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Mori Atsushi’s the Transformation of Meaning (Imi No Henyō 意味の変容): a Translation and Critical Introduction

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MORI ATSUSHI’S *THE TRANSFORMATION OF MEANING*

(IMI NO HENYŌ 意味の変容)

A TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

MEGAN LYNN HUSBY

B.A., University of Montana, 2001

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Dr. Patrick Greaney, Professor of German

Date April 14, 2017

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.
Mori Atsushi’s *The Transformation of Meaning* (Imi no henyō 意味の変容): A Translation and Critical Introduction

Thesis directed by Professor Faye Kleeman

Mori Atsushi 森敦 (1912~1989) was a writer who, after taking an unconventional path that included being protégé to New Sensationalist writer Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898-1947), traveling in and around Japan, working in technical industries, and studying mathematics and esoteric Buddhism, won the Akutagawa Prize in 1974 for his novel *Gassan* 月山. This thesis provides a translation and critical introduction to his 1984 text *The Transformation of Meaning* (Imi no henyō 意味の変容), a work that incorporates multiple genres (including essay, fiction, autobiography, and uniquely Japanese categories such as or *zuihitsu* 随筆 and *shishōsetsu* 私小説 and fields of intellectual inquiry, including mathematics, logic, the thought of Confucius, Western philosophy, and Buddhist philosophy), transforming them into a new “super genre” that is the goal of Mori’s theory of literature. Moreover, it introduces themes of circularity, repetition, and universal totality that are further developed in his later fiction.

To aid in comprehension of this challenging text, the thesis incorporates a full translation with illustrations, chapter summaries, and a glossary of terms. In addition, the introduction provides biographical information on Mori Atsushi, a discussion of the evolution of the text, explanations of a number of the subjects and fields that inform the ideas in the text, or are used as the media by which these ideas are presented. The third section of the introduction contains a discussion of Mori’s circular model of reality that serves as the conceptual scaffolding to the text, how it is indebted to both abstract mathematics (topology, projective geometry, set theory) and to
the Buddhist school of philosophy was inspired by the totalistic view of reality that is exuberantly revealed in the Kegon sutra (J. kegon-kyō 華厳経; Ch. Hwa-yen sutra; S. Avatamsaka sutra). It also includes an analysis of how the circular model expounded in *The Transformation of Meaning* informs Mori’s most famous work, *Gassan*.
Acknowledgements

Nagaya Kazuya introduced me to this fascinating text and its author and assured me that it was worth the considerable effort it would take to read and attempt to understand it. The members of my thesis committee provided encouragement along each step of the path. Literary translation seminars with Professors Laurel Rodd and Patrick Greaney instilled the curiosity, knowledge, and tools needed to take on such a challenging translation project. Both professors generously offered their time and expertise, suggesting sources and editing the translation. Professor Rodd also proofread several drafts of the translation and the entire introduction. Professor Faye Kleeman, in her Japanese literature seminar, allowed me the freedom to pursue my interests. She graciously agreed to supervise this thesis project and has been tremendously supportive throughout the entire process.

I would also like to thank the many wonderful professors and staff members in the Department of Asian Languages and Civilizations, especially those who expressed interest in my project, asked pertinent questions, and offered helpful information. Thanks to the language instructors with whom I have had the privilege of working and to my students for their enthusiasm, patience, and expressions of support. My fellow graduate students provided intellectual stimulation and a sense of community. Thanks especially to Minako Kuhara for cheerfully offering her time, intuition, and research skills. Rebecca Allison kept me on track, patiently answering questions and offering assurance that it would all come together.

I cannot begin to express my gratitude to the many people made it possible for me to pursue and complete graduate studies and this thesis: Dr. Judith Rabinovitch, the late Kajima Shōzō, my friends Mizuho, the Nagaya’s, Cassie, Kelly, Laura, and Mollie, cousins Laurel and
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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

What makes *Imi no henyō* worthy of reading and, in my opinion, of translating? In this important, genre-bending work, Mori Atsushi 森敦 outlines an intellectual model and literary vision of reality as an infinitely diverse and interpenetrating whole. His circular model of wholeness is a highly versatile template for achieving in the terms of twentieth-century mathematics precisely what Buddhist philosophers did in the sixth century with the Kegon sutra; that is, circumvent the impasse of paradox in formal systems by transcending the limited self and embracing contradiction and movement. This open-ended perspective makes it possible to connect to universal Totality by living fully in this very moment.

Japanese critic Karatani Kōjin 柄谷行人 makes the claim that this text represents the “essence of Mori’s experience and thought.” It is an autobiographical text in the sense that Mori brings together and plays with a wide variety of life and professional experiences, as well as multiple fields of intellectual inquiry that draw upon a lifetime interest in mathematics, formal logic, practical science, literature, religion, and Eastern and Western philosophy, including such philosophers as Kant, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard.

While this syncretism makes *Imi no henyō* a rather formidable text to approach, it is undeniably vital both structurally and in terms of the effectiveness of the text in conveying a

1 I will use the Romanized Japanese title throughout this introduction to refer to the work I have
2 The Kegon sutra (J. Kegon-kyō 華厳経, Ch. Hwa-yen, S. Avatamsaka sutra) has been translated into English by Thomas Cleary based on the Chinese translation by Siksananda (699 CE.) under the title *The Flower Ornament Sutra*. See Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (Boston: Shambhala,1993). In this introduction, I will refer to the sutra using the Japanese title.
sense of the totality and inter-existence of the phenomena that make up the cosmos. In this text, domains that are generally held to be separate, regardless of their relative size, become “worlds” with a structure that comprises interior, exterior, and a boundary. Moreover, this boundary acts like a Möbius strip, binding interior and exterior and affording inner and outer the flexibility to switch roles at will, to transform. The infinite interior of a “world” is infinitely complex, and yet worlds encompass worlds and are encompassed by worlds, a notion that Mori explores in depth in his novels Gassan 月山 and Ware yuku mono no gotoku われ逝くもののごとく, which can be considered extensions of concepts set forth in Imi no henyō. In fact, Imi no henyō is often cited as the key to understanding Mori’s late-period fiction. It is my hope that English translations or studies of Gassan and Ware yuku mono no gotoku will be undertaken in the near future so that the inter-textual implications of Imi no henyō within Mori’s oeuvre can be fully appreciated. Regardless, Imi no henyō is a fascinating work that stands quite well on its own, and it is my privilege to offer an English translation of this “conceptual, allegorical, literary, philosophical, mystical labyrinth.”

I. Mori Atsushi and his Life Work: Background to Imi no henyō

Among twentieth-century Japanese writers, Mori Atsushi (1912~1989) is known in Japan for a literary career that took numerous twists and turns. Born in Nagasaki and raised in Japanese colonial Seoul, Mori met and became the protégé of celebrated writer Yokomitsu Riiichi 横光利一 in his late teens. He later moved in Tokyo literary circles that included Kikuchi Kan 菊池寛, Dazai Osamu 太宰治, Kitagawa Fuyuhiko 北川冬彦, and Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成. In 1934, Mori made an initial splash in the world of Japanese literature at the age of twenty-two

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4 Professor Patrick Greaney, personal correspondence.
with the publication of his novella *Yoidore-bune* 醉釀船 [Drunken Boat] in the “new writers” column of the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* 東京日日新聞. Despite this and other early literary endeavors, Mori slipped largely out of the public gaze until 1974 when, at the age of sixty-two, he gained instant celebrity by being the oldest-to-date writer to be awarded the prestigious Akutagawa prize, for his novel *Gassan*.

In the interim years, Mori alternated periods of travel with extended stints working in specialized industries. All of these experiences contributed to the highly philosophical and metaphysical writings that would congeal into the unique literary experience that is *Imi no henyō*. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, as critic Karatani Kōjin has remarked, that the intellectual and metaphysical problems that Mori explores in *Imi no henyō* were in fact the impetus for his wanderings (*hōrō* 放浪), and for the deep interest he took in whatever work he took on to support his lifestyle of travel and writing.⁵

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**Mori Atsushi: A Brief Biography**

Here, let us delve into Mori’s biography in greater detail, as an acquaintance with his life story will facilitate a better understanding of the autobiographical dimension of *Imi no henyō*. Mori Atsushi was born in Nagasaki prefecture in southern Japan on January 22, 1912, the year the reign name changed from Meiji to Taishō. At the age of five, Mori moved with his family to Seoul, which was at the time under Japanese colonial rule. There, young Atsushi began his education with a private tutor, learning to recite the Analects of Confucius (*J. rongo* 論語). After graduating from elementary school a year behind due to an illness that left him bedridden—he

would later claim that this experience afforded him the time to read voraciously in a wide range of subjects—he entered middle school. Mori was an eager student of math, with interest in judo and debate. He devoured anthologies of western and eastern thought, and published poems and fiction in the school newspaper.

After failing the high school entrance exam, Mori met writers Kikuchi Kan and Yokomitsu Riichi at a lecture they gave in Seoul. The next year, he became Yokomitsu’s student. Moving to Tokyo, Mori read Joyce, Proust, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Gide, and began to publish works of fiction with Yokomitsu’s support, beginning with the aforementioned debut, the publication of *Yoidore-bune* in the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* in 1934. That same year, Mori met Dazai Osamu and Dan Kazuo, with whom he founded the coterie journal *Aoi hana* 青い花. Around the same time, he also became acquainted with the poet Kitagawa Fuyuhiko.

Then, in 1935, at the age of twenty-three, Mori attended a lecture on the Kegon sutra at Tōdaiji in Nara, an event that, as Karatani Kōjin notes, strongly impacted the subsequent direction of the young Mori Atsushi’s thought and career. It was also around this time that, despite having gained a foothold in the literary world of 1930’s Tokyo, Mori decided to leave the center of literary activity in order to pursue other experiences that might then enrich his writing. By 1936 he was living in a mountain cottage at Yugasan 瑜伽山. With this cottage as a home base, he used inheritance money from an aunt to fund trips on whaling and fishing boats, even crossing the Sakhalin Sea and living for a period with nomadic tribes. These are the “northern peoples” that feature in the chapter of *Imi no henyō* entitled “Arcadia” (Arukadia アルカディア).

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7 Now written with the variant characters 由加山.
8 J. Karafuto 樺太.
It was not, however, the case that Mori was estranged from the Tokyo literary scene entirely. Returning from his wanderings, he once again moved among the literary elite. It was during a trip to Hanyū 羽生 in Saitama with Yokomitsu Riiichi and Kawabata Yasunari that Mori received the pen name Hanyū Meitarō 羽生明太郎, under which he published several pieces in 1939 and 1940.

Despite such continued literary activity, Mori would not join his friends in becoming a full-time writer until much later in his life. In order to replenish his diminishing funds, he took on a job working for an optics company that made optical sights for weapons used in the Second World War. This factory serves as the setting for the second chapter of *Imi no henyō*, entitled “Eyes of the Dead” (Shisha no me 死者の眼). The company, called Tomioka Kōgaku Kikai Seizōjo 富岡工学機械製造所, was dismantled following Japan’s defeat. During his tenure of five years, three months at Tomioka Kōgaku, Mori married Maeda Yō 前田暘, whom he had met while in Nara (with Yokomitsu Riiichi and his wife serving as the traditional go-betweens), was hospitalized for tuberculosis, became supervisor of the Number One Machine Finishing Factory (Dai-ichi kikai shiage kōjō 第一機械仕上げ工場), was forced to evacuate from the Yukigaya 雪谷 main factory to the Ōmori 大森 district of Tokyo, and was promoted to Section Chief in charge of Production (seizō buchō 製造部長), while simultaneously holding a managerial position at the main office.

After the demise of Tomioka Kōgaku, Mori returned to wandering, albeit while attempting to make a living in various ways: working in the salt fields of Yamagata prefecture, attending GHQ conferences and selling stories to regional newspapers, and even unsuccessfully attempting to launch a newspaper. The years 1947 and 1948 brought the deaths of Yokomitsu
Riichi, Kikuchi Kan, and Dazai Osamu, but Mori was not without other literary acquaintances. Notably, a lifelong friendship with the writer Kojima Nobuo 小島信夫 began in 1951.

The next period of Mori’s life would be centered around the Shōnai 庄内 area of Yamagata prefecture. He had first visited this area, from which his wife’s family hailed, in 1939, and between 1949 and 1952, in the course of making a number of trips to procure rice, he ended up traveling widely in the region. In 1951, Mori arrived in August at Chūrenji 注連寺, an esoteric Buddhist temple of the Shingon 真言 sect founded by Kūkai 空海, and he stayed there until the early spring of 1952. This temple was to become the mysteriously and starkly beautiful setting for Gassan.

Between 1953 and 1957, when Mori once again entered the work force, he travelled back and forth between the Shōnai area and Tokyo, where he met frequently to exchange ideas with Kojima Nobuo and, in 1955, co-founded the coterie journal Ritsuō 立像. Ritsuō would give Mori a platform for much of his work over the next several decades, including part of his novel Jōdo 法土 (1957) and, later, a section of what would ultimately become Imi no henyō.

Mori’s next period of steady employment lasted from 1957 to 1960, during which time he worked for a company constructing dams in Yoshino 吉野, Nara. It is this area, and the technology and processes involved in building dams, that features in the third chapter of Imi no henyō, “The Cosmic Tree” (Uchū no ki 宇宙の樹). Upon leaving this job in 1960, Mori moved to Niigata with his wife for a time but soon went back to Shōnai.

In 1962, Mori took on the third and final major job of his life, this time working for Chiyoda Shuppan Insatsu 千代田出版印刷 (the name was later changed to Kindai Insatsu 近代印刷), a Tokyo printing company. This company appears as an example of a traditional
downtown Tokyo small business succumbing to the pressures of post-war growth in the fourth chapter of *Imi no henyō*, “Arcadia” (Arukadia アルカディア). Mori’s tenure at this company lasted eighteen years, five months.

While employed at Chiyoda Shuppan Insatsu, Mori began to step up his publication in coterie journals: “Tenjō no nagame” 天上の眺め in *Proletaria* ポリタリア in 1963, and “Kōin” 光陰 in *Bō 茫* in 1971; it was *Gassan*, however, a piece that was commissioned by a literary acquaintance, written largely on the train commute between Mori’s Tokyo apartment and the office of Chiyoda Shuppan Insatsu, and first published in 1973 in the literary journal *Kikan geijutsu* 季刊芸術, that cemented Mori’s subsequent writing career when it was awarded the 70th Akutagawa Prize in 1974.

The publicity the Akutagawa Prize brought increased Mori’s demand as a writer and commentator so suddenly that he spent the last fifteen years of his life writing at a frenetic pace, producing a large body of work. Initially, the hype surrounding Mori’s unusual career and his age—at 62, he was the oldest writer ever to be awarded Japan’s most prestigious literary award—was perhaps more effective than the popularity of the book itself in driving his success. Mori began to appear regularly on television, such as on Japan’s public television network NHK in talks with other intellectuals, and demand for his writing was high. In the same year that Mori was awarded the Akutagawa Prize for *Gassan*, *Chôkaisan* 鳥海山 was published in book form, “Amida” 阿弥陀 appeared in the journal *Bungei* 文芸, and a version of *Imi no henyō* was serialized in *Gunzô* 群像.

Following the death of his wife Yō in 1975, Mori settled in the Shinjuku district of Tokyo, where he lived from 1977 until his death in 1989. This was a productive period, despite hospitalizations in 1978 and 1981. 1979 saw the release of a film version of *Gassan*, directed by
Murano Tetsutarō 村野鐵太郎. In 1981, talks between Mori and Kojima Nobuo were serialized in *Bungei* 文芸. 1982 ushered the publication of two major works, *Waga seishun waga hōrō* が青春が放浪, an account of Mori’s youth and wanderings, and *Waga fudoki* が風土記. In 1984, the novel *Ware yuku mono no gotoku* われ逝くもののごとく, considered by many scholars to deserve a place alongside *Gassan* as Mori’s most important works, was published, as well as the book form of *Imi no henyō*. In the 1980s, Mori served as host for several popular NHK educational programs: a 1983 series on the famous Haiku master Matsuo Bashō entitled *Mori Atsushi Okunohosomichi kō* 森敦おくのほそ道行, and a 1985 series entitled *Mori Atsushi mandara kikō* 森敦マンダラ紀行, which was filmed along the Shikoku Hachijūhachi kasho 四国八十八ヶ所 pilgrimage route. Additionally, in 1988, a lecture given by Mori at the Eighth Annual Gassan Festival 月山際 was featured on NHK Educational television’s program *Kokoro no jidai* こころの時代. Mori Atsushi died in a Tokyo hospital on July 29, 1989, of a ruptured abdominal aortal aneurysm, bringing an end to an extraordinarily varied and productive life.

While his distance from Tokyo and the time spent on travel and work may have slowed his literary production and led to an unusually late blooming as a celebrated writer and thinker, Mori never stopped thinking about literature and about its role in inquiry into larger questions of life and truth. He used each experience to his advantage in developing his rich conceptual and literary world, and it was in the writings that would later be published under the title of *Imi no henyō* that he sought to give voice to this world and its implications for literary theory and philosophy, as well as what it could teach us about living a full life by embracing reality in all its wholeness and complexity.
A Life’s Work: The Story of *Imi no henyō* 

Like Mori Atsushi’s life, the text of *Imi no henyō* underwent a number of twists and turns over a period of decades before its publication in book form in 1984. Mori considered *Imi no henyō* his lifework and took great pains to write and rewrite it to perfection. While living in Yamagata after the war, Mori wrote down thoughts that he had reflected on while working for Tomioka Kōgaku, the optics factory and sent them to a few friends. This prose piece would go through numerous revisions and iterations to eventually become the second chapter of *Imi no henyō*, “Shisha no me.” In addition, this portion was published in the journal *Jitsugen* 実現 in 1955 and 1956, along with an early form of “Güwa no jitsugen” 寓話の実現, the first chapter of *Imi no henyō*. A version of “Shisha no me” also appeared in *Ritsuzō* in 1964. In 1974, the same year as Gassan’s Akutagawa Prize win, newer material was added to the material from these early chapters and serialized in *Gunzō*. *Imi no henyō* was finally published in book form in 1984 thanks in large part to the robust support and efforts of critic and philosopher Karatani Kōjin, who had published a piece in the same edition of *Gunzō* and became an enthusiastic supporter of Mori’s piece. Karatani wrote an essay introducing *Imi no henyō* that was published as part of the book along with short essays by several other prominent writers and intellectuals.

**Chapter Summaries**

The following chapter summaries are included for reference and as context for the discussions of style, genre, and themes that will follow.

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9 Biographical information in this section has been taken from the chronology (nenpu 年譜) created by Mori Tomiko 森富子 in Mori Atsushi 森敦, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō 意味の変容・マンダラ紀行* (Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 2012), 262-272.

The first chapter, “The Realization of Allegory” 寓話の実現, is composed of several parables told by a third-person narrator. The first parable is about a snake that sheds its skin in order to realize its true, magnificent, self, and the second is about a daikon radish that attempts to escape a glass panel that has been placed over it by a farmer. These parables can be interpreted as variations on the existential predicament of the Self that attempts to discover meaning, only to be met with the apparent cruelty and indifference of its creator. The first chapter reads as a fairly straightforward literary text, with no illustrations.

From the second chapter, “Eyes of the Dead,” through the fourth chapter, “Arcadia,” the text is essentially a dialogue between two unnamed friends. The lines spoken by Friend #1 (henceforth “the narrator”) are not in quotation marks, tying this speaker to the third-person narrator of the first chapter. Because the experiences related by the narrator closely match what are known to be Mori Atsushi’s life experiences, we might consider the narrator as Mori’s alter ego. The narrator’s friend, identified only as a writer, has his lines in quotations, as if to set his remarks apart from those of the narrator. In addition, blocks of bolded text have been inserted into the dialogue. These statements, usually spoken by the narrator, are given in the form of mathematical or logical axioms, and are sometimes accompanied by illustrations, which range from simple sketches to more complex and technical diagrams like those related to optical lenses.

“Eyes of the Dead” 死者の眼 takes place at the site of an optics factory where sighting devices for weapons were manufactured during WWII (as noted above, Mori worked for a company that ran such a factory until it was dismantled upon Japan’s defeat). Touring the site with his friend, the narrator speaks of philosophical and mathematical concepts. This is where he gives a formal introduction to his circular model, to which we shall return later in this Introduction.
The third chapter, “Cosmic Tree” 宇宙の樹, begins with the narrator and his friend having a drink at a banquet hall that belonged to the dam company where the narrator had formerly worked. The narrator explains the process of building dams, while again connecting his technical explanations to larger concepts. For example, he gives allegorical descriptions of the riverbed and the process of mining rocks to be used as raw material for dam construction as well as of how dams convert water to power. Then the men tour the nearby area in a Jeep searching for the Cosmic Tree. In the midst of all of this the friend recalls a parable that the narrator once told him, about a stray dog that seeks to escape its leather muzzle. Thematically, this parable connects to the two parables in the first chapter. At the end of the chapter, the two friends encounter a doe that stops in the headlights of their Jeep, and they shoot the creature. There are fewer illustrations in this chapter than in the previous one (only two).

The fourth chapter, ”Arcadia” アルカディア, further develops the dialogue between the narrator and his friend, but now they are sitting in a café in downtown Tokyo in an area that houses a printing shop where the narrator used to work. The business has gone bankrupt, leading the narrator to reminisce about his experiences living with nomadic tribes in the far North. Both the tribes and the printing business, he says, are examples of “rock bottom” (donzoko どん底), of ways of life that are in decline, forgotten by the world, and therefore they can be said to exist in a sort of frozen, timeless realm. Narrator Mori describes the type-picking process in order to explain his theory of the relationship between form and meaning. The chapter ends with the narrator relating a scheme he had once devised to borrow money from friends at an interest rate higher than that charged by the bank; he relates this episode to the Buddhist concepts of mutability(uitenpen 有為転変) and impermanence (shogyō mujō 諸行無常). There is another diagram that relates these concepts to reincarnation.
The final chapter, “Eli Eli, Láma Sabachtani” エリ・エリ・レマ・サバクタニ, takes its title from the final words of Jesus on the cross, “My god, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?” in the King James translation of the Bible. This chapter, like the first, opens with a third-person narrator, who introduces a retired saxophonist named Samuel Johnson, now a drunk who frequents dive bars in the slums. The narrator tells us that Samuel’s name was originally Bill, and that he borrowed his stage name from a minister whom he had greatly loved and admired in his youth. The minister had disappeared when Bill was still a child, but many years later this same minister sends the former saxophonist Samuel a letter. The chapter concludes with the highly metaphysical contents of this letter, in which Samuel the elder, in contemplating his impending death, uses the metaphor of peeling an apple to conceptualize the role of time in the circular model. He ponders the meaning of the individual self, and then finds the “potential for ecstasy” (kōkotsu no kanōsei 悟悟の可能性) in a shift of perspective to one of Totality.

II. Approaching Imi no henyō:

Influences, Genre Classification, Structure, Style, and Narrative Voice

One of the most remarkable and perplexing features of Imi no henyō is how the text weaves in and out of multiple styles and areas of intellectual and literary discourse. For the first-time reader, the text’s syncretism creates a sense of disorientation, as if one were being pulled into a labyrinth. Just as readers are becoming accustomed to the path, the formal, literary narrative style and allegorical content of the first chapter, they emerge entirely without preparation or introduction into the dialogue, in colloquial voice, of the second chapter, which is interrupted regularly with mathematical explanations and logical formulations set off in bold
type, frequently accompanied by conceptual illustrations and technical diagrams. Thematically, the dialogue veers here and there, among widely divergent subjects and approaches.

In order for the reader to better navigate the meanderings and surprises of the text, this section will lay out, in broad strokes, a map to the subjects that contribute to the syncretic approach that Mori has taken in *Imi no henyō*.

**Mathematics**

The mathematical explanations in *Imi no henyō* are drawn from basic set theory, projective geometry, and topology. Mori Atsushi was an enthusiastic student of mathematics from his youth. In his teens, he read Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913), an important work in three volumes of nearly 2,000 pages that “attempted to derive mathematical truths from axioms and inference rules in symbolic logic” and was “instrumental in developing and popularizing modern mathematical logic.”

He writes about later being devastated by his encounter with Gödel’s incompleteness theorem, published in 1931, which “had quite a sobering effect upon logicians and philosophers because it implies that within any rigidly logical mathematical system, propositions or questions exist that cannot be proved or disproved on the basis of axioms within that system, and therefore it is possible for basic axioms of arithmetic to give rise to contradictions.” Mathematical systems were showed to be either consistent or complete, but not both. Since the questions that had arisen for him when reading *Principia Mathematica* had been effectively answered by Gödel, Mori decided against pursuing a career in mathematics, but the problem of paradox in formal systems continued to intrigue him throughout his adulthood.

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In *Imi no henyō*, Mori uses a model rooted in basic concepts of topological spaces to explore problems of the self and its relation to universal reality. The model of an infinite interior, or in the vocabulary of topology, a “neighborhood” (*kinbō* 近傍) in which the subject “hermetically enclosed” (*mippei* 密閉) as the center of that space (*chūshin* 中心 or *genten* 原点), and of a corresponding exterior space, also infinite, with a corresponding center point, lends itself to any number of allegories and acts as a background container for countless transformations of meaning. Moreover, Mori conceives of the boundary as something that is permeable.\(^{13}\) No matter what binary pair is taken to be represented by interior and exterior—and the simplicity of the model allows for great fluidity in terms of meaning,—the boundary assures that the opposite concepts are less like two sides of a piece of paper, running parallel but never crossing, and more like two sides of a paper that has been twisted into a Möbius strip, so that interior and exterior meld seamlessly into one another.

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**Logic and The Analects of Confucius**

In “Eyes of the Dead,” the narrator quotes Confucius in a line from Chapter Eleven Verse Two of *The Analects*: “You do not yet know life, how could you know death?”\(^{14}\)

To begin, it is worth noting that Mori Atsushi was introduced to *The Analects* as a boy growing up in colonial Seoul, where he was sent to learn them with a private tutor, and that it is clear from Mori’s autobiographical and fictional writings and talks that he not only knew this

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\(^{13}\) Karataní Kójin 柄谷行人, “‘Imi no henyō’ ron--’Kaisetsu’ ni kaete” 『意味の変容』論−「解説」にかえて, 679–89. Karataní uses the term *ekkyō* 越境 (“transboundary” or “crossing the boundary”) to refer to the passage from interior to exterior.

classic of Chinese philosophy through and through, he respected it deeply. The line, “You do not yet know life, how could you know death?” was apparently a favorite of Mori’s, as it also serves as the epigraph at the beginning of *Gassan*.

In *Imi no henyō*, however, the narrator of “Eyes of the Dead” proceeds to turn this line on its head in the following contrapositive statement: “Knowing death, how can you not know life?” It could be said, then, that on one level the Confucius quote is employed for purposes apart from its meaning, merely as an example for the purpose of presenting an exercise in logic. At the same time, the quote is rich in thematic significance in a text that returns repeatedly to the interplay between life and death. In particular, it resonates with *Imi no henyō*’s resistance to the temptation to reify death or the afterlife as something separate from life, to freeze it into a concept or an eternal ideal.\(^{15}\)

There are several aspects of *The Analects* that seem to peek out from the pages of *Imi no henyō*. One is the character of Confucius himself, which seems to blend into the character of the narrator/author. The Confucius that Mori would have encountered in his rote memorization of *The Analects* was not the stuffy, pompous Confucius that was canonized and glorified under the imperial system, a sort of authoritarian figure who to this day is celebrated as “China’s First and Supreme Teacher.”\(^{16}\) Rather, scholars protest that the Confucius of *The Analects* is a pragmatic political philosopher, a humanist whose teachings as recorded by his disciples express a keen love of life and even a sense of humor. This life-affirming, humorous quality is evident in *Imi no henyō*, with its often playful use of allegory and its embracing of life in its complexity. Another

\(^{15}\) This approach is one that is shared by Buddhist philosophers in their refusal to either confirm or deny the existence of abstract notions like God or an afterlife.

possible borrowing from Confucius is a quality of intelligence that values not only logical, ordered thought, but also experiential learning; the Confucius of *The Analects* advocates for praxis over dogma, eschewing blind obedience in favor of self-cultivation, reflection, and discernment. Confucius urged his disciples to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions about whether tradition retained meaning and was worth preserving for them, in their own times.\(^{17}\) Likewise, in “Eli Eli, Láma Sabachtani,” the elder Samuel writes in his letter of the importance of asking questions about reality and also of the threat such questioning poses to the status quo. *Imi no henyō* resembles *The Analects* in its refusal to accept dogma, that is, the freezing of reality into solid and unchanging concepts.

**Buddhist Philosophy**

An understanding of Buddhist philosophy is vital for a balanced understanding of *Imi no henyō*, not only because there are a number of direct references in the text to Buddhist sects and concepts, but because Buddhist philosophy pervades the entire work. The first obviously Buddhist reference in the text is to the Mahayana idea of emptiness, (kū 空).

*It is said that if subject merges with object, the result is emptiness. In fact, when two vectors are moving toward each other, are equal in length to one another, and follow a straight line, they equal 0. This 0 is emptiness.*\(^ {18}\)

The narrator also directly references two schools of Buddhist philosophy, the Kegon and the Yugagyō 瑜伽行 (S. Yōgacāra), or “Mind-only School,” also known as Yuishiki 唯識

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\(^{18}\) 主観と客観が一致すれば空になるという。ところが、二つのベクトルは互いに向きが反対で、しかも相等しく、一直線上にあるとき 0 になる。空はこの 0 である。Mori Atsushi 森敦, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō* 意味の変容・マンダラ紀行 (Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 2012), 27.
"Consciousness-only." Regarding the influence of Buddhist thought on *Imi no henyō*, the focus here will be on the totalistic philosophy of the Kegon school and the sutra that served as its inspiration, the Kegon sutra. Therefore, a brief overview of the content of the sutra as a whole, as well as the basic ideas of the Kegon school of philosophy that developed in China based on its ideas, will be needed to fully appreciate their integration into the viewpoint described in *Imi no henyō*.

The Kegon sutra is a massive work of more than 1500 pages in the English translation. Legend attributes it to the historical Buddha, but in fact it was probably written by more than one author, compiled around the third or fourth century in Central Asia, and later translated into Chinese, although sections of it may in fact have been composed in China. Like other Mahayana sutras, it is predicated on notions of emptiness and dependent arising, which tie in with its central concern, the revelation of the “Buddha-Realm of Infinity,” that is, reality as it appears to an enlightened being. The sutra goes into extravagant detail in its descriptions.

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19 The “Mind-only” and “Consciousness-only” schools take the philosophical stance that our experience is constructed in the mind, and idea that is reflected in the notion of projection (realization of the exterior in the interior) presented in *Imi no henyō*.

20 As noted in Footnote 1, there is a complete English translation of the eighty-volume Siksananda Chinese version by Thomas Cleary: Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993).

21 Francis H. Cook notes that only two parts of the Chinese translation completed by Buddhahadra in about 420 C.E. are “wholly extant in their Sanskrit originals,” and that “there is no mention in Indian Buddhist literature of any other of the many chapters” of the sutra. “This, coupled with the appearance in the sutra of Central Asian and Chinese place names, would seem to indicate that much of the sutra was composed outside of India.” There are in existence complete Sanskrit original texts for two chapters, the Daśabhūmika, or “Ten States” (and the Gandavyūha, or “Entry into the Realm of Reality.” Francis Harold Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 21-22.


23 “The reader is staggered by the loving description of scenery, down to the numbers of leaves on the trees, with their configuration and coloring; with the descriptions of perfumed trees and golden lotuses, singing birds, clouds that emit wonderful odors and sounds, varieties of clothing
includes an abundance of “visual metaphors, especially images of light and space, in its
depictions of an infinite universe in which all things interpenetrate without obstruction.”
Take, for example, the metaphor of the Ocean-Mirror Samādhi,” in which “each and every thing in the
universe is at once a ‘mirror’ and an ‘image.’” The sutra also presents the familiar metaphor of
Indra’s Net, a vast net that “extends infinitely in all directions” and contains a sparkling jewel in
each of its infinite knots: “As the multifaceted surface of each jewel reflects all other jewels in
the net, each of the reflected jewels also contains the reflections of all other jewels; thus there is
an unending process of infinite reflections.”

Another theme of the sutra is the stages of the bodhisattva path, recounted in the tale of
Sudhana’s quest for enlightenment in the last chapter, “Entry into the Realm of Reality” (J.
Nyūhokkaibon 入法界品, S. Gandavyūha).

Unique to the sutra is the doctrine of totality, also called the “round view,” the notion that
all phenomena are essentially one, that is, “mutually arising, mutually penetrating, and mutually
contained.” Within this round view, contradictions are able to exist harmoniously; by shifting

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Macmillan Reference, 2004), 341. This concern with light and space is also a feature of Imi no
henyō.
25 Chang, The Buddhist Teaching of Totality, 124. Note that in Imi no henyō, there is also a
reference to the mirror metaphor, in “Eli Eli, Láma Sabachtani”: “This is how the interior, which
as a realm that does not include the boundary is infinite, is seen to be a mirror image of the
exterior, that realm that encompasses the boundary but also contains a point of infinity, just as
the exterior is seen as a mirror image of the interior.”
27 “Entry into the Realm of Reality” is Thomas Cleary’s translation of chapter thirty-nine of the
sutra. There is a connection between the structure of this chapter and themes of repetition and
return in Imi no henyō which will be considered in the Section Three of this introduction.
28 Chang, The Buddhist Teaching of Totality, 128.
perspectives they become non-contradictions, part of the perfection of Totality. Totality, or mutual identity and mutual penetration, is expressed in Japanese in the phrases “all in one and one in all; all is one and one is all” (J. issoku issai sokuichi; ichinyū issai issai nyūichi 一即一切・一切即一・一入一切一切入一).

The philosophical school that grew out of this sutra in China during the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, expounded by a series of patriarchs, was an arguably brilliant attempt to synthesize the numerous teachings of Buddhism that existed at that point into a philosophy of the nature of reality. Because the patriarchs were influenced by indigenous philosophical traditions and sensibilities, the system they developed blended Indian Buddhist doctrinal concerns with Chinese elements, notably the “concern for harmony and balance and a tendency to valorize the phenomenal realm.” Hua-yen formulations of emptiness, for example, take a more positive, life-affirming approach than Indian conceptions of śūnyatā.

Although the Hwa-yen school did not survive in China, it influenced the Chan (Zen) school and was introduced to Japan by a Korean monk in 740, and Kegon became one of the eight schools of Nara Buddhism and went on to help shape the teachings of Kūkai 空海(774-835) and his esoteric Shingon 真言 school and Saichō 最澄 (767-822), who founded the Tendai 天台 school.

Western Philosophy and Allegory

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29 Chang, The Buddhist Teaching of Totality, 128-135.
31 See Cook, Hua-Yen Buddhism, 43-44; 95-105.
32 Mori Atsushi explored Shingon and Tendai Buddhism in his essay Mandara kikō, published alongside Imi no henyō in the bunko edition. Mori Atsushi, Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō, 131-250.
In an essay included in the *Mori Atsushi zenshū*, Karatani Kōjin emphasizes the allegorical qualities and structure of *Imi no henyō*. In merging philosophy, or metaphysics, and allegory, Karatani places Mori in a lineage of philosophers stretching back to Plato, adding that philosophers have tried to “dispense with allegory, but have not been able to get rid of it entirely.”33 It is to philosophers who speak in allegory that Mori turns for source material in *Imi no henyō*. It is perhaps felicitous that two of the most influential of these philosophers in modern times also offer theories that can provide a sort of counterpoint to Mori’s themes of circularity; these are Nietzsche’s eternal return (or recurrence) and Kierkegaard’s repetition.

Postmodern critic Asada Akira calls *Imi no henyō* a “profound but humorous parody of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.”34 “The Realization of Allegory,” with its “Magnificent snake” (*sōrei naru hebi* 壯麗なる蛇) does indeed seem to contain references to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, even if they are only echoes (for the snake plays a very different role in the Magnificent snake allegory than it does in Nietzsche’s parable). Then again, the parable of the boulders that go against the flow of the stream could also be a humorous jab at Nietzsche’s Übermensch, for while the idea of embracing life over asceticism and the appeal to an afterworld is quite in line with the themes of *Imi no henyō*, as is the notion of cutting a path upstream by asking questions. Mori’s text would seem to be at a variance with any philosophical system that replaces God with an individual of superior capabilities.

References to Kierkegaard’s concept of repetition in *Imi no henyō* are more direct. In “Eli Eli, Láma Sabachtani,” the elder Samuel discusses “repetition” (*hanpuku* 反復) in his letter. The

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33 「哲学」はこうした寓話を排除してきた。しかし、それを除去したのではない。Karatani Kōjin, “‘Imi no henyō’ ron,” 685.
34 深遠にしてユーモラスな『ツァラトゥストラ』のパロディ。Asada Akira, “Mori Atsushi shi he no tegami,” in *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō* 意味の変容・マンダラ紀行 (Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 2012), 121.
spiraling forward motion of Kierkegaard’s “repetition” is in line with the circular returning of the
text to a beginning, to a point which is the same point and yet new, in *Imi no henỳō* and in the
“Entry into the Realm of Reality” chapter of the Kegon sutra, which are discussed in the final
section of this paper.\(^\text{35}\) However, Satō Noburō takes exception to Karatani Kōjin’s equation of
Mori’s circular theory with Kierkegaard’s repetition, citing evidence from Mori’s personal notes
that shows he considered Kierkegaard to have been “stuck in the Self phase, and therefore
plagued by suffering.”\(^\text{36}\)

What, then, is the purpose of the allusions to Western philosophy in *Imi no henỳō*? By
employing Western philosophy, along with logic and mathematics, Mori positions himself within
the broader context of world intellectual history. By means of this strategy, he gives broader
relevance of his intellectual endeavor and the answers he proposes.

And yet, there is an important point to be made about Mori’s relationship to the various
fields of intellectual inquiry from which he draws. *Imi no henỳō* represents neither a rejection nor
a glorification of Western philosophy, formal logic, and mathematics. Rather, Mori uses the
knowledge and insights gained from these fields in a *provisional* way. Because of the Buddhist
backdrop of the text, it will be useful to draw a comparison to the Buddhist idea of expedient
means (J. *hōben* 方便; S. *upaya*). In *Imi no henỳō*, the fields of Western philosophy, logic, and

\(^{35}\) See Arne Melberg, “Repetition (In the Kierkegaardian Sense of the Term),” *Diacritics* 20, no. 3 (1990): 74. Melberg explains that in the Kierkegaardian sense, repetition is “a movement in
time: re-take, re-peat, re-turn, re-verse mans going back in time to what ‘has ben.’ But still, in
spite of this movement backward, ‘repetition’ makes it new and is therefore a movement
forward: it is the new.”

math are found to be very effective in posing problems relating to the nature of self and reality, but insufficient in providing satisfactory answers. This is because their solutions are unable to escape the problem of paradox, and therefore the problem of human suffering. Mori uses Western logic, philosophy, and even mathematics not as a source of absolute truth but as spheres of inquiry that can carry to important questions about the nature of reality. By frustrating us with the problem of paradox, intellectual traditions also point to a truth that underlies their limitations, something that it only takes the proper shift in perspective for us to grasp. It is this “something beyond” that Mori attempts to illuminate in *Imi no henyō* via the expedient means of Western fields of intellectual inquiry, of language and linear thought. What the limitations of these fields point at is the possibility of wisdom that leads to direct contact with the infinite nature of reality.

*Imi no henyō* as a Theory of Literature: Designing a New Genre

*Imi no henyō* presents a challenge not only because of the esoteric and syncretic nature of its content, but also because of its stylistic iconoclasm. Even for the Japanese reader, accustomed as she is to more fluid or ambiguous genre classification schemas, particularly regarding the line between fiction and non-fiction, the relative dearth of critical work on *Imi no henyō* attests to it being a tricky text to pin down. Certainly, if we look at *Imi no henyō* through the lens of Western literature, it seems to defy categorization into any established genre.

Should this text, infused as it is with material from the fields of mathematics and formal logic, be approached as a literary text at all? Perhaps it should be read as a philosophical essay? And yet, *Imi no henyō* is laced with allegorical sections that are written in a literary style, including the entire first chapter, as illustrated by the following passage:

If moonlight spills deep into the recesses of the forest, a forest unpenetrated by the light of day, the tens of millions of leaves on the trees begin
to sparkle like so many reptilian scales. Surrounded by the Magnificence of Nature, even the most Magnificent of snakes would hardly attract notice. In this way, the Magnificent snake may feel it will be liberated from that Magnificence. But when its scales begin to sparkle like the tens of millions of leaves on the trees, and the rarefied, the beautiful, and the solemn come together with the dark, the grotesque, and the decayed, the enchantment takes on the quality of limitless magic. Herein lies the secret of true Magnificence.  

In addition, much of the material in *Imi no henyyō* is autobiographical. *Is Imi no henyyō* to be read, then, as literary non-fiction, along the lines, perhaps, of the Western memoir?

Like many writers of his generation, Mori Atsushi produced a body of work that spans multiple genres, as even a cursory review of the *Mori Atsushi zenshū* 森敦全集 reveals. Volume One contains early and unpublished works, including short fiction, poetry, and a substantial section of notes. *Imi no henyyō* is included in its various iterations and variations in Volume Two, where it is grouped with two other works, *Mandara kikō* マンダラ紀行, which centers around the Shikoku pilgrimage and esoteric Buddhist mandala, and *Ware mo mata Oku no hoso michi* われもまたおくのほそ道, reflections by Mori, who was known for his travels, on Bashō’s famous poetic travel account. Both works are based on eponymous television programs produced by NHK and hosted by Mori Atsushi. Combining elements of memoir and travel writing with

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37 昼も暗い森深くにも、月光が流れれば、その幾千万の木の葉は、幾千万の鱗のように輝きはじめる。こうした大自然の壮麗さの中にあっては、壮麗な蛇の壮麗さのごときも、ものの数でなくなるだろう。かくて、壮麗な蛇もまたその壮麗さから、解き放たれると思うかもしれない。しかし、壮麗な蛇の幾千万とない鱗もまた、幾千万の木の葉のように輝き、崇高なもの、美麗なもの、厳然たるものには、いよいよ破壊のもの、怪異なもの、破滅したものと兼せて、幻術は果てなく幻術を吸い入れる。ここに壮麗なものの真に壮麗なるゆえんがあるのだ。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyyō/Mandara kikō*, 13.
philosophical speculation, they might best be summarized as essays. This volume also includes transcripts of a number of talks given by Mori Atsushi.

The next two volumes contain Mori’s late-period fiction, including Gassan (Vol. 3) and Ware yoku mono no gotoku (Vol. 4). Volumes Five and Six comprise short, autobiographical works, which might be said to fall somewhere in the realm of memoir or even of the “I-novel” (shishōsetsu 私小説), which will be expanded upon later. Volumes Seven and Eight are labeled “Essays 1” エッセイ 1 and “Essays 2” エッセイ 2, using the English loanword for essay rather than a Japanese term such as zuihitsu 随筆. In her explanatory remarks, Mori Tomiko labels the writings included in these volumes as “essays and the like, in the broadest sense of the word, including literary and critical essays, book reviews, prefaces and postscripts, book endorsements, questionnaires, and other pieces that appeared in newspapers, magazines, or were published as short-term series.” Volume Nine is an appendix that includes letters, bibliographic references, and chronologies.

A review of writing about Imi no henyō in Japanese reveals the presence of both literary and non-literary or non-fictional readings. Criticism and commentary of Imi no henyō tends to fall into one of two camps: that focusing on the text’s literary qualities, and discourse that centers around the text’s considerable philosophical and intellectual contributions. Such interpretive variation may result in part from of the professional background and slant of individual commentators but stands out in comparison to the relative dearth of secondary sources that

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38 Mori Tomiko 森富子, “Kaidai” 解題, in Mori Atsushi zenshū 森敦全集, Vol. 7. (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō 筑摩書房, 1994), 635. [第七巻には、エッセイの類を納めた。ここでいうエッセイの類とは、文学的・評論的エッセイのほか、書評、序跋・推薦文、アンケート等を含めた講義のエッセイであるが、これらは新聞、雑誌等に折にふれ発表したもの、あるいは、短期連載やシリーズ等で発表したものである。] It is interesting to note that in Volume 7, she uses the English loanword for essay (essei エッセイ), whereas in Volume 8 she uses the Japanese term zuisō 隨想, a variation of zuihitsu.
specifically treat *Imi no henyō* as opposed to the relative abundance of work on *Gassan*, and as such it is worth exploring how such diversity of interpretation reflects a quality of open-endedness that is a feature of the text itself.

Essays and critiques by Nakagami Kenji 中上健次, Iwai Katsuhito 岩井克人, and Karatani Kōjin (in his essay “*Imi no henyō*`ron—‘Kaisetsu’ ni kaete’” 『意味の変容』論—u(although Karatani’s essay is perhaps properly situated as straddling the two camps). Nakagami, in “‘Ten’ no ichi” 「天」の位置, makes several points that warrant mention. First, he makes the observation that there is evident what he calls a “rejection of the narrative” (*monogatari no haijo* 物語の排除) in *Imi no henyō*, a quality that he compares to the Jorge Luis Borges short story collection *Ficciones*, and especially one story it contains, “El Aleph.”39 In *Imi no henyō*, there is an emphasis on what Nakagami terms the “presumed location of the narrative” (*monogatari no ichi sotei* 物語の位置指定); that is, action unfolds in the realms of interior and exterior much as is the case with simultaneous land and space battles in a video game, with movement taking place in all directions and in circles.40 Nakagami goes on to explore Mori’s use of the concept of “heaven” or “the heavens” (*ten* 天) to describe two kinds of conceptual wholes, the microcosm of “heaven in a jar” (*tsubo naka no ten* 壷中の天) and the infinitely expansive cosmos itself, as well as the heights of spiritual realization, which Mori calls “the potential for ecstasy (*kōkotsu no kanōsei* 恍惚の可能性).

Economist and critic Iwai Katsuhito also settles on the theme of “heaven” in his analysis of Mori’s short story “Amanuma” 天沼 (Heaven’s Marsh) and how it embodies the concepts

presented in *Imi no henyō*. “Amanuma,” he says, is “no less than the exterior which has been realized in the interior. That is to say, it is not of this world, but at the same time, it is a world that is realized in the very spot, the very neighborhood, in which [protagonist] ‘I’ is walking. It is ‘heaven in a jar,’ which is in itself ‘heaven’; it is none other than the heaven of our neighborhood.”

In “*Imi no henyō* ron—‘Kaisetsu’ ni kaete” 『意味の変容』論—「解説」にかえて, Karatani Kōjin illuminates how *Imi no henyō*, is an allegory, in its form, its use of the language of geometry, and its depiction of Mori’s personal experience and technical know-how. Karatani also cites evidence from the earlier Gunzō version of *Imi no henyō* that ties the work to Kafka’s unfinished allegory, *The Castle*, as well as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard.

Asada Akira 浅田彰, Satō Noburō 佐藤伸郎, and Karatani Kōjin (in “Kisekiteki na sakuhin” 奇跡的な作品), on the other hand, offer readings that situate *Imi no henyō* primarily within the realm of intellectual, philosophical, or religious discourse. Postmodern critic Asada Akira praises Mori for advocating undecidability and open-endedness over dogmatism in thought, praxis over formalism in mathematics and the sciences. Karatani Kōjin’s essay, an introduction to the book edition, centers around the text’s philosophical and mathematical mooring, as well as its amenity to a wide range of intellectual interpretations. A study by Satō Noburō 佐藤伸郎, “The Literature of Atushi [sic.] Mori: Consideration of the Theory of Line” 森敦の文学：境界論をめぐる考察, examines the role Kegon philosophy plays in the worldview represented in

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41「天沼」とは、まさに内部において実現している外部、すなわちここではない世界でありながら、同時に今「わたし」が歩いている地点の近傍において実現している世界のことなのである。それは、まさにそれ自身が「天」である「壷中の天」、いや近傍の天にほかならない。」 Iwai Katsuhito 岩井克人, “‘Amanuma’ Chūkai” 『天沼』注解, in *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō* 意味の変容・マンダラ紀行 (Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 2012), 113-14.

42 Asada Akira, “Mori Atsushi shi e no tegami,” 121.
I am especially indebted to Satō Noburō’s study for helping shape my discussion of the philosophy underlying the text and its expression in the themes of circles, loops, and lines.43

Discussions of *Imi no henyō* appear as well in articles that discuss multiple works by Mori Atsushi, for example, the first chapter of *Hana no furakutaru: 20 seiki Nihon zen’ei shōsetsu kenkyū* 花のフラクタル 20 世紀日本前衛小説研究 by Nakamura Miharu 中村三春, “‘Janru’ to ‘kōzō’ no tabi: *Gassan* to *Mori Atsushi* no tekusuto yōshiki” 〈ジャンル〉と〈構造〉の旅 「月山」と森敦のテクスト様式; and a scholarly paper by Yamamoto Miki 山本美紀, “*Mori Atsushi Gassan* to *Ware yuku mono no gotoku* shiron: *Imi no henyō* no riron ni yoru haaku” 森敦「月山」と「われ逝くもののごとく」試論－「意味の変容」の理論による把握－.

There are in addition a number of published talks (*taidan* 対談) between Mori and prominent intellectuals and writers, among which some shed light on the philosophical moorings of the text of *Imi no henyō*. Furthermore, a wealth of anecdotal, first-hand information can be found in two volumes of memoirs by Mori’s protégé and adopted daughter Tomiko, which contain her accounts of Mori Atsushi the man and Mori Atsushi the writer.

Kojima Nobuo suggests a non-fictional reading when he labels *Imi no henyō* as an “essay” エッセイ, using the English loan word, although it is unclear whether he means to convey the English sense of the essay or is thinking more along the lines of the *zuihitsu*, a genre term that will be discussed below.44 To the English-speaking reader, the “essay” category does not seem to

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fit the peculiar blend of shifting narrative style, embedded parables, and mixture of philosophical discourse and personal experience that characterize *Imi no henyō*. Even the genre of creative non-fiction and the form of the personal essay do not seem up to the task, for they give weight to narrative continuity where *Imi no henyō* strays at will from notions of plot, aim to be strictly non-fictional where *Imi no henyō* contains elements of fiction as well as non-fiction, weaving material that seems to be based on details of the author’s life with parables, dialogue that seems to be largely imaginary, and explanations of abstract concepts that have metaphysical implications.

In order to contextualize the text within the broader scope of Japanese literary history, with its unique genres and problematics, it will be useful to analyze the position of the text vis-à-vis two major genres of creative prose fiction that have gotten much attention in modern Japanese literary criticism, the *zuihitsu* 随筆, and the *shōsetsu* 小説 (and more specifically, what has been referred to as the *shishōsetsu* 私小説 and its sub-genre, the *shinkyō shōsetsu* 心境小説. While the standard translations of *zuihitsu* and *shōsetsu* are “essay” and “novel” (within which fall the *shishōsetsu*, or “I-Novel,” and *shinkyō shōsetsu*, or “mental attitude novel”), the Japanese and English do not match up in any precise way. One major factor accounting for this disconnect is that Japanese categories allow more flexibility with regards to distinctions of fiction versus non-fiction.45

It is certainly relevant to note that debates over the definition and relative merits and demerits of the *shishōsetsu*, as well as discussions surrounding the reevaluation of the *zuihitsu* form, were at their height in the 1930s when Mori Atsushi was beginning his literary career and

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45 As both Linda Chance and Tomi Suzuki have claimed, the impetus to reach a definitive understanding of genre distinctions was born of the encounter with Western literature; therefore, an understanding of the resulting genre categories can only truly take place within the historical context of Japanese modernization with its emphasis on establishing a modern subjectivity.
playing an active part in Tokyo literary circles.\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, Mori’s literary mentors were active in shaping these debates. Kikuchi Kan, in particular, was involved in debates surrounding the \textit{shishōsetsu}, and also played a major role in shaping the direction taken by the \textit{zuihitsu} in modern Japanese literature, featuring \textit{zuihitsu} in \textit{Bungei shunjū}, the popular literary magazine he founded, as the genre-of-choice for a burgeoning educated class.\textsuperscript{47} That Mori Atsushi was conscious of ideas about genre that were circulating in his time is evident from his writings, and his body of work shows that he was keenly interested in exploring and playing with genre.

First, let us investigate whether or not \textit{Imi no henyō} matches the standard profile of a \textit{shishōsetsu}. Mori has, in fact, been called “a contemporary \textit{shishōsetsu} writer.”\textsuperscript{48} Karatani Kōjin praised \textit{Imi no henyō} as an “\textit{shishōsetsu} without parallel” 比類のない私小説.\textsuperscript{49} Any attempt at classification depends on how the genre is defined, so let us attempt to provide a standard definition.

Out of debates about the \textit{shishōsetsu} in the 1920s and 1930s emerged a general consensus about the properties associated with this genre or subgenre of Japanese literature, despite the coexistence of different perspectives and understandings of its value.\textsuperscript{50} The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of \textit{shishōsetsu} might be “confessional literature,” a medium for non-conformist writers to document their antisocial behavior and thoughts, often leading in self-

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\textsuperscript{48} Edward Fowler, \textit{The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xxi. Although Fowler states that the heyday of the \textit{shishōsetsu} was the Taishō period (1912-26), he also describes how the form persists in various permutations and is common among contemporary writers.
\textsuperscript{49} Karatani Kōjin, “Kisekiteki na sakuhin,” 111.
\textsuperscript{50} Hijiya-Kirschner, \textit{Rituals of Self-Revelation}, 152.
\end{flushright}
destructive directions. This type of *shishōsetsu*, an offshoot of naturalism, has little in common with *Imi no henyō* and its rational, wise, gently humorous, and at times self-deprecating narrator.

There is, however, another established branch of the *shishōsetsu*, the *shinkyō shōsetsu*, or “mental attitude novel.” This more introspective form was termed by Itō Sei and Hirano Ken the ‘harmony’ subtype of *shishōsetsu*. The writing of Shiga Naoya is considered the pinnacle of the form, featuring protagonists Fowler refers to as “the hero as sage.” In looking for parallels between *Imi no henyō* and the *shishōsetsu*, it will be most productive to focus on *shinkyō shōsetsu* category of *shishōsetsu*. In any case, many of the features that are commonly attributed to *shishōsetsu* are common to both the confessional and the more measured, introspective branches.

One of these features is narrative style. Although *shishōsetsu* is sometimes equated with a *shōsetsu* in the first person, Edward Fowler adopts the view that it can also be narrated in the third person as long as it is “narrated in . . . such a way as to represent with utter conviction the author’s personal experience.” This is achieved by means of the employment of a “single-consciousness narration” style under which author, narrator, and hero are equated. Hijiya-Kirschner calls this the “focus figure” and identifies important features of this as the “‘with’ and the ‘accompanying’ narrative perspective and the central position the first-person narrator and hero assumes in the world of the ‘novel’ He is not only the axis along which the plot develops, but he also carries out the implicit evaluation.”

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53 The term *shinkyō shōsetsu* has at times been used as an alternative name for *shishōsetsu* at large. See Hijiya-Kirschner, *Rituals of Self-Revelation*, 152.
Another feature is the devaluation of plot as a driver of narrative structure. Because it does not adhere to a “linear, forward-moving plot” related by an omniscient narrator, it is unable to be interpreted according to standard Western definitions of fiction or autobiographical non-fiction, such as memoir, which relies on the same narrative devices as fiction.\footnote{Fowler, The Rhetoric of Confession, xxiv.} In *Imi no henyō*, the “single-conscious narration” style is observable, certainly in the middle three sections where Mori’s life experiences come into play and are narrated by a voice that seems indistinguishable from Mori’s own. The first and last chapter, however, are problematic, as they make use of what appears to be an omniscient narrator.

Another defining feature of the *shishōsetsu* as a form or genre is a preoccupation with the transparency and immediacy, a notion that the text represents the “truth” of the author’s experience. The desire for authenticity in *shishōsetsu* begins with the inclusion of details from the author’s life. Because the traditional audience for *shishōsetsu* was literary acquaintances of the author who were expected to be familiar with the details of his or her life, there was no need to provide a narrative backstory; a *shishōsetsu* author could dive right into personal experience and expect the audience to pick up on references to places and people. In the case of *Imi no henyō*, the autobiographical component is undeniable, as there is a considerable overlap of details provided with known details of Mori’s life. Indeed, Mori claimed he wrote the initial drafts of sections of *Imi no henyō* to send to a select group of friends, people who would have been able to contextualize the many details from his personal life that appear in the text. In addition, when these sections were first published, it was in coterie journals read by literary associates who would have been on similarly close terms with Mori. The approach to
autobiography that Mori takes in *Imi no henyō*, then, can arguably be said to be in line with that taken in *shishōsetsu*.

Transparency in *shishōsetsu* extends beyond mere factuality in the personal information included, however. A *shishōsetsu* writer, according to Fowler, makes use of “the techniques of essay, diary, confession, and other nonfictional forms to present the *fiction of a faithfully chronicled experience*” (emphasis mine). 58 The nonfictional form adopted in *Imi no henyō* is that of a dialogue with a friend, a dialogue that is presented in such a way as to instill in the reader the impression of a faithful record of a conversation. This “*fiction of a faithfully chronicled experience*,” then, is an aspect of the *shishōsetsu* that applies to *Imi no henyō* as well.

It is apparent, however, that there is more going on in *Imi no henyō* than, as in the case of *shinkyō shōsetsu*, a faithful depiction of the inner world of the author-narrator-hero. One way in which *Imi no henyō* can be said to diverge from the typical *shishōsetsu* is in its handling of emotion. *Shishōsetsu* are considered to be primarily affective in their interpretation of experience. The focus figure, writes Hijiya-Kirschner, “experiences emotionally; cognitive conception is considered to be an intrusive factor because it destroys the impression of immediacy essential for ‘genuineness’. . .. This emotional relationship with the world corresponds to a basic sentimental mood expressed in a poetic-impressionistic form of presentation.”59

*Imi no henyō*, on the other hand, retains a point of view throughout that could best be described as that of detachment. Even in the dialogue sections that relate personal experiences, there is a marked lack of sentimentality. “Cognitive conception,” or intellectualism, is a central component of the text. Certainly, the wisdom that shines forth in *Imi no henyō* is of a vastly different sort from that expressed in *shinkyō shōsetsu*, which tend to shed light on truths that are

primarily psychological or affective in nature. While in *Imi no henyō* there is an interest in subjectivity that rivals that of the *shishōsetsu*, the implications of this interest extend far beyond the individual, encompassing truths that are universal.\(^{60}\)

So far, we have identified some overlap as well as points of divergence between *Imi no henyō* and the *shisōsetsu*. What, then, of the *zuihitsu*? *Zuihitsu*, literally “following the brush,” is often translated into English as “miscellany,” “miscellaneous essay,” or “fragmentary prose.” Although the term was imported from China, its most representative texts in Japan were actually composed prior to this borrowing, namely Yoshida Kenkō’s *Tsurezuregusa* and Sei Shōnagon’s *Makura no sōshi*.\(^{61}\) The qualities that distinguish the Chinese and Korean progenitors of the Japanese *zuihitsu* are individuality and anti-conformity, “self-expression as display of taste, a preference for multidimensional process over linearity, and a deliberate resistance to convention (the anti-generic intent).”\(^{62}\) This freedom and resistance to generic classification translated in Japan into an association of *zuihitsu* with texts that display an overall freedom of form that can also be viewed as desultory, fragmentary, or unstructured. While the original, continental sense of *zuihitsu* as non-conformist and resistant to generic categorization is certainly applicable to *Imi no henyō*, it is in no way accurate to call *Imi no henyō* unstructured or random; on the contrary, as we shall see, structure is a primary concern of the text.

\(^{60}\) This leads to parallels with the *honkaku shōsetsu* 本格小説, which was posited as a more objective, universalist type of *shōsetsu* that was to correspond to the Western novel, but the twentieth-century literary debate over the which type of novel was capable of expressing “truth” more faithfully, the *shishōsetsu* or the *honkaku shōsetsu*, is beyond the scope of this paper.

\(^{61}\) This is one of the reasons cited by Linda H. Chance in her argument that *Tsurezuregusa* has been misclassified as a *zuihitsu*, and that this misattribution has affected how the text has been interpreted. See: Linda H. Chance, *Formless in Form: Kenkō, Tsurezuregusa, and the Rhetoric of Japanese Fragmentary Prose* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997).

\(^{62}\) Chance, *Formless in Form*, 51.
Other general qualities of the zuihitsu as it developed as a genre in Japan involve “varied and rich” materials, a mature author whose work displays the “quiet and tranquility befitting older writers,” spontaneity, and subjectivity; that is, texts that are reflective of the author’s personality. Linda Chance quotes a dictionary definition of zuihitsu as “writing that lacks restrictions of time such as diaries have, and that freely gathers, according to the dictates of the brush, information, impressions, experience, observations, and discussions. When the description and portrayal have literary value, zuihitsu literature comes into being.” The combination of “varied and rich” materials, consisting of “information, impressions, experience, observations, and discussions” are certainly observable in Imi no henyō. As noted earlier, there is evidence of a literary style and allegorical contents worthy of the distinction of being called “literary.” The text certainly can be said to reflect Mori Atsushi’s subjective experiences, reflections, and personality. There is also a quality of timelessness and a downplaying of plot, as the text weaves in and out of experiences, observations, and logical trains of thought.

Lastly, zuihitsu is sometimes considered to fall somewhere in between poetry and prose. Imi no henyō has indeed been described by Mori Tomiko as a “prose poem” (sanbunshi 散文詩), although in the context of drawing a comparison between the style of Imi no henyō and Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

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63 From a list of “special characteristics of zuihitsu” by Satō Kanji given in: Chance, Formless in Form, 31.
64 From “Zuihitsu bungaku” 随筆文学 in Kokugo kyōiku jiten 国語教育辞典 (Tōkyōdō 東京堂, 1950), 341. In Chance, Formless in Form, 28.
65 Of Imi no henyō, Mori Tomiko writes, “It’s a prose poem like Thus Spoke Zarathustra, an discussion of abstract, mathematical ideas, a theory of the novel, and in some ways a more carefree, autobiographical novel (shōsetsu) than Gassan.” それは、『ツァラトストラかく語りき』のような散文詩であり、抽象的・数学的な考察であり、小説の方法論であり、またある意味で『月山』よりも飄々とした自伝的な小説でもある。Mori Tomiko 森富子.
In this discussion, we have seen that *Imi no henyō* exhibits qualities and characteristics general ascribed to both the *shishōsetsu* and the *zuihitsu* genres, as well as to genres such as the (Western) essay and the prose-poem. And yet, it is also quite clear that this extraordinary text defies relegation to any one established genre. Upon examination, it seems to seep out of any box in which we try to contain it. Indeed, the text serves as a deliberate synthesis of multiple genres in one totalistic “whole.” This is perhaps what literary critic Hiraoka Tokuyoshi 平岡篤頼 intends when he writes that “In [Mori’s] writings, genre distinctions such as *shōsetsu*, memoir (*kaisō* 回想), or *zuihitsu* are meaningless.”

Mori Tomiko brings attention to the fact that her mentor Mori Atsushi had a “pet theory” (*jiron* 持論) that a writer is “someone who writes in order to open up new genres,” and that it was in order to put his theory to practice that he wrote works like *Imi no henyō*, *Gassan*, *Chōkaisan*, *Jōdo*, and *Ware yuku mono no gotoku*. In other works, he experimented with temporality (“mixing past and present and making them spiral”) and style, such as the use of –desu/-masu sentence endings in *Gassan*. In *Imi no henyō*, the amalgamation of genres and discursive fields that we have explored in this section should be viewed, then, as a device in the deliberately crafted attempt to create a new genre that was simultaneously a radical break with

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67 Mori Tomiko, “*Kaidai*,” in Mori Atsushi 森敦, *Mori Atsushi Zenshū* 森敦全集, Shohan (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō 筑摩書房, 1994), 689. Mori claimed that his use of -desu/-masu sentence endings in *Gassan* reflected the fact that the novel was intended to be a letter to the Heavens (*ten e no tegami* 天への手紙). See Mori Atsushi 森敦 and Karatani Köjin 柄谷行人, “*Gendai bungaku to ‘Imi no henyō’* 現代文学と” 意味の変容”, Gunzō 群像 37, no. 11 (November 1982): 171.
the conventions of traditional narrative fiction and an exercise in the incorporation of pre-existing genres into a sort of super genre. Perhaps this is what Nakagami Kenji means when he writes that Mori “dispenses with story” 物語の排除 in *Imi no henyō*.68

Formally, a synthesis occurs in *Imi no henyō* between the subjective, as represented by the personal perspectives of the *shishōsetsu* and the *zuihitsu*, and the objective, evidenced in the text’s intellectual bent, which incorporates such “objective” disciplines as philosophy, logic, and mathematics, and the third-person omniscient narrating subject of the Western novel that frames *Imi no henyō*’s five chapters. This juxtaposition contributes to the non-dualistic, totalistic worldview revealed in the text, the merging of subjective and objective, universal and particular, abstract and concrete into a harmonious whole that embraces the entire cosmos.

III. Circles, Loops and Lines: The Logic of *Imi no henyō*

The main objective of this section will be to explore the circular model of reality that Mori employs throughout *Imi no henyō*. This model serves as the conceptual scaffolding for the text, as well as the basis for themes of circles, loops, and lines that recur throughout. An understanding of this model and how it functions in the text is crucial in approaching not only *Imi no henyō*, but also Mori’s fiction. In particular, the novels *Gassan* and *Ware yuku mono no gotoku* can be considered fictional iterations of the concepts presented in the form of philosophical discourse and allegory in *Imi no henyō*.

Mori first devised this model in his youth to conceptualize the relationship between any set of binaries.69 After being exposed to the Mahayana teachings of the Kegon sutra and the

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68 Nakagami Kenji, “‘Ten’ no ichi,” 126.
Mind-only doctrine of Yōgacāra, Mori expanded his model to reflect these worldviews. In *Imi no henyō*, Totality is expressed as a circle that forms an interior [naibu 内部], and an exterior [gaibu 外部], separated by a line, or boundary [kyōkai 境界]. The narrator takes care in establishing a correspondence between the interior and exterior, which functions to bind opposites in a reciprocal relationship:

*With a center point O, draw a circle with a radius r. From O, draw a random line. On this line, draw a point A within the circle, and a point B that falls outside the circle. If OA X OB = r², for any random point within the circle there will be a corresponding point outside the circle.*

He then asks what he considers to be a vital question: does the boundary belong to the interior or the exterior? Here is the answer given in the text:

*With a random point as the center, draw a circle with a radius of random length. If we call this circle the boundary, the whole comprises two realms. The boundary must belong to one or the other of these realms. Let us call the realm that does not include the boundary the interior; the realm to which the boundary belongs we call the exterior.*

This proposition makes possible several crucial statements about the properties of the interior. Because the boundary belongs to the exterior, says the narrator, the interior, is

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69 Satō Noburō outlines the circumstances under which Mori introduced his concept of a “boundary” (*kyōkai 境界*) which allows opposites to be transformed into each other to his mentor, Yokomitsu Riichi. Satō, “The Literature of Atushi [sic.] Mori,” 146.

70 いま、中心をOとし、半径rの円を描く。Oから任意の直線を引き、その線上の円内に点A、円外に点Bをとり、OA・OB=r²とすれば、円内の任意の点には、必ずこれに対応する円外の点がある。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō*, 22.

71 任意の一点を中心とし、任意の半径を以て円周を描く。そうすると、円周を境界として、全体概念は二つの領域に分たれる。境界はこの二つの領域のいずれかに属さねばならぬ。このとき、境界がそれに属せざるところの領域を内部といい、境界がそれに属するところの領域を外部という。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō*, 20-21.
“hermetically sealed.” This is an expression of Mori’s “encapsulation thesis” (mippei ron 密閉論), an idea that comes into play in many of his subsequent writings, fictional and critical alike. At the same time, the narrator presents a contraposition (taigū meidai 対偶命題): If the interior is sealed off completely from the exterior, it must also be infinitely expansive.

In Mori’s model, the center of the interior is the Self, the “I.” Here, Mori relies on the topological concept of the “neighborhood” (kinbō 近傍) to re-iterate the interior-exterior pairing. In this case, he calls the exterior the “out-of-area” (ikigai 域外). In placing the Self at the center of the interior/“neighborhood” while simultaneously identifying and emphasizing the existence of a corresponding point in the exterior/”out-of-area,” Mori establishes what is, from a Buddhist perspective, the proper understanding of any binary pair, as well as of the Self; that is, a self that is relative, only existing in contrast with that which is not self. The mutual arising and inseparability of opposites is a major concern of the text. While not an exhaustive list, some examples of binary pairs that are given consideration in Imi no henyō are relative versus absolute, concrete versus abstract, subject versus object, personal versus universal, earth versus heaven, life versus death, the vulgar versus the sublime, duality versus non-duality, and static versus ever-changing. The supremely simple and infinitely flexible formulation of his circular model makes it capable of representing the relationship between any pair of opposites, a relationship that is essentially what Buddhists mean by emptiness or dependent arising.

One discursive realm to which the circular model is applied is that of the self. In his study “The Literature of Atushi [sic.] Mori: Consideration of the Theory of Line” (Mori Atsushi no bungaku: Kyōkai ron o meguru kōsatsu 森敦の文学：境界論をめぐる考察), Satō Noburō offers considerable insights into Mori’s circle-with-boundary model in light of Kegon and
Yōgacāra philosophy, as reflecting the process of self-formation (jiko kakuritsu 自己確立), despair, and self-transcendence, or the process by which consciousness becomes aware of itself.

According to Satō, Mori conceives of the self as a provisional entity that arises by result of the entrapment of the individual consciousness within the interior, or “the neighborhood, which has as its origin the ‘I.’” 72 From the dualistic, narrow viewpoint of the self-trapped-in-interior, reality is perceived a) as dualistic and b) as static and unchanging, but this is not the whole story: “In Mori’s conception, emptiness is reality. Reality is fluid, in flux, but is ossified by language. This produces a contradiction between the original/essential being(ness) and perception. Humans, from the perspective of being, are fluid (in constant flux), but in order to perceive, reality must be frozen. Mori’s theory of the line (boundary) is a method by which a reality that has been ossified by language is made to be fluid through the use of language. Using this method, Mori attempted to access the true self.”73

In Satō’s subsequent argument, he claims that Mori presents, and rejects, a second possibility for transcending the boundary (the self), and that this possibility is that of a return to the original oneness of nature. This is the idyllic Arcadia of Mori’s Northern people, and a return to this wholeness necessitates a dismantling of the self that has been formed by means of encapsulation in the interior. But such a return to a state of non-conceptual wholeness that precedes any distinction or discrimination among phenomena is not Mori’s aim. Nor does he negate the value of Western philosophy or systems of formal logic; while making use of such

72 われを原点とした近傍。Mori Atsushi 森敦, Imi no hen'yō/Mandara kikō 意味の変容・マンダラ紀行 (Tokyo: Kōdansha 講談社, 2012), 64.
73 森の用語でいえば、空は現実である。現実は流動し、言語はそれを固定化させる。ここに本来の存在と認識に矛盾が生じる。ひとは存在として流動するものなのに、認識するにはそれを固定化するほかはない。森の境界論は、言語によって固定化された現実を、言語によって流動化させる方法である。もりは、この方法によって、ほんとうの自己に到達しようと試みたのである。Satō Noburō “The Literature of Atushi [sic.] Mori,” 143.
systems to the fullest extent possible, he simply recognizes their limitations, seeing them not as ends or solutions to the problems of existence and perception, but as tools that point the way to the means for and possibility of their own transcendence.

This point highlights the importance of the circle to Mori’s vision: Mori conceives of the journey of the self towards awakening (ecstasy) not as a path from a oneness to which we must return, but as a circle: from the original harmony of oneness with nature to the formation of a Self that perceives the world through binaries (by means of being shut into the interior), and, passing through the despair and frustration that is born being trapped in a world of paradox to acceptance, and back around to wholeness. Satō presents a convincing argument that this wholeness is not the same as the original wholeness, for it is a wholeness that is experienced by a conscious self that has transcended itself and the limitations of its narrow view of reality.74

This transcendence comes about by means of a complete shift in perspective that is religious or mystic experience. Satō identifies this shift as that from a “microscopic” perspective (kyokubi 極微的) to a “macroscopic” perspective (kyokudai 極大 or kyoshiteki 巨視的).75 In Mori’s formulation, the interior is something that is enclosed, producing a perception that is narrow and confined in scope, but (because the interior, to which the boundary does not belong, is infinite) simultaneously contains within it the potential for a shift to a macroscopic view, an expanded state of consciousness that is able to perceive reality in a holistic way that both co-exists with and transcends paradox.

So far, we have examined Satō’s idea of the circular model as it relates to the process of self-formation and self-transcendence; that is, from complete oneness with reality without self-awareness to a “microscopic” view of reality that is enclosed, self-conscious, and questions

74 Satō Noburō, “The Literature of Atushi [sic.] Mori,” 144.
reality. This self questions until it hits a wall of paradox, resulting in suffering and existential despair, but a proper understanding of the meaning of the boundary and acceptance the transformation of meaning that it effects, including awakening to a view of the self as relative and provisional, allows for the ecstatic experience of infinity, a oneness with all that is but with awareness. This process could alternatively be articulated as the circular journey from reality-as-is (emptiness) through the linguistic realm to realization (awakening or actualization), also expressed by the narrator of *Imi no henyō* as the “shift to a higher dimensional space” (*kūkan jigen wo takameru* 空間次元を高める).

Having explored one possible expression of Mori’s circular model for conceptualizing Totality, let us move on to some of the other variations on the theme of circles, loops, and lines that are woven through the text of *Imi no henyō*. It is important to keep in mind that the circular model serves as the conceptual scaffolding for the text, as well as the basis for the other circle variations that appear throughout.

One way that circles function within *Imi no henyō* is to represent the physical space of the interior. For example, in “Eyes of the Dead,” the narrator describes the circular sight of a telescope, representing the interior or reality on which the exterior is projected (“realized”):

*The telescope realizes the realm of the exterior within the realm of the interior; in doing so it seeks to prove that the reality that makes up the interior is, indeed, the interior.*

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76 Satō Noburō, “The Literature of Atushi [sic.] Mori,” 144.
77 望遠鏡は、これによって内部をなすところの領域の中に、外部をなすところの領域を実現し、この内部をなす現実が、まさに内部であることを証明しようとす るものである。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō*, 28-9.
Another physical circle appears in the “Cosmic Tree” chapter, when the two friends shoot a doe that has been trapped in the headlights of their Jeep. Here, the headlights serve as an interior.

Also featuring in the text of *Imi no henyō* is a sort of loop created by systems that are cyclical in nature. For example, there are several examples in “Cosmic Tree” of circles as recycled resources. First, in the recounting of the parable of the stray dog, which takes place outside a black market bar in the immediate post-war period, a septic pump truck arrives to haul away sewage:

Because it was night we could drink in such a place, but in the morning dozens of septic pump trucks arrived from out of the fog to moor in the sewage ditch behind the bar. They were going to unload the sewage onto boats to be carted away as fertilizer. Before long, the stench of human waste became mingled with that of left-over black-market food. Stray dogs began to gather, drawn to the smell, and linger, so that the septic pump truck drivers had no choice but to stop their engines to yell abuses.78

In this circle, food becomes sewage, which is then turned to fertilizer that will grow more food, serves to emphasize the interrelation of phenomena that is so important to the establishment of the Kegon philosophy of mutual identity. Later in the text, another cycle is described when the narrator explains the workings of dams built deep in the mountains as an

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78 《夜だったからあんなところで飲めたものの、朝は朝霧の中からヴァキューム・カーが何十台となくやって来て、あの裏の汚水の溜まりのような河に舫っている、オワイ舟に空けるんだろう。やがて、まだそこらに残っている闇市の食べもののでにおいに混じって、生温かく屎尿がにおいはじめる。そのにおいに憧れて来た野良犬どもが群れをなして横行し、ヴァキューム・カーの運転手たちも、車を止めて大声で罵らねばならぬほどだった。》Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō*, 48.
allegory for the even larger cycle of reincarnation (in Buddhist terms, the wheel of samsara that
rotates from life to death to rebirth):

It turns out that right now we are at peak output. When energy needs can’t be
covered using thermal energy, we make up for the deficit by discharging water
from the dam. And when there is a surplus of thermal energy, we pump up the
water that was discharged and refill the dam so it can be released again later. In
short, you could say that we allow the water to be reincarnated: from death to life,
from life to death.79

In “Arcadia,” Mori describes the process of printing Chinese characters as a metaphor for
the relationship between meaning and structure:

Remember watching the workers silently picking up the characters in that dim
room, under the fluorescent lights? They’re called type-pickers, and for them, the
Chinese characters packed into cases are no more than points on a coordinate
graph. Or at very least, one cannot be said to be a master type-picker until one
comes to view the characters in such a way. When the picker has filled the type
case with characters, he passes it to a compositor, who moves this to a composing
stick, encodes it, and places it on an assembly tray. Only then does the text come
to have meaning. In other words:

All things must first be stripped of meaning if they are to be made to

correspond. If they cannot be made to correspond, they cannot have
structure, and without structure there is no meaning.80

79 ところが、いまはピーク発電といって、一定量の電力は火力発電でまかない、それで
まかなえなくなったとき、ダムの水を放流しておぎなうんだ。そして、火力発電で電力
があまると、放流した水をポンプ・アップして、放流したダムの水をまた満たしては落
とす。つまり、死から生へ、生から死へと輪廻させるんだ。Mori Atsushi, Imi no
hennyō/Mandara kikō, 59.

80 きみはあの薄暗い部屋の蛍光灯の下で、工員たちが黙々と活字を拾っているのを見た
だろう。あれは文選工というんだ。文選工にとって、ケースにつめられる活字はたんに
座標上の一点也不に過ぎない。また、座標上の一点に過ぎないようになるのでなければ、そ
In this passage, Mori proposes the circle of meaning-creation, which progresses as such: from removal of meaning through structure through transformation to meaning restored. This circular transformation of meaning is the source of the title that binds the five chapters together, and is one permutation of what is expressed in “Arcadia” using Buddhist terms like “impermanence and mutability” (shogyō mujō 諸行無常 and ui tenpen 有為転変), the incessant motion and flux of all phenomena that dooms any attempt to grasp reality through frozen concepts.81

Let us proceed to the notion of “worlds” (sekai 世界), which is another domain in which the circle is featured in Imi no henyō. The three locations that feature in the dialogue chapters, namely the optics factory, the dam project, and the printing company, represent circular worlds, and a relationship of equality is set up among these worlds. Since he has defined the boundary as not belong to the interior, and the interior as infinite and yet hermetically enclosed, the narrator claims that there is an equality of size among worlds from the perspective of the interior. By describing each of these worlds in close detail, he shows them to be equal in light of their diversity as well as their particularity:

As far as worlds go, that small typesetting shop is no different from any other world.

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の文選工はまだ熟練工ということはできない。文選工はこうして活字を文選箱に満たすと、植字工に渡す。植字工はこれをステッキに移し、符号化し、記号化して、組みゲラの上に構造し、はじめて意味を生ずるものになるのだ。すなわち、いかなるものも、まずその意味を取り去らなければ対応するものとすることができない。対応するものとすることがでなければ構造することができず、構造することができなければ、いかなるものもその意味を持つことができない。Mori Atsushi, Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō, 76.

81 Mori Atsushi, Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō, 80-81.
Large and small can only exist when viewed from the exterior; within the interior there is no relative size. The reason is that the boundary belongs to the exterior, and when the interior is viewed from this exterior, the boundary determines large and small. On the other hand, the boundary does not belong to the interior. The interior, therefore, can be said to be infinite, and in infinity there is no relative size.\(^{82}\)

In addition, at the end of the final chapter, the idea of worlds is expanded to encompass religious worldviews. Time, the elder Samuel writes in his letter, is the only line that can pass through the boundary, and by doing so it creates circular worlds: “Some religions view the world as one large circle drawn by the one-dimensional space called time, while other religions envision infinite rings, each comprising its own world.”\(^{83}\) According to Karatani Kōjin, the former represents the Judeo-Christian worldview, while the latter refers to the Buddhist conception of multiple world-systems.\(^{84}\)

Yet another circle appears in the final chapter: the apple. In the elder Samuel’s telling, the apple is peeled by the blade of time to reveal the white flesh beneath, here inverted into a metaphor for the exterior, or death:

Now that I think of it, could the boundary that is part of the white fruit not be likened to the boundary that separates the seen from the unseen? Let us consider,

\(^{82}\) 森敦，世は、あの小さな印刷屋もおなじ世界だよ。大小はただ外部から見て言えることであって、内部にはいえば大小はない。なぜなら、境界は外部に属し、外部から見た内部の大小は、この境界によって判断される。しかし、内部には境界が残しないから、いわば無限であり、無限には大小がない。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no hen'yō/Mandara kikō*, 73.

\(^{83}\) ある宗教は時間と呼ばれる一次元空間が唯一の大円を描いて円環するところのものをもって世界とし、ある宗教はその無数の円環するところのものをそれぞれ世界として包む。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no hen'yō/Mandara kikō*, 95.

when we touch the base of the knife’s blade to the stem of the apple, the length of
the blade extending from base to tip as representing the one-dimensional space
called time. If we do so, the stem of the apple, while facing away such that the
one-dimensional space called time could not return, becomes a point of infinity
that loops back around and returns.\(^85\)

The apple, like the dam, symbolizes reincarnation, the loop from life to death and back
again that might best be visualized as a Möbius strip, and in Mori’s thinking time is the factor
that makes it possible to access the boundary and cross back and forth between interior and
exterior.

Samuel’s letter closes with an account of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In this
account, the female disciples experience ecstasy in their unity with Jesus on the cross. Indeed, in
the moment of their ecstasy they succeed in merging all distinctions, subject and object, idea and
form, darkness and light, finite and infinite, absolute and relative, and life and death, into their
original state of mutual identity and interpenetration. And yet, the story does not end here, for the
merging of life and death, mind and matter is quite literal:

The morning after the Sabbath, it is said that the women came in search of Jesus’s
remains. How empty it must have felt there, like a stage after the performance is
over and everyone has gone home. They would have been told that Jesus had been
resurrected, that he had left for Galilee. But the women would have recalled their
ecstasy, and even while engulfed in a fatigue resembling despair, would have
smiled inwardly as they sensed the slightest flicker of life within their wombs.\(^86\)

\(^85\) そしてみれば、白い果肉に属する境界は、幽明の境になぞらえてもよいのではあるまいか。このリンゴの果柄に根元をあてて、次第にその先端へと伸ばしつつあるナイフの刃
渡りを時間と呼ばれる一次元空間とすれば、リンゴの果柄はまさに時間と呼ばれる一次
元空間が、ふたたび戻れぬ方向をとりつつも、円環をなしてふたたび戻って来る無限遠
点となる。Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō*, 95.

\(^86\) 安息日を過ぎた朝、彼女らはイエスのなきがらを求めて来たといわれる。そこはもう
ハネた小屋のようにむなしかったであろう。イエスはすでに蘇り、ガリラヤに去ったと
The womb, then, is another round space that facilitates the closing of circles, from death to (re)birth, and from the absolute to the phenomenal, the unconditioned to the conditioned.\(^87\)

Finally, the overall structure of *Imi no henyō* is a loop, one that begins with allegory (first chapter), continues with three chapters of dialogue (which are nevertheless linked with allegorical descriptions of the narrator’s experiences and ideas), and returns in the last chapter to allegory. As Karatani Kōjin has noted, *Imi no henyō* ends with a beginning.

In this structure of a journey that returns to its starting point, there is a further allusion to the journey of Sudhana in the last chapter of the Kegon sutra, “Entry into the Realm of Reality.” In this story, aspiring bodhisattva Sudhana, after meeting with a succession of fifty-three spiritual benefactors, boddhisattvas spanning a broad range of humanity and including priests, laypeople, children, kings and queens, a prostitute, and transcendent beings, and after an experience of awakening to reality-as-is, returns to precisely where he started, in Manjushri’s forest, suggesting that the reality he experienced was something that was there to be experienced all along. And yet it took an epic journey, with each of the spiritual benefactors offering him something precious before sending him off to the next, for Sudhana to awaken to what was there from the start.\(^88\)

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\(^87\) This “womb” is likely also an allusion to the Mahāyana notion that all beings are “wombs of Buddhahood” (tathāgatagarbha). See Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 44-5. The merging of the infinite with its “phenomenal manifestation in space and time” is also symbolized in Kegon Buddhism by Vairocana, the cosmic Buddha. Cook, *Hua-Yen Buddhism*, 93.

\(^88\) Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, 1135-1518. I wish to thank Professor Keller Kimbrough for bringing the circular structure of “Entry into the Realm of Reality” to my attention.
Concentric Circles in *Gassan*

Let us now proceed to an examination of the ways in which the circular theme makes an appearance in the 1974 novel *Gassan*. First, the novel spans roughly one cycle of the seasons. *Gassan* opens in summer, when the unnamed first-person narrator arrives at Chūrenji temple at the foot of Gassan in the Dewa Sanzan region of Yamagata prefecture and seeks lodging. The narrative progresses through fall, complete with a gorgeous description of the autumn foliage, toward winter. The narrator “I,” “having no where else to go,” procrastinates (intentionally, it seems) in his descent down back down from the temple, only to become trapped there due to the heavy snows that are typical of the region. At this point, the narrative focus shifts to winter, which the narrator must now endure along with the temple’s caretaker and the inhabitants of the small village just below. Finally, spring arrives and the narrator is “rescued” by the arrival of a friend who comes to take him back to civilization.

Aside from the revolution of one year that makes up the temporal background of *Gassan*, the novel contains a number of other circles. Yamamoto Miki  has likened these circles to the concentric circles of Kegon philosophy, realms-within-realms (each of these worlds, regardless of its relative size, is what in *Imi no henyō* Mori calls a “hermetically-enclosed interior”). Yamamoto examines the progression in *Gassan* of wider circles contracting inward. The novel starts with the outermost (macro) circle and gradually moves inward, tracing the path of the narrator. First there is the greater world, which is viewed with suspicion by the residents of the village. Within this is the entire mountainous region known as the Dewa Sanzan 出羽三山, an “otherworldly” region comprising three sacred mountains, Haguro 羽黒, Gassan, and Yudono.

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湯殿, mountains that are believed in the local religion to represent the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, and were a site of practice for initiates into Shugendō 修験道.

Within this region is the snowed-in village, a self-enclosed world into and out of which there is very little traffic throughout the winter months, with the exception of that that revolves around the sake bootlegging enterprise that sustains the villagers. Within the village (roughly) is the temple, which traditionally served as the boundary for Shugendō initiates before they entered the sacred mountain area for training. Referred to in terms that emphasize its decline, such as “ruined temple” (yaburedera 破れ寺) and inhabited only by a caretaker, as the temple is without a priest during the period in which the novel takes place, the temple becomes a world of its own.

The narrator takes up residence on the second floor of the building adjacent to the temple, which at the time of the novel is open to the elements, and, rather than moving downstairs when winter arrives, creates a tiny room for himself by piecing together old prayer slips made of Japanese paper that he finds in a closet. A parallel is drawn between this little room and the cocoon of a silkworm, which the villager’s call “bug of the Heavens” (ten no mushi 天の虫). It is within this tiny self-enclosed world that the narrator awaits transformation. This transformation largely comes about though constant reminders of the proximity of death: Gassan looming in the near distance; the all-engulfing blizzards; stories of suicides and mummies; and periodic gatherings of widows from the village at the temple to chant sutras for the dead (nenbutsu 念仏), which predictably devolve into feasting and the singing of lewd songs. That is to say, they become celebrations of life. As in the poem attributed to the narrator in Imi no henyō, death brings life into sharper contrast:

Darkness has come like a mantle
the living trees conceal themselves
while dead trees stand out in white
revealing the shape of life\(^9\)

The aim of this brief section has been to give a sampling of the ways in which themes of circularity and of the intermingling of life and death in *Gassan* are drawn from the conceptual framework introduced in *Imi no henyō*. I believe that investigation into Mori’s other fiction, including the novel *Ware yuku mono no gotoku*, would reveal similar levels of indebtedness to the ambitious literary experiment that is *Imi no henyō*.

This translation and critical introduction are offered with the knowledge that they cannot possibly do justice to the depth and breadth of the original text, as well as in the hope that they will serve as springboards for future interest in translation and research into Mori Atsushi’s writing.

\(^9\)闇が覆って来た/
生命ある樹々は姿を隠し/
死んだ木が白く浮き上がり/
生命の形を現す
Mori Atsushi, *Imi no henyō/Mandara kikō*, 30; 40; 62.
PART TWO: TRANSLATION

I. The Realization of Allegory

Latent within the Magnificent are the dark, the grotesque, and the decayed, which emit a luminous nocturnal glow. Now, for a moment, let us posit the Magnificent as the world would have us see it: rarefied, beautiful, and solemn. This ends up being a futile exercise in substitution of terms; the result is an image incapable of radiating the nocturnal luminosity that would make it worthy of being called Magnificent. Does this suggest that the Magnificent is not, after all, rarefied, beautiful, and solemn? Should the Magnificent instead be defined as the dark, the grotesque, and the decayed?

But no, the rarefied, beautiful, and solemn, on the one hand, and the dark, grotesque, and decayed, on the other, are conceptual opposites: an interior and an exterior, separated by a boundary. As for what creates this division, let us leave precise definitions for a later discussion. For now, we shall just say that the Magnificent is synonymous with the whole, which embraces opposing concepts.

Indeed, the rarefied, the beautiful, and the solemn, on the one hand, and the dark, the grotesque, and the decayed, on the other, make up, by means of the boundary, either the interior or the exterior; herein lies their power to attract horror and aversion, while at the same time thrilling, fascinating, and giving an impression of something seductive and enchanting. This would seem to explain why it is that the Magnificent holds people enthralled, while at the same time making them want to look away. Here there is a contradiction: the whole always contains and creates contradiction, and we must keep in mind that the reason for the contradiction lies in
the boundary. To understand this fully, we must also reference the center point that corresponds to the boundary, but let us put this aside for now.

As a snake of unparalleled Magnificence, it is undoubtedly wise to keep myself concealed in the deepest recesses of the forest, which never see the light of day, biding my time. Because I am the most Magnificent among snakes, if for even a short time I were to stop hiding and reveal my form, I would be felt to be incomparably magical and would display an unfathomable brilliance. In addition, my strong, sharp fangs contain a terrible poison that enchants and can bring down all those who look upon me with horror and aversion. But to have such power is also to cause their horror and aversion to intensify permanently, sometimes putting my very life in peril.

Despite this, there are untold numbers of snakes that single-mindedly aspire to Magnificence. Many, in fact, have succeeded in achieving a good semblance of it. By “semblance,” I do not mean to say that these snakes lack the qualities that characterize the Magnificent; at first glance they appear to be rarefied, beautiful, and solemn. What they are missing, rather, are the latent qualities—the dark, the grotesque, and the decayed—that shine in all their nocturnal luminosity.

And so, without the opposing concepts that give form to the whole, they are not ordered, by means of a boundary, into either an interior or an exterior, and so do not have the power to evoke horror and aversion, to thrill and fascinate, to give an impression of something seductive and enchanting. Nor do they possess that quality that holds people enthralled, while at the same time making them want to look away. Indeed, all they can do is elicit laughter. This does not even count as comedy; it is merely a mistake. Without the boundary that brings opposing concepts into being, there can be no interior and exterior; even so, the imposters think of
themselves as forming interior and exterior, convinced that they constitute a whole. The boundary holds the key to the transformation of interior and exterior, and transformation is the key to perception.

In short, untold numbers of snakes resemble Magnificent ones, but because their resemblance is incomplete they instead become something ridiculous, nothing at all like their model. Healthy, cheerful, carefree, not a drop of poison in their fangs—they are harmless, insipid. And yet, although their fangs do not contain a drop of poison, they are wily enough to try to present themselves as if they did. Cleverness coupled with a touch of vanity makes the countless imposters aspire to Magnificence. This is, it goes without saying, absurd.

If moonlight spills deep into the recesses of the forest, a forest unpenetrated by the light of day, the tens of millions of leaves on the trees begin to sparkle like so many reptilian scales. Surrounded by the Magnificence of Nature, would the Magnificence of a single snake not pale in comparison? And thus, a Magnificent snake may feel it will be liberated from its Magnificence. But then its scales begin to sparkle like the tens of millions of leaves on the trees, and the rarefied, the beautiful, and the solemn come together with the dark, the grotesque, and the decayed, and the enchantment takes on the quality of limitless magic. Herein lies the secret of true Magnificence.

As luck would have it, everything has descended into a deep sleep. It is at a time like this that a Magnificent snake must go in search of food. I move quietly so as not to interrupt the sleep of the forest, threading through the brilliantly sparkling grass, undulating like a stream that makes not even the faintest murmur. But then suddenly, I stop in my tracks, my scales bristling in fear. A man is standing tall, his scythe gleaming in the moonlight. He is the keeper of the imposter snakes. How big and black his form appears in the dark!
Here in the brilliantly sparkling grass are the bodies of innumerable imposter snakes that had gathered for the purpose of reproduction. Their bodies have been hacked into round sections and the heads and tails lie in a muddled heap, drenched in blood. This, I suppose, could not be avoided. These countless imposter snakes did not follow my example and hide deep in the dark forest, unpeneetrated by the light of day, biding their time. No, by emerging from the forest’s recesses, by revealing themselves, by wanting to at least appear like the Magnificent snake, they became imposters, mere simulacra of the Magnificent snake.

In any case, I had a feeling something bad was going to happen and braced myself to fight, but it was only because there were shivers running down my body. Then again, it would not be true to say these shivers were a result of some fear that my poison fangs stood no chance against an enemy so strong. But my position, posed as if to strike, provoked horror and aversion in the one who, in an effort to be Magnificent, made the scythe, bred and raised imposter snakes for their skins, and then, without so much as a second thought, cruelly slaughtered those that had gathered to breed. I had what could only be called a premonition, and seeing me react to this premonition only increased his horror and aversion.

I returned to the recesses of the forest, where tens of millions of leaves sparkle like as many scales. My scales sparkling with the brilliance of tens of millions of leaves, I pondered the idea of fecundity as the fool’s greatest weapon. No matter how many are slaughtered, the imposter snakes will, in time, burst forth and multiply. They will live healthy lives, cheerful and carefree, unaware of the cruel death that awaits them. Or perhaps they are laughing at those who, due to their Magnificence, will be forced into desperate loneliness, remaining behind unseen to forage for food.
Still, I had no inclination to laugh back at them. On the contrary, I longed to be like the imposter snakes, raised like livestock unaware of their impending slaughter, living healthy lives, cheerful and carefree. So what if my fangs contain a terrible poison! Not only do they reduce me to desperate solitude, they do nothing to serve me in the defense of my solitude. And yet there will come a time to shed this skin. Oh Heavens, when that time comes, bestow your grace, and let me cast aside my Magnificence along with my skin, so that I may be ugly, wretched, and abject. If I should pray to be Magnificent, make even the semblance of Magnificence beyond my reach.

At last, the time came to shed my skin. I moaned and writhed, feeling that to have my prayer go unheard was worse than even the pain of birthing myself. Dazed and unsteady, I gradually regained consciousness. Then, everything I had seen under the dazzling light of the moon was but a transparent skin, trivial in the extreme. As if to challenge God himself, I had to discover myself, the self that had now become a Magnificent snake. And so I found out that when the interior becomes that which can properly be called the interior, it forms a whole of its own. And if this is the case, that whole must also incorporate its opposite. This is how the imposter, by means of being enclosed within the interior, becomes, at last, a Magnificent snake. A formidable sleight of hand by the One Who Realizes Allegory! Or perhaps the man who stood tall in the moonlight, wielding his scythe, perhaps he was that One.

Take a look: a vast vegetable field has been planted entirely with daikon radishes. The radishes are healthy, cheerful, and carefree. If left alone, they will push up and protrude from the earth when ripe, displaying a vigor befitting someone who, forgetting his place, would violate the heavens. The radishes lie in heaps, struck by the occasional typhoon. The farmer finds this
disconcerting and covers the protrusions with dirt. But we must not think he acts from kindness. In time, he will yank the radish he has cultivated out of the earth. In this way he is no different from the man who breeds and raises imposter snakes, all so that he may one day slaughter them.

But what have we here? That man has chosen a radish and over its bushy leaves has placed a square pane of glass. On the four corners of this pane he has rested lead weights. The bushy leaves of the radish are not crushed, but they look as if they might snap at any moment. On top of this device, the man attaches a slow-motion camera in order, it would seem, to film what unfolds.

When he has finished, the man takes the film into the viewing room and plays it at high speed. The screen projects a huge radish with leaves that appear about to snap. With every bit of strength they can muster, the leaves—right, left, front, back—are propping up the pane of glass on which the weights rest.

But this foolish radish, as if enraged at the injustice of being compressed and considering how to escape its plight, begins bit by bit to move its leaves—right, left, front, back, and all the others. As a result the glass panel begins to tilt ever so slightly, and the weights, too, begin to slide. But these, as if conspiring to amuse themselves by thwarting the radish’s efforts, slide a little only to return to their original location. This process repeats until, before long, the radish has been even more severely compressed.

The pane of glass is much like the boundary that encloses the interior, and those who try to escape only suffer all the more. Most would give in and endure their torment, thinking there is nothing else to be done, but the radish is undaunted, stubborn. Unafraid that its leaves might break at any moment, it takes advantage of the glass panel’s slightest movement, kicking first
with its right leaf, then its left, then its front leaf, then its back, then all its other leaves, with not
so much as a thought of giving up its imprudent battle.

All of a sudden, the glass panel tilts and the weights begin to tremble. The shaking causes
the panel to slant further, and eventually the panel tilts all the more under its own weight. Then,
when it has taken on a considerable slope, the panel slides right off the leaves of the radish,
shattering on the earth, flinging its shards silently like ocean spray. The lead weights, like so
many buffoons, disperse in leisurely leaps and tumbles.

Already the radish has unfurled its leaves—to the right, to the left, forward, backward,
and then in all directions. The man is greatly satisfied to witness the radish’s joy at successfully
vanquishing its foe. Perhaps he thinks that he has succeeded in transforming the radish from
being a part of the interior, which, by hermetically enclosing the radish, had formed a whole, into
that which belongs to a whole comprising both an interior and an exterior. But the glass panel,
which had constituted the boundary, is no more. Without the boundary, interior and exterior
cease to be; thus, it is impossible for them to comprise a whole. Indeed, it might be the case that,
in liberating the radish from its state of wholeness and changing it into something that, as in the
case of the imposter snakes, does not form a whole, the man sought to achieve in the radish the
Realization of Allegory—the parable of the Great Fool. In doing so, he is no different from the
man standing tall in the forest, the moonlight gleaming on his scythe.

A snake of rare Magnificence, I thought the magic was within me. But no, it is I who
attempts to exist within that magic. Oh storm that rips at the trees, blizzard that crashes and roars
like the surf, desolate rocky mountaintop, thick black clouds that send down pillars of light, from
you comes the sound of howling laughter.
II. Eyes of the Dead

I didn’t think I’d ever see you again. Thanks for coming.

“Now that you mention it, I had the same feeling. The war has already broken out. I guess everyone has the same sense that parting is forever.”

How true.

“What a big factory this is. I didn’t expect it to be this big. Just when I thought we’d reached the end, there was another building, and on each floor there were innumerable workers. . .”

It’s not so big, really. I guess you could call this place heaven in a jar.

“Heaven in a jar? I see. That describes the world to a T.”

The world? Oh yes, it’s actually the same thing, but we refer to a world as that which gives form to the whole.

With a random point as the center, draw a circle with a radius of random length. If we call this circle the boundary, the whole comprises two realms. The boundary must belong to one or the other of these realms. In this case, we call the realm that does not include the boundary the interior; the realm to which the boundary belongs we call the exterior.
It is hardly necessary to mention that interior + exterior + boundary = whole. But the interior is the realm that does not include the boundary, so it is an infinite realm and, as such, constitutes a whole in its own right. It follows that the whole composed of interior + exterior + boundary can be realized in the interior, which constitutes a whole in its own right. What this means is that heaven is heaven, even if it happens to be heaven in a jar. Remember the story about the Magnificent snake? That was an allegory that explains this very idea.

“Wholeness? Could that be why it feels so peaceful here?”
Hmm, but what you refer to as peacefulness would be something quite different. Bit by bit, enemy planes mar the sky. At such a time, we find consolation in the mere fact that there are weapons under construction to face up to these planes. This is but the magic of self-delusion.

“Are you saying that what is being made at this factory are not true, weapons, but merely optical weapons?”

Not necessarily. What are being made here are telescopic sights. Although they are used in weapons, a telescopic sight is just a variety of telescope, and you can’t rightly say that the eye of a weapon is the same as the weapon itself. You could, however, say that it’s more than a weapon. That reminds me, you understand that the interior and exterior correspond to each other, don’t you?

**With a center point O, draw a circle with a radius r. From O, draw a random line. On this line, draw a point A within the circle, and a point B that falls outside the circle. If \( OA \times OB = r^2 \), for any random point within the circle there will be a corresponding point outside the circle.**

*Mori Atsushi Zenshū 森敦全集, Vol. 2, 14.*
That is to say, the interior corresponds to the exterior. But we have already defined the interior as that realm which does not include the boundary, and the exterior as that to which the boundary belongs.

OA is less than \( r \), and OB is greater than or equal to \( r \), so if OA is 0, OA \( 	imes \) OB=0, and OA \( 	imes \) OB cannot equal \( r^2 \). Then, even if OB = \( r \), OA is less than \( r \), so OA \( 	imes \) OB cannot equal \( r^2 \).
The contradiction that arises between the center point and the circumference is a critical one. It could even lead us toward an explanation of the movement of the celestial bodies. But let us set aside for a moment the idea of using the correspondence between A and B, which are separated by the circle that serves as the boundary, to establish a correspondence between the interior and exterior realms. Let us suppose that a correspondence is established by the interior, which does not include the boundary, being transformed into the exterior, which does. In such a case, we have simply to see the center point of the circle O as a point of infinity. The difference between interior and exterior is merely one of whether something is conceived by infinity or whether it gives birth to infinity. However, this, too, is magic. The center point and boundary are elusive, it would seem, but when we confront a conceptual whole this sort of paradox will inevitably arise. This is where we must resort to a bit of magic. You see, with just a touch of magic, we can see not only with the eyes of the living, but also with the eyes of the dead.

“The eyes of the dead? Are you saying that your telescopes can see not only this world, the world that the eyes of the living can see, but also the other world, the world that only the eyes of the dead can perceive?”

That’s right.

“But no matter how many people your telescopes slaughter while serving as the eyes of weapons, it’s only others’ deaths, another’s death. This is not the same as glimpsing that other
world that you can see by means of your own death, but rather is just something that makes you more intensely aware that you are alive.”

You talk as if you are sure there is a world beyond death.

“Why do you say that? Even if death were fast approaching, so long as I’m alive, I’m alive. What I mean is that to the extent that there is no way to escape this life, there is no way to know death.”

But your question has already produced its own answer. You said that as long as you’re alive, you’re alive, that there is no way to escape being alive. But our life, as a realm that does not include the boundary that separates the seen from the unseen, becomes a realm that encompasses this boundary. Why would it not be possible to realize death within life? At least it’s possible to realize the exterior within the interior. And the interior within the exterior, too. Incidentally. . .

**Because the interior does not encompass the boundary, you say it is hermetically sealed. At the same time, you say that because the interior does not encompass the boundary, it is wide open. In short, that which is simultaneously closed and open can be called the interior; this means that any random point within the interior can become the center point.**
Fig. 4

Key:

生 = Life

死 = Death

幽明境 = Boundary between the seen and the unseen

A person could stand at any given point and have it be the center, but would exist there as a paradox. I will add just this one thing: As a paradox the boundary, too, constitutes the whole, so the formation of a whole must necessarily involve the creation of paradox.

“You said you thought the snake in “The Magnificent Snake” had magic within it. But you went on to say that it was more like the snake existed within the magic. That’s what it’s like for me. You must understand because you were at Yuga Mountain, a place of mystery. What is this ‘yuga,’ anyway?”
It's mantra yoga, involving awakening to emptiness through the merging of subject and object. Of course, this is based on the premise that we can stand at any point and have it be the center, but that we come into existence there, necessarily, as a paradox.

“You throw around words like subject and object; what is a subject, anyway?”

Hmm, I can’t say I know. But I think it could be defined as a point of view that has a certain direction or course, a vector. Because that’s what a vector is in the broadest sense, don’t you think? A point of view with a certain direction or course.

“So is the object also a vector, a point of view that has a certain direction or course?”

At the very least, they must be oriented in opposite directions.

It is said that if subject merges with object, the result is emptiness. In fact, when two vectors are moving toward each other, are equal in length to one another, and follow a straight line, they equal 0. This 0 is emptiness.

\textit{Mori Atsushi Zenshū} 森敦全集, Vol. 2, 18.

\textbf{Fig. 5}

Key:

客観 = Object(ive)

主観 = Subject(ive)
Do people not often make the statement, “Confucius is human”? When this is true, we can also convert the way of thinking of the interior to the way of thinking of the exterior with the contrapositive statement, “What is not human is not Confucius.” When we do this, “Confucius” and “human” both belong to the interior, which does not include the boundary; “that which is not Confucius” and “that which is not human” fall into the realm of the exterior, to which the boundary belongs. Moving another step forward, it is possible to make the following statement, in which is self-evident the logic of the interior: “You do not yet know life, how could you know death?” Yet transformed into the logic of the exterior, this statement takes the form of the contrapositive: “Knowing death, how can you not know life?” It goes without saying that the statement, “You do not yet know life, how could you know death?” is of the interior, which does not include the boundary; “Knowing death, how can you not know life?” belongs to the exterior, to which the boundary belongs. I said that I did not know the meaning of “subject.” But I have come to know the ultimate meaning of “subject.” It’s found in the statement, “You do not yet know life, how could you know death?” I also said I did not know the meaning of “object.” But I have come to understand the ultimate meaning of “object.” It’s found in the statement “Knowing death, how can you not know life?” The meeting of these two statements calls to mind the union of subject and object.

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Fig. 6

Key:

人間 = Human

孔子 = Confucius

外部思考 = Thinking of the Exterior

内部思考 = Thinking of the Interior

Fig. 7
Key:

外部思考 (客観) = Thinking of the Exterior (Objective)
既ニ死ヲ知ラバ = “Knowing death . . .”
何ゾ生ヲ知ラザラン = “How can you not know life?”
境界 = Boundary
内部思考 (主観) = Thinking of the Interior (Subjective)
未ダ生ヲ知ラズ = “You do not yet know life. . .”
焉ゾ死ヲ知ラン = “How could you know death?”

“That’s it! You are trying to say that the interior and exterior make up contraposing spaces.”

Just over there is a telescope mounted on a stand. It’s gotten a little dark, but let’s go have a look.

The telescope realizes the realm of the exterior by projecting it within the realm of the interior; in so doing so it seeks to prove that the reality that makes up the interior is, indeed, the interior.

“How amazing, when you get outside the view is even better. The houses are densely packed in, but the land slopes down gently into a basin, and there is a hill in the distance.”

These days, adjustments and inspections are done mechanically from within the workstation, so there is no need to come outside. It used to be that the telescope was most often
adjusted to accord with an actual scene, which is why factories like this were built in locations with views.

“That, over there, is that area part of the factory, too? When we went inside the factory I was surprised at its seemingly ridiculous size, but now I can see that it is even bigger than I had realized.”

Is that right? I figured that when you looked out over it like this, you would feel like it wasn’t that surprisingly big after all. The way the town spreads out infinitely, it seems like the factory should look less impressive in comparison. Still, on the edge of the factory grounds there is employee housing, which makes it hard to locate the boundary between the factory and the outside. This is probably what’s making you feel the factory is bigger than it is. In any case, come over here and take a look through this telescope.

“Is this all? It’s just the crosshair in the round view of the telescope lining up with the cross on the steeple of a church down amid the houses of the town. It’s nothing more than that. Or maybe it’s like in that poem you wrote:

Darkness has come like a mantle
the living trees conceal themselves
while dead trees stand out in white
revealing the shape of life

“Is that it?”

Well, in time the darkness will come like a mantle, and the dead trees will stand out in white revealing the shape of life. What you are seeing in that telescope’s round view is but a projection, a realization of the realm of the exterior. Already, it is not reality.

“Not reality?”
That’s right. Look at this. I am going to cover half of the telescope’s objective lens—that’s what we call the lens that is pointed at the exterior. When I do so, the view remains round, with no part missing.

“It’s no different than before. I can’t even tell that you have your hand over the lens, the objective lens, did you call it?”

Well, from an optical perspective the amount of light that permeates the lens is less than before, so the image you see will be that much darker. But if you were to take a plain piece of glass, cover it with black ink, leaving only a round hole, and look through that hole, when I covered the hole with the palm of my hand in the same way, you would see a hand. That’s because it’s nothing but reality.

“Is that so? But the things that enter the telescope’s round field of view only appear as if they were right there; they don’t look particularly large.”

Well, of course they don’t. This telescope only has a magnification of one.

“A telescope that magnifies to the power of one? What good would that do you?”

You already know, remember? This factory exclusively manufactures telescopic sights for weapons.

“Doesn’t a sight need front and rear parts? But all that shows up is the crosshair floating in the round view.”

It used to be that telescopic sights all used front sights and rear sights like the ones most people are familiar with. The reason we look through the rear sight at the front sight is so that we can achieve a straight line parallel to the gun’s barrel. By pointing the muzzle in such a way that the target appears as an extension of this straight line, the gun can be aimed properly. However, a parallax effect occurs between our two eyes, and in order to correct this we must, at the very
least, close one eye. But when we focus our open eye on either the front sight, the rear sight, or the target, it becomes difficult to see the other two. The convex lens, however, is equipped with an exceedingly simple feature.

An objective lens is convex, so it takes an object of infinite distance and forms an image of that object in its focal plane. With a telescope, a beam of light radiates from a single point, and when that beam appears to be parallel, the point from which it radiates can be said to be at infinity.

Using this concept, it is possible to create telescopes that magnify to the power of one.

In this telescope that magnifies to the power of one, the focal planes have been lined up and two convex lenses positioned symmetrically, equidistant from the focal planes, to act as objective and ocular lenses.

In a telescope that has a magnification of one, the exterior is realized on the focal plane. Therefore, if we place a mirror over the focal plane, one into which a cross has been carved, we need only to look at the point at the intersection of the lines; however, that will make the exterior appear inverted. This is where we resort to a bit of magic. It’s nothing terribly impressive, but an upright lens is used to invert the image back to its original position. This is what you have been viewing.

“Is this because the interior and exterior make up contraposing spaces?”
Fig. 8

Key:

無限遠 = Infinity

対物レンズ = Objective lens

焦点鏡 = Focal mirror

接眼レンズ = Ocular lens (eyepiece)
That’s interesting. You mentioned that before, but I hadn’t given it any thought. Let’s consider that for a little while.

“Well, I was just so shocked when you pulled the words, “Knowing death, how can you not know life?” out of Confucius’s famous statement, “You do not yet know life, how could you know death?””

Anyway, open both eyes and have a look.

“You tell me to open both eyes; is that so I can see the interior and exterior at the same time? There’s nothing special. The round view has disappeared, and it looks the same as it would without a telescope.”

That is a property of a telescope that has a magnification of one. Now we can define a telescope’s power.

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When the realization, or representation, of the exterior produced by a telescope maps onto the reality seen by the naked eye, we call this a magnification of one.

“Maps onto, you say? So that means that we can use that to define other powers of magnification:

When the realization, or representation, of the exterior produced by a telescope becomes separated from the reality seen by the naked eye, we can say at the very least that the power of magnification is not one.

“Higher-power telescopes must have developed in this way, from telescopes with a magnification of one.”

That is not necessarily the case. It is precisely because the realization, or the representation produced by the telescope, appears larger than the reality seen with the naked eye that the telescope is valued so highly. The first telescope made by Galileo had a magnification power of around nine. The view produced was so amazing that Galileo was treated as a sorcerer by the academy. Most likely, those scholars could not conceive of something that looked different from what the eye perceives as reality. You could say that because realization and reality were separated, it did not occur to the scholars to investigate the nature of this realization. What Galileo ought to have done was to lower the power of his telescope until he got to a magnification of one in order to prove that realization and reality can map together.

“How is it, do you figure, that a genius like Galileo didn’t try to demonstrate that?”
Well, that’s because Galileo, more than anyone, believed firmly that the value of the telescope lay in its ability to produce images larger than those we can see with the naked eye. I think I remember reading that it took seventy years after Galileo’s creation of a telescope with a magnification power of nine for a magnification-one telescope to be made as a finder. Just like how it took you guys a shockingly long time to arrive at Realism.

“So you are trying to view Realism as the equivalent of a magnification of one:

**When the realization of the exterior comes together with the reality of the interior, we call this Realism.**

“But why do you think it took them seventy years to come up with a power-one magnification telescope?”

It took time for the magnifications to increase to the point that the separation between realization and reality was so extreme that it was no longer possible to see the celestial bodies the astronomers were trying to find. It was only then that the idea of attaching a low-magnification telescope parallel to a large telescope as a finder was first considered.

“Why parallel?”

As I just explained, when the beam of light that radiates out from a single point appears level, we can say that the original point is at infinity. If that is true, when we set up a low-magnification telescope as a finder parallel to a large telescope, it should be possible to capture the point at infinity. But even that low-magnification telescope did not approach this magnification-one telescope that you have been looking through. In fact, this is a telescope that is made as a telescopic sight to be outfitted parallel to the gun on a fighter plane.
“The gun of a fighter plane?”

Yep, and there shouldn’t be any need to explain why it is outfitted parallel to the canon. Additionally, that telescopic sight is only *called* a magnification-one telescope. In fact, it magnifies to the power of 1.25. If the magnification were precisely one, everything would feel somehow small, and it would produce a sense of separation from reality.

“You defined the exterior as the realm to which the boundary belongs. Does the separation happen because the boundary is realized, or projected?”

The boundary has the astounding ability to transform the interior into the exterior, and vice versa, but it is no more than a concept. Still, if you look through a frame, things look somehow smaller than they should be, and it produces a sense of things not mapping together. It is simply a matter of overcoming this effect. Even your Realism relies somewhat on exaggeration, does it not?

“Oh, I see:

What we call Realism claims to be a magnification of one, but is actually a magnification to the power of 1.25.

“What do you know, that makes perfect sense. Even writers like me have to resort to a little bit of magic, or we can’t accomplish anything.”

Oh, but the fact is you can.

*When we place a focal mirror in the focus of a convex lens and shine a miniature light bulb from below, the line that crosses the mirror appears to break into parallel lines. If we catch*
these lines on a plane of parallel glass tipped at a 45-degree angle, a cross will float up in a point at infinity. Such a device is called an imaging scope.


**Fig. 10**

光像式照準機 (Optical Sighting Device)

Key:

無限遠 = Infinity

平行平面ガラス = Plane parallel glass

焦点鏡 = Focal mirror

豆電球 = Miniature light bulb

凸レンズ = Convex lens

Here, the interior and exterior are inverted, with the interior realized on the exterior. In this case, there is no need for a frame that makes things appear small, so there is nothing to
prevent the realization from mapping onto reality. That device beside you is one of these imaging scopes. No longer are we dealing with a 1.25 magnification telescope passing for a magnification of one; this is an authentic magnification-one telescope. There, I’ve turned on the switch to light up the miniature light bulb. Of course, there is no need to close one of your eyes. Take a look.

“It’s beautiful. The crosshair appears twinkling on top of the cross on the church steeple over there.”

Right? This device dramatically improved shooting accuracy.

“That’s vaguely frightening.”

Things are most terrifying when they are completely lacking in magic. I was once on a fighter jet, flying in the patrol area. I was thinking of heading back, not because it had gotten dark, but because the crosshair of the sighting device seemed to be floating in mid-air in the direction I was headed, glittering in a disconcerting way. Then it suddenly occurred to me that the enemy was also on patrol, that the shadow of an enemy plane had appeared near the crosshair, and that just as I thought I had caught a glimpse of it, it had appeared at point zero, growing steadily larger--as if the enemy was heading straight for that zero point. It was a terrifying gamble. I don’t know whether it was because I was too terrified, or trying too hard to contain my terror. The enemy was approaching straight on. So my plane would also appear on the crosshair of the enemy’s sighter, at point zero. That made me start to feel like the plane I was seeing at point zero was me, and as I fixed my eyes on the sighting device I gripped the control stick with sweaty palms, feeling I was about to pull the trigger. Suddenly, a tracer bullet was fired from point zero, pulling across the sky trails of light that seemed to be heading straight for a point between my eyebrows. But then the shadow of the plane at point zero spread its wings, and before I knew it was far behind me. It was not my plane, it was not me. It was the enemy plane,
sputtering flames as it spiraled down into a dark reality. It was the enemy. It was as if I had come back to life, the realm to which the boundary that separates the seen from the unseen does not belong, from death, to which this boundary does belong.

“Are you saying that in that moment, you saw with the eyes of the dead?”

I’m not sure whether I did or not. The enemy who was trying to kill me I felt to be like myself; I thought it was a realization of me trying to bring death on myself. But was that really what I was thinking in that moment? I can’t say. We always remember things afterwards and think about how we thought this or that at such and such a time, but in fact such feelings are often born in the act of remembering itself. Is that the church bell ringing? I hadn’t noticed until just now, but now that it has come to my awareness there is beyond a doubt a bell ringing. I would have thought it would be prohibited at a time like this.

“You’re right. I didn’t notice it either, but there is most certainly a bell ringing.”

It’s strange. The houses are all lit up now, but it has the effect of making the rooms appear darker than before.

Darkness has come like a mantle
the living trees conceal themselves
while dead trees stand out in white
revealing the shape of life

Well, I hadn’t planned on talking about all of this. Wait here while I go inside and turn on the light.

III. The Cosmic Tree

Cheers! Take a big long swig of that for me.

“Well, if you insist! I say, what a grand hall this is.”
At the very least, it’s a group of educated folk. They’ve all left their families far behind to come to this remote mountain location. They’ve done their best to make the facilities nice so the workers can get a taste of city life. When I stopped on the way at the transfer point and called, they told me you’d already arrived. I drove my Jeep as fast as I could, but I’m afraid I’ve kept you waiting quite a while.

“They were showing me the riverbed. Everyone is so kind around here.”

They just miss having someone to talk to.

“Even so, I was grateful. Say, is that the sound of a brook?”

During the day, even a remote mountain area like this is filled with the sounds of this world. As night falls, the sounds become otherworldly, like the babbling of a brook, or the rustling of trees. Sometimes the rumbling of the valley keeps me awake at night.

“Is that so? When they showed it to me just a little while ago, the riverbed was nothing but pebbles. It feels not so much like being in the mountains as it does that you’ve wandered onto the seashore without a sea. Where did the water go?”

Oh, it’s there, and you never know when it will overflow. That riverbed was formed by floodwaters rushing by and kneading the rocks time and time again. Even so, there are always those great rocks that sit in the center of the flow and are never broken down into pebbles.

“Of course.”

And they don’t just sit there, either. You see, those great rocks actually move upstream each time there is a flood.

“Move upstream?”

Yes indeed. No matter how strong the current, it can’t make those boulders budge. All it can do is to carve out the sediment around them on the upstream side and go on its way. The
boulders then roll back into the space that’s been carved out by the rushing water. So with each
flood, they move farther upstream. Isn’t that delightful? You can almost hear the howls of
laughter.

“Howls of laughter?”

Yep, that’s why we call it Heaven’s Riverbed.

“The sky is wedged between mountains, but it’s true that the land around here must be
close to the heavens.”

When the people who live around here point at the mountaintops, they don’t call them
mountaintops; they refer to them as the sky.

“That must be where the legend came from, the one about the gods holding a banquet on
the mountaintops.”

Nah, the locals just use that story as a pretense to eat, drink, and be merry.

“A pretense?”

You could say the flood is the howling laughter of the firmament and the pebbles
evidence of that. But the pebbles, too, have the nerve to howl in laughter. These rocks make the
finest aggregate for building dams. Like this great big one we’re sitting on. The rocks have
gathered here to grab hold of the howling laughter of the heavens in order that they may one day
howl right back.

“Howls of laughter?”

Nah, the locals just use that story as a pretense to eat, drink, and be merry.

“A pretense?”

You could say the flood is the howling laughter of the firmament and the pebbles
evidence of that. But the pebbles, too, have the nerve to howl in laughter. These rocks make the
finest aggregate for building dams. Like this great big one we’re sitting on. The rocks have
gathered here to grab hold of the howling laughter of the heavens in order that they may one day
howl right back.

“On the dawn of that day, this great big one will openly rule the land.”

It’s no joke. Don’t you remember the story of the daikon radish? In the instant the radish was
able to thrust aside that pane of glass, did it not feel a joy as though howling in laughter at the heavens?
This is the same thing. The great big rocks have already been pulverized and made into material for
building dams. Even you and I will eventually meet the same fate.
“This conversation has gotten so bleak. Actually, I was remembering the time I visited you at the optics factory, when we were standing on that hill.”

Turned to rubble as far as the eye could see. And then a bell rang, do you remember?

“What was that all about, I wonder? If there hadn’t been that one lonely church steeple with a cross on top, who would have believed that it had once been crowded with houses from the hill in the distance down to the bottom of the slope and that there had been a huge factory there.”

That church with, its steeple and cross, made up a *neighborhood*.

“A *neighborhood*?”

You know, the surrounding area. No matter how small, we can think of the surrounding area as a *neighborhood*. Then again, no matter how large the surrounding area, we can also think of it as a *neighborhood*. On your way here, while you were crossing the mountain and the river, did you give a thought to where the dam company’s property started? Nope, most likely you arrived here before you had even started to have the sense that you were on company property. In short, you came all the way here before you first gained an awareness of being in a *neighborhood*. But you must already have been close to something like the *neighborhood*.

“Hmm, is that the case?”

That is indeed the case.

*With a random point at the center, we draw a circle with a random diameter. If we make the circumference the boundary, the conceptual whole becomes divided into two realms. The boundary must belong to one or the other of these realms. The realm to which the*
boundary does not belong we call the interior; the realm to which it does belong we call the exterior.

Just like that, this interior becomes a *neighborhood*. But in this case, let’s not use the term “conceptual whole”; in this case let us call it, as I seem to remember you doing at one point or another, a world. Likewise, let us call the center the “origin”; the exterior we shall call the “out-of-area.” You will come to understand the reason for this in good time.

With a random point as the origin, we draw a circle with a random radius. If we make the circumference the boundary, the world becomes divided into two realms. The boundary must belong to one or the other of these realms. The realm to which the boundary does not belong we call the *neighborhood*; the realm to which it does belong we call out-of-area.

How could I not have explained this before?

Because the interior does not encompass the boundary, we say it is hermetically enclosed. At the same time, because the interior does not encompass the boundary, it can be described as wide open. In short, if something is simultaneously hermetically enclosed and wide open, it can be called the interior. This is why, with the interior, any random point can serve as the center.

With this concept in mind, we can expand the definition of the *neighborhood* even further, although strict mathematician types may not agree with me.
Because the neighborhood does not encompass the boundary, we say it is hermetically enclosed. At the same time, because the neighborhood does not encompass the boundary, it can be described as wide open. In short, by virtue of being simultaneously hermetically sealed and wide open, a thing can be called a neighborhood. This is why, within a neighborhood, any random point can serve as the origin. Not only does the boundary not need to be a circle, there may also be cases in which a random point out-of-area can become the origin. This is because such a random point out-of-area also makes up and unifies a neighborhood.

“A random point out-of-area?”

Well, I suppose we would also call it the Cosmic Tree. There can be no doubt it exists somewhere, but where that is we cannot know. Although I believe you writer types rejected the idea of the sort of impersonal collective that such a thing would entail long ago. No matter how we strive, and despite what I said about boulders climbing upstream in a flood, we are still no more or less than pebbles.

“You, a pebble? When was it you told me that story, “The Dog with the Leather Muzzle”?

You mean that time we were drinking shōchū in that black-market stall among the charred ruins?

“Ah, but at that time I was both happy and surprised. When we were standing on that hill, I had the feeling I would never see you again. But how was it that we met again in such a place?”

We all fell down and settled in the same place.
“Now I remember:

Because it was night we could drink in such a place, but in the morning dozens of septic pump trucks arrived from out of the fog to moor in the sewage ditch behind the bar. They were going to unload the sewage onto boats to be carted away as fertilizer. Before long, the stench of human waste became mingled with that of left-over black-market food. Stray dogs began to gather, drawn to the smell, and linger, so that the septic pump truck drivers had no choice but to stop their engines to yell abuses.

“Yes, I think that’s how it went.”

Yes, that’s right.

“That’s the one. We were drunk on shōchū at that night stall, when someone spat and said, ‘lately you hear about these new things called animal welfare groups.

“Another guy slammed his fist on the table and shouted, ‘Whadya mean, “animal welfare”? Aren’t we just as good as stray dogs? But they just brush us aside to worry about animal welfare? When there aren’t enough clubs or wire to get rid of all the buggers?’

“‘But maybe that’s just the thing. They can’t keep up with all the strays, so they form these animal welfare groups that run hospitals to castrate them with the “scalpel of kindness” so they can be forced on the nouveau rich as pets.’

“‘Castrate out of kindness, humph! If that’s all it takes to be taken in as a pet by the nouveau rich, I wouldn’t mind going under their scalpel myself.’”

In those days, everyone was a stray dog, and they didn’t even try to better themselves. I guess that’s what you call despair. But there was a peculiar sort of fun in it, too.

“But you were different.”
You’re wrong about that.

“Then why tell that story?

As if out of nowhere, a dog with a leather muzzle arrived among the group of stray dogs. It had the overall appearance of a wolf, with pointy ears and long legs. But its entire body was ravaged with the mange: its hair had fallen out in clumps, revealing the festering sores beneath, and its gait was weak and unsteady. At one point, it had certainly been much more handsome than any of the other stray dogs, but now it was scorned by strays and humans, who were worse even than strays, alike.

“It seems like you must have been pondering the Book of Job at that time. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. 93 It was like Job turning a deaf ear to the words of the three friends who had come to visit him:

The dog with the leather muzzle was no longer aware even of the scorn that it elicited. Every thought it had seemed to be connected with the leather muzzle. The fact that the muzzle prevented it from biting at the itchy patches made it all the more aware of the itchiness. It was not, though, as if this filthy dog could not scratch any of its itches. By twisting its body, the dog could scratch its spine with its rear legs. But when the rear legs itched there was absolutely nothing to be done. In short, the presence of a spot that could not be scratched made the dog feel as if all spots were beyond its reach. Increasingly, it wanted to chew up its own body, its own back legs. With this thought, it would sometimes forget all about the leather muzzle and begin to run in circles, while at other times it would once more

become aware of the presence of the muzzle and shake its head furiously. But the muzzle stayed put. Whether the dog moved forward or backward, the muzzle clung to it. The miserable dog lost hope. How could there be a God! The dog became exhausted from its own anger. No matter how much it tore about and struggled, the muzzle stayed put. The dog had been forsaken, chased into a dark place into which the voice of God could not reach.

“Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand?”

I only told that story because such a dog truly existed, you know.

“I’m not so sure. It seems to me you were telling a parable, by which you sought to realize, or actualize, yourself. You wanted to say that the leather muzzle, the one that pushed the dog to despair, was also what distinguished the dog from a mere stray. This led to its being struck by mange at the hand of Satan, but also allowed it, by virtue of its being owned, to escape not only the clubs and wires, but also the hospitals of the animal welfare groups with their ‘scalpels of kindness.’ It seems that you were questioning the identity of the owner, the one who put the leather muzzle on the dog. Were you not trying to say that the one who allowed Satan to afflict the dog with mange, but would not let the dog ‘take its own flesh in its teeth’ was God?

But one morning, the dog realized that the leather muzzle was gone. The dog had worn the leather muzzle even in its dreams, so upon waking it did not notice at first that the muzzle, which had to that point caused it so much suffering, had fallen to the ground right in front of its nose. When the dog realized beyond a doubt that the leather muzzle had come off, it could not help but let out a derisive laugh. Why, it was nothing but a dirty little strip of leather! It was comical to imagine how it could not have fallen off sooner. When the dog, now free, thought about how this silly strip of leather would never again be its muzzle, no matter

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how it wished it to be, the dog almost wanted to try to put it back on. But on second thought, it decided there was no time to waste on such trivialities.

“What a story!”

I can’t believe you remember all that.

“Of course I remember. Oddly, whenever I think of that story it gives me courage:

The dog, set free from the bonds of its leather muzzle, did not realize that it had become nothing more than an ordinary stray. Forgetting the unbearable itch of the mange that covered its entire body, it got up, stretched, and let out a howl, its body trembling with joy. It crouched to pee, and then ran off into the morning fog. The fog trailed away to both sides, and the slight breeze carried the faint sensation of a blizzard rising in the bitter cold wilds. In fact, as it ran the dog began to have the vague sense that it had once been in such a snowy wilderness. Perhaps it had but had since lost all memory of that cold expanse. Hadn’t there been black marks on the snow, scat left by a passing herd of reindeer? The fact that the snow had not yet covered the scat was evidence that the herd was still close by. The dog could not help but remember the taste of the innards of a reindeer it had brought down.

“When you got to that part in the story, it reminded me that in your youth, you once lived with a tribe of reindeer-herding nomads in the far north. The fact that you included the reindeer struck me as evidence that you had never forgotten the experience.”

That’s right. Even now I remember the feeling as if it were yesterday.

“That’s what I thought:

All of a sudden, the dog froze and jumped aside. From out of the morning fog appeared a septic pump truck. With a screech of brakes, the truck came to an
abrupt halt and the driver leaned his grimy body out the window and shouted curses at the dog before the car disappeared back into the fog, leaving a tepid and slightly nauseating smell in its wake. The dog didn’t care about the driver’s swearing, but it could not forgive itself for jumping out of the way in fear. Perhaps it was because it no longer felt itchy that it had forgotten that its entire body was still covered in mange and had returned to feeling instead like its old proud self, a dog with pointy ears and long legs that resembled a wolf. Instinctively it chased after the truck, barking ferociously. Just then, the septic pump truck appeared again and knocked the dog over, ripping off one of its back legs as if it were nothing at all. The dog let out a yelp and got up to find its leg lying in the road in a pool of blood. The same creature that had earlier been freed from its leather muzzle now forgot its pain and, blood dripping from its thigh, took the leg in its mouth while looking around for a route of escape. It somehow had the sense that someone or something was after its leg. Somewhere in the direction in which the dog was trying to escape, from out of the fog came the faint growl of a lone stray dog. Panicking, the dog looked the other way, but there too were more dogs that were coveting its miserable leg, which had become no more than a bone with meat stuck to it. Until the other day, the dog had even considered biting off that back leg, but here it was frantically trying to keep other strays from stealing it. Blood dripped from its thigh as it hopped this way and that. Perhaps those other stray dogs were less interested in the leg than in the dog itself, blood dripping from its thigh as it tried to escape. Sensing stray dogs gathering one after another in the morning fog, the dog who had been newly freed from the leather muzzle felt a cry well up in its heart: And you say there’s a God!

“At this point in the story, you had the dog, now free of the leather muzzle, cry out twice. The first cry was for its back leg, which it could not tear apart and eat. The second cry was for having had that same leg ripped off. But unlike in the story of Job, God did not appear. Were you trying to say that there is no God?”
No, God too exists as contradiction. The fact that the boundary gives birth to contradiction means that the origin also gives birth to contradiction. You and I exist as a contradiction in the origin of our neighborhood. So long as I, who exist as a contradiction, am placed opposite God, God too must be something that exists as a contradiction. It is in this fact that despair resides.

“But why did the dog take its own leg in its mouth and try to escape from the stray dogs who were coveting it?”

It was out of the despair that comes from wanting to be I, even in such a desperate situation. But people do not wish for the despair that will inevitably befall them when they try to hold onto I. I wonder what brought that up again? I, too, must have been without hope. Just like the magnificent snake wishes to be an imitation of itself, people long to be pebbles. As for me, I have finally succeeded in becoming a pebble. I wouldn’t dream of wanting to become that great boulder that sits in the middle of all the other pebbles and travels upstream.

“Is that why you talk about the howling laughter of the pebbles?”

That’s right. It was in order to escape my existence as contradiction that I longed to become a pebble. However, having finally escaped and been successfully transformed, the job of the pebble became to figure out how it could create bigger and bigger contradictions. Listen carefully: We must first find a wide river basin. The reason is that we must dam the water and enclose it in order to secure the largest neighborhood that we can. It is desirable for the dam to be between mountains, where the bedrock is strong. That’s why this area looks like the heavens have been tucked between all these mountains.

“So you could make a dam here?”

Certainly.
“That must mean that over there between the mountains, there is a river basin that, if
dammed and sealed in, could become a vast neighborhood.”

Yes, yes. It’s just like I told you.

The neighborhood, as a realm that does not encompass the boundary, we say is
hermetically enclosed. And yet at the same time, because the neighborhood does not
encompass the boundary, it can also be said to be wide open.

Do you not at the very least find there to be a contradiction in the logic of this argument?

Contradictions are oriented so as to seek to become non-contradictions.

And so by exaggerating a contradiction, we exaggerate its tendency to seek to become a
non-contradiction. By the same principle, to be hermetically enclosed and open at the same
time is clearly paradoxical, but when this paradox is exaggerated the tendency to seek to resolve to a
non-contradiction will inevitably factor in, and “hermetically enclosed” and “open” will become
split into two concepts. In addition, if being “hermetically sealed” is exaggerated, being “open”
must also become exaggerated. In order for contradictions to be exaggerated, we must have
difference. That is why this land is said to be close to Heaven.

“It’s as I thought; you were no stray dog. You were a dog that started out with pointy
ears and long legs, resembling a wolf. Sitting here with you in this magnificent hall, drinking and
talking like in the old days, I get the feeling that you have ended up just where you were meant
to be.”
Ah, but the fact that we are sitting here doing what we’re doing is proof that we are strays. It all looks good from the outside, but this whole project is like a national version of the animal welfare groups’ efforts to save stray dogs. When you see a decent guy waiting longingly to leave these mountains and go back home, like a woman waiting for menstrual leave, you get the sense that these guys are all wishing to be castrated with the “scalpel of kindness.” Besides, it wouldn’t matter what kind of protagonist you put in the story of this place; the world that results would be no different. In short, in this place people have a sense that they are certainly somewhere, but where that somewhere is they cannot tell; you could say they rely on a sense of unity with the Cosmic Tree and therefore are fortunate enough to have no need whatsoever to become I.

“The mere fact that you wish for that shows that you are not that kind of person to begin with. But it sure is a big change to go from working in an optics factory to the very different job of building a dam deep in the mountains.”

What’s so different about them? Both challenge heaven, responding to the howling laughter of the heavens with a laugh of their own. Telescopes realize the exterior in the interior. In the same manner, at the power-generating station a vast basin that has been made by damming a river that runs between two mountains is transformed into a different vast basin, made by damming a different river that runs over or through the mountains. Or else the same river is divided up into segments and diverted from one vast basin into another vast basin. It follows that:

The orientation by which contradictions seek to become non-contradictions comes into play at the power-generating station, inducing the dam to interrupt the flow of even the greatest
of floods and create a flow that exceeds it in order to gain the maximum amount of electricity; dams must exist as a boundary that gives birth to the greatest of contradictions.

“...”

That’s why, in order to exaggerate contradiction and maximize difference, water is diverted to a different basin by drilling a high-pressure tunnel through a mountain and causing the water to drop into a river at a far lower elevation. But this means that the transformation from life to death is no more than a diversion from one area to another.

“The transformation from life to death? You mean to die?”

*Mori Atsushi Zenshū* 森敦全集, Vol. 2, 44.

**Fig. 11**

Key:

近傍 = Neighborhood

生 = Life

域外 = Out-of-area
死 = Death

It turns out that right now we are at peak output. When energy needs can’t be covered using thermal energy, we make up for the deficit by discharging water from the dam. And when there is a surplus of thermal energy, we pump up the water that was discharged and refill the dam so it can be released again later. In short, you could say that we allow the water to be reincarnated: from death to life, from life to death. Reincarnation is a subject that we should return to later. You have time, right? I think about these sorts of things a lot. This is an ideal place for such a dam to be built. Dams have been called the pyramids of modernity, and it’s easy to imagine that one day these vast mountains will be dotted with numerous dams, just as the pyramids remain standing in the boundless deserts, as if to remind us of the remote past.

“What do you mean, ‘one day’? Are you saying they still haven’t been built? It seems to me it has been quite a long time since I first heard rumors that you were here.”

Well, dams represent the remote future; we are still building the roads that will allow us to reach that future. In order to build those roads, it is necessary to build roads that allow us to get to where we need to be in order to build those roads. Those roads dead end and will someday become overgrown and abandoned, and no one will even remember they were there.

“. . . . .”

That’s it! Let’s have them get a Jeep ready for us. Our work here starts with surveying. Surveying is a technique whereby we suppose there to be innumerable triangles of various sizes on the surface of the ground in order to approach the true land area. Any triangle can be divided into right triangles by extending a perpendicular line from the vertex to the base. There’s an interesting thing to be said about these right angles:
First, we divide the hypotenuse AC of a right triangle ABC. Above this line AC we draw multiple small triangles with sides parallel to AB and AC. Of course, the lines of these small triangles have a sum total that is equivalent to AB+BC, and AC is less than AB+BC. However, when we divide AC further and further into countless triangles, there will be a moment in which it reaches infinity, and in this moment the sum of the two sides of the small triangles will be absorbed into line AC. As a result, AB and BC will be absorbed into AC, and AC will become equal to AB+BC.


**Fig. 12**

Key:

道路 = Road

河川 = Waterway
However, it goes without saying that this happens for a mere instant, and when that instant passes AC will return to being smaller than AB+BC. But the instant of time in which this magic is created, an instant manifested by transformation, possesses a surprising absorbency that would seem to suggest a density so thick as to overwhelm the imagination. Thus when it comes to time, something like the theory of contradictions I have been describing is of no consequence at all. Of course, this is a paradox. But modern mathematics has set off in the direction of overcoming paradox. In addition, it has been proven that no matter how perfect the logical space of a set of axioms, it is impossible to escape paradox. This shook the very foundations of number theory, demonstrating that we should not necessarily depend on proofs. Well, it looks like the Jeep has arrived. There exists a mysterious tree. It is dried up and white as a skeleton. As the sky darkens, the tree comes to appear strangely luminous.

“Do you remember reading me your poem that time? The one called ‘Eyes of the Dead’:

Darkness has come like a mantle
the living trees conceal themselves
while dead trees stand out in white
revealing the shape of life

“Of course, you didn’t write that poem after seeing a tree like that. The tree was realized by means of your poem. That is your Cosmic Tree.”

Whenever I think of that tree, everything begins to appear inverted. The road that was built for the sake of building a different road disappears in a dead end and in time will be completely forgotten, no longer even worthy of being called an abandoned road. In this way, it is reborn as its true self. It was absorbed into the original nature of roads that was there before any particular road. There is an original nature of time that absorbs my death, your death. To
compare roads with time is a tall order, since there is such a great difference in their density, but they work in the same way. Because of this, both can be regarded as one-dimensional spaces.

“Time? Is time a space?”

That’s right. We can look at time as a space.

With a random point as the origin, anything that possesses a structure such that it divides into a **neighborhood**, which does not encompass the boundary, and an out-of area realm, which does encompass the boundary, can be called a space.

If this is true, does time not also possess the structure by which it divides into a **neighborhood** and an out-of-area realm? Moreover, no matter how small we imagine the **neighborhood** to be, it will encompass past and future, with the present moment serving as the origin. Past and future are clearly opposing and contradictory ideas. Contradictions always orient so as to become non-contradictions. In this way a path is created, but its destination is not the future; the path itself is what we call the future.

The path must be a straight line that is the shortest distance between the two points it connects. Also, the path must be the curve that traces the contour line with the least fluctuation in elevation. It follows that a **neighborhood** must be seen as a one-dimensional space with paradox as its origin.

Time, too, must seek to fit this design, for this is the most natural path from contradiction to non-contradiction. If the path changes, the world changes. In order to change the
world, we must change the path. This is to say, not only do the path and the world relate as functions, it can even be the case that by means of the path, the world is made to have meaning. If time can give meaning to the world, could not changing the world also change time? It’s an interesting question, but impossible to answer. Oh yes, there is one difference between roads and time.

“A difference?”

Yep. We are always in the *neighborhood*, which has as its origin the “I.” The *neighborhood* is the area that does not include the boundary. No matter what kind of road, it can never reach that boundary. But . . .

“But what?”

But there is one road that can reach the boundary. That is the road called time, which leads us to the boundary that separates the seen from the unseen.

My, it’s gotten dark. A large paved road spreads out before us, appearing white in the headlights. Maybe it just looks dark because, although we’re speeding along at one hundred kilometers per hour—no, probably more than that—all we see is the white road spreading out before us. As if to say that we can neither go back nor reach our destination, that white road continues on, silent and seeming to stand still. It almost seems to be moving backward, don’t you think? Even so, the rough wooden grave markers appear and disappear, then appear again. What? You ask why there would be grave markers here? It’s because someone died in the places where they stand. We even work it into our budget, since we can estimate how many workers will die per dollar invested, you can tell what an astounding amount of money went into the construction of this road by the number of grave markers that flash by as we pass, appearing and disappearing. And our estimates are not far from the mark; they may not be like clockwork, but the wooden
grave markers are placed at pretty close to evenly spaced intervals. Oh yes, I remember. The car that was driving in front of me suddenly went out of view. No, I wasn’t in a Jeep. A resident of the flood area had used the payoff money to buy a fancy foreign car in town. He had his whole family in the car, and they passed us. I could see the grandma and grandpa waving and smiling proudly at us from the back seat. It looked like the kids were having a good time, goofing around. But then the car was gone. I thought it was strange, but soon I’d forgotten all about it. There must be markers around here for them, but there’s no way to identify which ones are dedicated to the family that drove their fancy foreign car into a deep ravine. In mountainous areas like this, they carve into the mountains to make roads. The dirt is dumped into the valley below, so the wider the road the greater the amount of dirt that gets thrown off. Sometimes the road looks five or six times wider than it actually is, so it lures passing cars off the side. Time, of course, is just the same. Magic? Yes, that’s right. When we try to fight back against time, nature resorts to extreme methods. That forces us to do whatever we can to react. It’s all just trickery, through and through. Look, there’s a simple shrine built into that concrete wall on the side of the road. See how someone has left Jizō and Fudō statues? The shrine was built when the road was still in use. Anyway, a man once climbed a mountain and crossed a valley to get here, but he never came back. It was said that just when he thought he had reached his destination, he was swept up in a flash flood and ended up a skeleton. Eventually, Jizō and Fudō statues like these will be forgotten and will go smiling into oblivion, in the way that all things that crumble and fall appear to do so with a grin. Even so, some of the statues may have been moved from elsewhere to look over the grave markers. The branches rustle in the darkness. Listen, over here, over there. Afraid, the monkeys jump in the dark. Look, in the headlights. It’s a doe. What a splendid doe! What’s

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95 Jizō 地蔵 is the guardian deity of children and of travellers (Khitigarbha bodhisattva); Fudō 不動, the Unmovable (Āryācalanātha), guards against evil.
that you say? We should shoot her? Hunting is surely prohibited. Oh, that’s why you want to try to shoot her? When she’s trapped in the headlights, she doesn’t know how to get out. For the doe, the headlights are time and the road, the world. She is desperate to run away. Oh, she’s gotten out, but now it’s as if she lost her time, her road, her world. She panicked and jumped back in. She is paralyzed from fear. She’s spread the fur on her beautiful, pure white hindquarters in a fan-shape. It’s just like when she runs as fast as she can to get away from a buck but only ends up seducing him. Who are you, bearing your fangs and spitting like a savage dog trying to satisfy ferocious desires? When did your feelings turn in this direction? What in the world are you becoming? And anyway, are those the words of someone who attempts to level mountains and drain rivers? Shoot! Missed. You got her. It must be a horrible sight, the way the blood splatters in the darkness. Oh, the bloodcurdling joy of the killer! What, you want to stop the Jeep? There’s no need. Hurry! The Cosmic Tree: it’s getting farther away from us!

IV. Arcadia

Do you remember? This area is where the black market used to be, in the charred ruins of the city where we drank shōchū at a night stall that time.

“Oh, is that right? Now that you mention it, that stagnant stream of sewage water was turned into a culvert over which a fine road now overflows with traffic.”

In this day and age, they even build big roads like that deep in the mountains.

“It feels strange having you be the one to remind me about this area, you who were out building dams deep in the mountains back then.”
There is nothing here that would make it into a *neighborhood* for you. Not even a church with a steeple with a cross on top. Of course, there’s no Cosmic Tree, either.

“Ah, the Cosmic Tree. What was that all about, anyway? That great tree that appeared so vividly out in the dark, did it symbolize death? Or was it a symbol for life, which is the inverse of death? You showed me so many things, but they’re all distant memories now. Here we are drinking coffee, but there’s nothing but tall buildings all around us. The stray dogs are all gone; you don’t even see pet dogs tied up. It makes me kind of nostalgic for that vacuum car and the pack of stray dogs. Look around—everything’s changed.”

But it’s only different on the surface. If you enter the narrow streets behind the tall buildings, you will find a messy den of small typesetting and bookbinding shops.

“Has that area always been like that?”

It appears so. All of the buildings are shabby and look like they are headed laughing into old age and decay.

“Because it was unwise of them to survive the devastation of the war?”

That is part of it. But even if they were to tear down the old buildings and build new ones, the businesses would still just be small-scale typesetters and bookbinders, nothing more. They’re just subcontractors, struggling to survive.

“But isn’t there anyone among them who vows to escape from the subcontracting business and build a multi-story building or something?”

No, no one. Even if there were, you couldn’t put up a building in a neighborhood like that.

“So you’re saying that only the surface has changed; on an essential level it’s exactly the same?”
That’s right.

“Do you think it’s because they are making a decent living doing what they do?”

Not really, they just think that’s the way it is. Of course, there’s no retirement for these people. No one expects to retire. There are those who are eighty and have been working there their whole lives. In short, that’s all they know. Or maybe I should say they don’t try to know anything else. When I would tell them about optics or dams, they wouldn’t listen. Maybe they were suspicious of a person who talked about such things. Only the owner would take an interest and enjoy our conversations. The owner was past eighty, and he would laugh as he told me that he wished he could have a factory big enough for a strike to occur. In short, he was resigned to the hopelessness of his situation. He just smiled the smile of all things that crumble and fall. You should write something about “rock bottom.” You wouldn't lack for characters.

“‘Rock bottom,’ eh? But think about how that optics factory, reduced to rubble, was brought back to life so splendidly.”

But that’s not quite the case. It grew like an apparition along with the war and, like an apparition, turned to rubble and vanished.

“But the dam was eventually finished, right? The one that you called the ‘pyramid of modernity.’”

Not just one, but three or four were completed. Back then I said that thing about the pyramids, but dams are not immortal, either. After they’ve survived about the lifespan of a single human, they sink into the earth. Of course, when the dam I was responsible for was finished, I left and traveled from village to village along the Sea of Japan coast, so I don’t really know what happened to the dam after that.

“How was it that you ended up working at a typesetting shop?”
A friend sent me a letter. It was a small typesetting shop, nothing special. He said, ‘I’m not telling you that you should get a job, and it’s not like I’m trying to intervene. I just happened to be talking about you to a typesetter, and he said that he would love to have someone like that come work for him. I know the chances you would come are slim.’ I had just been thinking that I wouldn’t be able to go on traipsing about for much longer. I felt such warmth and consideration contained in my friend’s letter.

“But weren’t you disappointed? I mean, you worked in an optics factory and built dams.”

You mean, wasn’t I disappointed to go to work for such a small-scale typesetter? As far as worlds go, that small typesetting shop is no different from any other world.

Large and small can only exist when viewed from the exterior; within the interior there is no relative size. The reason is that the boundary belongs to the exterior, and when the interior is viewed from this exterior, the boundary determines large and small. On the other hand, the boundary does not belong to the interior. The interior, therefore, can be said to be infinite, and in infinity there is no relative size.

“How can you say such things? You said something like that at the optics factory, too, and when you were making dams. And now you’re repeating the same thing.”

But when you write, aren’t you attempting to realize an infinite interior, one with no relative size, to which the boundary does not belong? That is why you can write about the optics factory and have it become its own world. Write about the site of dam construction, and it becomes an interior, a world if you will. Would it not be equally accurate to say that if you were to write about a small typesetting shop, it too would become an interior, a world? It is the job of
the writer to pull the reader, who looks in from the exterior and is concerned with binaries like big and small, into the world of the interior, without letting him or her get caught up in distinctions of relative size. This is what we would call enchantment.

“It’s a difficult thing to do.”

Of course it is. If you simply write about me picking up this cup and taking a sip, there is no problem. That’s because your relation is only to me, and the cup is a mere correspondent that does not form a relation. But if you were to try to write the cup itself, things would be very different.

“That’s true. Take something that is nothing special when you look at it without a particular intention. But when you approach it intending to portray it in writing, it exhibits very different features.”

Isn’t that the case? So just as when you combine I with everything that is not I you get the whole universe, so it is when you combine cup with everything that is not a cup. It takes enchantment to overcome the tendency of the cup not to let you write it.

“Enchantment?”

That’s right. Once, in a movie, I saw a fight between a polar bear and a walrus. The polar bear stands up on its back legs. The walrus also attempts to stand up. The walrus is a cowardly creature, but it has an enormous body and is equipped with long tusks. The polar bear raises both paws to protect its self, but then suddenly turns its head to look off in a different direction. In that moment the walrus attacks. But the polar bear has only been pretending to be distracted and is in fact awaiting the walrus’s attack. In the blink of an eye, the polar bear brings down its raised paw, knocking the walrus to the ground.
“So are you saying that in my attempt to portray a cup, I have to create the impression of an unguarded moment before I strike? Why would that be necessary?”

This is what I think. Whenever I engage in a confrontation, I will necessarily come into relation with my opponent, the relation of two creatures on equal footing.

*Relation is not merely correspondence. Relation comes about when two beings come to correspond in the fact of their contradiction-ridden existence.*

As I stated before, contradictions orient in such a way as to become non-contradictions. This is why it was believed to be possible to arrive at an explanation of the movement of the celestial bodies through the sky.

“Because of relation, you say?”

Remember watching the workers silently picking up the characters in that dim room, under the fluorescent lights? They’re called type-pickers, and for them, the Chinese characters packed into cases are no more than points on a coordinate graph. Or at very least, one cannot be said to be a master type-picker until one comes to view the characters in such a way. When the picker has filled the type case with characters, he passes it to a compositor, who moves it to a composing stick, encodes it, and places it on an assembly tray. Only then does the text come to have meaning. In other words:

*All things must first be stripped of meaning if they are to be made to correspond. If they cannot be made to correspond, they cannot have structure, and without structure there is no meaning.*
But the meaning is of no consequence to the workers, especially the more masterful ones.

“It seems so pointless.”

Pointless, you say? Oh, have I never told you about the northern people?

“You’ve mentioned the northern people, but you didn’t tell me much about them.”

Is that right? For me, the north was Arcadia. Let’s see, I guess I’ll start with the sleigh dogs. Those sleigh dogs are so faithful, friendly, and docile. But the ones that appeared before me were of a different kind. Were they calling their companions? Barking furiously in all directions, they came running like gusts of wind, their mouths looking fearfully red against the snow. They took no heed of whips or nets. I found out later that several pieces of reindeer scat had unleashed the sleigh dogs’ wild instincts. It is unlikely that these dogs had ever brought down a reindeer and devoured its innards, but they went crazy all the same, just as if they had, indeed, once tasted fresh reindeer meat. Finally, a lasso was thrown into the dull gray sky where snow whirled, and the lead dog was tied up. So the whole thing ended well, but the dogs did not calm down for some time. I was told that if left alone, their excitement would grow to frenzy, and they would chase the reindeer indefinitely. Now those tales make sense, the ones about the northern people, who were reindeer herders, fighting the Ainu, with their sleigh dogs, at Tarayka.96

“Long ago, you can bet that both of these groups were very brave in battle.”

Indeed. But now both have diminished and live far apart from each other, so they are no longer at war. Or maybe they have just forgotten all about their former rivalry. When I asked

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96 *J. Taraika* タライカ (多来加). Could refer to one or more of the following: The Gulf of Patience (*J. Taraika-wan* タライカ湾) on Sakhalin, Lake Tarayka (*J. Taraika-ko* タライカ湖) in central Sakhalin, or a former Ainu settlement facing the Gulf of Patience.
people about it, it was hard to tell from their expressions whether they even remembered this history or not. Still today, that boundless snowy tundra is Arcadia.

“So that’s what you mean by Arcadia.”

Still, it’s not like the northern people don’t have dogs. All but the puppies wear a collar with rope hanging from it that is tied to a crossbar. While not a muzzle, the bar hits at the joint of the front leg so that the dog cannot run even if it tries. The people love the dogs, but at the same time they fear something that might be awakened in them. What could such small dogs possibly have in them to fear? Even the northern people, if asked that question, will chuckle in amusement. But occasionally a strong wind blows in and whips the snow up off the ground into a blizzard. The climate is dry, so the snow is by no means deep. But the snow in the north is nothing like the beautiful hexagonal crystal flowers that come to mind for us when we think of snow. The snowflakes are shaped like tiny bullets with the butts gouged out, and when blown up by the wind they come sailing a surprisingly long distance, filling the air with snow-smoke. But the sun is out and the light that filters through the snow creates numerous tiny rainbows right before your eyes. It is dazzlingly beautiful, but dangerous. In fact, explorers often get lost in just such conditions as these. The only magic the people can rely on against such a foe is to look upon the reindeer, their source of meat for sustenance and skins for clothing, as gods. The people put aside their nets and lie low on their sleighs, letting the reindeer pull them where they will. From among the smoke and the innumerable tiny rainbows appear the rear ends of the reindeer, only to vanish back into the smoke in the very next moment. We simply allow ourselves to be led. I was reminded then of how we write nyorai, meaning Tathagata, with the Chinese
characters, “thus come.” What? They put the little dogs on the sleigh, too, firmly tied up. If left tied to their fetters, how could they move? The reindeer know where to find shelter in such a blizzard. At last, we arrive at a copse of Sakhalin fir. Who would have known there were trees on this snowy tundra? The people pitch their tents and spread out fir branches to sit upon. They burn birch branches and bake bread on skewers. It’s as if they have lived in this very place from long, long ago and plan to go on living there forever. The dogs return to begging and barking, but the reindeer seem not to notice as they trample the snow, making squeaking noises with their hooves and causing the bells tied around their necks to jingle. But what was it about that printing shop that made me remember the northern people? And it wasn’t like I was merely reminiscing. There is something about that neighborhood and the people who work there that make one remember such things.

“‘Rock bottom,’ you mean? I’m just borrowing your words.”

Go right ahead. ‘Rock bottom’ is ‘rock bottom,’ after all. Once we are there we are not wholly aware of it, but as a far-off world that has been forgotten by everyone, are “rock bottom” and the far north not the same? Even so, name one person who spends their time thinking about how we will all eventually be forgotten, when today feels so real? If one could speak of being forgotten as a sort of bliss, in that place of “‘rock bottom’ resides the bliss of something that is forgotten and fades into obscurity.

“You said it, so it might be true. But do we not have blizzards here, too?”

We do, we do. After all, we are in a vast wilderness. Just the other day, the owner finally reached a point where he was unable to honor his debts, and the shop went under. Remember how I told you that the owner was past eighty years old? I don’t know if he gave up or lost hope

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97 An honorific title for a Buddha: “the one who has thus come” or “the one who has arrived at suchness.” Nyorai is written 如来.
or what, but now he just smiles. Just like those statues of Jizō and Fudō that were brought from the abandoned road to eventually be forgotten, crumble, and fall into oblivion. The workers scatter to who knows where, with nothing at all to which they relate. Oh, is this Arcadia? The northern peoples and their dogs, having rested under the under the Sakhalin fir, simply disappeared into the endless snow of the tundra, following the reindeer. What could they be doing now? It is likely that for them, today is the same as yesterday, and yesterday will be the same as today. To ask for nothing more than this must be our true nature. While I was thinking about these things, I suddenly heard the faint sound of laughter. The laughter may have been just my imagination, but it nevertheless called up things that I had begun to forget, a whole host of “pasts.”

“...”

I suddenly got the urge to borrow money from my friends. It wasn’t because I was short on confidence in my ability to succeed in making some money. I just couldn’t wait for payday. If I could only bring in enough to tide me over, surely the wheel of impermanence and mutability would come back around. Just as impermanence leads to reincarnation, the wheel of death and rebirth. Oh, that reminds me:

If we take one point on a circle and spin it, this point will form a sine curve along the time axis. Impermanence and mutability are not this simple. But when the curves are synthesized, we can get infinitesimally close to a representation.
You know, it’s easy, looking at this, to extrapolate impermanence and mutability from reincarnation, but it is more difficult to wake up to the fact that impermanence and mutability are reality, but reincarnation is realization. In any case, that’s how I came to borrow between three hundred and five hundred thousand yen each from my friends. I collected a total of nearly twenty million yen. I promised to pay five sen a day in interest.
“Five sen a day? Just like that polar bear who was trying to bring down a walrus, you showed them a gap in your defenses.”

It’s the same as when you try to write about the cup—it makes for a completely different story. But all it took was a phone call for my friends to agree to lend me money with no interest, as long as I promised to pay them back. I wrote out promissory notes, and not only did I pay the full five sen per day in interest, but rather than deducting the interest as a loss I counted it as profit. This spared my friends from having to declare it on their taxes, since this is what everyone hates the most.

“Can you really make out okay doing that? Banks charge three sen per day in interest, and the borrower can deduct the interest as a loss. Even so, you hear of people struggling to repay their loans.”

But I only need money to tide me over at certain times, like when the promissory notes go through on the 23rd of the month or when there’s a check due. If I can just weather these payments, payday will come back around and I will be in the clear for the time being. So even if I were to borrow from the bank at an interest rate of three sen a day and deduct the interest as a business loss, I would have to take out the loan for the entire period and therefore result in an even bigger loss for me. But in lending me money at an interest rate of five sen per day, my friends feel like they are making money while simultaneously avoiding having to pay taxes on it.

“You have just the quick wits to pull something like that off. It’s impressive that someone who spends his time pondering the faint glimmer of Arcadia is capable of such magic. Are you still in the game?”

No, the blizzard has passed. Otherwise I would not be able to take shelter in my friends’ generosity the next time a storm hit. Is that not why I’m able to be here talking to you, indifferent
to my company’s fate? In the beginning, what makes magic magical is the extent to which it can dissolve itself. Eventually, the resounding howls of laughter must recede.

“Laughter?”

After all, there is something to be gained. When you’ve borrowed money, it would hardly be fair to get bent out of shape if the lender were to ask you to pay it back the very next day. So if someone agreed to lend you money for two or three months, you would think them a very generous person, would you not? How much more impressed you would be if they said you could keep the money for two or three years? And if they told you to keep it as long as you needed to, you would think them magnanimous to the extreme. But what if they were to tell you to keep the money as long as you live, yet make you sign a promissory note to pay it back after you died?

“After you died?”

Magic will no longer work. It was a very long road, but I have finally arrived at what you could call a view of life and death. Signing a promissory note that says you are off the hook as long as you are alive, but that you must pay back the debt as soon as you die: who would make a bet like that? Here, meaning is transformed and becomes religion. Such a transformation of meaning is possible because time has an astonishing absorbency and a density that is beyond our wildest imagination; not only this, time is the only path which can reach, and therefore pass through, the boundary separating the seen from the unseen. A person who views things from the perspective of a hundred years is completely different from someone whose perspective spans only ten years. And how different still the perspective of a thousand years would be. This is because even history undergoes a transformation of meaning, becoming philosophy. It’s the exact same logic; there is not enough time to enumerate all the examples that could be found to
demonstrate it. Therefore, at the very least we must begin by seeing on both the micro- and the macro-levels, and only then turn our thinking to reality and capture the meaning in its transformation. If I were to follow your lead and write something, it would be with this transformation of meaning in mind.

V. Eli Eli, Láma Sabachtani

Surely many people still remember black saxophonist Samuel Johnson. It was his arrival on the scene that led to the saxophone, at the time a new instrument, and still met with mixed reviews, becoming the representative instrument of jazz.

But no one thought that Samuel was still alive. If he had been living, certainly they would have heard some news of him. After all, he was a huge star. So even if he happened to come up in conversation, everyone just assumed he was dead. But Samuel was, in fact, still alive. You could find him at any time hanging out in some dive bar in the slums. He could not stand to be sober for even a moment, and whenever he took a drink he immediately got drunk and made a fool of himself. The homeless of the neighborhood called this drunken fool Samuel and would say things like, “He’s a spitting image. It’s as if Samuel has been brought back to life.” But in reality no one, not even the people who frequented the bars where he would always drink, believed he was the real Samuel. Samuel didn’t give a damn what anyone thought, but he did sometimes smile bitterly at the phrase “brought back to life.” What a joke, he thought. It makes it sound like I’m dead or something.

“Do I really look that much like him? I’m flattered that you think so, but could you just call me Bill? That’s my real name, you know.”

“Oh your real name is Bill, is it? Wasn’t that Samuel’s real name?”
They all burst out in laughter that sounded like the howling laughter of the gods. It was as if to say that if he wanted to be called Bill, he would have to become Samuel.

What a mess, Samuel thought. I had planned on being just plain Bill, but I can’t even manage to do that. Haven’t I become nobody? But he said that to die is not to become nobody, but for what had existed, for some people, at least, as reality to become something which is called realization. But isn’t that just for other people? But what a surprise this is.

Samuel looked up at the soot-covered ceiling, stretching out his thick arms facetiously to reveal his white palms.

“Eli Eli, Láma Sabachtani?”

It goes without saying that these are the words of Jesus on the cross, meaning, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He was only pretending to be Jesus, but from among the group of transients who were howling in laughter, someone held out a half-drunk cup to him as if he looked like he wanted more to drink, saying “There’s no need to call Elijah. Drink up and try blowing into that horn over there. Samuel’s saxophone playing was not something that just anyone could imitate.”

He talked as if he had heard Samuel perform, but of course the chances that he actually had were next to none.

There was an old saxophone hanging on the dingy wall. It had been there for a long time, probably left be someone in in payment for drinks. By now it had been forgotten like some dusty knick-knack, and no one ever bothered to take it down to play. Saxophones were becoming passé, unwelcome even in a dive bar like this. This is no wonder, given that the saxophone was looked on as a challenging instrument, on a par with classical instruments in the refinement and skill it required. But jazz does not necessarily attempt to be challenging. It demolishes the refinement
and skill of classical music and tries to take music back to its origins. The mix of praise and
censure aimed at the saxophone actually sprang from the contradiction born of Samuel’s ability
to bring out that refinement to an extreme in his playing.

But the reason for Samuel’s descent into the company of transients had nothing to do
with the passing of the saxophone’s glory days. Undaunted by critics of the saxophone, Samuel
had forged new frontiers and put it in the spotlight. If only Samuel had not quit the saxophone,
he would have continued to blaze new trails for his instrument, and the saxophone would likely
not have been forgotten.

Samuel didn’t give up in disgust at the contradiction of being libeled for the refinement
of his sound and style. Nor was he was fed up that as a jazzman, he could not gain acceptance in
the world of classical music. What made him despair was the fact that no matter how refined his
sound and no matter how exalted his performances, he was merely asking hollow questions of
the masses.

But is asking questions not a sign that I exist as a contradiction at the center of a
neighborhood. In this way, Samuel pioneered new terrain for the saxophone, but at the point
when he stopped asking questions he became nobody. And as such, even if he were to stand up,
take the saxophone down from the wall, put it to his lips, and make a sound, what would that
prove? Now that I think of it, Samuel was not even his real name. He had borrowed it from
someone special from his past. Thinking of that person Samuel felt ecstatic, as if he had become
once again the Bill of those days. As if it were because he had now succeeded in becoming
Samuel that it had ever been possible for him to be called Bill.

In any case, he was the first person to teach Samuel that the world was a big place and
that wherever he went he had friends. He spoke of even death as if it were part of this world. He
was young, bright, and personable, so the children thought of him more as a friend than as a minister. Above that, he had a physical strength that belied his appearance. Without breaking a sweat, he would tear an apple in two and give you half, then put his left hand on his hip and wrap his right leg around his left one, all the while munching on the apple with great delight at the joy of sharing. When people would watch, looking surprised, he would roar with laughter, saying, “When your name is Samuel, it’s a piece of cake.” Then he taught them all about the name Samuel, like that it came from the name Samson, “that strong Samson you all know.”

But then he was gone. There were some who said that he had to leave the church because he wasn’t a real minister. Now that you mention it, there had been nothing about him that was at all minister-like. Other people said he left for a different reason, because he didn’t have it in him to discriminate. He talked cheerfully with everyone, even with the young girls. There were even people who whispered in timorous voices that he was just pretending to be cheerful and nonchalant, all the while plotting something horrendous in the name of the fight against race discrimination. When he heard people say these things, Bill had the sense that Samuel was the perfect name for a person who would do something like that.

It wasn’t like he had done anything special, but no one could forget him. He went to Baltimore, they said. He went to Las Vegas. Samuel would remember those rumors when he was somewhere playing a show and would ask around, but there was nobody in either Baltimore or Los Vegas who had heard anything about his friend’s whereabouts. But then, why would there be? Samuel had been but a child when those rumors were going around. And then again, he might be dead. This was before Samuel had retired, when he was at the height of his career. When it occurred to him how improbable it was that he was still alive, Samuel felt as though he were in the afterworld hearing a voice from far off in this world.
Dear Bill,

How long it has been! When I tell you this is Samuel, will you remember me, as if you were still the Bill of long ago? When I learned that you were Samuel, I was dumbfounded. It was as if I had become Bill, part of a dream that you must have had in your youth, and was standing in the limelight.

What a marvelous performance! I often used to play a trumpet for you kids. Sometimes I would read you stories. Well anyway, I used to think that art as it has developed so far can be divided into two main categories. Some art jumps right out and catches the eye: paintings and poems and statues, for example. Music enters our ears despite us. So art is divided into two types, the kind that compels itself on the audience forcefully, and the category of stories and such things that require the audience to turn one page at a time.

It was this awareness that made me think that I wanted to tell at least one story, even if I could not complete it, in order to recapitulate this life of mine. Even if the recursion were to begin from a single point in the past, I must position myself as if I am in that moment, facing the future. Just like how, standing in the present moment, we must face the future by means of a priori reasoning. Moreover, just as any number of rivers might appear to block my way and any number of mountains might tower before me, with repetition there must be this possibility as well. When these are the rivers and mountains of experiential fact, they instantaneously become nothing more than memories.

For you, there must be some distant, poignant memory that makes you play a certain sound. In addition, you reproduce the rivers and mountains, as if to presage a future in which rivers will block your path and mountains tower before you. It would seem that you are removing the meaning from things in order to create structure, and that in creating structure you
find meaning. Here, in the one-dimensional space of time, the contradiction of speed substitutes for all manner of contradictions, and it travels in a straight line. It is by means of such forward motion that all things come to be ordered. Thus arrayed, phenomena appear only to disappear, and disappear only to appear once more, thereby creating in us a sensation of the passage of time.

And then it occurred to me. I had been thinking of narrative as belonging to the category of art in which you have to flip one page at a time. But does it not happen to be true that when read aloud, a story becomes a voice, and that it is transformed, taking on the characteristics of that category of art that imposes itself on the audience? In the beginning, did we not attempt to make the text powerful by giving it rhythm and melody? And did it not then become absorbed into the larger problematic in art that questioned whether it was possible to retain the power of the text even while dispensing with rhythm and melody?

As I was pondering these things, I forgot all about thinking and entered into a state of rapture; from out of nowhere I heard the screams of women and recalled the sound of Jesus crying out. “Eli, Eli, lāma sabachtani?” Was that really his voice? Or was it a cry that escaped from the women, an outer expression of what was in their hearts? In any case, it shows that when voices merge with the wish for resurrection, they become cries of ecstasy.

Overwhelmed with feeling, I longed to embrace you, but the adoring masses prevented me from getting close. At the very least, I wanted to shout out my name to let you know that I was there, but people would just howl in laughter that this old man was shouting again. I felt dismayed, as if this name we shared had become the source of the boundary separating me from you.

And yet I must be grateful that it is so, that the name Samuel is what divides us. Even though we are separated, we are called by the same name, and wherever I go, I carry with me the
joy of having part of you with me. But now, that boundary has become entirely mine, and it may
be that my wish is simply for you to imagine me from afar.

I have grown old, and I no longer have the strength to tear an apple cleanly in two for
you with the words, “When your name is Samuel, it’s a piece of cake.” Always remember that it
is through the removal of meaning that all things come to have structure and in structure that
meaning is to be found. There was a time when I considered trying to transform all concepts in
such a way, but perhaps the qualities that made me Samuel have already been lost. Or could it
be that I am no longer of this world? Still, lying on my lonely dining table are a single apple and
a well-honed knife, so why not enjoy an apple in memory of bygone days? My apple-peeling
skills remain up to par.

In order to peel this bright red skin, one must be careful not to cut into the flesh of the
apple. Put the base of the blade to the stem, like so, and turn the apple in smooth revolutions
around it. Does it not appear as though the bright red skin covering the apple has become a thin
strip that is being born of the knife? And so, in attempting to gain access to the realm of the
apple’s white fruit, I am creating a realm that is covered in bright red skin; the boundary that
separates these two realms can be considered to belong to the realm of the white fruit, which
could be called the exterior.

Now that I think of it, could the boundary that is part of the white fruit not be likened to
the boundary that separates the realms of darkness and light? Let us consider, when we touch the
base of the knife’s blade to the stem of the apple, the length of the blade extending from base to
tip as representing the one-dimensional space called time. If we do so, the stem of the apple,
while facing away such that the one-dimensional space called time could not return, becomes a
point of infinity that loops back around and returns. This is how the interior, which is infinite
because it is a realm that does not include the boundary, is seen to be a mirror image of the exterior, which is a realm that encompasses the boundary but also contains a point of infinity. Likewise, the exterior is seen as a mirror image of the interior. And so, just as I am able to consider death from the perspective of life, so too am I able to consider life from the perspective of death.

If in this moment the one-dimensional space called time were to orthogonally bisect the boundary, which belongs to the realm of the exterior, it would surely loop around to create a large circle. But suppose the intersection of time with the boundary was not necessarily orthogonal—could we not then expect the result to be an infinite number of rings? There are those religions that view the world as one large circle drawn by the one-dimensional space called time, while others include an infinite number of rings, each comprising its own world. But no matter what kind of world we are dealing with, it becomes transformed into an interior when I am inside it, and the boundary, not belonging to the interior, becomes something infinite. Among worlds there is an equality of size; no world can be said to be larger or smaller than another.

You were too young to understand. The reason I had to leave behind all of you children whom I loved was because the adults could not accept that in anything, meaning had to be removed in order to create structure, and that the resulting structure was a prerequisite for the creation of meaning. Was it not for this very same reason that Galileo was put on trial? That is because for those who tried him, to remove meaning was irreverence, and any attempt to discover meaning by means of the resulting structure was met with fear. But what in the world was I capable of doing that would make them fear me so? Do I not whittle away my life in quiet, just as the bright red skin of this apple being peeled?
But you could say that this dwindling life is in fact a sculpture being carved by death that awaits realization. Could it not be that realization is actually death? This is the question that life must constantly ask. For, you see, it is by means of realization that reality first comes into existence. But what if I were to abandon this problem altogether, thinking it pointless to ask? Would I not then become merely what I am; that is to say, nobody?

Even if a comparison is drawn between the white flesh of the apple and the afterworld, to which the boundary separating the seen from the unseen can be said to belong, this is only the case so as long as I try to gain access to that inexorably vast and imminent white flesh by peeling the bright red skin of life with the blade of time. As soon as I cease to peel, the boundary can no longer belong to either realm, so that now we cannot identify white flesh and bright red skin as belonging to either the interior or the exterior. And so would they not become merely what they are; that is to say, nothing?

But what would happen if we did not abandon our query? The space that comes to be realized will always be one dimension higher than that of the boundary. For example, the boundary that creates a one-dimensional space is in zero-dimensional space, the boundary that creates a two-dimensional space is in one-dimensional space, and the boundary that creates a three-dimensional space is in two-dimensional space. And so our life to this point, which had merely been realized in the one-dimensional divide between life and death, is not lost at all; is it not merely reborn in a higher-dimensional space, a higher-dimensional boundary that separates the seen from the unseen? Here exists the potential for ecstasy. This is the space in which Pontius Pilate questioned Jesus.

Jesus did not answer. For him, the answer must be to question until you arrive at the great question. Could this not be said to be much like the moment in which I finished peeling the
bright red skin off the apple? Ah yes, did I not tell you that when an apple is divided into apple and non-apple, it becomes the whole cosmos? The boundary, in short the two-dimensional curve that covers the entire surface of the apple, becomes a realm belonging to the whole cosmos except the apple, and the apple is reborn. Here exists the potential for resurrection, for ecstasy, and it comes about by means of further raising the dimension. Finally, the apple becomes something that flows with nectar.

But there were surely those to whom the trial of Jesus, by which he attempted to become a great query confronting the heavens, looked like the cheap pageant of Golgotha. In fact, they say that those who had slandered Jesus, the chief priests, the rabbis, and the elders, joined together with the soldiers to jeer at the fact that Jesus was going to die so, like a mere mortal. But how was it that they did not listen to the howling laughter of the heavens?

Mary and the other women gave no heed to the sneers. They knew. Knew that to die was for reality to lose its reality and to become complete realization. And as result of this they knew that union with Jesus would be possible in the moment when they themselves lost their reality and shifted into a higher-dimensional space, on the brink of perfect realization. Could it therefore not be said that “Eli Eli, lâma sabachtani?” was the cry of the women in ecstasy at their union with Jesus?

The morning after the Sabbath, it is said that the women came in search of Jesus’s remains. How empty it must have felt there, like a stage after the performance is over and everyone has gone home. They would have been told that Jesus had been resurrected, that he had left for Galilee. But the women would have recalled their ecstasy, and even while engulfed in a fatigue resembling despair, would have smiled inwardly as they sensed the slightest flicker of
life within their wombs. Why were they smiling? Because just as reality constantly seeks to be realized, so too does realization give way to reality, and so too my being comes into existence.
GLOSSARY OF TRANSLATED TERMS

Boundary: **Kyōkai 境界.** Alternative translations for *kyōkai* as a general term would be “border” or “dividing line.” However, as a mathematical term, possible translations for *kyōkai* are “boundary” or “frontier,” which are used synonymously to refer to all points which are not interior points of a set $E$ or of its complement $C(E)$.\(^9^8\) I chose to translate the term as “boundary” rather than “frontier” because it better conveys the sense a division between two related spaces, that is, interior and exterior.

Boundary that separates the seen from the unseen: **Yūmei kyō 幽明境.** The characters literally mean “obscure” and “bright.” This term is understood by Japanese speakers to refer to the boundary between life and death. I have intentionally kept this association vague by retaining some of the characters’ literal meanings.

Center: **Chūshin 中心.** In mathematics, “center” usually refers to the “center of symmetry, such as the center of a circle, or the center of a regular polygon as the center of the inscribed circle.”\(^9^9\)

Contrapositive statement: **Taigū meidai 対偶命題.** In logic, a contrapositive of a conditional statement “If $P$ than $Q,$” is the conditional statement ‘If not $Q$, then not $P.$” The two statements are held to be logically equivalent.\(^1^0^0\)

Correspondence: Taiō 対応. In mathematics, correspondence is synonymous with mapping or transformation: “A pairing of things in one set with things in another (or the same) set by means of an unambiguous rule.” Also, although in *Imi no henyo* a distinction appears to be drawn between correspondence and relation (kankei 関係), in mathematics, “technically, a correspondence is the same as a relation from one set to another.”

Exterior: Gaibu 外部. As a general term, this could be translated as “outer,” “without,” “outside,” or “exterior.” I chose “exterior,” a mathematical term which signifies “the set of all points neither on nor inside” a figure (circle, polygon, sphere, triangle, etc.): “The exterior of a set $E$ is the set of all points which have a neighborhood having no points in common with $E$. Same as the interior of the complement of $E$.”

Heaven in a jar: Tsubo naka no ten 壺中の天. Karatani Kōjin points us to the earlier version of *Imi no henyo*, published in *Gunzō*, in which Mori explains the origins of this phrase as a story of a jar owned by an old man in China who jumps into it every day at twilight. A boy happens to be passing by and witnesses this mysterious sight, and the old man takes him along into the jar, inside of which is a vast and marvelous city. Thus, the phrase was much more literal than might be gathered from reading the later book version.

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102 James and James, *Mathematics Dictionary*, 159.
103 あるぼう大な支那の道都—たぶん長安かどこかの街の檐下でいつもひとりの老人がそばに壺をおいて休んでいる。そして、街々にランタン（志那挑灯）がともされるところ
Infinity: *Mugen-en 無限遠.* “The concept of a value larger than any finite value.”\(^{104}\)

Interior: *Naibu 内部.* In general, this could be translated as “inner,” “within,” “inside,” or “interior.” The term as used in *Imi no henyō,* however, refers to a mathematical concept: “the interior of a set \(E\) is the set of all points of \(E\) that have a neighborhood contained in \(E\).”\(^{105}\)

Magnificent: *Sōrei na 壯麗な.* Translated variously as “glorious, magnificent, splendid, grand, gorgeous, resplendent, impressive”; I have chosen “magnificent” because it captures the grandeur contained in the Japanese term (composed of characters that mean “big/grand” and “beautiful”) while also being capable of elegant nominalization in English. I chose to capitalize this term because it is given such weight throughout the opening parable of the first chapter.

Neighborhood: *Kinbō近傍.* A neighborhood in Topology is defined as a “set in a topological space which contains an open set which contains the point.”\(^{106}\) An open set is “a set which is a neighborhood of each of its points; a topology on a space is determined by a collection of subsets which are called open.”\(^{107}\)

になると、この老人は壺を檐端にかけてすうっとその口から吸われるようにとびこんでしまう。だれも気づくものはなかったが、たまたま通りかかった青年がそれを認めて不思議さのあまり老人にただすと、老人は笑って青年を壺の中に連れて行った。なんと小さなその壺の中には以外にぼう大な街があり、長安にもみられぬような綺羅な堂閣が立ちならんでいたという。Karatani Kōjin, “*Imi no henyō* ron--’Kaisetsu’ ni kaete,” 680.


\(^{105}\) James and James, *Mathematics Dictionary,* 228.


**Origin:** *Genten* 原点. *Genten*, like “origin,” has definitions that change depending on context. As a mathematical term, it means “the fixed reference point in a co-ordinate system, at which the values of all the coordinates are zero and at which the axes meet.”

**Out-of-area:** *Ikigai* 域外. Could also be “extra-territorial” or “offshore” in different contexts, but the term is used in *Imi no henyō* in the former sense of being outside a prescribed (topological or mathematical) area, a neighborhood. Because I could not find a mathematical term to correspond to *ikigai*, I invented the term “out-of-area.” Here, neighborhood is to out-of-area as interior is to exterior.

**Paradox:** *Mujun* 矛盾. A paradox in mathematics, also called an antinomy, is “a proposition or statement that leads to a contradiction if it is asserted and if it is denied.” *Mujun* in Japanese can also be, simply, “contradiction,” and at times I have translated it as such.

**Point at infinity:** *Mugen-en ten* 無限遠点. In projective geometry, a point at infinity is defined as “an ‘ideal point’ attached to an ordinary line; in this geometry, (ordinary) parallel lines share a common point at infinity.”

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**Reality:** *Genjitsu* 現実. See “Realization.” Specifically, Mori is referring to the Buddhist idea of suchness, also known as “thusness or “reality-as-is.” Satō Noburō claims that Mori’s usage of “reality” is synonymous with emptiness (*kū* 空), “the nature of interdependent existence.”\(^{111}\)

**Realization:** *Jitsugen* 実現. There is extended considerable interplay between *jitsugen* （“realization”）and *genjitsu* 現実 (“reality”), terms that employ the same kanji in inverse order. To preserve this sense of mirroring, which reflects thematic concerns, I have settled on “realization,” rather than “manifestation” or “actualization” as a translation for *jitsugen*. In certain instances and contexts, I have chosen alternative translations to make the translation read smoother and clearer (such as “projection” or “actualization”).

**Relation:** 関係. As a mathematical term, “relation” is, in general, “equality, inequality, or any property that can be said to hold (or not hold) for two objects in a specified order.”\(^{112}\) In a technical sense, it is defined as “a set of ordered pairs. Also known as correspondence.”\(^{113}\)

**Space:** *Kūkan* 空間. In mathematics, a space is defined as “a three-dimensional region.”\(^{114}\) In the context of topology, it is “usually a set with a topology on it or some other type of structure.”\(^{115}\)

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\(^{114}\) James and James, *Mathematics Dictionary*, 388.
**Transformation**: Henyō 変容. In the mathematical sense, a transformation can be defined generally as any correspondence.116 Or, it can be said to be “any function or mapping that changes one quantity into another.”117 In geometry (and topology), it is “the changing of one shape into another by moving each point in it to a different position by a specified procedure.” Related terms are “translation; deformation; enlargement; projection; rotation.”118

**Whole; Conceptual whole**: Zentai gainen 全体概念: Literally zentai 全体 (the whole, the totality) plus gainen 概念 (concept).

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