

INTRODUCTION

Questions like Where is nature? or What is nature? have long lost any residual probity or innocence they may have had (or pretended to). . . . The point here is not that nature has become cultural; one might as well argue that culture has become feral. . . . Rather, the point is that nature has become political.

—PETER VAN WYCK, *Signs of Danger*

Nothing to Fear Here

In the eighth lunar month of 1868, amid the collapse of the Tokugawa samurai government—even as civil war raged in the North—a pamphlet appeared in Edo (modern-day Tokyo) assuring its readers that Benjamin Franklin had made them safer: “In the past, devoid as it was of scientists (*shikisha*), it was endlessly repeated that lightning was the scolding of an angry god, an object of awe, something to be feared. But ever since a man named Franklin came into the world there is no one who would explain lightning this way. He has even built the device by which this disaster may be avoided—people’s joy is truly boundless.” So begins *Tenpen chii* (*The Extraordinary Workings of Heaven and Earth*), by Obata Tokujirō (1842–1905). An eleven-page work divided into eight chapters, *Tenpen chii* was dedicated to “subdu[ing] the strange (*ki o osaeri*), . . . showing that neither does Heaven act strangely nor Earth go mad.” One by one Obata attacks the

false wisdoms of the past and explains the true principles at work behind seemingly strange natural phenomena. In turn, lightning, earthquakes, comets, rainbows, sunspots, lunar haloes, “shooting stars and fireballs,” and “cold fires” (*inka*)¹ are revealed as wholly knowable, predictable, and avoidable.

For Obata, Franklin’s discovery means that lightning, rather than a form of divine punishment, is nothing more than the same electricity (*ereki*) that exists “in more or less amounts within all substances.” To prove this to his readers, Obata invites them to rub a few pieces of paper together in a darkened room, producing their own spark of static electricity. After establishing this safe, mundane essence of lightning, Obata declares atmospheric lightning to be the mutual stimulation of heaven and earth, the *yin ereki* of one meeting the *yang ereki* of the other. Having reduced lightning from divine punishment to a parlor trick, Obata produces a Kantian separation of this natural phenomenon from politics and morality, assuring his readers that all the lightning and thunder they see and hear acts according to its own independent principles, with no relationship to their personal situation. Obata lays out the mechanics that keep them at a safe distance: because the gap between the lightning flash and the thunderclap is the result of the differing speeds of light and sound, if they can “count to three or four between the flash and the clap,” they may safely conclude the bolt struck some “700–800 ken”² away. In fact, “if you do not immediately hear the thunder following the flash, you have absolutely nothing to fear.”

In contrast to its title, then, *Tenpen chii*’s opening sentence makes clear that Obata’s project is to prove that the “extraordinary workings of Heaven and Earth” are, in fact, quite ordinary. Only the false wisdom of the past has obscured this liberating insight. The first sentence of the Franklin chapter denies the past any “scientists” (*shikisha*) whatsoever, making no allowance for the wisdom some past “sage” (*seijin*) may have had. Each section of *Tenpen chii* begins with a repetition of common wisdom linking natural phenomena to the gods, followed by a survey of Western scientific breakthroughs that reveal nature’s true, earthly principles. And each section culminates in an assurance that, with the true workings known, there is nothing to fear. In Obata’s text, previous knowledge of the workings of nature was not only flawed but also caused people to fear the wrong things. Worse, people’s vague understandings of the underlying principles (*ri*) behind phenomena rendered their outdated knowledge useless for avoiding future disasters. For Obata, Franklin’s greatness is not his discovery that lightning is electricity but his invention of the lightning rod. Franklin

showed that the way to protect oneself from lightning was not to hope and pray to avoid it, but to attract it with a copper rod placed at the highest point of a building. (The accompanying illustration in Obata's text shows a churchlike European structure with six rods, one on each gable.) People, not gods, would now have the power to make lightning go where they want.³ According to this new worldview, no longer would natural phenomena such as earthquakes and comets foretell Heaven's political dictates, as they had from the *Mencius* to the recent Ansei earthquake (1855). Obata's comets exchanged their political roles for scientifically predictable and stable orbits with a periodicity "wholly determined by themselves" (*mawari kuru jikoku wa mizukara kimari ari*). In sharp contrast to the politically active nature of the 1850s and 1860s, the nature of the 1870s existed outside politics.⁴

Tenpen chii appeared just months after restorationists seized control of the court in Kyoto and issued the five-point Charter Oath, point 4 of which read, "Evil practices of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of nature." Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, all inherited thought was ruthlessly scrutinized and brought into agreement with a regime of knowledge known as "civilization and enlightenment" (*bunmei-kaika*). Civilization and enlightenment was an optimistic intellectual, social, and political reorganization that sought to bring Japanese practice into alignment with those "just laws of nature" most often defined as the Western, rational, scientific worldview.⁵ According to this new regime of knowledge, humans, armed with absolute scientific principles, stand outside their environment and are able to manipulate a material nature operating according to knowable laws. In other words, human manipulation of nature based on knowledge of true principles can remove the unpredictability, randomness, and fearsomeness from nature itself.

It is important to notice that the epistemological and physical separation of humans from nature in Obata's text is also the construction of the individual, autonomous, modern Japanese subject. The indifferent comets and lightning of *Tenpen chii* echo the equally disinterested Heaven of Meiji natural rights theory (*tenpu jinken*), in which Heaven neither played favorites nor chose anyone to be lord or master over another. Here we need look no further than Obata's Nakatsu colleague and founder of Keiō gijuku (*Tenpen chii*'s publisher), Fukuzawa Yukichi, whose hugely influential *Gakumon no susume* (*An Encouragement of Learning*, 1873) opens with the famous lines "Heaven makes no person superior to another, nor does Heaven make any person inferior to another. All are born of Heaven and, as such, all are

alike.”⁶ Under natural rights theory, the Meiji subject was a world unto him- or herself, entering only consciously chosen, voluntary relations with the outside world. Freely chosen contracts, either economic or social varieties, were the liberal model of interaction. Obata’s separation of nature from politics was in no way a simple Japanese story. As we shall see in chapter 1, this separation of the individual from nature and nature from politics was, and is, fundamental to the theory of the liberal subject, making a repoliticization of nature explored in this book a point of particular concern for liberal political theory. Indeed, in the European context, Marx had already noted sarcastically how “remarkable” it was that Darwin “rediscovered” his own bourgeois society at work in nature in *The Origin of Species*. We could say something similar of Obata, who in investigating the extraordinary workings of Heaven and Earth “discovered” self-determining comets to be the complement to natural rights theory’s bourgeois social relations of discrete, equal individuals operating and interacting according to their own inner principles.⁷ *Tenpen chii*’s radical attack on superstition and tradition metaphorically, and as we shall see in some cases literally, cleared the ground for a Meiji subject separated from its surroundings.

To be sure, when the true principles of nature were themselves quite dangerous (as in the case of a comet striking the earth), Obata could not completely separate the Meiji subject from nature. Nonetheless, in these instances he was still able to subdue the real powers of nature by resorting to rational calculation of the enormous odds that any individual subject would ever be so unlucky as to have nature intrude on his or her life: “The universe is an enormous place; as for something as incredibly small as the earth moving through it, even though there are countless comets, there should be no fear that there would ever be a collision. It is like a few leaves floating on the enormous expanse of the ocean.”⁸ Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, too, are fearsome and destructive, but the forces that might destroy any given town or village (*ikka kuni wa ikka mura no nangi*)⁹ are the same forces that produced the land, mountains, and islands that form the basis of human life.¹⁰ “When viewed from this perspective, truly thinking and feeling people (*kokoro aru hito*) cannot bear any grudge against Heaven for these [localized tragedies].”¹¹ In Obata’s world, there really is nothing to fear. For in this new understanding of the human-nature relationship, rational calculation proves powerful enough to erase even actual, lived disasters.

But by 1900, just thirty years after Obata had banished them from modern experience, disasters once again seemed to be everywhere. Seemingly

understood, accounted for, and controlled in the 1870s and 1880s, nature's power reasserted itself in the 1890s, most spectacularly in the massive amounts of copper, arsenic, mercury, and a host of other pollutants unleashed into the Watarase and Tone watersheds by the Ashio Copper Mine. With Ashio, Japan's first experience with industrial-scale pollution, the certainty, optimism, and ambition characteristic of the natural and social sciences during the first two decades of Meiji began to falter and fail. Unfortunately for Obata, by 1900 it seemed the earth could indeed go mad.

In one of the first responses to the emerging environmental crisis in 1890, Kawashima Isaburō, writing in what would be the first and last issue of the journal *Ashio Mine Pollution*,¹² warned the residents of the Watarase and Tone watersheds that the mine had fundamentally changed their world and that they could no longer rely on the natural laws that had sustained the life of the valley for generations.¹³ Across the polluted regions, Obata's separation of nature and politics was coming undone as rural liberals feared that the growing environmental crisis was eroding the political gains of the popular rights and liberty movement of the 1870s and 1880s. By 1902, writing at the height of the Ashio Incident, the former Progressive Party (Kaishintō) member Tanaka Shōzō anticipated the current concept of "ecocide" and signaled a breakthrough in environmental thought when he openly expressed the fear that Japan was creating a "second nature" of "foul rocks and polluted soil that wholly penetrates the [river] water. . . . Once this process is complete," he warned, "there will be no saving anyone."¹⁴ Later, fresh from battles in the Ashio Incident and the slaughter of World War I in Belgium, the anarchist Ishikawa Sanshirō used the reciprocal relation of humans with their environment to formulate a critique of industrial society and Darwinian natural selection, even developing a dispersed social ecology based on the rhizome. Another Tanaka disciple, Kurosawa Torizō, fearful of the corruption of the environment wrought by money and politics, fled to Hokkaido in search of a social model that explicitly did not "rely on [polluted] distant mountains and rivers."¹⁵ Convinced that only family-operated dairy farms could save Japan from simultaneous ecological and social degradation, he founded Japan's original "green company," a producers' cooperative that became Snow Brand Dairy (Yukijirushi)—until a 2003 merger Japan's largest dairy company. By the time postwar thinkers took up Minamata disease (methylmercury poisoning), it seemed that no discussion of human freedom was even possible without considering the environment. As all of them asked in their different ways, "Just how free can one be in a toxic landscape?" Clearly something greater than a literary nostalgia for a lost agrarian

past or an Orientalist environmental ethic was at work in the decades following Japan's first experience with industrial pollution.

So what had changed? Put simply, in the 1890s nature became political again. After Ashio, Japanese thinkers and activists came face to face with the reality of modern nature: that for the first time in history, human practice had the capacity to transform nature itself into something antithetical to human health and freedom. Industrial-scale pollution showed how easily and often nature permeated liberalism's supposedly autonomous, self-contained, individual bodies, and the environmental degradation of the Watarase and Tone watersheds showed how vulnerable nature was to modern human practice. By forcefully reasserting the mutual penetration of humans and nature, industrial pollution not only eroded Meiji ideologies of a nature indifferent to human practice, it *biologically and politically* contaminated the autonomous liberal subject on which Meiji political philosophy was built. The emergence of industrial pollution revealed that nature and society, which Meiji neo-Kantian ideology had considered to be two separate systems, were in fact a poorly understood, indeed ignored, totality. Put another way, Ashio's pollutants mapped Japanese society in ways political philosophy had not yet grasped. As the growing links between the body, society, and nature were revealed in the 1890s, thinkers and activists from Popular Rights and Liberty leaders such as Tanaka Shōzō to socialists like Kōtoku Shūsui, and radical journalists like Matsumoto Eiko, realized that a significant part of human health and freedom existed outside the individual subject. As the subject was penetrated by an increasingly toxic material nature leading to sickness, poverty, pain, and sometimes death, it became clear to many that even if nature had lost its autonomy, it clearly had not lost its agency. The discovery in the 1890s of an inescapable ecological part of the abstract liberal subject set off a frantic search for a reintegration of the environment into Japanese social and political theory. In the following decades, Confucian benevolence and moral economy, socialism, anarchism, and even fascism were marshaled in the search for new theories of a modern political subject and for a social organization adequate to the environmental crisis. This book is about that search for what might be called an "environmental unconscious" at the base of modern political and social thought; more specifically, it is about Japan's environmental turn, a broad historical moment when Japanese thinkers and activists experienced nature as alienated from themselves and were forced to rebuild the connections.

The Politics of Permeable Bodies

To say that environmental politics emerged in Japan only after 1900 is not to say that pollution itself was new—it was not. Nor was pre-Meiji exploitation so small that there was no ecological damage—there was. The Ashio mine itself had been exploited since at least the late sixteenth century. In the Ashikaga and Tokugawa Eras, farmers downstream from Ashio, Kamioka, and other early modern mines frequently drafted petitions complaining of “bad water” (*akusui*) from the mines that damaged their crops.¹⁶ There were also many other peasant protests against other environmental problems, such as those caused by the opening up of new areas to cultivation and numerous large Tokugawa River projects, including those on the Tone River supervised by the Confucian scholar Kumazawa Banzan in the eighteenth century. There were even petitions and protests against garbage and food poisoning.¹⁷ Further, Conrad Totman, Brett Walker, and David Howell have shown the significant changes that took place in the early modern period in forestry, fishing, and the ecology of Tokugawa trade with Ainu.¹⁸

To say that an environmental politics emerged around 1900 is also not to say that Japanese discovered that nature is finite, that its fertility may be exhausted. This had already been grasped by Tokugawa forestry.¹⁹ More broadly, it is also obviously true that humans have always and everywhere been altering their environment. To say that an environmental politics emerged is to say that it was not until the development of industrial capitalism’s terrifying nature-altering capacity that basic material practice became an urgent political, even existential issue. This confluence of the ecological and the political in pollution, means much more than that the concept of the environment was discovered in its moment of crisis. It means the environment was discovered *as crisis*.

What drove this urgency was only partly the scale of the problem. In other words, the environmental problem in 1890s Japan was much more than a case of “bad water” becoming “really bad water.” Such a quantitative understanding of the problem might suggest a purely technological fix. Instead, the 1890s activists’ emergent understanding of the human body as permeable to an increasingly polluted environment undermined the self-contained, autonomous, individual subject of Meiji liberalism. Contrary to Kurosawa’s hopes, it turns out that human health and freedom do rely on distant mountains and rivers. And this realization required a much deeper and wider examination of the whole of nature-body-society interactions and mutual penetrations. Under the early Meiji rationalist (neo-Kantian)

model, nature was the study of *fact* left to the materialist methods of natural science, while history was the creation of *value*, especially as manifested in morality, politics, and culture. But nature could not fail to be deeply transformed in complex interplay of new power relations arising from capitalist production and the making of the Meiji state, both of which created the material and ideological networks that allowed industrial pollution to contaminate social, cultural, and political realms in unprecedented ways. The poverty, the disease, and the loss of suffrage due to tax relief for poisoned fields that seemed to follow in pollution's wake reestablished nature as an active force in human history.²⁰ With the environmental crisis, nature and history needed, once again, to become a totality. Built as it is on the necessity of the complete autonomy of the individual body, the liberal Meiji subject—and, because we inhabit the same political imaginary, our own subjectivity as well—is deeply vulnerable to anything that insists on an involuntary interaction. The materiality of the air, food, and water that may have been adulterated or even poisoned by negligence, accident, or politics located far away and in some other time only to be later taken in to the human body is perhaps the most basic blind spot of liberal political philosophy.²¹ This vulnerability of the liberal subject was noticed by Marx in the 1844 *Manuscripts*: “[External] Nature is man’s inorganic body, that is to say in so far as it is not the human body. Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is part of nature. Estranged labour not only . . . estranges nature from man. [It also] estranges man from himself, from his own active function, from his vital activity.”²²

As we shall see in chapter 1, the attempt by Meiji liberalism to completely transcend nature led to the massive project of building physical and metaphorical boundaries between the human body and the environment. Brett Walker’s recent work on industrial disease in Japan, *Toxic Archipelago* (2010), tracks the permeability of the human body to its environment and subsumes all of the incredibly complex interactions between Japanese bodies and nature under the most notable and most personal concept of industrial production: pain.²³ As such the Meiji project of separation was immediately threatened by the discovery of the porousness of the human body to outside agents as the modern Japanese subjects ate, drank, and inhaled their new world. Building on Walker’s work, I will show how the pain suffered by the permeable bodies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pollution victims became the signal that the neo-Kantian separation of nature (fact)

from society (value) that underwrote the liberal model of bodies and the environment, however elegant, was missing something important.

The particular political addition to the environmental problem I want to explore in this book came with a realization by Japanese antipollution activists that the nature of modern Japan was both alienated *and alienating*. By this I mean that the original severing of the majority of the population from their means of subsistence—their connection to the land—was now combined with the new problem that nature had been so altered by industrial capitalism that a simple reconnection with a now polluted nature was problematic. In other words, Meiji Japanese had discovered that permeable human bodies are always already embedded in what Linda Nash called “inescapable ecologies.” Being part of an inescapable ecology also meant that humans were not only the *subject* of evolution but also its *objects*. As the radical ecologist Gregory Bateson put it,

Let us now consider what happens when you make the epistemological error of choosing the wrong unit [of the survival of the fittest]: you end up with the species versus the other species around it or versus the environment in which it operates. Man against nature. . . . When you narrow down your epistemology and act on the premise “What interests me, or my organization, or my species,” you chop off consideration of other loops of the loop structure. You decide that you want to get rid of the by-products of human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them. You forget that the eco-mental system called Lake Erie is part of your wider eco-mental system—and that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of your thought and experience.²⁴

Bateson’s own preference for psychological feedback loops likely needs to be better grounded in the material relations and processes discovered by the sciences. But the impulse is correct and important, and I will follow something of this method.

While not specifically concerned with environmental politics, Julia Thomas’s *Reconfiguring Modernity* (2000), on the ideologies of nature in modern Japanese political philosophy, identified the 1890s and early 1900s as a key period for developing a political theory of the environment. After her examination of natural rights theory and social Darwinism in the 1870s and 1880s, Thomas reports a sudden lack of invocations of nature in Meiji political documents beginning in the 1890s.²⁵ I have already suggested that this is no coincidence, for it was precisely in the 1890s that nature, altered by

human practice, began behaving in strange and unprecedented ways. Nature's loss of normative status in the 1890s is therefore the key point of contact between Walker's bodies in pain and Thomas's history of modern Japanese political philosophy. In what follows I will combine environmental history with political philosophies of the subject in order to explore the extremely rich and still urgent search for a form of political subjectivity and social organization adequate to the environmental crisis of capitalist modernity.

What Tanaka Shōzō and his followers realized was that because of humans' new relation to nature, not all contact with material nature could be seen as beneficial. Any contact must be carefully chosen and organized. What Nash, Thomas, and Walker's work shows definitively is that nature is never transcended, only reconceptualized. So what sort of conception of nature can be the basis of a new politics adequate to the environmental crisis? This is the question the thinkers examined in this book have asked. And their question remains our question. While the thinkers examined here had diverse understandings of the cause and solution to the problem of an alienated and alienating nature, they are united not only by a connection to the crisis of the 1890s, but also by a belief that when attempting to reintegrate nature into a theory of human health and freedom, it was the specific *practices of nature* that mattered. For these thinkers, an external nature outside politics simply didn't exist anymore.

Throughline and Structure

One trend in environmental history, a way to talk about the nature-society metabolism historically, is to periodize based on different modalities of that relationship. In *Humanity and Nature: Ecology, Science and Society* (1992), Yrjö Haila and Richard Levins use the concept of "eco-historical periods" to explain the complex, changing specificity of the human coevolutionary relation to nature.²⁶ Beginning in the 1980s with *The Green Archipelago*, Conrad Totman has increasingly made the human-nature relationship the basis of his periodization of Japanese history. Echoing Haila and Levins, his *A History of Japan* (2000) and *Pre-Industrial Korea and Japan in Environmental Perspective* (2004) takes the nature-society metabolism as a method of periodization.²⁷ So if we were to follow these examples and look at Japan's modern transformation after the fall of samurai rule in 1868 from the perspective of humans' relationship to nature in the 1870s and 1880s, we would see that the dominant way thinkers and policy experts described that relationship

was in the language of *separations*, of barriers not only between the body and miasmas, sewage, and (later) germs, but also between the modern subject and the superstitious past, between Enlightened, rational Meiji and the Tokugawa dark ages. But with the outbreak of industrial-scale pollution in the 1890s, the language of separation is replaced with the language of *leaks*. After 1900 it becomes the language of *connections*, or, better, mutual penetrations. Once activists started looking, they found mutual penetrations everywhere: in the river, in the soil, in the indigo dyes, in breast milk, and in politics. After Ashio, the question is no longer the stable “What *is* nature’s relation to humans?” In the wake of humanity’s new capacity for complete alteration of the environment, the question becomes the practical “How do we *build* healthful human-nature relations?” I use this periodization as a way to explore the history of the metabolic rift, to follow how it has worked in thought and practice in modern Japanese history, and, ultimately, as a way to think through its implications for our own struggles on an increasingly toxic planet.

Pollution’s very materiality makes it seem straightforward, even ahistorical. But it, too, has a history, and this history depends on more than (natural) scientific and technological narratives. While retaining its materiality and therefore being somewhat more resistant to politics than traditional political philosophy or literary naturalism, pollution is nonetheless deeply embedded in the social, moral, and political networks through which it spreads.²⁸ The particular material history of the Watarase watershed was the foundation of the Ashio pollution. And it was on this material environmental base that the pollution was deployed. But it is also true that the ideologies of private property and laissez-faire individual rights, not to mention the Meiji policies “encouragement of industry” and “rich nation, strong army,” played an equal, and in some cases defining, role in how and where pollutants moved through space and time.

Actor-network theory (ANT) and science, technology, and society studies (STS) have long been arguing for a move from the analysis of discrete objects to the analysis of a relations obtaining between them. I will make much use of this work in arguing for the agency of the nonhuman world and its implications for our own bodies, communities, and politics. But while I think ANT-inclined readers will find much familiar in what follows, I intend to remain within an explicitly Marxian analysis. It seems to me that, particularly with the main tradition of ANT seen in Bruno Latour’s work, Marx’s concept of subsumption does more to address the historicity of the relations between the organic and inorganic, nature and society; and it is the

specific historicity of the environmental crisis that I am after. For without a strong historical analysis and historical sense, the environmental crisis is too often universalized, leading either to the fatalism that it has always been thus and therefore nothing can be done or, just as unhelpfully, to the conclusion that what is needed is a return to a premodern or even prehistoric hunter-gatherer society seen in much recent radical ecology.²⁹

Still I believe there are connections with ANT and STS, especially in work such as Michelle Murphy's Marx-inspired readings of technology.³⁰ As I will develop throughout the book and argue explicitly in the conclusion, I believe that Marx's concepts of subsumption (both formal and real)³¹ of labor and nature under capital accumulation provides one of the best theoretical apparatuses for unpacking the current problem—that industrial capitalist production represents a specific social technology with immense implications for understanding the environmental crisis. Throughout the text, and more theoretically in the conclusion, capital's, or capitalism's, attempt to render both human labor and the environment as a wholly abstract base of infinite accumulation not only makes it hugely interventionist into bodies and nature, but also dooms it to fail precisely because of the inescapability of both the materiality of the laboring body and the finite environment that are the necessary base of its expansion. Like Obata's depoliticized nature, a nature subsumed under capitalist production, too, is one that may have lost its autonomy but, given the "inescapable ecologies" of life itself, can never lose its agency. Thus to say that an environmental politics emerged in Japan only after 1900 is to say that the environment cannot become the basis of a new politics until it has first been "discovered"—which is to say that it must be experienced as a discrete object, or, following Lukács's thoughts on labor in capitalist society, it must first be alienated and reified.³² The commodification of human labor-power achieves this for Lukács. In Japan I argue something similar happened to the environment in the 1890s with the irruption of modern pollution at the Ashio Copper Mine. What was new in the 1890s was not only the sudden realization that humans were alienated from nature—something that was grasped by political economists in the destruction of traditional usufruct (*irikaiken*) and the establishment of absolute property rights and the land tax reform in 1873.³³ New was the realization that with the emergence of a "second [toxic] nature," nature is not only alienated, but also alienating—thereby highlighting its role in human health and freedom. In many ways this book is an exploration of environmental theory's insistence that, in the words of David Harvey, all

social choices are at the same time environmental choices, and vice versa.³⁴ Starting from the initial moment of realization in the Ashio crisis, this book is about detecting the often veiled environmental basis of modern Japan's seemingly abstract social, cultural, and political ideologies.

A further benefit of the Marxian approach to the emergence of environmental politics is that it suggests ways of grounding the famous culturalist (and Orientalist) discourse of Japanese culture's "special relationship" to nature. By focusing on the subsumption of nature and labor in the specific relations of capitalist production, the Marxian approach possesses tremendous theoretical and analytical resources for exploring the implication of the simultaneous deployment of multiple temporalities. It thus has the potential to undo the absolute opposition of premodern nature and modern industry that is the culturalist theory's very condition of possibility. After Ashio, nature was never more ideological than when it was being invoked as outside history, capable of serving as a norm for society. At the same time, my approach points the way to integrating Japan's environmental turn into a global history of modernity. Wherever capitalism has been established across the globe, the separation from nature in the creation of the liberal subject veiled that inherently ecological side of human existence. But in Japan, because there was a readily available tradition of nature as an ethical norm—neo-Confucianism, nativist studies (*kokugaku*)—the post-Ashio discovery of the interconnections between the human and the environment meant that any reconnection, though taking place across the industrialized world, *could appear to be* an especially *cultural* move. This is to say, in giving an account of the culturalist turn toward nature as outside capitalism, a Marxian attention to simultaneous temporalities can also account for this move.

In other words, cultural nationalists (and contemporary radical ecologists) grasped modern nature's inability to adjudicate human social and political disputes—both capitalism's contradictions and the negotiations and compromises of political liberalism—only to re-reify it by once again separating it from those struggles in a return to an imagined stability of premodern nature. Unlike the attempt of the Meiji theory of civilization and enlightenment to separate human culture from a dangerous nature, later theories of the human-nature metabolism, from Taishō vitalism (*seimeishugi*) to agrarian fundamentalism (*nōhonshugi*), followed the reverse course, identifying nature as a separate realm where the parasitic effects of cities, money, and class war did not obtain.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore the relationship of the Meiji liberal subject to the material environment, from the early attempt by Meiji liberals to separate

the two to the growing difficulty in maintaining that separation in both thought and practice during periods of industrial pollution. In chapter 1 I explore the establishment of the autonomous individual as the unit of politics based largely on a neo-Kantian division of fact and value, or science and politics. But with the emergence of toxic flows that repeatedly penetrated this body, the separation of nature and politics that had been essential for the “civilization and enlightenment” attack on superstition became a weak point of Meiji liberalism, because liberalism had also removed the modern political subject from the space it occupied. As the chapter moves from the 1870–80 invention of the autonomous individual subject to the growing leaks between this subject and the material exterior, the autonomy of the individual became harder and harder to maintain. The first significant attempt to deal with the new toxic threat came from *within* Meiji liberalism. As Ashio toxins revealed hidden connections between people, places, and things, liberals would try to augment the autonomous subject with voluntary associations between individuals in an effort to grasp the social-level problem of industrial pollution, but without discarding the hard-won popular rights. The chapter ends with perhaps the most important investigation of the pollution problem—works by the journalist Matsumoto Eiko. Her 1901–2 exposé on the ravages of pollution in Gumma, Tochigi, and Ibaraki was a key moment in the abandonment of the liberal model of the subject on the cusp of Japan’s environmental turn.

Chapter 2 includes a major reconsideration of Japan’s famous “first conservationist,” Tanaka Shōzō (1841–1913), especially the invocation of the seventeenth-century peasant martyr Sakura Sōgo in Tanaka’s appeal to the emperor in 1901. Chapter 2 sees Tanaka not as Japan’s lost agrarian consciousness, but as a dedicated Meiji liberal whose environmental thought only developed *after* the exhaustion of Meiji political philosophy in the Ashio Incident. This reconsideration of Tanaka is necessary because the iconic narrative of Tanaka as a residual peasant martyr is not only inaccurate (he was deeply involved in liberal and utilitarian politics for decades), but the peasant narrative also reconstitutes the ideological continuance of premodern agrarian consciousness in modern Japan at the level of biography. I argue that what is actually going on beneath the seeming continuity of Tanaka’s use of peasant imagery and tactics is a major rupture between preindustrial and industrial society. To do so, I focus on Meiji liberals’ extremely interesting and extensive use of Sakura Sōgo as a model of a *modern* Japanese subject. Nonetheless, as the initial optimism that the ideology and tactics of liberalism could be applied to the pollution problem waned, and

as the early trouble in the Watarase River turned into “the social problem,” the uses and connotations of Sakura also morphed into a contradictory image of free individual subjects who nonetheless had need of Confucian benevolence from their government. In an extended examination of Tanaka and Kōtoku’s dramatic appeal to the Meiji emperor (*jikiso*) in 1901, I argue that this contradiction was pushed to its limits and finally broke—a move that I argue signaled Tanaka and Japan’s environmental turn.

Chapter 3 takes up Tanaka’s post-*jikiso* lament: “I have finally awakened to the folly of appealing to this government. There is nothing left but to appeal to Heaven (*ten*, nature) itself.” From 1902 on, Tanaka threw himself into an investigation of the multiple interactions between humans and nature through what he called “river pilgrimages.” It was on these pilgrimages that he developed his theory of the “real powers of the land and water” (*chi no ikioi, mizu no ikioi*), which cannot be transcended, only managed. The real powers of the land and water acknowledge the existence of a material nature external to humanity that is nonetheless still implicated in human practice by the concept of “flows” or material exchanges, a metabolism of humans and nature, building from these exchanges to a monistic ecological philosophy of (beneficial) “flow” (*nagare*) and (harmful) “poison” (*doku*). From here, I argue, Tanaka made a key breakthrough in environmental thought when he argued that humans could neither transcend nature nor completely control it. Worse, attempts to do so would result in the formation of a “second, toxic nature” of *doku*, a system of matter in motion that, like a cancer co-opts the body’s own capacity for growth but now distorts it, leading to an accumulation of death instead of life. Tanaka’s move to Yanaka in 1904 was an attempt to thwart the Meiji state’s plans to reengineer the Kanto plain according to its (in Tanaka’s view) false belief that the environmental problem was solvable through engineering. Instead Tanaka developed a socioecology he called *Yanakagaku*, which he believed pointed the way to a “true civilization” of material flows that fostered human health and freedom.

Modernization theorists and many others have located Tanaka’s life and work within a period of transition from traditional to modern—an exciting time, to be sure, but one that has largely passed and has resolved into our still difficult, but largely stable, relationship between civil society, politics, and nature. Of course, the idea that the environmental crisis was caused by incomplete modernity is pure fantasy; I write this introduction on the one hundredth anniversary of Tanaka’s death and during the continuing crisis in Fukushima. As I will show throughout this book, both Meiji Japan’s environmental crisis and our own are located precisely in the fully modern

categories of the subsumption of nature in industrial capitalist production. Thus, thinking in terms of subsumption not only allows a criticism of both Meiji rationalism and Japan's special relationship to nature: it also, in a final advantage of a Marxian analysis of the environmental crisis, will allow us to acknowledge and account for the environmental practices and damage of actually existing socialist regimes from Stalin to Mao.³⁵

Nearly all works in English and Japanese depict Tanaka as a lonely crusader whose fate it was to be ignored. In chapters 4 and 5 I argue that this premise is simply untenable. Tanaka may have been one of the most spectacular and celebrated antipollution thinkers, but he did not invent the environmental crisis, and as everyone would agree, the crisis did not end with him. Of course, many others took up the complicated and urgent question of the nature-individual-society relationship after Tanaka's death in 1913. In the last two chapters I focus on two thinkers, the anarchist Ishikawa Sanshirō and the founder of Snow Brand Dairy, Kurosawa Torizō, both of whom had deep, direct contact with Ashio and Tanaka. Nonetheless, in exploring the ways these two took up the challenge after Tanaka, we glimpse many other attempts, from Second International socialists to Taishō life philosophers (*seimeishugisha*) such as Mushakōji Saneatsu or the members of the Shirakaba group to fascists like Tachibana Kōzaburō and Gondo Seikyō, who were also working out their own theories of the problem of bodies, subjectivities, and social organization under industrial capitalism. In this way, I try hard to avoid the fate of popular history (*minshūshi*) and some women's history in becoming merely one more voice heard from, adding to a familiar national narrative. Instead I try to show environmental history's potential for a larger political and cultural critique. Ishikawa's attempt to inject ecological concerns into socialism led him to develop an extremely interesting social ecology of liberation of all living things (one that is very close to Murray Bookchin's Social Ecology). It also allowed him the intellectual space to launch an illuminating critique of the agrarian fundamentalism of the divine soil of Japan (*nōhonshugi*) during the 1930s and 1940s.

Likewise, Kurosawa Torizō's attempt to find a mode of production and political economy that would follow and not fight nature's cycles led him to develop what I call the original green company. Though beset by theoretical and political problems that brought it close to the wartime state and participation in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, Kurosawa's grasp of the problem as located in production, what Marx called "the real relation of man to nature," meant his urgent problematic survived the war. Even here, it

is the soundness of Kurosawa's initial diagnosis of the problem of relying on distant mountains and rivers that allows us to see the deep continuities between Snow Brand's collaboration in the 1940s and the recent tainted milk and beef scandals of 2002–3, while still giving credit to its penetrating insight.

By the end of chapter 5, I argue that the real problem that began with Ashio is revealed to have been the real subsumption of nature under capital—or that, in the need to accumulate units of surplus value, capital is driven to remake a nature that is more conducive to future accumulation, without regard to any other possible valuations or temporalities, whether biological, ecological, political, or even ethical. In the conclusion I explore the implications of this argument for the relationship between ecology and capitalism and look for possible beginnings of a future theory of the subject and an environmental politics adequate to our own global environmental crisis.