニクル (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle, 1994-95) and Noruwei no mori ノルウェイの森 (Norwegian Wood, 1987).

While the pervasiveness of the image of the well in contemporary fiction might be accounted for in a number of ways, I would like to emphasize here that in the works named above wells are positioned as geographical sites that enable characters to momentarily transcend the physiological and psychological confines of the so-called “real” world. In the work of Freud, images of enclosed, watery spaces, as well as fears of being buried alive, are connected to subconscious fantasies of intra-uterine existence. Within this framework the womb is figured as a passive, exclusively internal receptacle from which the subject is cut off, and whose re-appearance at the edge of the real produces the feelings of anxiety in which the uncanny is embedded. In certain respects, Ringu’s well may be said to resonate with a Freudian vision of the womb. In one scene, for instance, Asakawa himself descends

31 Inoue, “Yamakaji,” 189.
into the well in search of Sadako’s remains and is confronted by the sheer horror of being enclosed in a tomb that is throbbing with Sadako’s psychic energy. Unable to subdue his fear of internment in this heavily feminized space, he loses consciousness. That Sadako is depicted as psychically compelling her rapist to murder her also lends itself to a Freudian reading, suggesting her desire to bring about her body’s return to its own dark, moist origins in an eternal escape from the eyes of a culture unable to abide either her enigmatic physicality or her psychic prowess.

Significantly, however, the mouth of the well functions not only as Sadako’s passageway out of the living world, but also as her means of re-entering it (both physically, upon Asakawa’s discovery of her remains, and in spectral form, through the psychic traces imprinted on her videotape). Elsewhere in *Ringu* the image of the well is employed to further demonstrate the fragility of the border separating the land of the living and the afterlife. When Asakawa’s investigation into the origins of the videotape lead him to cabin B-4—the site of Sadako’s watery grave—for instance, the narrator writes, “B-4, the room in which Asakawa would be spending the night, in some way seemed to rest at the border between the light and dark.”32 In this respect, Sadako’s well is less similar to Freud’s envisioning of the womb than it is to Ettinger’s *matrix*, a borderspace that “spreads out between the trauma and phantasy of each becoming-subject as it experiences the relationship in contact with the trauma and phantasy of its specific becoming-m/Other-to-be.”33 The construction of wells and the like as spaces infused with abundant psychic potential is also visible in many of the other works cited above. In Suzuki’s “Fuyū suru

32 Ibid., 70.

mizu,” a young ghost returns from her watery grave not so much for the purpose of revenge, but rather to establish an intimate connection with a living being who is sensitive to the presence of phantoms. In the work of Murakami, wells, while not explicitly linked to the theme of ghostly re-birth, are nevertheless figured as haunted spaces through which characters are enabled both to plumb the depths of their own subconscious minds and encounter traces of distant others.34

Ringu moves toward an understanding of the ghostly realm as intimately linked with the so-called “real world” in other respects, as well. Long before the novel reaches its climax, its characters begin to dispense with scientific methods of explicating supernatural phenomenon to hint at the possibility that the spirit world is not only a thing of myth. In one early scene, for instance, Asakawa finds himself contemplating the intersection of the living and ghostly domains upon discovering that his young daughter, Yoko, has become frightened by a demon mask:

It is understood that a child experiencing the sound of a thunderbolt or the strike of lightning for the first time is instinctually frightened. To begin, thunder truly exists. But . . . but . . . demons? If one were to refer to a dictionary entry for demons, he would learn that they were made-up monsters, or the spirits of the dead. If Yoko was afraid of the demon because of its scary face, she also should have feared the equally frightening faces of the Godzilla models—after all, they were made to look fearsome, too. She had seen one once, in a department store show window—an elaborately constructed

34 In The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, for instance, Lieutenant Mamiya recounts his period of isolation in a well, claiming, “the wind made an uncanny sound at the mouth of the well, a sound like the moan of a woman in tears in a far-off world. That world and this were joined by a narrow shaft, through which her voice reached me here, though only at long, irregular intervals.” In Norwegian Wood, the well is but a figment of an overactive imagination on the part of the whimsical yet deeply troubled character Naoko. Yet, the narrator explains, “I was never able to think of that meadow scene without the well. From that day forward, the image of a thing I had never laid eyes on became inseparably fused to the actual scene of the field that lay before me.” Murakami Haruki, Norwegian Wood, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage, 2010), 5-6. The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage, 1998), 164.
Godzilla replica. Far from being frightened, she had gazed at it intently, her eyes glittering with curiosity. How might he explain this? The only thing that was clear was that Godzilla, no matter how you looked at it, was an imaginary monster. Demons, on the other hand... Later, as Asakawa and Ryūji contemplate the existence of an afterlife, they stumble upon the possibility that the birth of life is accompanied by a form of energy that, after one has expired, persists in the form of an apparition—in other words, that "ideas are life forms, possessing energy of their own." In this way, physical spaces and philosophical musings combine to reinforce the notion that ghosts and demons, far from residing beyond the bounds of the civilized world, maintain a strong presence within the modern cultural landscape. This notion is underscored, if also complicated, by the reality that Sadako’s ghost manifests through a virtual medium. Physically located at the very heart of the modern household, the television set, along with Sadako’s second mode of communication, the telephone, is at once an undeniably "real" object and a device that serves to mediate between the human viewer (or, in the case of the phone, the listener) and the intangible airwaves on the "other side." As an all-too-familiar image that ultimately serves as a passageway linking the real with the ostensibly unreal, the television set is transformed into a multi-dimensional psychic space the moment the airwaves are hijacked by Sadako, again serving to highlight the fluidity of the boundaries between the world of the living and that of the dead.  

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36 Ibid., 185.

37 As an aside, the representation of television sets and telephones as objects that
I will expand on the trope of technology in *Ringu* in the final section of this chapter. In concluding this one, then, I would like to draw attention to a comment written by Michael Dylan Foster, who, in his essay on *tanuki* and ghost trains, articulates the effects of haunting as follows:

The phenomenon of simultaneously being *physically present in one time but affectively connected to another time* can cause the cognitive and contextual disorientation of haunting. In other words, haunting articulates an impossible copresence; it is the bewilderment a subject feels when two times are simultaneously experienced in the same place.38

Returning to the notion of “doubting one’s eyes,” Foster’s observation may be extended to explain the uncanny effect of Sadako’s return not only in terms of a suspension in time, but also in terms of the novel’s re-mapping of the landscapes of the living and spiritual realms onto one another. Unlike in the texts identified by Tsuruta, in which the male-oriented realm of culture is geographically distanced from the female-dominated natural world, in *Ringu* the “real” world is acknowledged as intrinsically permeable to, even already always a part of, the “other side.” When, owing to the series of deaths linked to the videotape, this notion becomes an undeniable reality for the novel’s characters, they are awakened to an alternate dimension of experience guided not by a collision of seemingly disparate physical spaces, but rather by a (quite literally) buried-alive psychic landscape: “Each and every one of those scenes in the video,” Ryūji remarks, “represents the powerful

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workings of Yamamura Sadako’s will and thoughts, captured in an instant.”39

Sadako thus functions as a reminder of the abiding presence of ghosts within a cultural landscape that ostensibly has its point of origin in the individual psyche. Moreover, by virtue of her refusal to remain in the grave this figure evades her own foreclosure, obliging a society that has allowed her to slip from memory to acknowledge the traumatic circumstances surrounding her life and death. In this way Ringu at once reproduces and frustrates popular representations of the phantom female as a locus of the repressed, countering abjection with a form of uncanny experience that moves toward what Foster terms a “copresence” and Ettinger, in a more radical twist, a “shareable subjectivity.”

Technology, Trauma, and the Ethics of Contagion

As Ringu moves toward its conclusion, Asakawa and Ryūji together solve the mystery of the cursed videotape, discovering (too late for Ryūji) that the key to surviving a viewing of the film is to replicate the video and show it to others. Yet this crucial discovery does not, as in the conventional detective story, serve to restore social order. Rather, in an innovative inversion of established form, it imagines a scenario in which all of humankind is compelled to bear witness to Sadako’s traumatic memories or pay a deadly price:

Her resentment toward the masses who had driven her father and mother to their deaths and the smallpox virus’s resentment toward the human wisdom that had driven it to the brink of extinction had converged in the body of a singular person, Yamamura Sadako, and had re-materialized in the world in a form beyond all imagination. Asakawa and his family, along with all of those who had seen the video, had been latently infected with this virus. They were carriers. And viruses creep directly into the genes, the nucleus of life. What would be born of this, at the moment one couldn’t know. How might it impact the course of human history—no, of human evolution?40

39 Suzuki, Ringu, 231.

40 Ibid., 324-25.
Having unraveled the mystery of *Ringu*'s deadly videotape—whose viewers are doomed to die in seven days unless they copy and show it to other potential victims—Asakawa is faced with a crucial decision: Should he allow his wife and daughter to watch the tape and die, thereby concluding the life cycle of the virus? Or should he save his loved ones at the cost of the virus’s endless proliferation throughout the subconscious minds of all of humankind? In the novel’s somewhat equivocal final scene we are led to believe that he has chosen the latter, thanks in part to the subliminal influence of the video itself.

The trope of virtuality has become a dominant trans-genre, trans-media landscape throughout contemporary Japanese popular media, as well as an oft-discussed topic in discourses on postwar Japanese identity. Foregrounding the issue of subjectivity, a number of scholars have addressed this theme in interesting ways. For Napier, such narratives as *Shin Seiki Evangelion* 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1995-96) and *Shiriaru eksuperimentsu Rein* シリアルエクスペリメンツレイイン (*Serial Experiments Lain*, 1998)—both of which have much in common with *Ringu* in terms of the representation of technology—present “deeply pessimistic visions” of post-modernity, visions evocative of what Jeffrey Sconce describes in his study of haunted media as a culture in which “where there were once whole human subjects, there are now only fragmented and decentered subjectivities, metaphors of ‘simulation’ and ‘schizophrenia.’”

For Yumiko Iida, too, the virtual has the capacity to fracture, even subvert, the real,

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resulting in a kind of “schizophrenic divide” in modern subjectivity. “One might infer that this limitless expansion of virtual imagery assaults our familiar notions of the self, the body, and the world,” she writes in her discussion of the “crisis of modernity” in 1990s Japan, “and inclines the subject to search for a point where the increasingly unbearable conditions of being torn between an assumed identity and the lack of its real content can be transcended.”

In his essay on the phenomenology of anime, Christopher Bolton, drawing on the work of Vivan Sobchack, likewise considers the implications of technology, and especially visuality, for our understanding of Japanese subjectivity in the postmodern era:

The film’s body is not directly visible, but the spectator can posit it or fill it in by comparing the film’s vision with his or her own and extrapolating a body that belongs to that filmed vision. For that to happen, however, the way in which the film views the world must have a coherence that allows us to relate its vision to our own . . . In the electronic (as opposed to the cinematic) regime, the film’s act of seeing loses this coherence, and we become unable to imagine a coherent viewing subject with a coherent body to accompany it . . . we might say that if this electronic vision does have a body, it is a networked (not even mechanical) body that we can no longer relate to our human one.

These and other critics identify the diverse corpus of Japanese popular engagements with virtuality as reflective of a kind of schizophrenic cultural condition stemming from what Napier describes as the possibility that “reality may ultimately be simply a creation of the mind.” Without denying the legitimacy of such approaches to the role of the virtual in shaping contemporary Japanese notions of subjectivity, I contend that exchanging the

42 Iida, “Between the Technique of Living an Endless Routine,” 456.


44 Napier, “When the Machines Stop,” 120.
rhetoric of psychological illness with an alternative framework might open up *Ringu*, and undoubtedly other texts, as well, to a subtly but importantly different reading. More pointedly, if we decline to pathologize the “symptoms”—disorientation, fracturing, identity loss—described above, we arrive at the possibility that this so-called condition, which Fredric Jameson (drawing on Lacan) links to “the failure of an infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language,” represents a psychic dimension available to all subjects, even long after our transition into the Symbolic realm.

Others have begun to pave the way for such an understanding of *Ringu*. Kawamura Minato 川村満, for instance, writes that while the novel begins as a conventional story of “retribution [inga 因果],” the narrative abandons this focus in its transformation into a text heavily informed by “biochemistry-related knowledge [seikagakuteki na chishiki 生化学的な知識].” Timothy Iles echoes Kawamura’s notion that *Ringu* is eminently concerned with the complex processes of signaling and energy flow involved in life, writing that the revelation of Sadako’s identity “does not pull her out from the realm of the indeterminate, does not root her in the categorized reality which harbors the ‘safe’ status quo, but rather affirms her as in effect a commodity to be transferred from one person to the next, bringing with her the constant deferral of a concretized, unique individuality.”

The irony of dwelling on the trope of viral reproduction in order to challenge the

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medicalizing rhetoric outlined earlier is not lost on me; nevertheless, this is precisely what I intend to do here. For the remainder of this chapter I will consider two possible ways of thinking about the problem of technological proliferation in *Ringu* by drawing connections between the novel’s central theme of the virtual virus and the concept of simulacra as envisioned in two major philosophical works. The first of these is Jean Baudrillard’s 1981 treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*. The second is Deleuze and Guattari’s 1972 *Anti-Oedipus*, which informs Ettinger’s own view of contemporary art.

For Baudrillard, the simulacra is linked to the concept of the hyperreal, described in his work as a Disneyland-like conglomeration of “illusions and phantasms” that in its excess functions to preserve the false impression that everything outside of it is real.48 “By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth,” he writes,

> the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials—worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.49

For Baudrillard, then, the proliferation of simulacra is rapidly approaching a postmodern “real” that is itself pre-defined by simulacrum, rendering obsolete the once-meaningful distinctions between “fantasy” and “reality,” “copy” and “original.” Baudrillard’s pessimistic vision offers one potentially fruitful way of approaching *Ringu*’s central theme

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49 Ibid., 2.
of viral reproduction. If we understand Sadako’s videotape as functioning similarly to media as defined by Baudrillard—as “a kind of genetic code that directs the mutation of the real into the hyperreal”\textsuperscript{50}—then the end results of its proliferation can only be the foreclosure of the possibility of an active subject and, in turn, the emergence of a form of nihilism embedded in the anticipation of humankind’s own inevitable disappearance.

Yet might we not also understand the viral element of Sadako’s videotape in a less apocalyptic way? I suggest that a reading of the novel may also be informed by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who not only cast the possibilities embodied by the act of reproduction in a far more optimistic light, but even go so far as to suggest that doing so is an ethical imperative:

Universal history is nothing more than a theology if it does not seize control of the conditions of its contingent, singular existence, its irony, and its own critique. And what are these conditions, this point where the autocritique is possible and necessary? To discover beneath the familial reduction the nature of the social investments of the unconscious. To discover beneath the individual fantasy the nature of group fantasies. Or, what amounts to the same thing, to push the simulacrum to the point where it ceases to be the image of an image, so as to discover the abstract figures, the schizzes-flows that it harbors and conceals. To substitute, for the private subject of castration, split into a subject of enunciation and a subject of the statement relating only to the two orders of personal images, the collective agents of enunciation that for their part refer to machinic arrangements. To overturn the theater of representation into the order of desiring-production: this is the whole task of schizoanalysis.\textsuperscript{51}

Into Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of the simulacrum as a mode of transgression Ettinger inserts the concept of the \textit{matrixial}, which likewise serves to collapse the distinction between “original” and “ready-made” artworks in order that the two, rather than standing in contradiction, “make each other swerve further with new

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 32.

\textsuperscript{51} Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus}, 271.
exchanges.” More plainly, Ettinger posits that the act of creating an original artwork and that of artistic borrowing do not represent fundamentally different points on the aesthetic spectrum. Rather, she claims, both seek to give form to something archaic, something that cannot be wholly captured by the individual artist owing to the limitations of available forms of representation. Thus, the act of reproducing an original artwork serves to sustain elements of the original’s vision while also adding to it a new dimension. In turn, through reproduction the artwork is both continually transformed and continually transformative, a participatory event jointly constructed by multiple artists and multiple viewers.

In my view, this notion offers not only a novel approach to the grander subject of the post-traumatic artwork, but also important insights concerning Ringu’s central theme of viral reproduction. To be sure, Sadako’s cursed videotape gives birth to a dystopian vision of the future wherein all of humankind is implicated in the transmission of a deadly disease that, like Sadako herself, has survived its own attempted eradication. Yet the viral nature of the videotape also underscores the artwork’s mutative qualities, suggesting that as Sadako’s simulacratic video proliferates, it will both inscribe and be inscribed by an endless series of viewers.

In this way Ringu deploys the motif of the video virus to develop a vision of subjectivity akin to what Scott Bukatman describes as a “terminal identity,” that is, “a potentially subversive reconception of the subject that situates the human and the technological as coextensive, codependent, and mutually defining.”

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52 Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 234.

however, the process of becoming this new subject entails embracing the primary tropes of postmodern science fiction: “the waning of affect, the erosion of meaning and representation, the rise of spectacle and simulacra, and the demise of history.” 

Contrastingly, within the context of an Ettingerian model, *Ringu*’s engagement with the virtual might instead be understood as attempting to excavate those very things that the postmodern, post-traumatic world would have us forget.

*Ringu*’s implications thus extend beyond the aesthetic plane by raising the possibility of a future in which not relating to others is an impossibility. This challenge to humanist models of subjectivity is most potently expressed in the trope of a virus that is intimately and intricately linked to the feminine. Yet as I have attempted to illustrate, the feminine in *Ringu* is not conceived solely within the context of conventional gender paradigms. Rather, here procreation is detached from the sexed body and replaced by the modes of viral and technological proliferation in order to reveal a dimension of obligatory interconnectivity that transcends gendered configurations of the body and psyche. Such a mode of femininity, Ettinger writes, “transforms from within what it means to be a subject, for it is the kernel of ethical being, the ultimate measure of the ethical relationship.”

In my view, in its concluding suggestion that Sadako’s virus will inform the course of human evolution, *Ringu* anticipates humankind’s entrance into, or perhaps its return to, an epistemological era whose landscape reverberates with echoes of trauma, buried but not repressed, unremembered but not forgotten.

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54 Ibid., 246.

Chapter 2
Queering (Outer) Space: Sexuality and Subjectivity in Zeusu no ori

“The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-information entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction,” writes N. Katherine Hayles.

The presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the “wills of others” is undercut in the posthuman, for the posthuman’s collective heterogeneous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another . . . If “human essence” is freedom from the wills of others, the posthuman is “post” not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will.1

Posthuman visions have gained a tenacious foothold in the Japanese cultural imaginary, frequently taking the shape of cyborg figures whose transformations into flesh-metal hybrids evince the negative ramifications of boundary transgression. As Rosi Braidotti notes, however, global discourses in this vein have also engendered considerably more affirmative visions of posthuman subjectivity, according to which

the enfleshed and extended, relational self keeps the techno-hype in check by a sustainable ethics of transformations. This sober position pleads for resistance to both the fatal attraction of nostalgia and the fantasy of trans-humanist and other techno-utopias. It also juxtaposes the rhetoric of “the desire to be wired,” to a more radical sense of the materialism of “proud to be flesh.”2

This chapter will explore what I view to be a unique formulation of the posthuman subject in contemporary Japanese science fiction through an analysis of Ueda Sayuri’s 2004 novel Zeusu no ori (Cage of Zeus).

1 N. Katherine Hayles, How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3-4.

For a writer whose career has spanned just a little more than a decade, Ueda is a highly successful one. In 2003 she was awarded the Komatsu Sakyō Prize (2003), and she subsequently earned both The Mystery Writers of Japan Award (2011 and 2014) and the prestigious Nihon SF Taishō Award (2011). Ueda cites a broad spectrum of influences, from Komatsu Sakyō’s 小松左京 1973 classic Nihon Chinbotsu 日本沈没 (Japan Sinks) to Paprika パプリカ author Tsutsui Yasutaka 篠井康隆 to English and American science fiction writers such as Arthur C. Clarke, James Tiptree Jr., and William Gibson. One thread connecting many of Ueda’s works, and perhaps especially Zeusu no ori and her acclaimed Karyū no miya 華竜の宮 (The Ocean Chronicles) series, is the author’s linkage of the posthuman body with the concept of queer desire as a means of exploring and affirming heterogeneous forms of sexuality and sociality. Zeusu no ori is the first of Ueda’s novels to appear in English, and in the wake of its enthusiastic reception in the United States publisher Haikasoru included a translation of her 2007 short story “Kusabira no michi” くさびらの道 (“Street of Fruiting Bodies”) in its 2014 collection Phantasm Japan.

In Zeusu no ori Ueda imagines a futuristic interplanetary society in which medical technologies facilitating one’s transition from male-bodied to female-bodied entities (or vice-versa) pose few if any bioethical conundrums. Enter the novel’s central conflict, an artificially constructed race of beings known as Rounds who present fluid gender traits and possess both male and female sexual characteristics. The Rounds are part of an experimental project to liberate humankind from their conventionally sexed bodies in order to render them more psychologically and physiologically capable of exploring worlds beyond their own solar system. Owing to their perceived threat to the moral fabric of
society, however, they are relegated to a special district located on a space station orbiting Jupiter. When the station becomes the target of an act of terrorism on the part of an organization known as the Vessel of Life, a group of typically gendered humans (referred to as Monaurals in the novel) is assigned to guard the local population.

In this analysis I will argue that Zeusu no ori seeks to frustrate conventional models of gender and sexual identity in order to elaborate a radically new economy of desire and, in turn, an affirmative vision of a community whose inhabitants are psychically and ethically bound to others. In doing so, I will begin with a consideration of how the novel engages with some of the primary tropes of Japanese science fiction narratives with the aim of highlighting how Ueda interrogates representational trends that have long dominated the genre. From there, I will explore the novel’s depiction of Round sexuality, employing a selection of thinkers working in the fields of psychoanalytic criticism, queer theory, and evolutionary biology in order to illustrate how Ueda devises a model of relationality that transcends the limitations of the human libidinal economy. Finally, I will examine how Ueda, extrapolating outward from her depiction of queer sexuality and sociality, develops a modified vision of posthuman subjectivity in which the purportedly marginal figure of the indeterminate social subject acquires a vital role in the course of future biological and cultural becomings.

**De-Constructing Masculinity, Dissembling the Cyborg**

In exploring how Ueda deploys only to undermine some of the dominant tropes of Japanese science fiction, I will first consider a plotline that lies at the crux of the tension between the Round and Monaural communities: the story of two former lovers, a Monaural
man named Harding and a Round named Veritas. This pair, we learn, had become sexually involved soon after Harding’s arrival in the special district, but as Harding explains it,

At first I made love to Veritas, one-way. But soon it could not be restricted to just that. It was a matter of course. The Rounds are absolute hermaphrodites. They achieve psychological balance first and foremost by loving both as a man and as a woman at the same time . . . To the end, I only physically desired Veritas’s female half. And during that time, I set aside the physical and emotional needs of eir male half. A part of me was turned on by imposing those sorts of constraints. And surely I experienced a kind of taboo allure . . . I couldn’t do what ey asked, I told em. My body was my own. 3

Subsequently, Harding confesses that, in an attempt to rebuff the Round’s amorous advances once and for all, he had punched Veritas in front of the men under his command.

While Japanese science fiction encompasses a diverse array of narratives, many works belonging to the genre share a tendency to cast traditional forms of masculinity as endangered vis-à-vis the manifestation of exotic life forms that are identified as both feminized and feminizing. As I will discuss later in this section, cyborgs represent one of the most widespread science fiction tropes that play on anxieties surrounding the dismantling of masculinity; in other texts, however, these same fears are explored in a variety of other compelling and corporeal ways. One of the most remarkable works in this vein to be published in Japan in recent decades is pharmacologist-cum-novelist Sena Hideaki’s 濱名秀明 1996 Parasaito Ibu パラサイト・イブ (Parasite Eve), which has since been adapted into a series of well-received video games for the Playstation platform. In the novel, an ancient mitochondria parasitically propagates itself through a female line of descent in order to subjugate the human genetic code to the will of an endlessly adaptable, wholly feminized

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life form. In Makino Osamu’s 2002 Lovecraftian short story "Shi no kaiken (Nekurofarosu)” (translated under the title “Necrophallus”), an alien disguised as a young woman turns an unambiguously phallic dagger against the sadistic male protagonist’s body, transforming him into something unrecognizably other, and thereby enabling him to experience a mixture of pain and pleasure unthinkable in this world. In Asamatsu Ken’s 朝松健 1993 Kun’yan no jō 崑央（クン・ヤン）の女王 (Queen of K’n-Yan), an investigation into the DNA sequence of a Shang Dynasty mummy is interrupted when the corpse reveals itself to be a shape-shifting alien queen who embodies not only the horrors of a subterranean alien world, but also deep-rooted hostility regarding Japan’s mid-twentieth-century aggressions against China.

These and other texts demonstrate a propensity to deploy figures that are identified as feminine as a means of dismantling (often quite literally) characters that are in some way aligned with conventional models of masculinity. In all of the works named above, men are exposed for their personal and cultural transgressions; in the process, however, the feminine takes on an even more nightmarish form in the interest of thoroughly tipping the scales in favor of chaos. I do not wish to imply here that there is no value beyond that of entertainment in such revenge fantasies—contrarily, such narratives can, I think, have productive outcomes by exposing the obscured mechanisms that keep social and political hierarchies in tact, as well as by articulating the possibility of their subversion. What I would like to suggest, however, is that these works illustrate the prevailing tendency in contemporary Japanese science fiction to fall back on antagonistic portrayals of femininity even in the process of attempting to interrogate the status quo.
Zeusu no ori stands apart from such works by permitting male characters to serve as the primary agents in exposing their own deficiencies. Returning to the incident described above, it is Harding who shoulders the responsibility for the failure of the relationship, having engaged in an extended fantasy predicated on the disavowal of Veritas's male attributes and, in the end, rejected the Round in an aggressive display of hostility. As Judith Butler writes,

the heterosexual presumption of the symbolic domain is that apparently inverted identifications will effectively and exclusively signal abjection rather than pleasure, or signal abjection without at once signaling the possibility of a pleasurable insurrection against the law or erotic turning of the law against itself. The presumption is that the law will constitute sexed subjects along the heterosexual divide to the extent that its threat of punishment effectively instills fear, where the object of fear is figured by homosexualized abjection.  

Reflecting his deeply entrenched feelings of misogyny and homophobia, Harding's fear of emasculation—expressed in his refusal to subject himself to being loved as a woman—nicely illustrates Butler's comment. Here we do witness a momentary destabilization of the phallic order whereby the self-identified man, confronted by the possibility of what he views to be a feminizing homosexual encounter, derives pleasure from the act of skirting taboo. Unable to extricate himself from the perceived crisis of his own desire, however, Harding altogether rejects the erotic potentialities of the act itself, employing humiliation and, ultimately, violence as a means of severing ties with Veritas and re-positioning himself within the established bounds of heterosexual masculinity.

In order to explicate a second way in which Ueda engages critically with established genre tropes I will now explore one of the novel's most complex characters, a Monaural

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4 Judith Butler, Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (New York: Routledge, 1992), 110.
woman named Karina Majella. A mercenary who has been hired by the Vessel of Life to help put an end to the genetic experimentation involving the Rounds, the figure of Karina was inspired by Ueda’s viewing of a television documentary on the subject of child soldiers. “I remember wondering what these children might hope for if they should survive the war,” Ueda stated in an interview with Charles Tan. “No matter how brilliant the ideology or how magnificent the new society that grown-ups end up creating, these child soldiers would see it all as nothing more than an illusion built on the bloodied corpses of the weak.”

In an especially revealing scene in Zeusu no ori, Karina captures Fortia, the leader of the Rounds. “Seeing people like you makes me want to tear you all to shreds,” Karina tells the Round. “If I were a man, I would rape you right now.” “Too bad, eh? You’re a Monaural woman,” Fortia replies. “You don’t have the equipment to make love to me.” Karina subsequently rips off Fortia’s clothes, explores her external genitalia, then rapes her:

Karina bent over Fortia and forcefully pressed her lips against eirs. Gritting eir teeth, Fortia resisted. Her tongue moving leisurely like that of a cat, Karina slowly licked Fortia’s lips. Then, as one would do with a sexual partner, she put her hand between Fortia’s thighs. Fortia screamed as though ey’d been struck with a hot iron. Ey tried to fend Karina off with all eir might.

In a novel in which, as I will address shortly, nearly every other character identified as a woman is depicted to be positively affected by encounters with the Rounds, how might we account for Karina’s behavior? Significantly, Karina is the only character in Zeusu no ori

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6 Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 180.

7 Ibid., 181.
who represents a cyborgic figure in the more traditional sense—that is, a character that is part flesh, part machine. Karina, we learn, had spent her childhood and teenage years reluctantly involved with a terrorist organization called Libra. Having sustained a series of injuries during combat, Karina had gradually replaced nearly all of her limbs with prosthetic ones. Moreover, she is also equipped with a neural inhibitor capable of manipulating the sensory neuron receptors that transmit pain impulses to the brain. Severed from the reality of her physical form, Karina prevails in a series of shootouts and escape attempts throughout the course of the novel. She also employs her body as a means of infecting the Round community with a parasitic machine designed to fix each member's sex. Karina’s cyborgic features, in other words, grant her a major advantage in times of warfare.

In her seminal essay on cyborg subjectivity, Donna Haraway contends that the rise of cybernetic technologies might initiate a collapse of the troubling dualisms—“self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man”—according to which modern private and public relations operate.8 In Japan, however, narratives that fully realize Haraway’s dream of “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” are far outweighed by those in which boundary transgression gives rise to personal and cultural catastrophes.9 As Stephen Brown notes in his reading of


9 Ibid., 150.
Tsukamoto Shinya’s 塚本晉也 seminal 1989 cyberpunk film *Tetsuo 鉄男*, for instance, while the salaryman’s transmutation into a hybrid flesh-metal body entails a number of positive implications, the film ultimately foregrounds the negative ones. “Such transformation,” Brown explains, “is marked by the release of dark forces, desires, and fears, the abjection of the body (both the protagonist’s own and others with whom he comes into contact), as well as the loss of identity in which the self becomes other as the body undergoes radical change.”

Sharalyn Orbaugh likewise touches on the pessimistic flavor of many contemporary Japanese science fiction narratives, honing in on the manner in which assumptions concerning gender have been deployed to add a second dimension of fear to pop cultural representations of the technological sphere, and particularly to images of the cyborg. Treating two highly successful mid-nineties anime series—the aforementioned *Shin Seiki Evangelion* and *Kōkaku kidōtai 攻殻機動隊* (Ghost in the Shell, 1995)—Orbaugh offers a deeply compelling analysis of how bodily penetration and permeability are explored through images of phallic plugs, yonic entry points, and womblike capsules that enable both bodily invasion and what Orbaugh terms “inter-corporation.” As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, Orbaugh views such imagery as anticipating the failure of social institutions designed to maintain a modernist model of autonomous male subjectivity vis-à-vis the eruption of the repressed feminine body into the realm of culture.

In her attempt to reconsider gender representation in cyberpunk within a uniquely

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Japanese cultural context, Kumiko Sato similarly focuses on images of the cyborg body. Through readings of two novels—Kanbayashi Chōhei’s 1984 Sentō yōsei yukikaze 戦闘妖精雪風 (Battle Fairy Yukikaze) and Noa Azusa’s 野阿梓 1991 Baberu no kaori バベルの薫り (The Flower of Babel)—she argues that the emergence of female cyborgs in Japanese cyberpunk represents a symptom of Japan’s struggle with its dual subjectivity in the wake of Westernization. “Strong female cyborgs and androids so dominant in recent Japanese science fiction,” she concludes, “are actually presented as referencing signifiers of the empty subject at the center, who is often embodied in the form of a passive, powerless male character.”

It is also important to note that one of the defining features of many Japanese science fiction narratives is what Braidotti describes as the “trans-humanist fantasy of escape from the finite materiality of the enfleshed self.” This so-called “contempt for the flesh” (a widely cited phrase derived from William Gibson’s seminal 1984 cyberpunk novel Neuromancer) is explored in a number of Japanese texts in which characters are enabled to transcend the confines of their own bodies in order to re-map their identities within the immaterial context of cyberspace. And, as illustrated by such works as Takeno Masato’s 竹野雅人 1989 Yamada-san niki 山田さん日記 (The Yamada Diary) and the aforementioned series Shiriaru ekusuperimentsu Rein, this form of experience is frequently depicted as one entailing shock, whether brought about by the vertiginous pleasures of shape-shifting and

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networking or, on the other hand, one’s realization of the eminent possibility of a short-circuit.

While many Japanese writers and filmmakers have thus envisioned the bionic body, on the one hand, and cyberspace, on the other, as humankind’s final frontier, the prominent image of the biomechanical hybrid, although profoundly transgressive of modern conceptualizations of the body as a self-contained entity, is frequently rendered as a site of crisis. Moreover, while in Haraway’s view the cyborg embodies the potential to transcend socially constructed categories such as gender, as Orbaugh and Sato’s comments suggest, in Japan (and elsewhere) the assumption of sexual dimorphism has long maintained a critical role in articulating the fears experienced by science fictional characters faced with the possibility of transformation into the other.

Through the character of Karina Ueda elaborates on widely explored anxieties concerning the erasure of the body vis-à-vis the rise of technology, while also interrogating the logic dictating that female/feminized cyborgs necessarily pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. This is not to say that Karina does not possess certain qualities that identify her as an iconoclastic character; as a biologist, a soldier, and, finally, a human-machine hybrid, she poses a triple-threat to the assumption that the spheres of science, warfare, and technology are the provinces of men. Even more interesting, however, is the novel’s emphasis on the ways in which Karina’s attempt to overcome the limitations of the human form ultimately lead to a restoration of the very conditions she had hoped to transcend.

In Karina’s view, her technologically enhanced form grants her absolute self-determination, enabling her to act in the service of her own ethical principles while
avoiding a replay of the suffering she experienced as a child soldier forced by her own mother to kill on behalf of a notorious terrorist organization. Yet in reality, Karina is increasingly subjugated to her cyborgic body, which represents a site imbued with violent potentiality. One defining feature of Karina’s character, for example, is her affinity for St. Gerard Majella, the patron saint of motherhood (an association that is further reinforced by the fact that Karina’s last name is also Majella). When the Round children begin to die off as an unintended result of the techno-parasite Karina has carried into the special district, it becomes clear that her own will has been undermined by that of her body, unexpectedly transformed into a genocidal organ through its incorporation and dissemination of the potentially fatal disease. By the end of the novel, it would appear as though Karina’s body has become a total other, betraying even the woman’s own sense of herself as an authentic being: “Her body, chemically altered to extinguish her pain,” explains the narrator, “felt entirely artificial.”

In her foundational text on posthumanist theory, Hayles makes a compelling case for viewing posthumanism as an extension of the liberal humanist project, noting that these traditions share an emphasis on cognition over embodiment. “Indeed,” she writes,

one could argue that the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to both the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman. Only because the body is not identified with the self is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality, a

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14 Gerard Majella (1726-1755) was an Italian lay-brother of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and his association with motherhood can be traced to a miraculous childbirth. The woman in question was purportedly on the verge of death, but, remembering that she possessed a handkerchief gifted to her by Majella, asked that it be brought to her in her time of great need. She and her child survived the birth, and Majella came to be widely regarded as a patron of mothers. He was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1893.

15 Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 243.
claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily difference, including sex, race, and ethnicity.\footnote{Hayles, \textit{How We Became Posthuman}, 4-5.}

Perhaps more than any other scene in the novel, Karina’s rape of Fortia demonstrates the astronomical personal and social costs of the erasure of embodiment by making the reader a witness to the shocking re-materialization of that which has been de-materialized. By severing her scarred limbs and dulling her synaptic pathways, Karina attempts to efface her “natural” body, inscribed with the collective trauma of her early life. Yet this trauma, we find, increasingly threatens to explode from within Karina’s seemingly perfected form when she is confronted by the hostile resurgence of the repressed memories of her childhood. It is finally the suggestion that Karina, by virtue of her femaleness, lacks access to the male prerogative of rape that gives rise to a renewed sense of the manner in which the woman’s own embodied experience has shaped her existence. Having grown irrevocably convinced that the body is inconsequential, however, Karina disavows the profound connections between her own lived trauma and the systematic oppression of the Rounds. Rather, she aligns herself with the now-familiar subject position occupied by Harding and a number of other male Monaurals, enacting her desires to destroy Fortia’s sexually irreducible body, as well as to punish the Round for her provocative suggestion that the Rounds’ existence as a collective entity represents a viable, and even desirable, alternative to Karina’s fiercely individualistic worldview. In this way, Karina’s dissociation from her own body is inextricably linked to her participation in a cycle of discriminatory violence designed to eliminate bodies marked by difference. This character thus demonstrates Ettinger’s contention that “if difference remains caught
unavoidably and exclusively in oppositions, disintegrated into endless particles or ignored by the pretense of sameness, the risk is that it will continue to threaten, terrorize, and destroy the fabric of our inner and political worlds.”

**Embracing the Flesh**

Having dedicated the first part of this chapter to exploring how *Zeusu no ori* exposes the limits of some of Japanese science fiction’s most prevalent tropes, I will turn now to a consideration of how Ueda, through a return to the flesh, constructs an alternative and more affirmative vision of posthuman subjectivity. In particular, I will examine the themes of love, eroticism, and reproduction in the novel, focusing on a selection of key scenes that elaborate the frameworks of the Round sexual economy, familial structure, and social schema. In doing so, I will argue that Ueda advances a radically new vision of posthuman identity that is predicated upon what might be described, to borrow from Ettinger, as an affective mode of “joining-in-difference.”

To begin, I would like to consider a connection between *Zeusu no ori* and a rather unlikely source, Aristophanes’ speech on love from Plato’s 4th century BCE philosophical treatise *Symposium*. “Possessing functional reproductive organs of both genders,” writes *Zeusu no ori*’s narrator, “the Rounds were the kind of virile beings envisioned by Plato.” In Plato’s text, Aristophanes describes the beings in question as follows:

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**Notes**


18 Ibid., 142.

19 Ueda, *Zeusu no ori*, 117.
And first let me treat of the nature and state of man; for the original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature; this once had a real existence, but is now lost, and the name only is preserved as a term of reproach.20

This account continues, explaining also that primeval man was round, comprised of twice the number of appendages we now possess, as well as of two faces set upon one neck and facing opposite directions. The gods, threatened by the will and strength of these beings, found themselves in need of a solution to the specter of an impending coup. And, Aristophanes claims, it is Zeus who ultimately brought an end to the threat of humanity by cleaving each of its members in two in order that their power might also be halved. “After the division the two parts of man,” Aristophanes states,

...each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one, and would have perished from hunger without ever making an effort, because they did not like to do anything apart... so ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two, and healing the state of man.21

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle Freud references the events described in Plato’s work as an example of what he views to be a driving force in the development of sexual instincts—namely, “the necessity for the reinstatement of an earlier situation.”22 Freud’s emphasis on the role of original unity in formulating libidinal desire is reflective of psychoanalysis’s grander preoccupation with regression, that is, with a compulsion toward repetition, and especially that of the subject’s traumatic split from the mother during the


21 Ibid., 16-17.

infantile stages of development. While Ueda’s depictions of Round physicality and sexuality do entail several striking parallels with Aristophanes’ conceptualization of original human nature, her novel impedes any attempt to understand these characters’ desire in the terms set forth by Freud. In fact, I contend, through the figures of the Rounds Ueda seeks to frustrate the concept of origins in the traditional sense by conceiving of beings who are constituted not by an Oedipal split, but, conversely, through their participation in a kind of enlarged, co-affecting subjectivity.

In exploring this notion I would first like to introduce the work of critic Sudeep Dasgupta, who fuses Ettinger’s re-conceptualization of the womb as a site of relationality with queer theoretical considerations of subjectivity. Dasgupta contends that Ettinger’s work shares with queer theory a “dynamic understanding of subjectivity and sexual identity,” while also diverging in certain important ways from the developing spheres of gay and lesbian criticism. Referencing the writings of Lee Edelman, Leo Bersani, and Tim Dean, Dasgupta stresses that while queer theoretical discussions of same-sex intercourse widely figure such forms of encounter as a way of “thinking beyond a self-enclosed subject”

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23. Of course, Freud cannot be considered the sole originator of the notion of a binary division of the sexes. As Thomas Laqueur, drawing on Foucault, notes, in the West the historical shift between what he terms the “one-sex model” and the “two-sex model” was propelled by a combination of eighteenth-century developments not only in the area of psychoanalytic thought, but also in the social and biological sciences. Contemporary Japanese attitudes toward sex and gender can be similarly linked to a wide breath of discourses arising out of the nation’s transition from a feudal society into a modern nation state. As in the West, however, in Japan Freud and other psychoanalytic thinkers would come to play a vital role both in the pseudo-scientific legitimation of existing gender paradigms and in generating a grander cultural interest in the connections between parent-child relations and adult sexuality. Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 124.

through the relational mode, these same models frequently position the rectum as a space serving not so much as a passageway between selves as a receptacle that, through the act of sodomy (and especially bare-backing), “instantiates the death-drive and the shattering of the self.”25

In an attempt to move beyond considerations of the rectum as a site of anonymity and fatality—and thus the act of penetration as a movement toward self-dissolution—Dasgupta suggests that Ettinger’s concern with relationality “might help re-direct the focus on deconstructing subjectivity in queer theory, broadening out the latter’s emphasis on self-shattering toward a politics based on forging alliances and a being-together between several selves rather than individual dissolution and dissipation.”26 While Dasgupta’s essay aims specifically to rethink subjectivity within the context of male homosexual encounter, I contend that his overarching concern with the forging of alliances can be extended also to the erotic potentialities embodied by the sexually fluid figures of the Rounds.

Consider, for example, a scene that appears relatively early in the novel, and in which the male Monaurals’ reactions to the Rounds are starkly contrasted with the perceptions of two female Monaurals named Shiohara and Ogata:

The men were curious about the female part of the Rounds, but they also felt resistance toward the male part. However they felt about transgendered persons, it seemed wrong for two sexes to exist simultaneously in one body. Shiohara and Ogata were different. The notion of a masculine Round possessing a female physiology wasn’t a deterrent . . . The two found themselves chatting about what kind of relationship they would have if they were to fall in love with a Round.27

25 Ibid., 3.

26 Ibid., 4.

27 Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 79-80.
Ettinger writes that the *matrix* “intertwines the woman as *between* subject and object and *between* center and nothingness, on the axis of heterogeneous severality; the phallus posits her as *either* a subject in the masculine format or an object patterned on masculine desire, and which can be reduced to nothing.” In her juxtaposition of the reductive tendencies of the phallocentric heterosexual matrix with her notion of the *matrixial* as a site of severality, Ettinger offers a fruitful way of thinking about Ueda’s articulation of desire in the gendered terms deployed above. In the case of the male-bodied characters, we witness here the subject’s tendency to reduce the other to a projection of his own desire, thereby evading the potential for the “self-shattering” described by Dasgupta by abjecting that which, to borrow from Julia Kristeva, “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” By contrast, the female members of the crew register minimal anxiety when confronted by the Rounds, instead finding themselves intrigued by the prospect of a re-signified form of erotic encounter.

Sex between Rounds is likewise depicted as a form of relating that is largely unthinkable within the confines of the human libidinal economy. This contrast is most pronounced in Ueda’s depiction of the relationship between Calendula and Tygris, who represent the first set of Round parents encountered by the space station’s Monaural team members. Surprised to discover that the pair’s two offspring are not twins but, rather, children born around the same time—one from each parent’s womb—a man named Arino

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inquires as to the difference between Monaural ovulation, termed “voluntary ovulation,” and Round ovulation, termed “reflex ovulation.” “In reflex ovulation, the amount of time between stimulation of the cervix and the beginning of ovulation differs depending on the animal,” Tygris explains.

For example, it’s ten hours for hares, but in the case of Rounds, it’s about a week after. In cases in which sex isn’t consensual, ovulation may not begin until around a month later. Since the pituitary gland is easily influenced by psychological factors, stress can delay ovulation. As we continue to have sex with a satisfactory partner, ovulation becomes synchronous, and simultaneous pregnancy occurs.30

This passage again emphasizes the vital relationship between the mind and body, while continuing to develop a schema of eroticism that challenges the dominant heterosexual matrix. Divorced from conventional models of sexual relations, Round sex is not gratifying because it re-enforces hierarchies through the sublimation of one partner or the other to an object of desire; rather, it would seem, the pleasure—as well as the productivity—of Round sex directly correlates to the intensity of the psychological and physical bonds linking each participant with the other.

Pregnancy, childbearing, and parenthood within the Round community must also be understood in terms other than those commonly deployed. As noted, in the work of Freud the subject is constituted by a split from the mother, and thereafter experiences at the psychic level a repetition-compulsion whose pleasure is located in the rediscovery of identity.31 Lacan likewise figures subject development in terms of loss, situating the mother as an object toward which we are eternally driven and, yet, eternally forbidden by the law

30 Ueda, Zesu no ori, 86.

31 Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, 43.
of the father.\textsuperscript{32} Within the schema of Round relations, however, the very dichotomies upon
which such conceptualizations of the psychic plane rely break down. And, in their place, there comes to light an alternative vision of becoming in which both parents share in the experience of the so-called maternal functions of pregnancy and nurturing, as well as in the purportedly paternal function of initiating the child into the grander cultural sphere. As such, identity is constituted not through the process of exclusion, but, contrastingly, through one’s birth out of and into a familial dynamic predicated upon non-hierarchical, mutually affecting forms of desire.

While Round reproduction is naturally depicted as vital to the survival of the species, it is crucial to note that Round sexuality is also linked to diverse forms of play. Consider an early scene in which Harding, while discussing Round sexuality, compares these figures to two other animals that are simultaneously hermaphroditic, sea hares and snails:

When sea hares mate they form a long link, with any number of them connected back to front. One puts its male organ in the female organ of the sea hare in front of it, while its own female organ is entered by the male organ of the sea hare behind. This is referred to as a “mating chain.” Snails mate in a similar way. But they face each other, so that each can insert its male organ into the other’s female organ. The Rounds are the same way . . . It ain’t right. Any group that that can so nonchalantly do something like that hasn’t any right to call themselves human.\textsuperscript{33}

While Harding’s comparison of the Rounds to these mollusks concludes with a painfully derogatory denial of their humanity, it is interesting to think about the more positive implications of his remark. Ethology specialist Jonathan Peter Balcombe, for

\textsuperscript{32} Lacan elaborates this notion in his mid-1950s seminar \textit{The Psychoses}, in which he develops his concept of the \textit{nom du père} (name of the father) to describe the father’s role in initiating the child into the symbolic realm of language and culture.

\textsuperscript{33} Ueda, \textit{Zeusu no ori}, 39.
example, contends that animal sex, far from serving exclusively reproductive purposes, is also characterized by pleasure. “Most of us are taught to believe that sex is merely an instinctive act for animals,” he writes. “Not so. Animal sex is versatile, opportunistic, and sometimes creative.”34 One would be hard-pressed to argue that the mollusk rituals described by Harding lack versatility or creativity, and it is precisely this reality that leads to his suggestion that Round sex represents a form of perversion. Yet from a different perspective, this comparison might also be said to affirmatively depict a sexual economy in which relations are not foregrounded in the reducibility of subjects to the roles of active and passive on the basis of their genitalia, but rather in heterogeneous configurations of desire.

This component of Round sexuality is more fully elaborated through the novel’s depiction of a character named Tei, who serves as a mediator between the Round and Monaural communities. Tei, we learn, possesses unique genital characteristics, with eir penis and vagina being positioned in a formation opposite that of the other Rounds. “With no fear or anxiety, Tei embraced her adolescent years,” explains the narrator. “When ey had tried to make love with another—more for the purpose of communication rather than procreation—ey had realized that eir own body was slightly different from everyone else’s.”35 The result of a chance genetic mutation, Tei’s unusual genital configuration is initially disconcerting to em; however, ey soon begins to embrace eir unique physical features. “Because people like me are also necessary,” Tei tells Karina when the woman


35 Ueda, *Zeusu no ori*, 41.
asks why ey elected not to correct eir condition with surgery. “If there is no one whose characteristics differ from everyone else, Round society will become homogenous and eventually reach an impasse.”

Rethinking the In-Between

I will now employ Tei’s comment as an opportunity to enlarge this discussion of the erotic and reproductive schemas of Round relations into a broader consideration of the trope of the “hybrid” or the “in-between.” As Brian Massumi notes, theories privileging notions of hybridity exhibit a tendency to articulate the in-between as a blending or parody of the always-already positioned. Social change is spatially relegated to precarious geographical margins, where unauthorized positional permutations bubble up from the fermenting mixture. Even more precariously, in the case of theories of subjectivity as performance, change is confined to sites whose “marginality” is defined less by location than the evanescence of a momentary parodic rupture or “subversion.”

Such a construction of the hybrid or metamorphosing body is one premise of Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, in which the author, drawing on the work of Chela Sandoval, cites “women of colour” as an exemplary model of cyborg praxis by virtue of their participation in what she describes as a form of “liminal transformation.” Because Ueda is engaged with the specific questions of queer identity and community, it should also be noted that in spite of the growing visibility and heterogeneity of gay culture in Japan, it remains the case that, as Keith Vincent notes, “an unspoken consensus makes it all but impossible for Japanese

36 Ibid., 209.


gays to come out to family or work colleagues. The result is to make gay identity in Japan largely a pre-political question of individualized sexual ‘preference’ or ‘shumi.’”

In her extensive study of feminist politics in global science fiction narratives, Kotani Mari highlights some of the ways in which artists have conceived of characters that challenge established gender and/or sexual norms as occupying a peripheral, or, in psychoanalytic terms, repressed, dimension of culture. In doing so, she develops the term “tekuno-gaineeshisu テクノガイネーシス” (techno-gynesis). Derived from Alice Jardine’s concept of *gynesis*, *techno-gaineeshisu* concerns the ways in which “the unconscious world of a self that is not human but, rather, technological” has come to be aligned (both negatively and affirmatively) with a feminine, or at least not-conventionally-masculine, subject position.

Other writers have taken a somewhat different approach to exploring the possibility of liminal transgression against the status quo by eschewing the anxiety-inducing images typical of cyborg and alien narratives in favor of depicting separatist utopias in which women are altogether cut off from male-dominated culture. Matsuo Yumi’s 松尾由美 novel *Barūn taun no satsujin* バルーン・タウンの殺人 (The Murder of Balloon Town, 1994), for example, imagines what Kotani describes as a “marginal blind spot” in which pregnant women seek solace from patriarchal society in order to embrace the transformations of


their own bodies and experience childbirth naturally.\textsuperscript{42} Arai Motoko's 新井素子 Chigurisu to Yōfuratesu チグリスとユーフラテス (Tigris and Euphrates, 1999) likewise unfolds within the confines of a "temporary space" dedicated to female bodily transformation, and specifically the process of the young woman's passage from adolescence to adulthood.\textsuperscript{43}

While Zeusu no ori shares several features with these and other works of feminist science fiction, what I would like to argue here is that the novel also challenges dominant theoretical and fictional delineations of the in-between. As I hope to have demonstrated thus far, the paradigm of subjectivity developed by Ueda is one that is embedded first and foremost in relationality. In my view, Ueda's radical vision of the posthuman subject not only urges us to reconsider the primacy of conventional models of identity, but also seeks to grant legitimacy to the in-between by elaborating a cultural economy in which, to borrow from Massumi, "individuals and societies are not only empirically inseparable, they are strictly simultaneous and consubstantial."\textsuperscript{44}

Consider once again the figure of Tei, who is marked as a kind of marginal character not only by virtue of her distinctive genital configuration, but also owing to her unique position as the sole mediator occupying the "gray zone" between the Round and Monaural communities.\textsuperscript{45} Ueda's depiction of this character is remarkable in that it manages both to illuminate the material difficulties of inhabiting a body that does not align with any


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 403.

\textsuperscript{44} Massumi, Parables for the Virtual, 71.

\textsuperscript{45} Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 303.
established set of norms while also construing this same body as desirable not only in terms of the Round sexual economy, but also within the broader schema of Round society. To broaden this discussion out even further, one could even say that by virtue of eir difference Tei is cast as occupying a vital role in the course of human evolutionary history.

In evolutionary theory, so-called adaptive features are viewed to be ones built by natural selection in order to fulfill their current role. Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth S. Vrba have addressed the flip-side of this coin, advancing the term “exaptation” to describe features that did not initially arise to serve a certain purpose, but which have since been co-opted to the advantage of those who possess them. “Flexibility lies in the pool of features available for co-optation,” they write. “The paths of evolution—both the constraints and the opportunities—must be largely set by the size and nature of this pool of potential exaptations. Exaptive possibilities define the ‘internal’ contribution that organisms make to their own evolutionary future.”

Gould and Vrba’s remarks can inform a nuanced understanding of Tei’s suggestion that eir physical makeup, while not conducive to the typical manner in which Round sex unfolds, represents a valuable asset in the course of human evolutionary history. More pointedly, while, as noted, it is tempting to read Tei as marginal owing to both her apparent handicap and her role as mediator between the Round and Monaural communities, as the following comment made by a Monaural named Prescott suggests, by virtue of her difference this particular character might instead be understood as leading the charge to

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overcome humankind’s obstinate, and even self-destructive, insistence on the body’s sacrosanctity:

We’re tied to the parts of our nature that keep us earthbound. And why? No matter how far we’ve come, our Earthian ways remain. So long as we hold onto our Earthly bodies, rather than adapt to gravity, we will indefinitely alter the space environment to render it habitable . . . We’re not Martians or Jovians. We’re Earthlings that live on Mars and Jupiter. This body holds us captive. Like a cage, it impedes our psychological growth.47

To further illustrate this point I would like to draw a connection between Zeusu no ori and another text that deploys evolutionary theory in an endeavor to present an affirmative vision of posthuman becoming: Octavia Butler’s Xenogenesis trilogy (1987-89). As Eric White remarks in his reading of Xenogenesis, through her depiction of the Oankali race Butler “imagines a revised economy of repetition and difference in which difference is neither persecuted as a threat to identity nor interpreted as subordinate in an attempt to justify a desire for primacy but in which repetition also finds a new legitimation.”48 Of course, there are a number of marked differences between Butler’s trilogy and Zeusu no ori. Perhaps most notably, Butler’s alien colonizers are, in the eyes of the human beings to whom they awaken following their capture, unmistakably other; by contrast, Ueda’s Rounds bear such an uncanny resemblance to members of the Monaural community that they are distinguishable only upon close inspection of their genitalia. Nevertheless, I contend that White’s observation concerning repetition and difference in Butler’s work can be extended to a consideration of Zeusu no ori. Like Butler’s Oankali, Tei, far from being excluded from the Round community on the basis of eir difference, is positively identified

47 Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 19.

as a primary agent of biological transformation. In turn, ey is also positioned as an agent of social change, tasked with strengthening the fragile ties that hold together Round-Monaural relations and, by extension, ensuring humanity’s long-term survival in a limitless cosmos in which the subject is grounded only through interdependent relations with other members of the human community.

Zeusu no ori seeks to depict an ethos of relationality as vital to the future of humanity in other respects, as well. In the moments prior to Karina’s rape of Fortia, for example, the Round explains to her captor that “in order to tackle unanticipated dangers with limited resources and people, it’s preferable that the staff exists as a giant organism with a shared consciousness. Like a Portuguese man-of-war, able to survive even if a part of it is cut off.”49 It should be noted at this juncture that Ueda’s Rounds have very little in common with, say, the antagonistic, hive-minded Borg of the Star Trek universe. That is, they strive to enlarge the human community not through assimilation, but, rather, through diversification. One might even say that they function less like an integrated circuit than as a discrete one, in which each subject is, in Ettinger’s words, “from its emergence several, joint-in-separateness, distant-in-proximity.”50

“Articulating change in a way that retains a necessary reference to the already-constituted preserves a crucial role for formations of power and marks a refusal of spontaneism or voluntarism,” Massumi writes.

The problem arises when no way is provided to conceptualize the in-between as having a logical consistency, and even an ontological status, of its own. The necessary connection to the already-constituted then becomes a filiative dependence to which the

49 Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 179.

50 Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, 27.
“subversion” must continually return in order to re-engender itself. The foundation eternally returns.

Continuing, Massumi argues for the importance of granting a logical consistency to the in-between by “realigning with a logic of relation.” It is only by doing so, he claims, that the discussion may be “diverted from an addiction to foundation and its negation to an engagement with change as such, with the unfounded and unmediated in-between of becoming.”

In *Zeusu no ori*, Ueda conceives of a space that, rather than relegating bodies that differ to the margins of culture, assembles these same bodies at the center of a speculative vision of humanity’s future. This vision is articulated through the development of an economy of desire in which selfhood is not threatened by the prospect of what Kristeva describes as “being swamped by the dual relationship,” but rather is sustained by co-affective exchanges with others. In this respect Ueda’s novel might be said to elaborate what White describes as an “erotics of becoming,” and in doing so to begin to rectify that which Orbaugh views as lacking within the grander corpus of contemporary Japanese science fiction narratives (and particularly science fiction *anime*): the representation of cyborg sexuality as something that may be experienced in a “pleasurable, fully post-gendered way.”

This is not to say that Ueda’s vision of the future is utopic—contrarily, in its elaboration on the fears that arise when humankind is confronted by the eminent collapse

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52 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 64.

of its perceived ontological and socio-political foundations, the novel is incontrovertibly bleak. “This station is a cage,” Tei remarks. “A cage designed to imprison the Rounds. To separate and distance us from the Monaurals, to create the illusion that we do not exist . . . For the Rounds, Jupiter-I is the cage of Zeus.” 54 Tei’s assessment of the setting in which Zeusu no ori unfolds serves to reinforce the novel’s overarching focus on the Round community as occupying a liminal position within the schema of human society. Yet while the Rounds are, for the foreseeable future, relegated to the special district—which rests in the borderspace between the Monaural domain and the heretofore unexplored universe beyond—the novel concludes with a tone of cautious optimism through yet another appeal to the figure of Tei, whose birth name, Lanterna, as well as her Chinese name, Tei 璽, mean “light”: “Perhaps Lanterna was too small to light humanity’s journey into the cosmos,” the narrator remarks. “But anything was better than nothing. Much better.” 55

Ultimately, Zeusu no ori moves beyond a politics of subversion to arrive at one of generativity. Like Suzuki’s Ringu, Ueda’s novel seeks to bring to light the regulatory mechanisms of culture while also devising an alternative vision of an enlarged subjectivity in which identity remains socially contingent, yet is not produced through exclusionary processes. Yet Zeusu no ori differs from Ringu in that its radical movement away from the so-called normative body does not entail a form of techno-rebirth. Rather, the novel constructs the body itself as a site of erotic interconnectivity, countering techno-apocalyptic visions of becoming-other with an affirmative vision of co-becoming.

54 Ueda, Zeusu no ori, 97-98.

55 Ibid., 303.
Chapter 3
Unspeakable Confessions: *Joshinki*

This tale is spun from my words, but it belongs to she whom I serve: the goddess of the Land of the Dead. Dyed crimson with anger and trembling with yearning for the living, each of these words irrefutably expresses the sentiments of the goddess . . . Izanami is the woman among women. And it would not be an exaggeration to say that Izanami’s destiny represents the fate suffered by all of the women of this land.¹

Feminist discourse in contemporary Japan has focused heavily on the place of women within the familial schema, a reality that demonstrates both the residual impact of historical efforts to tether women to the perceived imperative of motherhood and the persistence of reactionary backlash against present-day demands for increased female participation in extra-familial social, political, and economic domains. Pressures originating from all sides of this debate have rendered the female body a highly contested territory, with exchanges between Japanese feminists and their opponents closely resembling those underway within a great number of nations across the globe. Yet one feature of this dialogue is bound to frustrate many Western progressives. Namely, it is the case that many Japanese feminists remain deeply invested in the idea that the maternal, and particularly the familial and social institution of *boseïai* 母性愛 (motherly love), is vital to the survival of the Japanese nation-state. “I think there is something fundamental to Japanese feminism and questions of female identity that cannot be fathomed without reference to *boseïai,*” explains sociolinguist Ide Sachiko.

It is a fundamental social relationship, which is central to the female identity in Japanese society. Women don’t consider *boseïai* as oppressive or something to be overcome. After all, it is preferable that the maternal or nurturing function should be

one of the basic structures of social relations rather than more aggressive—what might be characterized as masculine or patriarchal—forms of power.\(^2\)

Contemporary Japan’s fraught relationship with motherhood has been explored extensively across a spectrum of genre fiction and film in which maternal figures and the spaces they occupy are shifted from the precarious margins of the cultural landscape toward the center of the narrative. The provocative lines that open this chapter are excerpted from one such text, Kirino Natsuo’s 2008 novel *Joshinki* (The Goddess Chronicle). A highly accomplished writer of crime fiction, Kirino is a recipient of the 1998 Mystery Writers of Japan Award, which represents the most coveted prize in the genre. The novel that earned her the award—her psychological crime thriller *Auto* (Out, 1997)—also propelled Kirino to international acclaim, leading to her nomination for the Edgar Allan Poe Award in 2004. Since the publication of *Out* Kirino has produced a series of novels that similarly employ the crime fiction mode to explore the darkest recesses of contemporary Japanese life. *Joshinki* marks one of many shifts in Kirino’s literary career, representing the first of her novels to delve deeply into the fantastic realm.

I have identified *Joshinki* as belonging to the fantasy genre based on its heavy reliance on Japan’s earliest extant mytho-historical text, the eighth-century *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters). In point of fact, however, *Joshinki* demonstrates the author’s strong propensity for interstitial writing, eluding easy classification via its continual slippage between mythic fiction, supernatural literature, and anti-romance. *Joshinki* resonates strongly with Kirino’s earlier work, maintaining her characteristic focus on familial dynamics, and especially the relationships shared among mothers, daughters, and sisters,

in order to expose the systems of privilege and oppression around which contemporary Japanese social relations are organized. Yet the novel also diverges from Kirino’s crime fiction, which is situated largely around the modern urban and suburban landscapes, by initiating a dialogue that spans thirteen centuries of literary production in order to foreground the historicity of gender inequality in Japan.

*Joshinki* opens on an island inhabited by the novel’s principal narrator, a young girl named Namima whose family shoulders the burden of producing the succession of oracles responsible for performing the community’s prayer rites. When Namima’s grandmother dies and the girl’s sister Kamikuu inherits the role of oracle, Namima, in accordance with the island’s spiritual institutions (which are organized around the concepts of *yin* and *yang*), is made to serve as a priestess of darkness, ensuring that the souls of the recently deceased find their way to the afterlife. Bound to her duty for the remainder of her life, Namima is prohibited from taking on a lover, as well as from abandoning her post as guardian of the dead. Soon, however, the young woman is impregnated by a man named Mahito, whose mother is unable to produce female children, rendering the entire family cursed in the eyes of the community. After escaping the island with Mahito and giving birth to their child, Namima is murdered by her forbidden lover—who, she learns, had impregnated her in order to pass off the infant as his mother’s own, thereby returning his family to good standing and allowing him to wed Kamikuu. In the wake of her death Namima awakens in the Land of the Dead, where she encounters the figure of Izanami, identified in *Kojiki* as the earliest maternal ancestor of the Japanese archipelago, the Shintō deities, and the Japanese people. As the passage that opens this chapter suggests, Izanami’s tragic story will become the focal point of Kirino’s novel, serving as the framework for an
exploration of the shared experiences of loss and longing, tribulation and trauma, and the return of that which has been consigned to oblivion.

In keeping with the chronology of *Joshinki*, this chapter will first examine the novel’s opening section, which foregrounds the central theme of female defilement in recounting the events leading up to Namima’s descent into the afterlife. With reference to the work of Julia Kristeva, I will elucidate how Kirino, in moving toward her engagement with the *Kojiki* myth, deploys the figure of the female deviant both as a means of exposing how the regulation of women’s bodies functions to sustain male control over sites of power and exploring the possibility of female resistance. Subsequently, I will transition into an examination of the novel’s central figure of Izanami, deploying Kristeva’s concept of the *chora* to consider the goddess’s otherworldly domain from the vantage of a psychosexual landscape constructed around the organizing principle of the maternal body. The second section of this analysis will expand upon this point to argue that *Joshinki* seeks to move beyond the rhetoric of absence and excess that pervades the novel’s early pages, and which has played heavily into Japanese literary and social discourses surrounding femininity and motherhood. In doing so, it will employ the work of Jacques Derrida and Bracha Ettinger in an exploration of what Kirino depicts to be the possibilities embodied by the feminine—and particularly the maternal—once liberated from the prison of the cultural unconscious. This section will also press *Joshinki* into the service of a critique of phallocentric and phallogocentric psychoanalytic and post-structuralist models by illuminating the novel’s sophisticated engagement with prominent fictional and theoretical discourses on maternal subjectivity. Finally, this chapter will engage with the question of what it means to invoke specters of women past in contemporary Japan in an endeavor to situate Kirino’s chronicle
amid ongoing debates surrounding gender and nationhood. With reference to *Joshinki*, along with a selection of other modern re-imaginings of earlier myth and folklore, I will propose that such ghosts continually demonstrate their utility as an apparatus for thinking through traumatic injustices that, having never been adequately redressed, continue to haunt the present. Moreover, I will argue also that maternal specters in particular evince the need for a radical intervention in contemporary Japanese socio-political developments by illuminating alternatives to the dismal futures envisioned by those who stand in resistance to dynamic change.

**Abjɛct Bodies, Abjɛct Desires: Mapping the Maternal**

While I will delay a discussion of *Joshinki’s* central figure of Izanami until later in this section, I would like to begin with a recapitulation of the *Kojiki* story to which Kirino’s novel refers in order to provide a mytho-historical point of reference for the novel’s thematic focus on the defiled maternal body. Transgression is a recurring motif throughout *Kojiki*, and represents an especially important plot device for understanding the manner in which femininity is constructed in the text. In *Kojiki’s* account of the relationship between the deities Izanami and Izanagi, the pair’s initial attempt to reproduce is complicated by Izanami’s defiance of gender hierarchies when, during their mating ritual, she brazenly speaks before her male suitor. This grave transgression soon gives rise to the birth of the leech-child Hiruko, a deformed offspring that, as Jane Marie Law convincingly argues, may be said to closely resemble a miscarried fetus. In the wake of this reproductive failure,

3 Jane Marie Law, “Out of Place: Fetal References in Japanese Mythology and Cultural
Izanami and Izanagi repeat their mating ritual, and this time Izanagi speaks first. In turn, the pair successfully spawns the various landmasses of which the classical Japanese archipelago was comprised, along with a series of Shintō deities.

Soon thereafter, however, the goddess dies suddenly and tragically in the process of giving birth to the fire deity Kagutsuchi, whereupon she descends to the Land of Yomi. Izanagi follows his beloved companion in the hope of returning with her to the world of the living; his quest fails, however, when a second important instance of transgression takes place. Having been prohibited from looking upon Izanami, the impatient Izanagi is unable to oblige and discovers that his wife has transformed into a rotting, maggot-infested corpse. Upon realizing that she has been seen Izanami chases her spouse away, promising to bring one thousand people to their deaths each day for all of eternity. In turn Izanagi vows to built 1,500 parturition huts to offset the deaths brought about by his wife, whereupon he exits the Land of Yomi, purifies himself, and in the process spawns a series of deities, including Amaterasu, Tsukuyomi, and Susano-o.

What *Kojiki* presents is a series of incidents in which Izanami is made to endure suffering, all the while growing increasingly aligned with the concepts of defilement and death, by virtue of her sex. The first of these events, as noted, involves the birth of her deformed offspring as a consequence of her violation of a prohibition on female speech. In this case, Izanami’s failure to perform as a woman very literally engenders that which defies logical categorization, with the amorphous leech child representing an abject consequence of the goddess’s transgression. Soon thereafter Izanami is also sentenced to

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an eternity of imprisonment in the dark underworld—and, lest this point be overlooked, owing not to her own transgression, but rather that of her husband. Nevertheless, it is the goddess who shoulders the burden of this violation, and moreover in the wake of her exclusion from the procreative process, her still-living spouse assumes sole responsibility for the conception of new islands and deities.

In his own analysis of ritual dimension in the *Kojiki* creation myth, Allan Grapard elaborates on this point, writing that

these kami that are born from a male body undergoing purification rituals symbolize the tri-partite functions and aspects of classical Japanese society: politico-religious, agricultural, and military. Culture, i.e., social partition, organization, and management, is a male prerogative that required the death of a woman (that is, the refraining from sexual activity), as well as a distancing from nature through the performance of a symbolic act of violation and its corollary, purification.4

In a discussion of the origins of the concept of “*josei no kegare* 女性の汚れ” (female defilement), Matsushita Midori 松下みどり likewise stresses *Kojiki*’s treatment of the female body as one associated with defilement and death. Referencing the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学体系 edition of the text, she draws attention to the stark juxtaposition of the language deployed in describing the space occupied by Izanami—the “unclean land” (*kitanaki kuni* 汚き国)—and the subsequent scene in which Izanami engages in “ritual purification” (*misogi-harae* 祝祓).5 Significantly, Matsushita also traces a genealogy of other texts that engage in the alignment of the feminine with defilement,


frequently in accordance with the Buddhist doctrinal principals of “ketsue 血穢” (blood impurity) and “san’e 産穢” (childbirth impurity). Such works represent a broad spectrum of historical and literary texts, inclusive of fudoki (records of local histories and customs), several imperially commissioned chronicles produced after Kojiki, court diaries, and monogatari.

In the myth of Izanagi and Izanami, then, woman is figured as a kind of self-contradictory embodiment of absence (from the realm of culture), on the one hand, and excess (when encountered by delegates of culture), on the other. Moreover, each time Izanami’s excessive side comes to light—be it in the form of speaking out of turn, giving birth to a malformed child, or transforming into a monster—her actions are met with punishment and a male-initiated reinstatement of order. In revisiting Kojiki, Joshinki likewise presents the tragic account of a female deity who is subjected to relentless punishment and, ultimately, eternally relegated to an otherworldly sphere. Yet where the original version of the myth might be said to reduce the feminine to an embodiment of two contradictory extremes, Kirino’s novel employs this unresolved dissonance as a means of drawing attention to the material and psychological dimensions of female suffering and desire and, in turn, formulating a nuanced critique of the hierarchical gender assumptions around which social relations are organized.

In exploring how Kirino expands upon the discourse of defilement and displacement visible in the Kojiki myth to engage with what the text depicts to be the trials of all women of the world, I would first like to consider how femininity is constructed throughout the first section of the novel, which details Namima’s life prior to her descent into Izanami’s underworld. In the early pages of Joshinki, Namima explains how her virtually carefree
childhood had come to an abrupt halt when, upon Kamikuu’s initiation into the position of the island’s new oracle, Namima had learned that she was to inherit the role of priestess of darkness. Thereafter, she recounts a seven-year period during which the trajectory of her own future had remained shrouded in mystery. Plagued by uncertainty, Namima explains, she had spent much of this time contemplating how she had come to obtain her lot in life. “A defiled body,” she writes in her account of one particularly dark moment. “What is it that made me impure? So wracked was I with anxiety that I was scarcely able to sleep that night.” Subsequently, Namima describes the moment that her sister had been forbidden to speak to her any longer: “Suddenly tears spilled from eyes. And atop my bare feet, dusted with white sand, my teardrops formed thin streaks. Although I had no inkling of the reason, in that moment I came to understand that I was defiled.”

Throughout these early pages of the novel, Joshinki persists in describing the narrator’s deep preoccupation with what she refers to as her own “defiled existence” (kegareta sonzai 汚れた存在), a burden that is framed as vital to the continuation of the family’s maternal lineage within a community organized around the principles of yin and yang. Out of a sense of responsibility to her people, Namima explains, she had initially accepted her preordained fate and proceeded to take on her first important task, which involved both the daily delivery of a basket of sacred food to her sister’s hut and, each evening, the disposal of the uneaten portion of each meal. Food in the novel is thus introduced as the central element of a ritual that serves to substantiate through repetition

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6 Kirino, Joshinki, 15.

7 Ibid., 16.
the spiritual, social, and physical borders separating Kamikuu, an embodiment of purity, fertility, and light, and Namima, a locus of defilement, death, and darkness.

Soon, however, the recurring motif of food takes on a somewhat different role, transforming from a kind of neutralizing object that situates the two sisters at opposite poles of a moral spectrum into a device through which Namima is enabled to pursue forbidden pleasures. After having diligently performed the task of disposing of her sister's leftovers for some time, Namima explains, she had been convinced by Mahito to instead give him the remnants of Kamikuu's meals in order that he might offer them to his mother, who had failed to produce a female child—leading to her family's exclusion from the community—owing to malnourishment. Namima had yielded to his request, but her transgression had not ended there; rather, the narrator confesses, in subsequent days she had joined Mahito in partaking of her sister’s forbidden leftovers. Naturally, the reader soon discovers that Namima’s gastronomic violation—which, she explains, had given rise to feelings of both terror and elation—doubles as a thinly veiled metaphor for her sexual relationship with Mahito. “In the end it was in my body, and for this I would be punished,” she writes. “If I were to vomit, would it be too late? But the taste stuck fast to my tongue, reminding me of what I had done.”

Julia Kristeva identifies abjection as a kind of crisis of identity wherein the subject seeks to cast off some vital element of her being in an attempt to contrive a neatly contained selfhood. And, she explains, when food represents a polluting object, “it does so as oral object only to the extent that orality signifies a boundary of the self’s clean and proper body. Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 47.}\]
t erritories.”9 Later, Kristeva describes the particular ambivalence of food remainders, which at once elicit repulsion by virtue of being “residues of something but especially of someone,” while also representing the “potential for renewal, remainder and fresh start.”10

As the literal and metaphorical object both of Namima's burning desire and her deepest fears, the illicit meals she consumes are continually constructed as objects of abjection, stimulating her appetite while simultaneously marking her body as something to be even further excluded from the boundaries demarcated by culture. On the one hand, the young woman's internalization of her so-called “defiled” status leads her to grow ever more disgusted with her own body, now polluted by her sister's food waste and her lover's semen; on the other hand, however, Namima also increasingly revels in her transgressions. Growing plump with food and, eventually, child, in other words, she responds to her community's insistence on her compliant acceptance of her place within the schema of the communal order by engendering what, in Kristeva's terms, amounts to “the interference of the organic within the social.”11 In this way, I contend, this character foregrounds the possibility of what Elizabeth Grosz describes as “counterstrategic reinscription”:

If the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organizations. As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus also a site of resistance, for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways.12

9 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 75.

10 Ibid., 76.

11 Ibid., 75.

12 Elizabeth Grosz, “Inscriptions and Body-Maps: Representations and the Corporeal,” in Feminine/Masculine and Representation, ed. Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis, 62-74 (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), 64.
Namima refuses to be subsumed entirely by the darkness to which she has been confined, countering her community’s attempts to render her invisible via the expansion of her own bodily boundaries through and into the sphere of culture. Yet the text’s unyielding focus on orality also serves to foreshadow the impossibility of her reincorporation into the community from which she has been excised. For a brief time, Namima fantasizes about leaving the island to build a new life with her lover and unborn child; it is soon revealed, however, that her relationship with Mahito is but a farce, and in the final moments of Namima’s life she dies at the hands of her lover as her infant daughter Yayoi lies suckling at her breast.

In psychosexual terms, this violent separation can be understood as an attempt to thwart the incestuous desire that is shared by the mother and child and which threatens the supremacy of paternal law. On a grander cultural plane, this scene also demonstrates how appeals for the preservation of tradition work to subdue what Kristeva describes as “excessive matrilineality,”\(^{13}\) which imperils the patriarchal power structures around which social institutions are organized. It is thus that through the motif of food and its corollary, intercourse, the novel gestures toward the fundamental incompatibility of feminine desire and the demands of patriarchal society.

Yet Namima’s tale does not end with her dissolution into a chaotic abyss. Contrarily, the most vital part of Joshinki’s story only begins with the woman’s crossing over into the underworld, which is governed by the goddess Izanami. And if Namima’s body might be understood as a site of resistance to the constraining discourses and practices around

\(^{13}\) Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 77.
which social relations are organized, Izanami’s otherworldly domain represents a psychosexual landscape that at once reconstitutes maternal subjectivity and, in turn, engenders relations that are radically subversive in their contingency upon feminine sexual difference.

In exploring how Izanami’s underworld is constructed I would first like to return to the work of Kristeva, whose 1974 Revolution in Poetic Language draws on the writings of Plato to elaborate her concept of the *chora*.\(^{14}\) “Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such,” she writes,

and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body—always already involved in a semiotic process—by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are “energy” charges as well as “psychical” marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.\(^{15}\)

Kristeva’s comment alludes to a moment during which the maternal body regulates the subject’s development through the provision and denial of nourishment in preparation for the child’s entrance into the sphere of paternal law. The repression of the mother is figured as a necessary step in this process, and it is thus that the ambiguous semiotic space of the *chora*, which is at once highly generative and profoundly destabilizing, places the symbolically constituted subject who approaches it at the risk of psychotic breakdown. In transposing the concept of the *chora* onto a linguistic plane, Kristeva conceives of this space as logically inaccessible from the vantage of, yet wholly vital to, the signifying realm of

\(^{14}\) This concept is introduced in Plato’s dialogue *Timaeus* as an “invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible.” Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2009), 131.

language. And, she claims, in artistic practice, and poetry in particular, this operative characteristic of the *chora* is perceptible and therefore demonstrates the possibility of a linguistic intervention that ruptures established conventions.

While shortly I will outline some of the limits of Kristeva’s *chora*, I contend that her work provides a fruitful starting point for thinking about the spiritual realm as depicted in Kirino’s novel. Upon meeting Izanami, Namima tells us, the goddess had declared her entirely suited to the realm of the dead by virtue of her former role as the island’s priestess of darkness. Namima, however, had countered the goddess’s assertion on the basis of her having given birth to a child, an act from which women in her position were strictly prohibited by island law. “It is precisely because you bore a child that you are suited to be my priestess,” Izanami had replied. “There is a deep connection between my own death and birth. For it is in order to give birth to a child that I died.”

Subsequent passages likewise emphasize the deep connection between death and life through the central image of the maternal body. “I am a god, to be certain. But to die in childbirth is always the lot of women,” Izanami explains in one scene. In another, the goddess details the tragic account of the aforementioned leech child Hiruko, born “boneless and gelatinous” because Izanami had spoken out of turn. Later, Namima, meditating on the goddess’s difficult position in their afterlife, writes, “What an ironic state of affairs it was that Izanami, who had once been responsible for giving life to this land and the

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17 Ibid., 87.

18 Ibid., 94.
children who inhabit it, had now come to be tasked with meting out the deaths of a thousand people each day!”

Soon after Namima’s descent into the underworld, the role of *Joshinki*’s narrator is handed off to a woman named Hieda no Are, who is based on a real-life courtier widely cited as the primary source of the *Kojiki* myths transcribed under Emperor Genmei’s instruction. Are’s account of the *Kojiki* tale is likewise amply punctuated with commentary highlighting the especially difficult hardships endured by Izanami, as well as other women, on the basis of their sex. Describing the couple’s creation of the Japanese island chain, for example, Are claims that “as one might expect, it was the woman, Izanami, who experienced the most dreadful consequences of this act. What I mean to say, of course, is that giving birth is nothing other than treacherous, a life-threatening act. And, one day, a tragic event transpired.”

Commenting on the fact that even after the fatal event of giving birth to the god of fire Izanami had produced from her vomit and excrement a series of other deities, Are adds, “And so it was that until her life ended Izanami continued to give birth to this land, and to the various gods that inhabit the natural world. But owing to the injuries caused by the fire, at long last she died.” Soon thereafter, Are offers a detailed description of Izanami’s transformation following her descent into the Land of Yomi:

[Izanagi] heard the sound of something that resembled rolling thunder, and a rotten stench hung in the air... What had transpired here? The beautiful Izanami had utterly

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19 Ibid., 108.

20 Ibid., 98.

21 Ibid., 98.
transformed. Her decomposing body was swarming with maggots, and her lovely face had collapsed inward. The rolling sound he had heard had been that of the maggots squirming. And on her face, her hands and legs, her stomach and chest and genitals, the thunder gods squatted and squirmed.\textsuperscript{22}

In a later scene, the storyteller elaborates on her portrait of the suffering of women by invoking a second \textit{Kojiki} myth—also involving ocular transgression—in which the princess Toyo-tama transforms into a crocodile while giving birth. "Ho-ori had witnessed her transformation into a crocodile as she had given birth to his child," Are explains. "And so ashamed was she that she abandoned the infant and returned to the Watatsumi Palace at the bottom of the sea."\textsuperscript{23}

The excerpts cited above are linked by a number of important features. Not least of these is their framing of the maternal body as a site at once vital to the process of creating life and deeply connected to the extra-cultural domains of the natural world and the realm of the dead. These accounts share also the common theme of female suffering, which, without fail, is associated with both the process of childbirth and the subsequent experience of loss owing to some transgression of established restrictions surrounding the female body. In these respects the concept of the \textit{chora} resonates strongly with Kirino’s depiction of the underworld, which is inhabited by the outcast maternal body and infused with volatile feminine drives that seek to destabilize the highly ordered living realm through the chaotic meting out of death.

Yet in further pressing this issue, we arrive at the limitations of Kristeva’s work. To be sure, in her acknowledgement of the vital role of the maternal in the development of the

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 101.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 122.
subject, Kristeva moves to transcend conventional psychoanalytic considerations of the feminine as an embodiment of lack. On the other hand, however, her conceptualization of the *chora* as accessible in the post-Oedipal world only to a subject who is a. psychotic or b. “firmly posited by castration”\(^24\) ultimately fails to move beyond phallocentric models.

Moreover, and most importantly, for Kristeva the *chora* rests prior to any subject position, with pregnancy being negatively defined as a regulatory event that is “deprived of unity, identity, or deity.”\(^25\) This latter point is especially at odds with a reading of Kirino’s novel in that it presupposes, as Lynne Huffer writes in her own critique of Kristeva, a “totalizing view of human agency in which the individual subject in isolation becomes the final repository of revolutionary change.”\(^26\)

In *Joshinki*, Kirino—not for the first time in her writing career—urges us to think beyond the pervasive tendency to posit abjection (and discourses that similarly conceive of femininity in terms of lack) as the final, insurmountable word on the place of the feminine within both the psychological landscape and the cultural sphere. Izanami’s domain is revealed to be not only a tomb, but also a space in which that which is expelled from culture is granted its own ontology, albeit one that holds out against the imperative of total rupture as a precondition for subjectification. Having served her life-giving purpose and been relegated to the crypt of the unconscious, in other words, here the archetypal mother figure re-emerges not in the form of a hallucination, but rather as a testament to the

\(^{24}\) Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 50.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 26.

enormous suffering—often in the form of separation or loss—to which members of humanity, and women in particular, are subject. In turn, the immemorial violence of separation described by Kristeva undergoes a radical reversal. And in place of the constrained space of the *chora*, there emerges a domain in which revulsion toward the maternal body gives way to a desire to construct new, transformative linkages with others.

**Spectral Mothers, Amnesiac Ghosts: At the Threshold of Life and Death**

In this section I will examine how Izanami’s domain is further expanded into a topos for the exploration of an enlarged subjectivity that is linked to the maternal body. In doing so, I will first shift my attention away from the figure of Izanami in order to address the host of barely-there apparitions who hover in multitudes throughout the goddess’s otherworldly domain. “In the shadows cast by the pillars servants stood silently, awaiting Izanami’s command,” Namima explains.

And in the darkness I could sense the presence of spirits, who lingered all about in human form. “Those who cannot ascend come to the Land of the Dead. Most are ghosts who roam through the darkness. Formless are they, and without feelings or thoughts. They are but remnants of former human beings. Look around you, Namima. It may appear to be only darkness, but a great number of departed souls drift about this place.”

27 The motif of haunting has been commonly associated with a disjointed or even absent sense of space and time, a notion that Jacques Derrida explores in *Specters of Marx* (1993), in which he introduces the concept of *hauntology*. An inverse of “ontology,” which presupposes a temporally grounded subject, *hauntology* encompasses the idea that repressed specters of the past both shape the present and rest ever on the verge of a future

return. Widely deployed in the exploration of histories that have been excluded from dominant narratives, hauntology is rooted in the supposition that “haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony.”

Derrida's hauntology can inform our reading of Joshinki, whose ghosts are neither entirely absent nor fully present, and who are impossible to locate at a historical juncture, caught as they are in the disorienting space-time of the underworld. “Nameless,” these spirits elude identification, yet they carry the weight of their own tragic lives, meandering through the darkness in a refusal to be wholly disavowed. They are what Derrida describes as “traces of traces,” irreducible to either life or death and, we later learn, brimming with undefined potential.

Yet, like Kirino’s spirits, a number of questions linger. In Japan, ghosts are routinely driven by a desire for the resolution of some particular misdeed, be it their own or that of one who remains among the living. This yearning to rectify a past offense frequently takes the shape of either a recapitulation of said wrongdoing (as in, for example, the kuse dance featured in the ha sequence of a Nō play) or the enactment of revenge against the living (exemplified by the onryō, or vengeful ghost, who haunts both Japanese folklore and contemporary film). Even among texts that engage in more novel ways with the phenomenon of haunting, ghosts are overwhelmingly linked to some original source. In

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*Ringu*, for example, the ghost derives from an event, a point in space and time at which a specific trauma gave rise to its own proliferation.

Derrida’s ghost, too, possesses an origin and an objective, and moreover is elaborated through the figure of a patriarch who is identified as holding the key to the truth. “As in *Hamlet*, the Prince of a rotten State, everything begins by the apparition of a specter,” Derrida writes. “The spirit of the father is going to come back and will soon say to him ‘I am thy Father’s Spirit’ (I, iv), but here, at the beginning of the play, he comes back, so to speak, for the first time.” 31 Hamlet’s father, of course, is but a model for the development of Derrida’s central argument concerning the specter of communism in Europe. The fact remains, however, that Shakespeare’s characters do not spare any thought for the ghosts of Ophelia and Gertrude, who are sacrificed in the name of Hamlet’s pursuit. And neither does Derrida approach this avenue of inquiry, for, he writes, the “forgetting of the maternal” is requisite to making “the spirit live in oneself.” 32

In contrast to the variety of ghosts mentioned above, Kirino’s spirits are unable even to remember, let alone articulate, that which has led them to the liminal space they occupy. Moreover, as integral components of the topography of Izanami’s domain, these phantoms exist in the shadow of the anguished goddess and as extensions (perhaps even children) of the same, at once demonstrating Derrida’s contention that the event of being-with specters represents “a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” 33 and casting doubt on the notion that the mother must be sacrificed in order that the spirit survive. What, then,

31 Ibid., 2-3.

32 Ibid., 136.

33 Ibid., xviii.
does it mean to be an amnesiac ghost? And moreover one who makes no claims to truth, perpetually hovering in uncertainty? Finally, how can these figures enhance our understanding of Joshinki's driving motif of violence against the maternal body?

At this juncture I would like to revisit the work of Ettinger, whose matrixial borderspace describes a scenario in which the subject-to-be (likened to the becoming-child), uninhibited by incest taboos, shares with another (likened to the becoming-mother) the status of part-subject, part-object. Within this paradigm, one becoming subject inscribes the other with traces of trauma, phantasy, and desire while being inscribed with the other's same. This relationship is mutually affecting, and on an ethical plane translates into a heightened sense of vulnerability to the other and, in turn, the emergence of traumatic memories that may be excavated only through the act of participatory witnessing.

Ettinger's work, I contend, can help us to understand Kirino's depiction of the ghosts that populate Izanami's domain. While these spirits are represented as unfeeling, unthinking, and without form, it is important to note that they are not altogether unmoved. Rather, collectively they resemble a kind of expanded unconscious, instinctually perceiving and responding to those around them, making the dark air "grow dense,"34 seeming to "hold their breath"35 and "move about wildly,"36 so touched are they by the anger and sorrow emanating from Izanami's own embodied form. It is as though these specters, in an inversion of the formula identified by Derrida, have forgotten themselves in remembrance

34 Kirino, Joshinki, 83.
35 Ibid., 108.
36 Ibid., 112.
of the maternal. Here all language is suspended except for that which testifies to the
profound sense of loss engendered by the separation of mother and child, the conclusion of
a vital first relationship that becomes accessible only when the self begins to fade away,
creating space for the reappearance of what, in Ettinger's terms, might be described as a
“becoming-m/Other-to-be.”

This point becomes even clearer in consideration of the introduction of the figure of
Hieda no Are into the narratological schema of the novel. I would be remiss not to mention
at this juncture that this character's presence inevitably calls to mind a rather hotly
contested topic among scholars of classical Japanese literature: Hieda no Are's biological
sex. Leaving aside debates concerning the actual Are’s gender, the fictional one’s lament
over her transformation into a man within the Japanese cultural imaginary gives voice to
an all-too-familiar scenario, calling attention to the fact that a heavily gendered set of
institutional mechanisms have not only historically shaped the reception of Japanese
women’s writing, but also sought to disavow the vital role of women in the construction of
both Japan's literary tradition and its cultural identity.

Beyond serving as a critique of masculinist assumptions concerning classical
Japanese authorship, this character also bolsters what I view to be Joshinki's grander
attempt to demonstrate the possibility of a language that does not yield entirely to phallic

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37 Ettinger, The Matrixial Borderspace, 105.

38 Historically, Are has been widely identified as a man. Since the early nineteenth
century, however, a growing number of scholars have contested this assumption, with
folklorist Yanagita Kunio and Marxist critic Saigō Nobutsuna, among others, arguing both
on the basis of Kojiki's content and in consideration of Are’s clan lineage that this figure
was, more likely than not, a woman. For more on this subject see Yanagita Kunio, Imōto no
chikara (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1973) and Saigō Nobutsuna, Kojiki no sekai (Tokyo:
Hanbai kyōikusha shuppan sābisu, 1978).
logic. Are is constructed as a testament to the affective potential of language by virtue of possessing a voice imbued with powerful, even magical, properties: “Without any further adieu, Hieda no Are bowed,” writes the narrator, “and as she began to speak, the words flowed forth like the water that rushes across the earth’s surface in the wake of a heavy rain.” This prelude to the harrowing story that is soon to unfold foreshadows the impending resurgence of a series of traumatic events whose reverberations have been muted by both their transcription into the written word and the passage of time. By replacing Are in her historical role as storyteller, then, Kirino reanimates this tale, rendering both Namima and the reader participatory witnesses to Izanami’s suffering via the translation of a text both widely identified as the original and conventionally associated with male authorship into an affective force suffused with the weight of the goddess’s anguish. It is thus that through the mediating figure of Are, Kirino illuminates the dynamism of language emancipated from the law of letters.

Thus, in Joshinki the maternal space of the crypt—repressed, inaccessible, and, in conventional psychoanalytic terms, wholly “non-symbolizable”—is refigured as a site where that which eludes signification is not excised in the interest of producing a singular subject (or even the hauntological spirit of Derrida) but, instead, dispersed among a plurality of partial subjectivities. The question then becomes, as Judith Butler writes in her introduction to The Matrixial Borderspace, “What is the agency of the one who registers the imprints from the other?” Her answer is as follows:

This is not the agency of the ego, and neither is it the agency of one who is presumed to know. It is a registering and a transmutation that takes place in a largely, though not fully, preverbal sphere, an autistic relay of loss and desire received from elsewhere, and

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39 Kirino, Joshinki, 97.
only and always ambiguously made one’s own. Indeed, they are never fully made one’s own, for the claim of autonomy would involve the losing of the trace. And the trace, the sign of loss, the remnant of loss, is understood as the link, the occasional and nearly impossible connection, between trauma and beauty itself.\textsuperscript{40}

I would like to draw attention here to what Butler figures as the compulsory ambiguity of the \textit{matrixial}, that is, the impossibility of borderlinking once a claim to autonomy has been made. Or, to rephrase her comment in positive terms, her suggestion that there exists the possibility for circumventing paternal law—which insists on the subject’s separation from the mother and engenders the formation of the super-ego—in the act of giving up a piece of the self in order to forge maternal linkages with others. Butler highlights the fragility of these connections, yet she stresses also their affirmative potential, a prospect that is largely untouched in conventional psychoanalytic thought.

I will now turn to a later scene in \textit{Joshinki}, in which the healing potential of relating is finally elaborated through the reintroduction of the central theme of the maternal body into Kirino’s text. Toward the novel’s conclusion the narrator describes how the god Izanagi, having transformed himself into a mortal, had made his way to the underworld with the aim of apologizing to his long-estranged lover. Izanami, however, had been unmoved by his pleas, and, after chiding him for entering a space unsuited to mortal beings, had refused to grant him a light so that he might find his way back to the living world. “Black was the darkness, and so textured that one could have sliced it with a sword,” Namima explains. “We watched as Izanagi stumbled into the pillars, crawled about in confusion across the floor.”\textsuperscript{41} Continuing her account, Namima then writes,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{40} Judith Butler, “Bracha’s Eurydice,” foreword to \textit{The Matrixial Borderspace}, by Bracha Ettinger, vii-xii (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2008), xi.

\textsuperscript{41} Kirino, \textit{Joshinki}, 252.
\end{flushright}
After several days had passed, Izanagi made his way into a crypt at the end of a blind alley and finally collapsed . . . In order to ease his suffering as he neared his end, I approached Izanagi from behind and embraced his body tightly. And when I did, something unexpected transpired: Mahito was behind me, propping me up. I could not sense the weight of his flesh, nor could I feel his touch, the both of us being only spirits. But I recalled the happiness I had felt on that boat . . . Weren’t Mahito and I now embracing the man who had loved our Yayoi, gently holding him down as we had our own child? Like a teardrop, something cold flowed down my cheek.42

Izanagi, undone by his descent into a wholly feminized space, and in his final moments transformed into a surrogate infant for a mother bereft of her biological child. The powerful deity’s reversion to a childlike state calls to mind Doi Takeo’s famous assertion, in *Amae no kōzō* 「甘え」の構造 (The Anatomy of Independence, 1973), that the emperor is the quintessential model of a Japanese selfhood built upon infantile dependence—that is, upon a psychological denial of the reality of separation from the mother and the pain that accompanies this event.43 Does this moment, then, represent merely an example of repetition in a Freudian sense? Or might this scene be otherwise understood?

Certainly, as Izanagi’s demise approaches he draws ever nearer to Namima, an archetypal mother who remains firmly linked to the shrouded world of death. Yet this encounter is not a hallucinatory one, nor is it wholly pervaded by the feelings of anxiety identified by Freud. Rather, here Namima assumes an increasingly dynamic and wholly soothing presence as her grief edges her ever toward the material sphere, ultimately taking the shape of a spectral performance of her most profound memory of life. Moreover, it is

42 Ibid., 254.

through his joining with this maternal figure that Namima’s now-deceased lover Mahito—who, like the other ghosts that populate the underworld, exists as a fragile shell of his former self—achieves some measure of release from his own anguish, having finally overcome, if only partially, the amnesia that clouds his memories.

It is in this way that forgetting is again revealed to be vital to remembering, for it is only through the partial loss of the self that Mahito is enabled to gain some sense of both the source of his own unresolved guilt and the burden of separation that prohibits Namima from letting go of the living world. What transpires in this scene is thus a kind of expansion of a singular unconscious into an enlarged one, concluding in a collective reenactment of that which has been all but lost. A sense of the uncanny is maintained; however, this encounter does not terminate with rejection. Rather, it engenders a new, if undefined, relationship in which the act of witnessing, dangerous though it may be, gives rise to healing.

As Joshinki approaches its conclusion, Namima explains that Izanami had intruded upon the scene described above, whereupon Izanagi had insisted that if the goddess were to release the spirits of the underworld from their desires, she might give birth to new life. Izanami, however, had refused his pleas, proclaiming, “I choose to welcome defilement—after all, must it not be done? And should one delve deeper, to the farthest limits of defilement, one might discover something wholly unanticipated. But this has nothing to do with you.”44 Subsequently, Namima writes,

Now that Izanagi was dead, the regeneration of life would surely fall to Izanami. She was the goddess who received our desire and defilement alike, all the while bearing the burden of the past and, unchanging, existing into the future . . . This is Izanami’s story.

44 Kirino, Joshinki, 256.
As ever, she remains the goddess of the Land of the Dead. And around her, the ceaseless grumbling of the spirits—and nothing more—accumulates without end. But this is beautifully lucid, and it is ephemeral as dust. Contrary to what Izanagi claimed as he met his end, nothing is born here. And so Izanami continues on just as before, electing one thousand people to die each day.45

Ettinger proposes that the artist ventures to capture not only the unique values of death and foreclosed femininity, but also those of archaic trauma and *jouissance*. And, she suggests, if one were to refuse to relegate these to the status of the foreclosed or the abject, "a certain hybridization of the margins of these two domains, Eros and Thanatos, can become a source of a feminine difference whose comprehension can be accessed as a configuration of symbiogenic liberty born from a particular occasion of occurrence and encounter."46 In *Joshinkī*’s final scene, outlined above, the realm of the dead, haunted though it is by the world’s suffering, is reaffirmed not only as a locus of death, but also as one of potentiality, of beauty, that lies beyond the limits of paternal law. This reality is made all the more apparent when Izanami refuses her husband the luxury of sight, thereby prohibiting a repetition of the very transgression that had once led to her excision from the living world. As Namima finally asserts, nothing will be born here—for to birth and to be birthed connote the inevitability of separation. And, as Izanami’s comment to Izanagi implies, it is of those proscribed linkages that, like specters, precede one’s reality that the fabric of her domain—erected on the ruins of the maternal body and echoing with the cries of ghosts—is comprised.

**Specters of a Becoming Japan**

45 Ibid., 258.

In closing this chapter I would like to consider how Kirino’s retelling of this classical myth might be understood to engage with questions of gender, and especially motherhood, in contemporary Japan. “The notion that Japan is a maternal society (bosei shakai) is a powerful cliché that has been haunting the discussion of gender in the Japanese context for some time,” writes Tomiko Yoda. “That it is still an issue that demands some attention appears to be underscored by ongoing condemnation of the maternal excesses in Japan launched by conservative critics today.”47 If recent developments in the Japanese socio-political sphere are any indication, Yoda’s comment, issued at the turn of the twenty-first century, continues to hold true today. In fact, one the most visible demonstrations of Japan’s enduring anxiety surrounding the maternal transpired fewer than two months prior to the writing of this chapter, when Liberal Democratic Party member Suzuki Akihiro interrupted Shiomura Ayaka’s appeal for programs to support working women with a shouted insistence that the councilwoman should get married and, subsequently, a suggestive inquiry into whether she is capable of bearing a child. Tellingly, in the end it was only in the face of immense pressure from news sources and online petitioners that the LDP publically identified Suzuki as the offending party.

I contend that via a return to the archetypal mother figure of Izanami, Joshinki seeks to intervene not only in what I have argued elsewhere (albeit with a focus on Buddhist doctrine) to be a longstanding and pervasive tendency in Japan to malign the female body,48 but also in a present-day cultural crisis whose symptoms have been falsely


attributed to the nation’s so-called feminization. In my view, the mother in contemporary Japan has been framed. And, the logic goes, the crimes of which she is accused—nurturing “uncontrolled egoism, narcissistic and hedonistic consumer culture, and the hysteria of entitlement and victimhood”\footnote{Yoda, “The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society,” 866.}—might be prevented if only she could be seduced to return to her proper place within the home.

Many Japanese neoconservatives are deeply invested in the narrative that, as prominent feminist thinker Ueno Chizuko succinctly phrases it, “If you are not raising children, you are an enemy of the state.”\footnote{Ueno Chizuko, “Shakaiteki haijo to gendaa,” \textit{Joseigaku renzoku köenkai: yori fukaku hori-sageru tame ni} 12 (2008): 74.} Yet when we pause to consider recent moves on the part of the LDP—for instance, Prime Minister Abe Shinzō’s pursuit of a “new nationalism” (\textit{shin-minzokushugi 新民族主義})—two things become abundantly clear. Firstly, the “symptoms” outlined above are part and parcel of the postmodern condition, wherein the dynamics of change continually threaten to erode the ideological borders that constitute the nation-state. In Japan, the mother has become a privileged scapegoat upon which to thrust the responsibility for these and other perceived cultural ills, with the regulation of her speech and bodily acts playing into the construction of the myth of a controllable environment in contrast to the impending crisis of national breakdown.

Secondly, and in a related vein, Ide’s suggestion, mentioned at the outset of this chapter, that the maternal represents a desirable and even vital counterpoint to the masculocentric organization of Japanese society now begins to make sense. This is not an
argument in favor of, for example, policies designed to limit Japanese women’s reproductive rights or the government’s snail’s-pace approach to boosting female workforce participation. It is to say, however, that the concept of *boseiai* warrants our reconsideration. Rooted in nationalistic discourse and essentialist in its attempt to denote “an emotion existing *a priori* in all women,”51 *boseiai* is, on the one hand, a term inextricable from nearly a century of efforts to relegate women to the domestic sphere. On the other, however, the concept of maternal love has been employed for almost as long as an avenue for the exploration of female selfhood, often in ways that complicate dominant constructions of female identity while also celebrating the capacity for women to love beyond the boundaries of the contained self.52 In light of its admittedly fraught history, the particular term *boseiai* does not seem to lend itself well to re-appropriation. Yet the fact remains that in contemporary Japan, the qualities with which it is identified have been rather persistently cited by writers and activists alike as ones that are sorely lacking in the present-day socio-political sphere.

Before examining what *Joshinki* can contribute to this discussion, I would like to note that Kirino is not alone in responding to the so-called problem of woman that has haunted Japan throughout the modern era—and particularly during moments of unprecedented cultural change—by invoking ghosts of the distant past. In the waning years


52 For an extensive discussion of how *boseiai* in Japanese women’s writing has worked both to reinforce and subvert nationalistic discourses concerning woman and nation, see Michiko Suzuki’s *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture.*
of the Meiji period, maternal feminist Hiratsuka Raichō 平塚らいてう famously alluded to the sun goddess Amaterasu in a poem included in the inaugural issue of *Seitō* 青髪 (Bluestocking), the first feminist literary journal to be published in Japan.⁵³ Employing the image of a once-brilliant woman transformed into a phantom of her former self, in this poem Hiratsuka implies what she would go on to describe in her autobiography *Genshi, josei wa taiyō de atta* 原始、女は太陽だった (In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun, 1971-72) as the need for women to “cast aside all external and internal pressures, reclaim their true selves, and assert their autonomy as fully developed human beings”.⁵⁴

In the beginning, woman was the sun.
She was a genuine human being.
Now, woman is the moon.
She lives because of others,
and owing to others she shines:
the moon, with its sickly, blue-white face.⁵⁵

In Enchi Fumiko’s 円地文子 1958 novel *Onnamen* 女面 (translated under the title *Masks*), the author invokes a number of archetypal female figures that appear throughout Japanese literary history. *Nō* masks associated with the motifs of female vengeance,

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⁵³ I feel compelled to mention that Hiratsuka has justly come to be viewed as a rather contentious figure. While her influence on the development of feminist thought in Japan cannot be overlooked, her politics were also tainted by her endorsement of proposed eugenic policies centered largely on mandatory pre-marital testing for venereal disease and the restriction of marriage rights among individuals afflicted with venereal disease. Moreover, the sun imagery central to this poem reflects the reality that Hiratsuka’s writing was heavily shaped by nationalist discourse.


derangement, and grief represent the novel’s metaphorical framing device. Moreover, the female protagonist Mieko, a grief-stricken maternal figure, is modeled on the famously tragic *Genji monogatari* character Rokujō, whose jealousy leads her spirit to possess the body of Genji’s pregnant wife Aoi. Izanami herself even makes an appearance in the text. And, as Mieko contemplates the *Kojiki* episode in which Izanagi looks upon his wife’s decaying body and is consequently chased from the Land of Yomi, she seems to revel in the moment that the goddess’s love for her husband is “transformed utterly into blinding hatred.”

In her 2013 short story collection *Edo kaidan sanpo* (translated into English under the title *Apparitions: Ghosts of Old Edo*), Miyabe Miyuki revisits Japan’s lengthy *kaidan* (ghost story) tradition, spotlighting not only the horrors of haunting, but also the spectrum of other sensations that might be engendered by encounters with ghosts. Unlike Hiratsuka and Enchi, Miyabe does not allude to any particular historical character, female or otherwise; she does, however, bring to this tradition a degree of psychological depth that is characteristic of her oeuvre, which is comprised largely of mystery novels that explore the particular issues faced by women in contemporary Japanese society. In one especially compelling story, the haunting memory of a mother abandoned in a cell to die a terrible death sparks a household servant to murder those who had sent her to her early grave. Yet more gripping even than the prospect of her revenge is that of her liberation, to which the narrator—all a specter—alludes in the

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56 These are, respectively, the *ryō no onna* 霊女 (spirit woman), *masugami* 増髪 (madwoman), and *fukai* 深井 (grieving woman) masks.

story’s conclusion: “Then we slip right out from between the bars of that sturdy cage and are free to go wherever we want. That’s what a ghost really is.”

In another tale that appears in this collection, a woman identified only as Mother finds an unlikely lifelong companion in the form of a ghost who, following the woman’s death, lingers in the world of the living just long enough to soften the narrator’s grief over her passing.

When prompted in an early 2014 interview with The Japan Times to comment on the enduring popularity of such stories in contemporary Japan, Miyabe, referencing the earthquake that struck Kobe in 1995 and the series of disasters that transpired in the Tōhoku region during the spring of 2011, replied that kaidan “act as a sort of requiem for the souls that were lost, and as a comfort for those left behind.”

Kirino likewise responds to anxieties surrounding Japan’s present-day and future circumstances not with a solution to the apocalyptic vision touted by patriarchs in the face of the loss of self, of nation, and of meaning, but rather with an appeal to seek amidst great loss some knowledge, some way of relating, that lies beyond the already fading logic of modernity. On the most observable level, Joshinki invites us to reevaluate the feminine, and especially the maternal, by refashioning the motherly body into a critique of the gendered regulatory mechanisms that continue to shape Japanese social life and which, if left in place, threaten to impose further humiliation and resentment on the part of those who hold the


key to our survival. The novel also explores the possibility of a feminine reclaiming of the
maternal body, a prospect that is congruent not only with the demands of prominent
Japanese feminist thinkers and activists, but also with a widely dispersed schema of
contemporary literature in which motifs such as pregnancy and childrearing are—often
imaginatively—pressed into the service of transgressing established notions of feminine
and familial ideals.

Furthermore, Joshinki extrapolates this figuring of the subversive maternal body
onto both the linguistic and social-psychological planes. Through the act of chronicling the
feminine finds its way back into language, with the novel self-consciously demonstrating
the capacity for storytelling to perform what Deleuze and Guattari, in their reading of the
work of Kafka and so-called “minor literature,” describe as “the deterritorialization of
language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective
assemblage of enunciation.”61 In turn, Joshinki breathes new life into the image of the
spectral mother, who refuses to lie still once relegated to the grave of the unconscious. Yet
here, as in Ringu, this haunting does not give rise only to fear; it also creates space for the
enlargement and dispersal of trauma, demonstrating the possibility of a future in which
social and political life are energized by memory, driven by a desire for relating, and
attuned to the potential for healing.

61 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana
Chapter 4
Toward a Co-poietics: Decoding “Jisei no yume”

Previous chapters have demonstrated that across the spectrum of contemporary Japanese genre fiction, the deployment of historically and socially constituted gender constructions functions not only as a means of articulating fears concerning the disintegration of masculinist paradigms, but also to advance affirmative visions of a social subject that is ethically bound to the other. All of the works discussed thus far have engaged in some way with corporeality, depicting bodies that bear conventionally masculine features as bodies-in-isolation, and female or sexually ambiguous bodies as bodies-in-connection. Each of these texts likewise considers the psyche in such terms. Resistance is coded as a masculocentric predilection; relationality, by contrast, is frequently associated with a feminine configuration of desire. Gender shapes also the manner in which each of these texts engages with questions of affect. In Ringu, the ghostly young woman cannot be subdued through the logical reconstruction of the event of her origin; instead, the video virus engenders a sublimation of words to the visual and the visceral, initiating a collapse of space and time and, in turn, demonstrating the possibility that traumatic witnessing might give rise to a de-isolation of the victim. In Zeusu no ori, the masculine body and psyche are explicitly identified as too constrained to endure the conditions of the unfathomably vast cosmos located beyond the realm of Earth. The future of humanity thus comes to be invested in beings who are not bound to the gender and sexual paradigms, social hierarchies, and notions of discrete selfhood that drive human acts of private and public violence. In this novel, too, sensory experience largely replaces language as a privileged mode of communication, with sexual encounter and intra-psychic
exchange being celebrated for their capacity to incite forms of desire and relationality that transgress the limits of the human linguistic and erotic economies. In Joshinki, the Japanese creation myth is revived from the perspective of Izanami, previously relegated to margins of a mytho-history designed to substantiate the deistic origins of the imperial lineage. Here the maternal body and the space she occupies largely replace the written word as a point of access to memory, illuminating a deep connection between the traumatic experiences of the goddess and enduring attitudes concerning female body economy in Japan. Each of the texts examined previously may thus be said to demonstrate Ettinger’s contention that language, being embedded in a phallic system of representation, is limited in its capacity to give rise to matrixial encounters. This being the case, my analyses have focused predominately on linguistic expression as a domain of constraints.

In this final chapter I will diverge somewhat from this thread in order to concentrate on a more affirmative view of language as possibility. Rather than a novel, I have chosen as the subject of this analysis Tobi Hirotaka’s 2010 short story “Jisei no yume,” which first appeared in the science fiction anthology NOVA Kaki-oroshi Nihon SF korekushon NOVA 書き下ろし日本SFコレクション. Tobi began his literary career in the 1980s and has since become a highly accomplished writer of science and speculative fiction. He is the recipient of two Seiun Awards in the short fiction category. The first of these was awarded to his story “Katadorareta chikara 象られた力” (Symbolized Power) in 2005; his second win was for “Jisei no yume” in 2010. Tobi’s novel Ragiddo gāru ラギッド・ガール (Ragged Girl) also earned the author the Grand Prize in the 2006 Sense of Gender Awards, a competition dedicated to literature, film, and manga that invite us to reconsider questions of gender.
“Jisei no yume” anticipates a future in which the virtually seamless integration of human activity and technological infrastructure has been achieved thanks to the development of a central organizing system intermittently referred to as the Golden Eternal Bookshelf and Gödel’s Eternal Bookshelf,¹ and more commonly referred to by the acronym GEB.² The story precludes easy plot synopsis, but the general premise goes something like this: Advancements in information technologies have given birth to a device known as CASSY, which translates human thoughts and actions into text and uploads them to the GEB. While CASSYs are described as somewhat unsophisticated gadgets, one young woman—a teenager named Alice Wong—employs her CASSY to generate poetry, transforming the clumsy snippets output by her device into a massive archive of continually evolving verse.

¹ Gödel’s Eternal Bookshelf refers to the twentieth-century mathematician Kurt Gödel, creator of two “incompleteness theorems” that have profoundly impacted the philosophy of mathematics. The first theorem states that within any formal system adequate for number theory, there is a formula that is not provable and whose negation is also not provable; the second states that a formal system cannot demonstrate its own consistency. For further reading see Raymond M. Smullyan, Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorems (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

² It is possible, though not certain, that GEB is also a reference to Douglas R. Hofstadter’s Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid, a mammoth-sized meditation that employs intersecting discussions of the three brilliant minds who comprise its title to consider questions pertaining to, among other things, the location of meaning. Originally published in 1979 and translated into Japanese 1985, Hofstadter’s book explores the concept of the “strange loop,” elsewhere referred to as a “tangled hierarchy consciousness.” Hofstadter writes, “My belief is that the explanations of ‘emergent’ phenomena in our brains—for instance, ideas, hopes, images, analogies, and finally consciousness and free will—are based on a kind of Strange Loop, an interaction between levels in which the top level reaches back down towards the bottom level and influences it, while at the same time being itself determined by the bottom level. In other words, a self-reinforcing ‘resonance’ between different levels—quite like the Henkin sentence which, by merely asserting its own provability, actually becomes provable. The self comes into being at the moment it has the power to reflect itself.” Douglas R. Hofstadter, Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1979), 704.
One afternoon Alice is out for a run, her thoughts and movements coalescing to generate poem after poem. She suddenly encounters what appear to be pebbles in the sky, and it is at this moment, the narrator tells us, that she is subjected to an intrusive contact from Imajika, a mysterious entity that threatens to engulf the GEB. Alice, her settings now corrupted, returns home and proceeds to go on a murderous rampage, killing her mother before she, too, dies. Meanwhile an investigation into Imajika’s origins has already begun, and at the center of this inquest is a brilliant writer and serial killer named Mamiya Jundo—who had died thirty years prior, and whose works, having been dispersed throughout the GEB, have coalesced with those of Alice to accelerate Imajika’s maturation. Jundo is quite deliberately (and at moments comically) cast in the role of a psychoanalyst, whose attempts to excavate the darkest recesses of his patients’ unconscious minds go terribly awry. Having finally ended his life in a spectacular act of suicide, Jundo is revived in virtual form, and thereafter begins his search for the origins of this viral entity. What he finds is none other than the ghost of Alice, who has returned to aid Imajika and, in the process, assist also in Jundo’s journey to self-discovery.

In this chapter I will revisit a number of the issues that have been raised throughout the course of this dissertation. Drawing on the work of N. Katherine Hayles, I will begin by establishing a framework for thinking about the pervasive trope of virtuality in Japan as one that is in many cases deliberately engaged with questions of the psyche, and specifically with the relationship between the unconscious domain and the conscious sphere of language. From there I will draw on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Elizabeth Grosz, and Ettinger in a discussion of the interconnected concepts of trauma, desire, and sexual difference in “Jisei no yume,” devoting particular attention to how language and
linguistic breakdown play into Tobi’s vision of a virtual landscape whose integrity has been breached. In the following section I will document the transformation of the Freudian dreamscape in which the early events of the story unfold into a dynamic system in which language and subjectivity are deterritorialized. In doing so, I will argue that Tobi, through a synthesis of corporeal and linguistic tropes, envisions a reconstellation of identity whereby the discrete subject becomes bound to the effects of the other. Finally, I will return to the subject of language to consider the following question: How might writing, like the visual artwork, move toward representing that which eludes signification? With reference to the work of Azuma Hiroki and other postmodern thinkers, I will propose that “Jisei no yume” raises the possibility of a *co-poetics*, a mode of affective writing that lends itself to the construction of shared worlds, and which reflects the trajectory of Japanese artistic developments in the virtual era.

**Decoding the Unconscious**

In her insightful essay “Traumas of Code,” Hayles employs the commonplace phenomenon of dissonance between human input and technological output to construct a compelling analogy between computer code and the unconscious:

I mistype a word, and my word processing program rearranges the letters. I think I am making the keystroke that will start a new paragraph and instead the previous paragraph disappears. I type a URL into the browser and am taken to a destination I do not expect. These familiar experiences make us aware that our conscious intentions do not entirely control how our language operates. Just as the unconscious surfaces through significant puns, slips, and metonymic splices, so the underlying code surfaces at those moments when the program makes decisions we have not consciously initiated. This phenomenon suggests the following analogy: as the unconscious is to the conscious, so computer code is to language. I will risk pushing the analogy even further; in our computationally intensive culture, code is the unconscious of language.³

In contemporary Japanese science and speculative fiction narratives, the code/unconscious corollary identified by Hayles is visible in myriad forms. Of course, this feature is not unique to Japan, where the likes of Philip K. Dick, William Gibson, and Ridley Scott, among other Western cyberpunk artists, have had a profound impact on aesthetic constructions of cyborgian and virtual identities. Nevertheless, the diverse ways in which Japanese artists have deployed the virtual as a means of mapping the psyche are remarkable for their engagement with a broad array of cultural concerns and, moreover, for the force with which such narratives have swept across the globe.

Consider, for example, Takeno Masato’s *Yamada-san nikki*, mentioned briefly in my second chapter. In this novel a PC-based role-playing game gradually takes hold of its schoolboy player, whose ever-strengthening desire to escape what he perceives to be a prison of conformity leads him to physically assault his own mother, in turning killing off his character in the game. A more complex articulation of both the anxieties and the potentialities embodied by the virtual emerges in Tsutsui Yasutaka’s 1993 novel *Paprika* (the inspiration behind Kon Satoshi’s awarding-winning 2006 film of the same title), in which psychotherapeutic techniques are integrated with virtualization technology, enabling instant access to the dreams of psychiatric patients. As the novel progresses, a collapse of the boundary separating the so-called “real world” and the realm of repressed trauma and desire transpires, leading to catastrophe but also, more importantly, to renewal. Nakamura Ryūtarō’s aforementioned 1997 anime series *Shiriaru ekusuperimentsu*

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Rein thrusts its *shōjo* protagonist into the depths of a virtual environment known as the Wired, which stimulates a series of powerful and troubling effects on the material conditions of the real world. Lain claims victory over the godlike patriarch that governs this domain; in the end, however, our heroine is herself erased, persisting only in the form of the faint memory of a schoolmate. Suzuki Kōji’s 1998 *Rūpu* ループ (Loop), the third and most contentious novel in his *Ringu* series, abandons the obsolete trope of the viral videotape in favor of a simulated reality through which Sadako’s virus continues to infect the living world, and in which our protagonist is enabled to merge his own consciousness with those of others. The interminable science fiction franchise *Kōkaku kidōtai*, first imagined in a 1989 *manga* series, was revived in 2013 in the form of a four-part OVA production that continues with the original’s exploration of the intersections of the body, the mind, and the network in an era of continuous connectivity. At the risk of belaboring my point even further, I would like to note that virtuality has also long constituted fertile ground for the development of an array of Japanese commodities aimed at the production of consumer desire for nonexistent objects. By way of example, consider the explosive success of the mid-1990s *tamagotchi* and obsessive fandom surrounding present-day virtual idols such as Hatsune Miku.\(^5\)

The ubiquity of the virtual in Japan both as a fictional trope and within the capitalist landscape, combined with the persistent deployment of virtuality to ponder questions of

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\(^5\) *The tamagotchi* is a pocket-sized digital pet produced by the toymaker Bandai. Hatsune Miku is a musical persona developed by Crypton Future Media. Her voice is produced using a singing voice synthesizer known as a Vocaloid, and she regularly performs concerts as an animated projection. She appears as a teenaged girl with turquoise pigtails.
memory, desire, and subjectivity in the technological era, suggests that the model outlined by Hayles offers a fruitful framework for thinking about Tobi’s story. “Jisei no yume” opens with an allusion to Víctor Erice’s 1973 film *El espíritu de la colmena* (The Spirit of the Beehive), recounting the scene in which the young protagonist Ana and her elder sister Isabel attend a mobile cinema screening of James Whale’s 1931 *Frankenstein*. “I am watching a movie,” the narrator of “Jisei no yume” explains. “Or let me put it another way. The film I’m watching (along with countless other works) is already a part of me, and I can access any scene in it instantly. Or perhaps it would be better to say that I have been incorporated into this movie.” The narrator—a computer program who refers to itself only as “<Watashi>” (<I>)—then explains that the account that is about to unfold is an interview with Mamiya Jundo, a man of letters and renowned murderer who had died three decades earlier and has been resurrected in virtual form to strike down a monstrous entity known only as Imajika (拒絕). In the next scene, the narrator describes descending in an elevator into a maximum-security prison. “My tacky houndstooth jacket,” it writes, “my mismatched bag and shoes, this pretentious prison—all contrivances. Do I have to explain the meaning of each and every one these things?” Lest the reader has yet to get the gist, Jundo’s subsequent comment on the narrator’s lotion—or rather, lack thereof—ensures

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7 The name Imajika calls to mind the title of a 1942 Nakajima Atsushi short story titled “Mojika” (文字禍), or “The Curse of Letters.” In Nakajima’s story, which is set in ancient Assyria, a scholar discovers a piece of writing whose letters mutate into incomprehensible forms. “Imajika” might be understood to mean something like “the curse of no letters,” or “the curse of banned letters.”

8 Tobi, “Jisei no yume,” 354.
that the image of Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the famed antagonist of Thomas Harris’s crime thriller *The Silence of the Lambs*, immediately comes to mind.

Deliriously leaping between and into a series of other texts, these opening pages establish the story’s central setting, a futuristic virtual environment whose landscape expands outward from the interface of the so-called “real world” and the realm of computer code. An ever-evolving assemblage of globally-produced artistic works, thoughts, and even physiological data rendered anonymous and translated into countless languages, the universally-accessible database known as GEB functions as a kind of collective psychological domain, in which self-consciousness is subsumed to an ever-evolving shared consciousness. As the text’s opening lines demonstrate, moments of uncanny repetition pervade the narrative, with characters unwittingly moving freely and inadvertently among a variety of subject positions that are tenuously linked with the familiar literary and filmic plots of which the database is comprised. The ambiguous status of the discrete subject within the network is further underscored as the narrator repeatedly draws attention to the hazy border that separates material reality and the virtual sphere. “Was her existence unraveling into infinite strands of data?” the narrator asks of Alice as her poems stream into GEB. “Or were these infinite strands of data weaving her into existence?” Later, the narrator explains to Jundo that he—along with the tens of thousands of other Jundos that have been brought to life—is a computer-generated assemblage of texts. “Am I a collected corpus? A mish-mash of corpses?” Jundo asks in reply. In this way, the story—as its title

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9 Ibid., 364.

10 Ibid., 395. In the original text, which reads, “私は死体の寄せあつめか;” the term “corpses” (*shitai* 死体) is accompanied by the furigana for “corpus” (*kōpasu* コーパス).
suggests—draws the reader into a kind of Freudian dreamscape, wherein the unconscious (code) and conscious (language) coalesce.

In the early pages of the narrative, we learn that this environment has come under threat, with tens of thousands of texts having grown corrupted under the influence of some unknown force. “I take a book from my bag, an old, heavy book,” the narrator explains.

_**Moby Dick.**_ A thick, cumbersome tome. The surface of the sturdy leather cover has taken on a rugged appearance, as though entangled in tree roots, knots, an old man’s veins. The pages within are frightfully swollen... The printed letters multiply, spill out of their lines, pile upon one another, devour each other, protract, turn the pages black. The letters penetrate their pages, fuse with other pages and swallow them. The lesions penetrate the cover, fuse it into knots.¹¹

Thereafter, it is revealed that this disease likewise affects images. By way of example the narrator describes watching Erice’s film yet again only for the movie to be engulfed by a giant sphere that expands until it bursts through the edge of the screen, morphing first into George Méliès’s crying moon and, finally, into a clenched fist.

We now arrive at the question that lies at the crux of the story: What is Imajika? I have argued thus far that the virtual landscape erected by Tobi corresponds to the world of dreams that lingers between the encoded unconscious mind and the conscious realm of linguistic signs. I would also like to propose that Imajika, which in computer terminology resembles a kind of encrypted virus, may be linked to the psychoanalytic concept of trauma. Hayles, drawing on the work of contemporary trauma specialists Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, extends the metaphor of code as the unconscious of language to the particular concept of trauma. “Traumatic events,” she writes,

are experienced and remembered in a qualitatively different way from ordinary

¹¹ Ibid., 358-59.
experience. The characteristic symptoms of trauma—dissociation, flashbacks, reenactments, frighteningly vivid nightmares—suggest that traumatic memories are stored as sensorimotor experiences and strong emotions rather than as linguistic memory . . . Experienced consciously but remembered nonlinguistically, trauma has structural affinities with code. Like code, it is linked with narrative without itself being narrative. Like code, it is somewhere other than on the linguistic surface, while having power to influence that surface. Like code, it is intimately related to somatic states below the level of consciousness. These similarities suggest that code can become a conduit through which to understand, represent, and intervene in trauma.12

Hayles’s comments resonate strongly with Tobi’s depiction of Imajika, an entity that eludes algorithms and resists narrative, manifesting instead as affect. As Imajika proliferates ever rapidly throughout the landscape of GEB, virtual representation is scrambled. Physical texts, too, are subjected to nightmarish mutations, their words growing corrupted, like a file once data integrity has been breached. And, we learn, humanity is likewise subject to this force’s destructive whims, rendered collateral damage as the virus self-propagates throughout the network and into the unconscious.

The story provides further evidence for viewing Imajika as linked to the concept of trauma through the development of its two central characters, the first of whom is the brilliant author and notorious killer Mamiya Jundo. “Imajika,” we learn, is the title of one of Jundo’s works, a collection of short stories about a novel whose plot differs each time it is read. In yet another instance of repetition, we learn that the collection, like “Jisei no yume” itself, opens with an allusion to El espíritu de la colmena, quoting a letter written by the young girls’ mother Teresa to a former lover: “So much of our lives has been lost, destroyed,” reads one section of the letter, which in Jundo’s collection is rendered into poetic stanzas. “Sadness alone remains/Along with the things we lost/I think the strength

12 Hayles, ”Traumas of Code,” 140-41.
to experience our own existence, too, has been extinguished.”

This is the only information provided concerning Imajika’s literary namesake, but it offers important insight into the character of Jundo and, in turn, the entity that threatens to collapse the GEB. In his life, we learn, Jundo had not been any ordinary murderer—his weapon of choice had been words. Jundo had possessed the ability to force people to recall the darkest of their forgotten secrets and sins merely through conversation. In turn, he had left seventy-three victims, driven to suicide by his whispers, in his wake. In a flashback to a scene from Jundo’s poverty-stricken teenage years, we discover that he had once encountered someone whose unconscious he could not decipher: a beloved teacher named Mrs. Tsuge. A fragile boy overwhelmed by the power of his own speech, young Jundo—then named Niwahiko Taira—had found himself thrilled by the prospect that Mrs. Tsuge might be capable of enduring his unusual and deadly talent. In the end, however, he had cut off his own ear, pushing her over the edge and into suicide. In the interactive flashback to this incident the narrator discovers young Jundo in the moments after his teacher’s death, his fists clutched so tightly that his fingers have fused together. “That ear,” the present-day Jundo explains, “is the core of my identity.”

Through these brief glimpses into Jundo’s writings and life story, Tobi paints a portrait of a man whose existence is profoundly shaped by loss, and in turn by a desire to relocate something that, it would seem, is no longer within reach. The narrator’s simulated


14 The name Niwahiko, which literally translates to “garden boy,” is revealed to be a fitting designation for the boy toward the story’s conclusion.

15 Ibid., 375.
return to Jundo’s childhood reveals a dilapidated home devoid of parental figures, suggesting that some measure of abandonment (whether willful or owing to external circumstances) had informed the boy’s development from an early age. The more vividly remembered suicide of Mrs. Tsuge presents itself as a recurrence of this irrevocable loss, with the beloved teacher being cast as a maternal substitute who likewise disappears from the boy’s life in a scene of traumatic rupture. Both of these memories remain available to the story’s characters and the reader through the process of virtual simulation; however, the narrative is also pervaded by a more deeply entrenched sense of loss, one whose object is beyond recognition, and whose memory has faded. In the early pages of the story, the elusive quality of this loss finds its most potent expression in the allusion to Teresa’s letter, which is addressed to an absent lover, and which makes its way into “Imajika” in spite of the author’s claim that he has no recollection of Erice’s film. Sustained and dispersed throughout the textual fabric of the GEB, this haunting loss becomes manifest in a variety of forms, and most notably in the recurring image of young Jundo’s fused fist, which represents one of the most significant shapes in which Imajika appears, and whose contents remain a mystery until the story’s conclusion.

I will revisit the elusive image of the fist later in this chapter; at this juncture, however, I would like to consider more fully the significance of Jundo’s decision to sever his ear. The character of Jundo has strong resonances with the historical figure of Vincent van Gogh, who in December of 1888 famously sliced off his own ear with a razor. The question of what drove van Gogh to commit this act remains an enigma—with one scholar having devoted an entire book chapter to elaborating an impressive thirteen theories concerning
the impetus for this event.\textsuperscript{16} It is widely believed, however, that the painter delivered his severed ear to a prostitute with whom he had become acquainted.

Connoting the now-mythologized plight of van Gogh, Jundo’s act bespeaks the character’s status as a tortured artist. The severance of Jundo’s ear also mirrors the sacrificial quality of van Gogh’s self-mutilation, with Mrs. Tsuge being cast as a maternal substitute in place of the recipient of van Gogh’s unusual gift.\textsuperscript{17} Further justification for this reading is located toward the end of “Jisei no yume,” wherein Alice hones in on the incident that had driven Mrs. Tsuge to her grave: “You wanted to amputate your own power,” Alice asserts. “That’s right, isn’t it?” As Alice suggests, Jundo’s grisly performance represents a kind of symbolic self-castration; importantly, however, here this act diverges somewhat from a Freudian model, according to which castration precludes the possibility of a union with the mother. In an attempted inversion of this conventional paradigm, Jundo removes his organ as a gesture of submission, quite literally opening himself up to the maternal figure of his beloved teacher.

Also significant is the fact that the ear, in contrast to the more common castration substitute of the eye, is an auditory receptacle, that is, a physiological opening. The ear thus serves a doubly signifying function. Within the immediate context of the scene in which it is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{17} It has been speculated that van Gogh’s own act stemmed in part from a desire to demonstrate to the prostitute that he was not, as his own mother believed, an aggressive figure. For an elaboration of this and other theories, see Albert J. Lubin, \textit{Stranger on Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent van Gogh} (New York: Henry Holt/Da Capo Press, 1996).
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 414.
\end{enumerate}
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severed, it is cast as the sign of a mutilated masculinity; as an auditory vessel, however, the ear also serves to foreground one of the story's central motifs: the impossibility of not experiencing language’s affect, even when meaning itself grows distorted. On the one hand, then, Jundo’s identification of the missing ear as the core of his being links the severed organ to the traumatic double loss around which his memories of childhood are organized. On the other, the ear, as a passage that opens the discrete mind and body to outside resonances, represents the potential for Jundo to undergo a reconstruction or reconstellation of identity.

The appearance of Imajika transposes what amounts to a personal crisis of subjectivity on the part of Jundo onto a broader linguistic plane. And, I contend, this crisis of language, too, is presented as inextricably linked to the feminine. In his Seminars, Lacan, drawing on Freud, explains his theory that desire as experienced in the realm of the Symbolic is constituted by unconscious lack:

Desire, a function central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable. And at the same time this desire lies at the origin of every variety of animation … Being comes into existence as an exact function of this lack. Being attains a sense of self in relation to being as a function of this lack, in the experience of desire. . . . Relations between human beings are really established before one gets to the domain of consciousness. It is desire which achieves the primitive structuration of the human world, desire as unconscious.19

Lacan’s position on the role of the maternal object in the organization of the subject’s psychic life would evolve considerably over the course of his career.20 Insofar as


Tobi’s story is concerned, however, his early emphasis on the child’s separation from the mother is of particular interest. Despite Lacan’s insistence that the event of birth, while connected with anxiety, cannot be linked to psychical trauma, he contends in *Les Complexes Familiaux* (1938) that the event of weaning [sevrage] repeats “the more obscure imago of a primordial weaning, one more painful and of a more vital magnitude: that of the separation of the infant at birth from its matrix.”\(^{21}\) In the same work, Lacan colorfully elaborates on the painful sensations that accompany this split, writing that “these primary discomforts share the same cause: an insufficient adaptation to the rupture of the environmental and nutritional conditions which comprise the parasitic equilibrium of intra-uterine life.”\(^{22}\)

What I find significant here for our understanding of “Jisei no yume” is Lacan’s suggestion that this earliest, highly formative split from the maternal body marks the beginning of the subject’s passage from an affective sphere into a linguistic one. Through this process, the mother becomes aligned with what Lacan describes in *Seminars* as the “primitive structuration” of the unconscious, rendered an object of desire that is irrevocably lost, and whose essence cannot be articulated. Just as Jundo’s destructive impulses are linked to the absence (and desire to negate the absence) of the mother, in other words, Imajika’s virulent proliferation throughout the GEB and into the material world is driven by a desire for a pre-/extra-linguistic object that is likewise identified as connected to affect, and to the feminine.

To further elaborate I would now like to turn to the character of Alice Wong, whose


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 30.
verse, as noted, sets itself apart from the anonymous streams of encoded material uploaded continuously to the GEB. Alice’s work, we are told, embodies the potential to reinvigorate the creative side of humanity, which has all but forgotten poetry in the technological era. Jundo’s desire, now dispersed throughout the GEB, had spawned Imajika’s search queries, and the virulent entity had devoured Alice’s poems with particular enthusiasm, infused as they were with introspection, sensuality, and life. Upon incorporating Alice’s verse, Imajika had grown incapable of containing the web of associations constructed by her dynamic words, thereby producing the material events that had transpired across the pages of written texts. As the catalyst for these events, Alice’s poetry demands further attention.

The most remarkable feature of Alice’s whimsical verse is the fact that each of her poems represents a complex synthesis of internally-derived data such as voice recordings, movement analysis, and information uploaded by receptors located within her bloodstream and nervous system, and externally-derived data such as links to literary works she has consulted, music she has listened to, and satellite observational feedback. What I find most interesting here is that in spite of the fact that Alice’s poems enter the virtual domain without ever having been committed to the page, their dynamism relies on their partial grounding in materiality. Consider, for example, the following verse, which Alice effortlessly produces during an early morning run: “#Long black hair tied up at her back, effortless acceleration, the crimson leaves of roadside sugar maples, shatter the glittering morning sunlight” (#Nagai kurokami o ushiro de tabane, iki mo midasazu kasoku-suru to, endō satōkaede no momiji-shita ha ga asahi o kira-kira to kudaita #長い黒髪をうし
Alice’s poetry demonstrates, to paraphrase Elizabeth Grosz, the necessary dependence of psychical interiority on a corporeal exteriority. Grosz elaborates this point through reference to the model of the Möbius strip, a structure that can help us to envision “the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes another.” Of particular interest to Grosz is the notion of the body itself as a textual surface that is doubly inscribed by psychical drives, on the one hand, and externally derived laws and customs, on the other. Objecting to the notion of a mind/body split, Grosz conceives of a subject that undergoes continual re-inscription from without and within, a self that is irreducible to any one of the dynamic, mutually constitutive forces through which it is continually produced. Such an understanding of the self, Grosz contends, is vital to understanding also “the contributions of the body to the production of knowledge systems, regimes of representation, cultural production, and socioeconomic exchange.” Moreover, she argues, this rhizomatic vision of the embodied subject has especially important implications for feminist theorizations of corporeality, enabling us to conceive of the feminine beyond her classical association with

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23 Tobi, “Jisei no yume,” 364.


25 Ibid., 19.
lack (which in Freud is constitutive of male desire and which in Lacan is constitutive of the Symbolic realm) and align her instead with the affirmative process of “becoming.”

The framework provided by Grosz can shed light on Tobi’s depiction of Alice, the potency of whose poems hinges on the playful synthesis of internal and external data. Repeatedly likened to a typhoon in perpetual motion, Alice’s verse stands in stark contrast to Jumbo’s own behemoth oeuvre, whose lyricism and poignancy, as Alice notes, are somewhat obscured by his attempts at restraint and peculiar embellishments. The crucial distinction here is that while Jumbo’s prose demonstrates a high level of technical mastery (which serves to diminish the emotive potency of his work), Alice’s verse, bearing traces of the flesh, is depicted as registering most powerfully on an affective plane—a characteristic that calls to mind Lacan’s aforementioned identification of the maternal body with a lost moment of “primitive structuration” that is informed by non-cognitive processes. Yet here, the feminine is not articulated as lack; contrastingly, Alice’s poems are engaged in a movement of becoming, mixing with other poems, multiplying and dividing, detonating and devouring other works as they are uploaded to the archive. The textual body of Alice’s poetry thus resembles something akin to a Deleuzian desiring-machine, whereby desire is affirmatively conceived as “what produces, what connects, what makes machinic alliances . . . an actualization, a series of practices, bringing things together or separating them, making machines, making reality.”

26 Ibid., 165. Grosz’s discussion is largely indebted to Deleuze and Guattari’s neologism becoming-woman.

27 Ibid., 165.
In order to further develop our understanding of Tobi’s engagement with the possibilities embodied by language, I would like to revisit the work of Ettinger, who views artworking as an occasion that might give rise to what she terms *co-poiesis*. Griselda Pollock explicates this concept as follows:

*Autopoiesis* is the theoretical construct of Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturano, who worked at the borders of biological and cognitive science to propose that “each living system constructs its environment through the ‘domain of interactions’ made possible by its autopoietic organization.” Drawing on this recognition that the world we inhabit is constructed according to a system that includes that which observes or reflects upon it, Ettinger expands the celibate imaginary of the isolated autopoietic organization to imagine the psyche as also a *co-poietic* organization, transsubjectively constructed shared worlds.28

Ettinger’s own artworks demonstrate how the aesthetic might open up reciprocal passageways between seemingly discrete moments, spaces, bodies, and memories. Consider the following image, number 37 in her series entitled *Eurydice*. On the left side of the frame is an image taken from a photograph of Ettinger’s smiling parents walking through a street in Łódź, Poland prior to Ettinger’s birth, and in a moment immediately preceding the Second World War. At the bottom right is an image of Ettinger, who was born after the conclusion of the war, as a child. A third image, far more abstract, has also been incorporated into the piece. This one derives from a well-known photograph, likely taken by a photographer who accompanied one of the Einsatzgruppen death squads that were deployed in Poland during WWII. The original shows a group of naked Jewish women, some of who are embracing children, being herded to their executions. Here this image is deliberately obscured, having been passed through a photocopier whose process was halted before the grains of ink could be heat-sealed into the paper. The result is a haunting

montage in which the happy couple from the past and their future child are integrated into a more timeless landscape inscribed with the traumatic memories of the Łódź ghetto, and of Auschwitz:

FIGURE 1. Bracha Ettinger, Eurydice n. 37 (2001)

Ettinger’s art enables us to comprehend what it means to be engaged in co-poiesis, in a process in which the simulacra is deployed to expand an event beyond its own temporal, spatial, and corporeal limits to encompass a plurality of subjects (inclusive of the subject of the painting, the artist, and the viewer). As I have stressed in previous chapters, for Ettinger the possibility for such an encounter is highest on a visual plane, with the artistic
canvas constituting a fertile space for the construction of blurred landscapes, temporal cracks, fractured bodies, and disparate emotional states. In “Jisei no yume” Tobi locates similar potential in the sphere of language, employing Alice’s poetry to suggest that affect, rather than existing only prior to or as an aftereffect of linguistic signification, might operate also as a force of renewal, an intensity that arises when language is “activated” by other texts, and by the reader.

As noted, the incipient Imajika metabolizes Alice’s poems, an event that enables the virus to access also the countless secondary works that are linked to Alice’s verse in what is described as a kind of cascade effect. Alice’s corpus is thus figured as a passageway between the encoded domain and the linguistic one—a borderspace through which the body (of trauma, of desire) might inscribe itself into the textual surface. Owing to its deleterious effects, Imajika’s materialization impresses us as something akin to rupture, a return of the repressed. As the story continues, however, it becomes clear that this entity is engaged in a far more radical project: that of realizing the potential for the virtual to engender new modes of being and becoming.

**Rhizomatic Visions: Becoming Virtual/Feminine/Animal**

To elaborate I would first like to revisit the work of Deleuze and Guattari, who counter a Freudian vision of the architecture of the psyche with one according to which the unconscious itself is continually under construction. “For both statements and desires, the issue is never to reduce the unconscious or to interpret it or to make it signify according to a tree model,” they write. “The issue is to produce the unconscious, and with it new statements, different desires: the rhizome is precisely this production of the
unconscious.”29 Drawing on these thinkers, Rosi Braidotti, like Grosz, identifies the rhizome as a fruitful model for thinking about sexual difference in terms other than those conventionally deployed. In doing so, she counters a modern vision of woman as the lesser half in series of binaries (man/woman, self/Other, human/animal, real/artificial) with the image of a feminist subject who both challenges humanist notions of identity and gives substance to the fragmented subject of postmodernity:

She, in fact, may no longer be a she at all, but rather the subject of quite another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis. In short, a virtual feminine. The feminist subject of knowledge is intensive, multiple and it functions in a net of inter-connections. It is rhizomatic, which means it is non-unitary, nomadic, non-linear, web-like, embodied, and therefore perfectly artificial. As an artifact this subject is machinic, complex and thus endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode. It is abstract and perfectly, operationally, real.30

As the GEB grows increasingly unable to mitigate the effects of Imajika, we witness the emergence of a rhizome, an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of states.”31 Fueled by Alice’s poetry, this transformation of the database is figured as a kind of feminization, a strangulation of the masculine (centralized, structured, hierarchical) framework that comprises the GEB. This is not to say, however, that Imajika’s proliferation throughout the network should be read as engendering a transformation of


31 Deleuze and Guattari, Thousand Plateaus, 23.
this virtual environment from the outside; quite contrarily, I contend, the conditions for this evolution have always already existed within the database, a latent possibility (a reality that is first suggested in the narrator’s reference to Kurt Gödel, whose incompleteness theorems demonstrate that there is “no non-shifting foundation on which any system rests”). To illustrate this line of thought consider the following excerpt from a musical score included in Thousand Plateaus as a model of the rhizome:

![Image of a musical score](image.png)

**FIGURE 2. Excerpt from Sylvano Bussotti’s Five Piano Pieces for David Tudor (1959)**

This image bears an uncanny resemblance to Imajika’s effects as described by the story’s narrator:

At first, letters in a line multiply insidiously. Closer examination reveals letters within words overlapping and replicating. Spaces are inserted into the middle of words, splitting them into terms with ambiguous meanings. This process accelerates, and soon the letters seep into the gaps between lines, unable to be contained. The letters run aground of one another, words grow entangled, devour one another, and moreover

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Moreover, the score nicely demonstrates how a rhizome might emerge from within and interact with an established system of representation.

Tobi’s vision of cyberspace as a virtual-feminist topography is further elaborated as the story leaps back to yet another moment from Jundo’s past. This time the narrator recounts Jundo’s suicide through the eyes of Alice, who had stumbled upon a video recording of the event while perusing the GEB thirty years after the man’s passing. The gruesome scene that unfolds reveals that the severance of Jundo’s ear had been but a prelude to his death, which had transpired at the hands of a medical robot that had flayed the man’s still-living body, piece-by-piece. “He doesn’t want to disappear. He wants not to,” Alice had thought, recalling the palpable loneliness that pervades Jundo’s written works. “He’s not giving up or running away. Is he… dispersing?”

The suggestion that Jundo’s mechanical dissection represents a kind of “dispersal” (san’itsu 散逸) marks this moment as one of transformation, and specifically of a deliverance of the flesh to the virtual domain. That this scene appears as an overdetermined repetition of the man’s earlier attempt at self-emasculance serves to further enforce the text’s coding of the discrete body as masculine and the porous, co-extensive paradigm of virtual embodiment as feminine. In his transition from embodied subject position to no-body in motion, then, Jundo comes to resemble Deleuze’s Body

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33 Tobi, “Jisei no yume,” 359.

34 Ibid., 399.
without Organs,\textsuperscript{35} entering into a state of flux in which the unilateral dynamics of communication are subsumed to endless possibilities for interconnectivity. In this passage, I contend, Jundo is liberated from the confines of Oedipal subjectivity and incorporated into a process of becoming-feminine, a process that is reproduced on a linguistic plane as his written works are dispersed throughout the fabric of the database.

Jundo’s movement from the sphere of material reality into the virtual one does not eliminate the problem of loss that had come to govern Jundo’s life and work. It does, however, fundamentally alter the manner in which his journey of self-discovery unfolds. When Imajika’s effects can no longer be ignored, Jundo is revived from the dead in multitudes in order that he might deploy his Lecteresque mastery of language to out-write the virus. What is at stake here is the unconscious itself, that is, the unconscious as mapped by Freud, the codified structure from which language and subjectivity arise. And Jundo is to play the role of psychoanalyst once again, this time using his abilities to unravel the core of Imajika and rescue the human spirit, in turn leading to his own redemption.

Or so we are told. As the story approaches its conclusion, however, it is revealed that the revived Jundo is himself the product of yet another entity, an Intelligent Textual Organ that has analyzed Imajika’s search queries and returned him to life in order to “harvest” Imajika’s contents. As Jundo embarks upon this quest we also encounter the ghost of Alice, who reenacts the \textit{Frankenstein} scene that is featured in \textit{El espíritu de la colmena}: “\textit{Just a short distance from the bottom of the hill, our heroine, a young girl,...}

\textsuperscript{35} The Body without Organs, or BwO, first appears in Deleuze’s \textit{The Logic of Sense}, and is elaborated in \textit{Anti-Oedipus} and \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}. A concept drawn from Antonin Artaud’s 1947 play \textit{To Have Done with the Judgment of God}, BwO is described by Deleuze as “a new dimension of the schizophrenic body, an organism without parts which operates entirely by insufflation, respiration, evaporation, and fluid transmission.” Gilles Deleuze, \textit{The Logic of Sense}, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 88.
encounters a fugitive soldier who is hiding out in the cabin with the well. And later on, some number of events having passed, she encounters Frankenstein's monster in the woods beside the lake, a place where dreams and reality are indistinguishable.”

When Alice finally stumbles upon her own monster—Jundo—the story’s earlier allusion to Melville’s novel comes full circle:

An antique wooden sailing ship rests against Imajika as if run aground, and a man stands on deck. Mamiya Jundo. But Jundo is not the reason Alice gasped. From her vantage point, she now sees that Imajika, which had earlier resembled a stone sphere, is unmistakably the head of a gigantic whale, piercing through the surface of the ocean.

As Alice approaches this fantastic scene, she sees that Imajika, having taken the shape of Moby Dick, is in fact lashed to the wooden ship. She subsequently calls attention to the fact that Jundo does not don Captain Ahab’s emblematic wooden leg—for in this case, it is his missing ear that defines his being. As these two figures converse, we learn that Alice has been resurrected to aid Imajika, whose makeup is finally revealed:

Some hundreds of people separated by hundreds of years have been writing about the same things in hundreds of languages. There was no way to link them together until GEB’s high-speed algorithm, a multilanguage intertextual semantic relationship generator, just happened to strike upon them. But GEB couldn’t handle these relationships. There was no way to assign them names. Whatever it couldn’t handle it discarded. And so GEB discarded millions and millions of relationships. It continued to find and discard them, over and over. But having accumulated, they returned, bringing with them the dynamic system known as Imajika.

At this juncture in the narrative, two questions arise. Firstly, what is the connection between the two most suggestive shapes in which Imajika appears: the fused fist and Moby Dick? Secondly, what is the relationship between these images and Imajika’s now-exposed

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37 Ibid., 410.

38 Ibid., 412.
makeup, a web of displaced relationships that cannot enter language?

As noted, the recurring image of the fist is closely tied to the formative event of Jundo’s childhood confrontation with his beloved teacher. That Imajika intermittently assumes this shape suggests that the memory of this encounter—marked by an intense fusion of love and loss, desire and trauma—has, by virtue of Jundo’s dispersed writings, become integrated into the complex web of inarticulable relationships of which the virus is comprised. Cast in the role of Captain Ahab, Jundo is tasked with the pursuit of Imajika in order that he might harvest its precious oil. But is he not already a part of this dynamic system, just as Imajika is already a part of him, has in fact produced him through its search queries?

Melville’s novel, too, presents a scenario in which the hunter becomes ever indistinguishable from the hunted, from the story’s opening—by which point Moby Dick has already devoured Ahab’s leg, now replaced with a whalebone prosthesis—through its conclusion, wherein the white whale pulls Ahab into the sea. Deleuze and Guattari contend that *Moby Dick* represents one of the “greatest masterpieces of becoming,”

39 conceiving of the captain’s passage from the *Pequod* into the vast sea as a break with law in order to forge a monstrous alliance.40 Similarly, I contend, Jundo’s incorporation into the virtual is once again affirmed as a kind of becoming-other, a deterritorialization whereby the discrete subject gives way to a dynamic system that exceeds the self, and which is figured feminine by virtue of its irreducibility to linguistic signifiers and affective intensity, most powerfully represented by Alice’s dynamic verse. To be sure, Imajika’s appearance in the shape of the


40 Ibid., 268.
fist functions on some level to sustain the memory of the traumatic moment with which it is associated; yet as we have already seen, in the virtual domain things grow detached from their particular origins. Accordingly, memory, as Deleuze writes, “does not apprehend the past directly; it recomposes it with different presents.”

The final pages of “Jisei no yume” elaborate the consequences of Imajika’s maturation for the entirety of the GEB (which, significantly, is earlier likened to Ahab’s Pequod): “Like an enormous stone monument, the whale head appeared to be leaping toward the sky. It was as though it wanted to sink its teeth into it,” the narrator writes. “Alice wondered if the moment might arrive that this tender organ, too, would be devoured. That would be the end of humanity’s words. They would be drenched in oil.” The threat of the database’s demise continues to linger as the story approaches its conclusion, anticipating the emergence of a virtual wasteland in place of the GEB, an expertly tilled garden whose deterioration is sure to decimate the human spirit. In its final lines, however, the story counters this bleak vision with a somewhat brighter one as Jundo, for the first time since his virtual rebirth, notices his clenched fist:

Mamiya Jundo reaches out to touch Imajika’s surface, when suddenly he notices that his hand is tightly clenched into a fist . . . He tries to spread his fingers. The tendons and joints are rigid and refuse to budge. He tries to pry his frozen fist apart. Alice joins in. She attempts to worm her slender fingers into the fist, and then tries using her teeth. They go at it for a long time, until they’re both dripping with sweat, trying to open the fist. “…” Together they let out a wordless cry. There in his palm is Niwahiko Taira’s tiny ear, like the petal of a flower.

Jundo is at last reunited with his severed ear, the core of his identity. And yet, by this

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41 Gilles Deleuze, Proust and Signs (New York: Continuum, 2008), 37.

42 Tobi, “Jisei no yume,” 416.

43 Ibid., 417.
Juncture identity itself has become a precarious thing, ever shifting, doubling, rupturing, regenerating, producing, being produced, becoming-other, becoming-many. A remnant of a body emptied of organs, the child-sized ear does not initiate a recovery of the whole. Rather, here the unresolved trauma of the past is reanimated in the present as a condition for future becomings, and, within the framework of this jointly constructed landscape, as a signal of Jundo’s opening up to the other’s desire. Like a flower petal, Niwahiko Taira’s ear belongs to a fleeting moment, a past to which its owner cannot return. Written into the present, however, it bespeaks the possibility for trauma to give rise to beauty. If Imajika’s oil is to bring an end to humanity’s words, in other words, the reappearance of Jundo’s ear signals a newfound vulnerability to the matrixial, where “foreignness and femininity represent and are engaged in a continual negotiation without exhausting recognition, without claiming full understanding, without even expecting love and harmony, and without definite resolution.”

**Beyond the Linear Narrative**

I would now like to consider more fully what “Jisei no yume” can contribute to our understanding of aesthetics and identity in the contemporary era. Cultural critic Azuma Hiroki proposes in his 2001 book *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* 動物化するポストモダン: オタクから見た日本社会 (translated under the title *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals*) that postmodernity operates according to a “database model” that is contrasted with the “projection model” of modernity. The projection model,

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44 Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*, 110.
developed by Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚英志 in his 1989 *Teihon monogatari shōhiron* 定本物語消費論 (Theory of Narrative Consumption), aligns closely with Karatani’s conceptualization of modern Japanese selfhood, being comprised of “a surface outer layer of the world that is reflected in our consciousness,” as well as a “deep inner layer, which is equal to the grand narrative that regulates the surface outer layer.”45 By contrast, Azuma’s database model lacks a “grand narrative.” Rather, it is, like the Internet, organized according to a double-layered structure comprised of an accumulation of encoded information and an outer surface resembling individual web pages. This surface, he stresses, constitutes not a projection deriving from a deep inner layer, but rather belongs to the viewer, revealing “different expressions at those numerous moments of ‘reading up.’”46

Azuma contends that the development of Japanese postmodernity is closely tied to that of the visual novel, a genre comprised of PC games in which the player determines the trajectory of the storyline through relatively minimal actual gameplay. For Azuma, visual novels are especially remarkable in that they reveal two layers of desire on the part of the player. The more self-evident form of desire is directed toward the surface of the text, and is satisfied through predictable experiences such as crying and *moe* 萌え.47 The second form of desire seeks to “invade the system of a novel game itself and to extract the raw


46 Ibid., 32.

47 *Moe*, which embodies the dual meanings of “budding” (萌え) and “burning” (燃え), generally refers to the feelings evoked by the image of a character or character type. Azuma is particularly interested in the idea of *moe* elements, that is, recycled animation features (e.g. large eyes, antenna-like hair, loose socks, cat ears) that inspire *moe* feelings.
information before it is constituted on a playing screenshot, and to reconstitute an entirely different work with the material.” Azuma is referring, of course, to the widespread practice of producing derivative works, which are created by combining fragments of a given game—text, images, music—into a new arrangement or format. Drawing on the work of Alexandre Kojève, Azuma contends that this practice exemplifies the animalization of Japanese society. With the decline of the grand narrative, human desire—driven toward the satisfaction of lack (the hidden desire of the authorial other)—has been subject to erasure. In its place, he argues, there has arisen an animalistic appetite, hell-bent on the assimilation of the textual other into its own reality. Because there exists no grand narrative that can fully quell this desire, the reader is engaged in an endless movement of narrative side-slippering:

Reading the grand nonnarrative partially creates small narratives, but numerous different small narratives can be created from the same nonnarrative, and no agency exists that determines which is superior. In other words, one can revert back from small narratives to a grand nonnarrative. Therefore, what we have is an endless movement of slipping sideways, in which one tries to revert back from the small, visible things before one’s eyes to the invisible, but the invisible turns into a small narrative the moment it becomes visible, and, disappointed, one heads once again for the invisible.  

I am not entirely on board with Azuma’s somewhat pessimistic vision, and especially his application of a post-Hegelian vision of the animal state as one that must be negated in the process of becoming-human. I also disagree that what he identifies as animalistic consumption marks a replacement of sociality with solitude. I do think,

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48 Azuma, Otaku, 80.

49 Ibid., 105-06.

50 In his 2011 book Ippanishi 2.0: Rūso, Furoito, Gūguru (General Will 2.0: Rousseau, Freud, Google), Azuma presents a somewhat less pessimistic vision of database postmodernity, at least insofar as the social is concerned. Here he posits that the web, as a
however, that his focus on the consumption and production of derivative works can be developed into a more affirmative vision of the aesthetic potential encompassed by the database. What if we were to come to an understanding of animalistic consumption that accounts for the participatory quality of plugging in to the network? One according to which the desire for the other is experienced not as an appetite for assimilation, but rather as a yearning to expand beyond the limits of the contained self? Might we rethink the side-slipping that takes place in the hypertextual domain as a movement that, rather than generating disappointment after disappointment, continually reconfigures both the text and its viewer?

Indeed, “Jisei no yume” echoes much of the pessimism expressed by critics for whom the culmination of modernity signals the dissolution of meaning, the dismantling of politics, and the demise of history. Imajika’s contagious propensity to de-familiarize the familiar induces widespread panic, engendering fears concerning not only the destruction of language, but also the demise of the autonomous self. The virus also functions as a striking metaphor for the pervasiveness of media throughout the contemporary Japanese cityscape, where the convergence of massive crowds and audio-visual stimuli (street speakers, advertising trucks, neon signs, enormous television screens) in public spaces places the commuter at the risk of sensory overload.

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channel for the transmission of animalistic desire, functions as an apparatus for documenting and visualizing traces of the unconscious. This being the case, he claims, the general will of the Japanese people might be ascertained through an analysis of digitized, publicly accessible data. While this discussion seems to me to have interesting implications for the art world, the author does not return here to the topics of artistic consumption and derivative works.
On the other hand, Tobi also conceives of Imajika as a metaphor for both the artistic intensity of the unconscious and as a materialization of the complex interplay of the individual and extra-individual forces that serve to continually transfigure the artwork. In this way, the story resonates with Ettinger’s contention that artists continually introduce into culture all sorts of Trojan horses from the margins of their consciousness; in that way, the limits of the Symbolic are transgressed all the time by art. It is quite possible that many work-products carry subjective traces of their creators, but the specificity of works of art is that their materiality cannot be detached from ideas, perceptions, emotions, consciousness, cultural meaning, etc., and that being interpreted and reinterpreted is their cultural destiny. This is one of the reasons why works of art are symbologenic.51

Of course, the possibility identified by Ettinger certainly exists in artworks predating the rise of virtualization technologies. That being said, Tobi identifies the digital sphere as an especially useful domain for thinking about the symbologenic possibilities of artworking—that is, the capacity for aesthetic expression, to borrow from Griselda Pollock, to “generate not an image of the trauma but a symbol that allows the foreclosed the relief of signification, a pathway into language.”52 This focus undoubtedly has much to do with the reality that, as Ringu anticipated more than two decades ago, we have arrived at a point at which we cannot help but be drawn into the rabbit hole of viral words and images that comprise the database. Moreover, the virtual sphere has been widely identified as one that is marked by what Brian Massumi describes as a “quotient of openness,” and in which readers are enabled to “serially experience effects, accumulate them in an unprogrammed


way, in a way that intensifies, creating resonances and interference patterns moving through the successive, linked appearances.”

In this light, the narrative side-slipping described by Azuma and depicted in “Jisei no yume” might be more affirmatively understood not as a succession of disappointments, but rather as a mode of non-linear reading in which the viewer’s desire and the artwork alike are continually reshaped and renewed. Moreover, while Tobi’s futuristic vision unfolds in a multimedia landscape, the author’s casting of the virtualized text as both a point of access between worlds (interior and exterior, material and digital) and as an agent of becoming suggests that language, in spite of its representational limitations, cannot escape its affective origins. Given the revelation that Imajika is comprised of texts produced in hundreds of languages, “Jisei no yume” might also be said to demonstrate Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon’s contention that “translation names primarily a social relationship whose form permeates linguistic activity as a whole, rather than simply comprising a secondary or exceptional situation.”

Integrated into the network, Alice and Jundo’s works, while continuing to carry a trace of their creators, are liberated from fixed positions, as well as from what Sakai and Solomon refer to as “homolinguistic address.” In turn, they become entangled in an infinite system of links, form repetitions, ruptures, and transmutations, and disappear and reappear anew in conjunction with the materialization and de-materialization of other

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53 Massumi, Parables for the Virtual, 138.


55 Ibid., 9.
texts, and with the desire of the reader. Piggy-backing off Ettinger’s notion of co-poiesis we might call the movement that unfolds co-poietics, a writing that is meaningful precisely owing to its failure to anchor meaning, and which exceeds the personal to coalesce with external systems of reference. In this way "Jisei no yume" employs the virtual topography to elaborate a vision of aesthetics in which linearity is subsumed to intensity, mutability, and unanticipated forms of assemblage.

In closing this chapter, it seems pertinent to note that unlike the other works explored in this dissertation, “Jisei no yume” does not frame itself as a piece of socially conscious fiction. In fact, while Ringu, Zeusu no ori, and Joshinki are similarly centered around exposing and, to varying extents, rectifying transgressions committed against persecuted characters and communities, Tobi’s story is most deeply invested in exploring the psychological plight of an unsavory male protagonist who not only escapes accountability for his horrific past, but also does so in an unimaginably gruesome fashion. Moreover, this failure to achieve resolution is further intensified in the story’s conclusion, which makes incumbent on the reader the task of imagining what might transpire as Imajika’s rupture fast approaches.

That being said, these features are precisely what make the story such an interesting, if also frustrating, piece. A postmodern alternative to the modern Japanese psychological novel, “Jisei no yume” counters the conventional story of a male protagonist on a quest to locate an autonomous identity with a scenario in which the dismantling of the male body and psyche form the basis for a recovery of the feminine within the self. The fact that Jundo is never properly held accountable for his transgressions is perhaps reflective of the reality that there are those crimes whose horror cannot be undone, and whose
aftereffects cannot be resolved. It is this haunting indeterminacy that guides Tobi’s depiction of Jundo, who can only begin to approach redemption via a transformation from psychoanalyst-cum-murderer to suicidal masochist—that is, through an inversion of subjectivity whereby identity is subversively constituted by the partial disappearance of the self. This resonates with Ettinger’s notion that the matrixial is a domain of risks, in which the “I may disappear in a traumatic way or in a subtle way . . . Contraction and gradual disappearance create a void in which an other—or a world—will appear.”56 While the story’s conclusion thus leaves the reader with more questions than answers, its reluctance to provide a tidy resolution seems an apt reflection of postmodern, post-traumatic modalities of expression and existence.

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Conclusion

This dissertation has explored gender, space, and psyche in Japanese genre fiction produced from the early years of the post-bubble period through the new millennium. Through examinations of the manner in which gender plays into the construction of the otherworldly locales in which genre fiction frequently unfolds, I have sought to illuminate how recent Japanese popular writers have grappled with, and envisioned alternatives to, the perceived fracturing of subjectivity, community, and nation in the contemporary era. Guided by the work of Bracha Ettinger, I have explored these issues through psychoanalytic examinations of representative works of horror, science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction produced by writers who have earned both local and international acclaim. In doing so, I have endeavored to demonstrate how works belonging to disparate genres similarly elaborate new configurations of subjectivity and sociality within the context of feminine and queer-coded landscapes situated at the peripheries of the everyday.

A number of common threads have emerged over the course of writing this dissertation. Each of the works explored here is deeply engaged with questions of trauma, and more precisely with the effects of traumatic repression, the possibilities for traumatic working-through, and the potential for averting traumatic repetition. A second and related feature shared by these texts is the tendency to deploy feminine and queer-coded subjectivities to explore questions of affect, which to varying extents reveals itself as both a viable mechanism for the transmission of traumatic memory and desire and, in turn, as a pathway toward radical forms of relationality.

I first explored these issues in my analysis of Suzuki Kōji’s Ringu, which plays on
widespread fears concerning the dual emergence of a new configuration of the shōjo, on the one hand, and digital technologies, on the other, to engage with questions of aesthetics, ethics, and subjectivity in the postmodern era. Guided by Ettinger’s concept of the matrixial gaze, I opened this chapter with a consideration of how the novel’s iconic videotape is constructed as a synesthetic point of access between the psyche of the artist and that of the viewer. In doing so, I argued that Ringu seeks to move beyond the rhetoric of repression and return that has dominated prior discussions of the specter of Sadako by revealing the possibility that uncanny encounter might engender not only anxiety, but also an openness to affective traces of the other. I subsequently examined the trope of haunting in Ringu, employing the iconic image of the well, alongside a series of other key scenes and broader discourses on the supernatural in Japan, to argue that the novel reveals the abiding presence of specters of the past within the contemporary Japanese cultural landscape. I next explored possibilities for thinking about the novel’s central trope of the video virus, whose transmission threatens to irrevocably transform the collective psychological landscape of the world in which the novel’s plot unfolds. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s writings on the simulacra, along with Ettinger’s work, I argued that Ringu challenges the oft-repeated notion that postmodernity entails the waning of affect and the demise of history by constructing a vision of a future in which the machinic proliferation of images might engender a de-isolation of, and a widespread sense of obligation to, personal and historical trauma and their lingering affects.

The interconnected concepts of trauma and affect also play vital if somewhat different roles in Ueda Sayuri’s Zeusu no ori, which counters the privileged cyborg vision of the posthuman with an exploration of the psychological, communal, and evolutionary
possibilities embodied by the flesh. In my analysis of this novel, I first explored how Ueda interrogates some of Japanese science fiction’s dominant tropes by highlighting her use of the figures of the Monaural soldier Harding, on the one hand, and the cyborg assassin Karina, on the other, to underscore how the psychological and machinic repression of the material body works in the service of perpetuating discriminatory acts of violence. Drawing on the work of Ettinger and queer theorist Sudeep Dasgupta, I next explored the dynamics of Round sexuality and sociality, which are organized around both an ethos of psychological interdependence and the equitable, and often playful, fulfillment of erotic desire. Here I argued that the novel elaborates both an economy of desire and a conception of community that, rather than privileging the hierarchical relationships that underscore hegemonic gender, sexual, and social relations, are organized around mutually affecting modes of relationality. Extrapolating outward from Ueda’s depiction of Round sexual, familial, and social relations, I concluded with a discussion of how Zeusu no ori might modify our understanding of the “in-between.” Drawing on thinkers working in the disciplines of affect theory and evolutionary biology, I argued that Ueda advances a futuristic vision in which the marginal social subject, rather than participating in what Haraway and others have identified as a kind of parodic rupture or liminal transformation, is re-positioned from the cultural margins to the center of evolutionary and ethical transformation.

Joshinki likewise reveals a deep interest in questions of trauma and affect, both of which Kirino explores through her engagement with such themes as pregnancy, childbirth, maternal desire, and matricide. In my analysis of the novel’s opening section, I drew on Julia Kristeva’s writings on abjection to demonstrate how Kirino employs the coming-of-
age story of the narrator Namima to establish *Joshinki*’s central theme of female defilement, and in doing so aligns the repressed maternal body with the traumatic experience of separation, as well as with the dual concepts of life and death. I subsequently explored Kirino’s depictions of the goddess Izanami and the cryptic space she inhabits, focusing on the novel’s construction of the underworld as a space that is suffused with intense feminine drives and populated by a multitude of ghostly subjectivities. With reference to Kristeva’s concept of the *chora*, Derrida’s neologism *hauntology*, and Ettinger’s *matrixial borderspace*, I argued that Kirino at once draws attention to the historical dimensions of the so-called problem of the maternal in contemporary Japan and advances a schema of maternal relationality in which dominant modes of subjectivity are subsumed to a desire for alliance and trauma might be worked-through via collective recognition and remembrance.

Considerations of trauma and affect are likewise central to Tobi Hirotaka’s “Jisei no yume,” which combines postmodern narrative techniques with questions of aesthetic expression to envision a virtual landscape threatened by the materialization of a virulent entity comprised of written works whose relationships resist codification. I began my analysis of this story with an investigation of the enigmatic Imajika, whose origins are tied to both the traumatic memories of the tortured genius Jundo, on the one hand, and the poetry of the teenaged girl Alice, on the other. With reference to Katherine Hayles and Lacan, as well as to Ettinger’s own artwork, I explored here how Jundo’s lacking desire and Alice’s profoundly affective verse coalesce to produce an entity whose intensities reveal themselves across the textual and imagistic landscape of the GEB. Drawing on the Deleuze-Guattarian concept of the *rhizome*, I subsequently explored more fully the transformation of the story’s setting into a feminine-coded landscape in which affect is privileged over
conventional forms of expression. Here I focused on Jundo’s own transformation from an embodied subject into a virtual one, a process that I argued marks his movement away from an Oedipalized subject position and into a dynamic process of becoming-feminine (and, analogously, becoming-animal). Sustaining my combined Deleuze-Guattarian and Ettingerian reading through a consideration of the story’s conclusion, I argued that the rediscovery of Jundo’s severed ear signals the final surrender of an identity constituted by lack. Finally, I explored what “Jisei no yume” can contribute to discourses on postmodern aesthetics and identity, devoting particular emphasis to the story’s implications for our understanding of artistic practices and configurations of identity in the digital age.

Feminine and queer subjectivities in this dissertation have thus been theorized not in terms of a temporary rupture in the fabric of the Japanese fictional, psychological, and cultural landscapes, but rather as enduring modalities of subjectivity that are radically transgressive of humanist models of identity and relationality. Each of the works explored here is concerned with the fragmentation of discrete identities, a process that in all cases is linked to feminine and/or queer-coded forms of expression and desire. Yet these four texts also demonstrate how the fissures that emerge from this process might create space for modes of recognition and alliance that lie beyond the scope of masculocentric paradigms. While this suggestion is not unique to literature of the post-bubble period, Japanese genre fiction’s intensifying focus on constructing new models of subjectivity and relationality suggests that the nation’s readers are desiring of alternative ways of processing both Japan’s catastrophic past and the uncertainty of its future. In my view, these works suggest that if Japan is to resolve its status as a nation constituted by trauma—and moreover to curb its drive toward traumatic repetition—it must begin with an acknowledgment of
responsibility to past and future injustices, as well as with a positive valuation of difference.

In closing, I would like to posit that if, as I have argued, the works explored here reveal a pressing need to think about genre writing beyond the purview of dominant modes of literary analysis, it follows that genre itself requires some re-theorization. At this juncture, I think, we have moved beyond the claim that genre writing somehow falls short of so-called literary fiction, at least in terms of its capacity to engage seriously and intelligently with issues of historical and contemporary socio-political relevance. Furthermore, popular writers in Japan and elsewhere have long sought to challenge the constricting configurations of genre, employing generic models to carry the text to the point of auto-critique of the formal and ideological elements that underpin popular literary categories. This being the case, I propose, a genre itself might be understood in terms of the *matrixial* in that it is both irreducible to the symbolic ordering that structures it and engaged in the constant processes of undoing, reconfiguration, and hybridization in relation to other texts, and to other genres. This is not to say that this notion applies only to genre fiction; it is to say, however, that were we to more resolutely prioritize genre fiction as an object of literary analysis and potential source of theoretical inspiration, we might stumble upon previously unexplored avenues of inquiry into literature and art at large.
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