

SCATTERING SPACE AND TIME: THE POSTHUMAN SUBJECT IN ITO SEI'S *STREETS*
OF FIENDISH GHOSTS

By

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Introduction

As Uto Tsutomu walks the banks of the Myoken-Gawa River in Ito Sei's *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*, the water speaks to him through a myriad of wagging, fishlike tongues. Enumerating the sins of Uto's past, the river chides, "My, my, what sort of human being were you?" (Ito, 129). This question resonates throughout the narrative, as Uto's human status and his constitution as an individual person become increasingly uncertain. A character whose psyche comes into being only through his encounters with grotesque apparitions, swarming crowds, and talking textiles, Uto is a protagonist who tests the limitations of the term "human."

Through Uto's character, Ito Sei represents a model of subjectivity that is spatially dispersed rather than collected in a unified entity. This dispersed subjectivity signals a departure from the liberal humanist construct of autonomous selfhood and prefigures theories of the posthuman that find articulation in late-twentieth century science and literature. Most notably, Ito's evocation of a diffuse and eccentric selfhood satisfies Katherine Hayles's description of posthuman subjectivity as having a "collective heterogeneous quality" that "implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another" (Hayles, 3-5). Ito's representation of consciousness as shared among a multiplicity of agents, artifacts, and apparitions anticipates the externalization of thought process and destabilization of distinctions between self and other implicit in Hayles's "distributed cognition." An examination of dispersed subjectivity in Ito's narrative reveals that, anterior to the age of digital technology and robotics, the conceptual basis of the posthuman was already embedded in cultural productions that figured the subject as asymmetrical, relational, and external to itself.

The political valence of this scattered subjectivity resides in its challenge to the humanist ideology that views the self as internal and authentic, a perspective that privileges an imagined interior over a marginalized outside. Moreover, to postulate a subjectivity spread out across a range of things, agents, and places involves a remapping of space itself. Without the unified, concentrated subject as the central point of a spatial scheme, space becomes asymmetrical and amorphous. In this sense, Uto's diffuse subjectivity not only calls into question the individual as established by humanist discourse but also disfigures the spatial paradigm of center and periphery that is crucial to imperialist cosmographies. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles suggests the potential of posthuman identities to reconfigure the universal claims of liberal humanism by presenting a subject "whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction" (3). Though Hayles does not overtly connect the liberal humanist subject with the center and periphery structure, her attention to the "construction and reconstruction" of "boundaries" implies that the disintegration of the subject entails reconfiguring the contours of familiar categories. Indeed, binaries such as inside and outside or self and other become unstable and their terms enter into reciprocal substitutions when the subject that apprehends them is itself distributed across their lines. Dispersed subjectivity thus makes untenable the hierarchy of center over periphery, since it posits a subject whose origin or center is impossible to locate, one whose consciousness is unevenly housed in a multitude of disparate vessels.

Streets of Fiendish Ghosts explores posthuman subjectivity and its political implications in three ways: it describes a dispersed consciousness in the figure of Uto Tsutomu; it develops that externalized selfhood as both the symptom of and the solution to hegemonic systems that establish an uninhabitable outside against a privileged interior; and, finally, it explores a literalizing of the posthuman through the presence of ghosts who manifest an eerie simultaneity

of past, present, and future. In its divergence from dominant spatial and temporal paradigms, particularly its abandonment of centric models of dissemination and progress, Ito's narrative contributes to the dynamic, international phenomenon of Futurism that entered Japan almost immediately after Marinetti's publication of "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" in 1909. In his manifesto, Marinetti declared the abolition of spatial and temporal systems through the advent of motor technology: "Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, for we have already created velocity which is eternal and omnipresent" (Marinetti, 51).ⁱ Marinetti's notion that the train, the automobile, and the airplane have merged with human experience to absorb the horizons of time and space suggests a posthuman subjectivity akin to Ito's representation. The subject is not a discreet entity perceiving and responding to external stimuli but a fluid being whose thought process loops through the materials surrounding and reflexively constituting it.

In the pages that follow, I provide a more detailed reading of *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* in connection with the specific elements of posthuman subjectivity and Futurist aesthetics that resonate with this narrative, that is, with representations of dispersed subjectivity and disruptions of established spatial and temporal paradigms. The conclusion of the paper considers an important difference that distinguishes Ito's work from the point of view of Futurism and posthuman theories. This difference lies in the orientation toward the future as a temporal telos. While Hayles and the Futurist writers promote images of the future as a site of progress, radical change, and a liberating plenitude of possibilities, Ito presents a compressed experience of simultaneity from which there is no escape into either past or future.ⁱⁱ In *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*, haunting emerges as a temporal alternative to the linear succession of homogenous moments. If "time and space died yesterday," their afterlife in *Streets* is as palpable as the flesh

and steel of the present-day city. Ito's foreclosure of a flight into the future combines with the anachronistic gesture of labeling his work "posthuman" to raise the question of whether the language of "posts" and the appeal of the contemporary over the distant past—an attraction that seems to be embedded in the study of modernism as a field—are not also bound up with outmoded definitions of time and space that promote the predominance of center over periphery.

Cultural and Theoretical Context

Through its refashioning of subjectivity and space *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* offers a conceptual alternative to the dynamics of center and periphery that often inhere in conversations on modernization and modernism. As Shu-Mei Shih has discussed in her study of Chinese modernism, cross-cultural interpretations of modernist art need not consist of discussions about the "belatedness" of non-Western "variations" on metropolitan European modernism.ⁱⁱⁱ As both a locus of imperial power and a site of dissemination for Western artifacts, Japan challenges and complicates the geopolitical view by which "Euro-American modernism displaced the significance of the periphery and constituted and justified itself as center" (Shih, 2). Designated as a peripheral location in Eurocentric visions of modernity, Japan simultaneously constituted its own imperial center flanked by the marginal and supposedly backward territories of Korea and China. This proliferation of centers and peripheries appears magnified in *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*, in which the port city Otaru acts as both a peripheral place in relation to Tokyo and a center of modernity in comparison to the surrounding provincial villages. Ito's invention of a dispersed and decentered subjectivity thus signals not only the permeability of the individual's

boundaries but also the relativism of spatial paradigms that constantly generate uneven maps of center and periphery.

The cultural conditions under which Ito produced *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* also recreate this multiplication of origins and outliers. Ito contributed to the circulation of Western literature in Japan through his translations of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), both of which created sensational responses.^{iv} As an author and translator, Ito was profoundly engaged in the aesthetic practices of modernism in Europe, and *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* in particular has often been read as a direct response to the Nighttown episode in Joyce's *Ulysses*. While Joyce's text may serve as one source for Ito's narrative, the vibrant literary context of Japanese modernist writing resonates just as widely in the work. Seiji Lippit has examined the ways in which several Japanese modernists, including Yokomitsu Riichi and Akutagawa Ryunosuke, interrogated the uniformity of the subject and has connected this negotiation (and sometimes negation) of personal interiority with historically specific anxieties about the porous boundaries of Japanese culture in the early twentieth century. Lippit's study would suggest that Ito's exploration of dispersed subjectivity is as much a response to Japanese aesthetic trends and concerns as it is a mediation of Joyce. In Ito's work, the worlds of Anglophone and Japanese modernism overlap in such a fashion that neither is the dominant nor the minor term. Ultimately, the dispersed and heterogeneous quality of Ito's protagonist reflects the uneven and expansive nature of what Harsha Ram has called the "global literary system" that spans nations and continents in the modern era.

These concerns with modernism's intercultural exchanges bring my study of Ito Sei into conversation with Ram's comparative analysis of Italian and Russian Futurism. In a forthcoming article, Ram describes the futurist movements in Italy and Russia, two semiperipheral locations

of modern Europe, in order to advance the argument that Futurism simultaneously opened up transnational correspondence and articulated sentiments of nationalism and localized interest. While Ram sees Futurism as part of modernism's "second spatial turn," which constituted a "return to the periphery" in the form of ethno-nationalist assertions from Europe's provinces, he also envisions it as a cosmopolitan phenomenon (Ram, 12). The shared vocabulary and exchange of ideas generated by Futurist movements in a variety of locales fostered dynamic global visions. In particular, the Russian Futurists challenged the spatial hierarchy that privileged the European metropolis as the seat of modernity and articulated "an alternative pan-Asian cultural axis" (Ram, 29). A study of Ito's fiction enhances the picture that Ram so deftly traces, because *Streets* engages the vexed relationship between translation and creative output, between the dissemination of European cultural artifacts and the production of counter-hegemonic narratives.

Though some might object to studying Japanese fiction in connection with Futurism on grounds of cultural specificity, Toshiharu Omuka's work in excavating the material links across geographical boundaries of East and West demonstrates that such a study does, in fact, reflect the specific historical and cultural conditions from which these works emerged. In "Futurism in Japan, 1909-1920," Toshiharu describes the varied and dynamic responses to Italian Futurism by Japanese intellectuals, activists, and artists. He notes that Marinetti's *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* appeared translated in the monthly literary magazine *Subaru* only one month after its original 1909 publication. The rising generation of *avant garde* scholars and artists embraced Futurism in rebellion against the Realist aesthetics that dominated Japanese cultural production during the Meiji period, and the violent activism called for by Italian Futurists resonated with the increasing ranks of protestors in the wake of the Russian-Japanese war of 1904-1905.^v Seminal

to Toshiharu's analysis of the influence of Futurism in Japan are his accounts of the travels of various Japanese writers to London, Paris, and other European locations. Scholars such as Ogai Mori, who studied medicine in Germany and eventually translated some of Marinetti's works into Japanese, and Kozue Sawaki, who visited Vorticist shows in London, wrote about these Western cultural productions for Japanese audiences (Toshiharu, 244, 256).

Futurism merits some discussion in an analysis of the posthuman elements of *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*, because the emphasis that Marinetti and his cohort placed on the merging of machinery with human consciousness also prefigures the posthuman and tends toward a dispersal of subjectivity. Marinetti's assertion that the automobile had irreversibly changed the nature of human thought and experience exemplifies this standpoint. In "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," he declares: "We intend to hymn the man at the steering wheel, the ideal axis of which intersects the earth, itself hurled ahead in its own race along the path of its orbit" (Marinetti, 51). The thrill of speed, made possible by the invention of the motorized car, projects the human subject beyond himself into the vastness of global space and time. Marinetti's expression of "velocity" as an "eternal and omnipresent" phenomenon instigated a theoretical and aesthetic departure from conceptions of space as homogenous and static (51). In *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*, Ito continues this deformation of established spatial norms but also extends the problematic to deal more literally with the externalization of self.

Anticipations of the posthuman and futuristic imaginings of mechanized life found articulation in Japanese modernism by several of Ito's contemporaries. Seiji Lippit and William Gardner both examine the extent to which Japanese modernists propagated the notion that the self, as a coherent unit, was dissolving in the wake of technological and cultural transformations of rapid modernization. Gardner takes the title for his book, *Advertising Tower*, from a statement

by the poet Hagiwara Kyojiro: “All forms of poetic literature are destroyed—now they will be replaced by the electric-radio advertising tower!!” (Gardner, 3). Hagiwara’s equation of the poet and poem with the medium of the “electric-radio advertising tower” describes a changing attitude about the subject, one that fuses the human with the machinery of communication. Instead of a stable and iterable form, the poem becomes an ethereal and transitory message. Its destination is no longer the individual reader but the masses within the reach of a cacophonous noise. Thus the author-subject is replaced by a string of unrelated, fragmented sound bites and the reader-subject dissolves into a dispersed plurality with a mass consciousness. This sense of disintegration manifests itself again in the poet Hayashi Fumiko’s articulation of self-externalization. Startled by the sight of her own name on an advertising poster, Fumiko ruminates on her self-estrangement: “My way of living today,” she remarks, “is like chopping myself into pieces and throwing myself in every direction” (Gardner, 4). These decompositions of the autonomous subject and convergences of human consciousness with machinery demonstrate that the movement toward a posthuman construction of subjectivity was already inscribed in modernist expressions, though the term “posthuman” had not yet emerged in this sense.

Dispersal of Self: The Posthuman Subject as Mist

Before embarking on a close analysis of Ito’s text, those who may be unfamiliar with the narrative will benefit from a brief synopsis. *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* is a novella that chronicles one day in the life of Uto Tsutomu, a young academic who returns from Tokyo to visit the provincial port city of Otaru where he lived as a youth. Though he passed several years as a

student in Otaru, Uto is actually a native of Esashi, a small village associated with the racially marginalized Aino people. He is doubly estranged from the social context of Otaru, as both a traveler from the imperial center and a native belonging to the outlying rural domain. This alienation manifests itself throughout the novel, as Uto's walk through Otaru is described in terms of dream-like detachment and punctuated by encounters with bizarre apparitions that evoke his past. The vast majority of these apparitions are ghastly and disfigured women who condemn Uto, both vocally and through their ruined appearances, for his history of misogyny and abandonment.^{vi} Wherever Uto wanders, he is trailed by a legion of accusers who bring forth the corpses of his wounded friends, debilitated lovers, and aborted infants as evidence of his culpability. Aside from these demonic solicitors and ghostly presences, Uto fails to elicit any positive acknowledgment of his existence; those whom he seeks to interpolate on his own behalf either ignore or snub him. After struggling in vain to disentangle himself from the throng of accusing creatures, Uto succumbs to a violent delirium of self-destruction.

Early in the narrative, Ito presents and undercuts orthodox notions about the human as a cohesive category that carries intrinsic value. In flight from the apparition of a past lover, Uto encounters the ghost of an old friend who has become a disciple of Marxism. The ghost, Kobayashi, shows Uto a vision of Marx as a figure in the clouds, a "New Messiah" who pronounces the gospel of materialism to the desperate masses (Ito, 118). Kobayashi describes the phenomenon of Marxism in terms of a worldwide religious awakening that adheres to a center and periphery model of dissemination:

But, verily, verily, I say unto you Our New Lord has brought light to the darkness of modern society. He has pointed to the place wherein humankind ought to abide. Uto, my boy, I ask you to think on these things. Imagine for a moment the small light that shone

from the window of that impoverished flat in London where Our New Lord once resided! Think of how it has begun to shine and glow. Think of how it has illuminated the harsh realities of modern life that were shrouded in darkness until now. Think of how the glow has gained in strength and how it has spread to the corners of the earth (119).

The image of light emanating from a source of truth and diffusing outward to fill a vast space clearly has Christian resonances as well as echoes of Enlightenment rationalism. The phrasing “verily, verily, I say unto you” suggests a Biblical register, alluding specifically to the gospels of the New Testament, and thus positions Marx as both a savior-figure and a circulating artifact of Western culture. Because the light emanates from a “flat in London” and then spreads “to the corners of the earth,” it becomes something of an imperial beacon, a representation of the privileged metropolitan center’s authority over the affairs of the external territory. London, the site of cultural revival and philosophical understanding, cannot be one of the “corners of the earth,” and Otaru, by extension, cannot constitute an origin of thought but exists as the receptacle of Western ideas. In “pointing to the place wherein humankind ought to abide,” this translated humanism promotes a particular map of the world that relegates Otaru, and even Japan more generally, to a marginal status. In this sense, Kobayashi’s articulation of Marxism underscores the disparities of cultural hegemony that are woven into the universalism of humanist discourse.

Rather than a representation of distinct, autonomous individuals, this rhetoric of Eurocentric humanism produces the image of an undifferentiated crowd that becomes one of the narrative’s earliest evocations of dispersed subjectivity. Uto’s vision of Marx as a specter of smoke and clouds culminates appropriately in another semi-meteorological event, a tumult of human rain. As masses of people plummet through the sky toward the city below, Uto hangs suspended in mid-air, watching their fall:

Suddenly I feel the fat physician in the striped pants breeze past me. He falls through the air like a huge boulder. The long rubber hoses of a stethoscope, an enema bottle, and shiny glass syringes spill from his medical bag. They go chasing after him, scattering across the sky and growing smaller in size until they finally disappear. Next comes the enormous derriere of a woman dressed in a purple kimono. She snarls at us. Is she the accountant? Of the woman doctor? A handbag and a pair of red leather sandals follow in her wake. The instep catches the light, and the sandals flicker as they turn over and over in the air (Ito, 120).

Even as the narration focuses in on the physician and the woman as distinct figures, their personal characteristics are supplanted by the shape and force of their bodies as projectiles. Thus the physician's "fat" stature and the woman's "enormous derriere" describe their total impression on Uto. The images of the hurtling man and woman scarcely appear before they are replaced by the abundance of objects—stethoscope, enema bottle, syringes, handbag, shoes—that trail behind them. Marinetti's insistence on the victory of velocity over form is apt here, as the falling bodies comprise a phenomenon of movement rather than a static image. The identities linked to these bodies inhere in the possessions that seem to pursue them through the air as leftover bits and pieces of their social existence. This scene enacts the merging of humans with their environment: the physician appears "like a huge boulder," and both figures are absorbed and eventually "disappear" along with their artifacts into the air. The keenness with which Uto perceives the falling objects, especially the flickering light reflected by the sandals, suggests the superseding of the autonomous human self by objects that denote the social significance and identity of that self. The spreading out of these objects and bodies across space as they

accelerate toward an unquestionable doom is a literal dispersal of subjects and their constitutive parts.

In keeping with this vision of the scattered subject as a fluid and uncontained collective, Uto emerges as a dispersed person, one whose consciousness crosses the boundaries between his physical body and his surrounding environment and resides in non-human and sometimes non-living deposits. This dispersed subject cannot be circumscribed by the universal humanist perspective that Kobayashi voices as a mixture of Marxist and Christian discourse. Instead of the model of the autonomous, internally coherent and original self, a model that reinforces the spatial arrangement of center and periphery by positing the interior as the exclusive site of authenticity, Ito presents a subject that is spread out across multiple substrates and that has no distinctive origin or center. Ito's illustrations of dispersed selfhood prefigure Hayles's characterization of the posthuman persona as one whose consciousness is "a bodiless fluid" rather than a contained apparatus. Just as the masses tumbling through the sky evoke rain, Uto's subjectivity anticipates the "fluid" posthuman in its aquatic, diffuse form.^{vii}

Throughout the narrative, mist functions as both a type of weather and a metaphorical evocation of dispersed subjectivity. Vapor materializes repeatedly in the steam of a train's engine, in the clouds gathering over the town, and in the "thick and heavy" mist of miniscule plankton-like creatures that assail Uto at the story's conclusion (Ito, 164). Significantly, mist is an element whose traits describe Uto: he is obscure, cold in his disposition, only tenuously visible to others, and prone to drifting across space. The story opens with the clause, "The sky is overcast and the morning air chilly on my arms," and the gloomy, "chilly" quality of the weather instantly reflects Uto's emotional frigidity. He articulates his lack of dynamic emotion by noting that, though the return to Otaru ought to incite nostalgic reminiscence, "nothing stirs inside" him

(Ito, 106). Uto enters the narrative as a vacant personage, so lacking in affect that he seems to be integrated with the somnambulant haze around him: “I wander past them [the buildings of Otaru] like a man walking in a deep sleep. They might as well be invisible” (Ito, 106). Uto renders himself invisible at the same time that he attests to the unremarkable quality of the fixtures around him. The lack of hard and fast lines drawing the precise contours of objects in the environment corresponds with the dissolving boundaries of Uto’s selfhood. Lippit has suggested that urban space in Japanese modernism often “elicits an experience of shifting identifications and an instability of place and borderlines” (Lippit, 5). Uto’s walk through the city becomes a case study in the “instability” of “borderlines,” as he is consistently unable to anticipate which barriers will be permeable. Moreover, the “shifting” and unpredictable structure of the city—a place that channels Uto through its haunts despite his efforts at active navigation—intermingles with the mutable and insubstantial structure of his person.

Just as mist is external to itself, the contents of Uto’s psyche are to be found in the architecture and physical features of the city around him. He muses:

Yet even as I say the landscape of Otaru no longer has much meaning for me, I know all of my memories reside deep within it—indeed its elements are the hook on which my entire past hangs. Indeed I need only open my eyes and see a big, black transformer atop a creosote pole or a flag flying from a building to know these phenomena have the power to unleash thoughts and reminiscences and joys and sorrows that uncoil like ropes in my mind (Ito, 107).

The inanimate “elements” that make up the city are receptacles of Uto’s consciousness, and they have the power to impart memory and emotion upon sight. Whatever latent affect is embedded in Uto’s mind is inaccessible to him without the functioning of these external catalysts. The

phrase, “my memories reside deep within it,” even suggests that Uto’s thoughts are not wholly contained in his mind but are rather strewn across the cityscape. Not only does the mist metaphorically describe Uto’s disposition, it metonymically denotes the form of his consciousness, which is diffused across space and has accrued to surfaces and objects. Uto’s peripatetic body is a smaller instantiation of his subjectivity, which is a broad phenomenon that occurs through the simultaneous operations of multiple agents and things. Ito’s selection of the “black transformer” and “flag” as items in which Uto’s memories inhere indicates the influence of technology and imperial culture on Uto’s consciousness. The “transformer,” a gadget for redirecting electrical currents, evokes a fusion of machinery with flows of thought or communication and, through innuendo, suggests both the material transformation of Japan through modernization and the potential metamorphosis of the human into the posthuman through the same process. The “flag” atop the Western-style hotel stands as a symbol of European cultural imperialism and recalls for Uto “the rippling banners one sees in old-fashioned pictures from foreign countries” (Ito, 107). That Uto’s memory draws upon the mechanical representations of foreign cultures is evidence of the intermingling of human consciousness with circuits of technology that overlay the grids of national and imperial territories and transmit hegemonic values.^{viii}

Uto’s state of dispersal becomes noticeable in a scene in which his invisibility is literalized. After entering a beer hall in Otaru, Uto happens upon a group of his colleagues who are brutally criticizing his work and his personality. The crux of the criticism is that Uto is “always imitating someone else’s work” and, consequently, there is “not a shred of originality in anything he writes” (Ito, 158). The extent to which this criteria of “originality” reflects the spatial paradigm of center and periphery appears in the scornful colleague’s conclusion that

Uto's mimetic habits are the result of his "colonial mentality" (Ito, 158). According to this particular critic, Uto's corpus consists of belated and pathetic versions of authentic work emanating from the imperial center: "Look at what he's done. It's a miscellany, or it's a copy of someone's work. Or it's a translation. If he thinks he's going to make his mark in the world by foisting junk on us, it only shows how colonial he is. A real provincial" (Ito, 158). The rhetoric deployed against Uto constructs a binary of metropolitan, imperial culture and peripheral transplants of that culture. Since his colleagues can neither hear nor see him, Uto finds himself unable to mount a defense. His body has become as mist-like as his consciousness, enabling him to walk through solid walls and listen to conversations without inhibiting those present. Yet this transformation weakens rather than empowers Uto, as it prevents him from articulating his own identity or speaking at all on his own behalf. In this sense, Uto's dispersed subjectivity is a manifestation of the silence and invisibility imposed on those at the extremities of imperial spaces. The disintegration of his selfhood is a result of his alterity as a person indigenous to the provinces.^{ix}

While Uto's scattered selfhood works as a symptom of his social exclusion, it also functions to undercut the very mechanisms that marginalize him. A decentered and externalized subjectivity challenges the rubric of originality and authenticity posited by Uto's colleague. As becomes clear through the embedment of Uto's memories in architectural features of the city, the landscape itself is a translation of Uto's thoughts at the same time that Uto's thoughts are a translation of the surfaces and figments around him. Wandering in search of his scattered thoughts, feelings, and memories, Uto performs a blurring of the boundaries between self and other. His sense of identity comes into being as the objects and agents surrounding him emit a narrative of his past. Uto first alludes to this process of disclosure and emergence of self in what

seems to be a figurative statement: "...as I saunter along, something about the city speaks to me. It makes me relax and feel at ease, although I cannot say why" (106). Here, the "it" has an ambiguous antecedent; the most obvious substitution is "something," which does little to clarify who or what is speaking to Uto and shaping his mood. The origin of Uto's emotion is not definitively located either internally or externally but is rather spread out across the two. Ultimately, this distribution of the origin of feeling amounts to a negation of the origin as such and makes the charge of mimesis or peripheral reproduction irrelevant. Rather than deriving from an authoritative center, Uto's emotion and cognition come into being through the interplay of disparate, loosely woven things: a flag, a creosote pole, a city street, a string of ghosts. The collective interface of these objects is the virtual fabric that comprises Uto's subjectivity, a hovering selfhood that foreshadows the "distributed cognition" of the posthuman. This posthuman self, from which a conception of the autonomous interior has dropped out, explodes the bounds of the center and periphery graph.

As the narrative progresses, the speaking agents that enunciate Uto's identity become more palpable but take on forms that are increasingly bizarre and surreal. Rather than distilling as a crystallized whole, Uto's sense of self becomes gradually destabilized through his dialogic exchanges with entities increasingly removed from a normal conception of the human. The first of these exchanges takes place between Uto and the ghoulish apparition of his former lover, Hisae, whose pronouncement of Uto's culpability exerts a formidable force on his identity. Hisae escorts Uto to a washroom in a hotel and announces to him that this is the place where, years ago, she used a chiseled bar of soap to abort her infant at Uto's bidding. Presenting Uto with the relic of her suffering, a "white enamel basin," she recalls the infection that nearly killed her and left her disfigured after Uto's desertion (Ito, 108). As Hisae speaks, Uto's memories

begin to take shape, drawing their potency from the fury of Hisae's tone and gestures. Responding to the "wild and angry look in her eyes," Uto explains, "I cannot fathom what she means until a faint glimmer of recognition begins slowly and belatedly to form in a lost, dark corner of my brain. Some horrible fact from my past is about to return to haunt me" (Ito, 108). In this moment, penultimate to Uto's recognition of his guilt, Hisae's narrative wedges open the "lost, dark corner" of his mind and lodges there as incontestable fact.^x Everything that Uto believes to be true about himself from this point of the narrative onward derives from the certainty of his culpability that is engendered by Hisae's enunciation. And Hisae does not only disclose Uto's wrongdoing but also states the content of his psyche, which she deems to be narcissistic: "Wasn't that the way you always thought?" she insists, "You were always the most important person in the world insofar as you were concerned" (Ito, 110). Regardless of the historical accuracy of Hisae's tale, which is impossible to decipher from within the narrative, her speech acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy: from this point on, as he walks the city, Uto re-enacts incessantly the drama just described by Hisae. He encounters companions and lovers whom he has betrayed and comports himself as a solipsist for whom the suffering of others only registers as his own eternally recurring trauma.

Solipsistic as his thoughts may be, Uto does not contain within himself the origin of this guilt and self-loathing; it is an identity that congeals in the accusations hanging in the air after Hisae's speech. Through her persuasive performance, Uto has changed from an indifferent shell of a man with "nothing" stirring inside to a person "so terrified" he is "ready to jump out of" his "skin" (Ito, 110). More than a mere change of temperament, this transition indicates that the encounter with Hisae has caused the emergence of a personality, one that stirs and jumps, where before one was lacking. Just as Hisae's spoken account replaces the emptiness of the "white

enamel basin” with the specter of the aborted fetus, her speech triggers the anxiety and shame that supplant Uto’s previous lack of feeling. Here, as in the interchange between Uto and the “something” speaking to him through the city, personality comes into being through dialogue and does not emanate from an isolated core. Once again, the notion that any version of Uto’s identity is more or less authentic than another becomes unsustainable given the fluid and asymmetrical invention of his selfhood.

Though it is Hisae’s narrative that fashions the content of Uto’s personality, her facial features, and not the sound of her voice, are what arrest Uto’s attention. In particular, Uto’s obsession with the prominence of Hisae’s mouth corresponds with the power of her speech to craft his memory and identity:

Her eyes narrow and form into little peaks. The pale, taut layer of skin that stretches across her cheekbones looks as tough as leather. Perhaps her true face lies hidden somewhere underneath, but who can tell? The gaping hole of her mouth opens and closes like a frog’s. How big it has gotten over the years. It must have doubled in size. I’ll bet it will get even larger... (111).

This description of Hisae presents her more as a talking carnival mask than as a woman, as her human face seems to recede beneath a painted clown-face with “little peaks” for eyes and cheeks reminiscent of “leather.” The term “leather” works as the seam between the inanimate and the animal registers, opening up toward the comparison of Hisae’s painted mouth to a “frog’s.” Morphing from human to painted mask, from painted mask to animal, Hisae is as malleable as Uto. She negatively answers the question of whether her “true face” is concealed beneath the mask when she explains that the infection following her abortion left “Nothing. Absolutely nothing” of her former beauty and youth: “I might as well have dug a hole in the ground and

buried it” (109). Even her current lover, the man who sustained her after Uto’s abandonment, views Hisae as a “sideshow” character, someone “put back together again” from broken fragments (116). An amalgamation of artificially assembled fragments, painted surfaces, and animal parts, Hisae is a grotesque parody of the human form. For Uto, however, her weird presence is a powerful determinant of his subjectivity. Consequently, the haphazard and artificial appearance of Hisae suggest that human subjectivity is threaded through instances of the strange and the fantastic as much as it is rooted in experiences of normalcy.

Haunting as Temporal Claustrophobia

While Hisae’s carnivalesque physique suggests an initial departure from the index of normal human bodies, the ghosts that trail after Uto as he walks through the city represent further removals from the human. In a sense, these ghosts are literally posthuman subjects: they both constitute the afterlife of humanity and act out a return of the past in the form of haunting, suturing the future and the past in the occult zone of the present. Through Uto’s encounters with ghosts, Ito displays a compressed temporality, one that enfolds all events in a stifling simultaneity. Thus, when Uto meets the ghost of Kobayashi outside of the bank and begins speaking with him, he feels “as if we had stepped back in time to when he was working there” (118). Haunting becomes a mode by which the past inserts itself into the present while the afterlife is made contiguous with mortality. This collapse of temporal registers manifests itself on a cosmic scope in Kobayashi’s statement, “since the age of the Renaissance, the world reverted to a sea of mud and chaos, which was its original state before the creation. Since then, no one has been able to divine the fundamental laws that govern humankind” (Ito, 119). Here,

the sense that humanity becomes inscrutable in the wake of a global reversion to the distant past suggests that Ito's representation of simultaneity runs counter to narratives of progressive modernization. Instead of unfolding toward the advancement of society, time runs in a feedback loop that perennially recreates the past and obscures its causality. Just as Uto's dispersed subjectivity scatters and dissolves the spatial model of center and periphery, the simultaneity expressed by his haunting problematizes the idea that time proceeds from an origin.

Though the simultaneity of past, present, and future evoked through Uto's haunting signals a rupture between Ito's work and that of the forward-looking Italian Futurists, Ram has described a trend among Russian Futurists to generate cyclical, geological conceptions of time. For Vladimir Maiakovskii, Benedikt Livshits, and others of the Hylean school, Russian Futurism conceived a "radical contemporaneity of the remote past with the impending future" (Ram, 4). This simultaneity supplied a counter-narrative to notions of standardized, linear time that were sanctioned by the imperial governments of Western Europe. By celebrating the inevitability of recurrence on a cosmic scale and interpreting the layered sediments of continental Russia as a natural record of this process, the Russian Futurists developed an alternative to the worldview that imperial European cultures would eventually diffuse throughout the world, ushering in the fullness of modernity. Not only does this particular strand of Futurism diverge from the progress models of humanism, it also opens up a consideration of futurity as posthuman or extra-human in imagining the grand scope of zoological and geological return.

A diffusion model of modernization knits together the assumption that time is a linear progression with the conception that space adheres to a center and periphery form, and it is this two-fold construction of time and space that becomes less and less sustainable in *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*. The interconnection of dispersed subjectivity with the phenomenon of

simultaneity manifests itself in an episode in which Uto encounters the “droves” of “fiendish ghosts” that inhabit Yamada-cho, one of Otaru’s shopping districts (Ito, 146). These ghosts are the second-hand garments that hang displayed across the storefronts, “phantoms of the past” that “sway slowly back and forth” like “dead men hanging on a scaffold” (Ito, 146). The swaying of the clothes and their resemblance to hanged men evoke the absence of the people who once wore them. Because the translation uses an active construction, the clothes seem to “sway” by virtue of an energy that animates them rather than as a consequence of wind. The memories and emotions of those who once wore the clothes have accrued to the textiles, so that the rows of suits and Kimonos are not simply worn by the phantoms but are the phantoms, sentient creatures imbued with consciousness. They constitute the residual, scattered identities of the throngs of people with whom Uto has crossed paths. And just as Uto’s subjectivity is spread out across this constellation of other people, his ethos inheres in these traces of their personhood, the uncanny vestibules of their memories.

The clothes demonstrate a startling, eerie vitality, as of a Carlylian mob.^{xi} Uto receives this impression as he encounters an abundance of clothing stashed behind the store:

There are countless piles of garments at the back of the shop. They slowly unfold and get to their feet. There is the sound of silk rustling as they struggle with each other to get close to me. They look like lepers. Their eyes are blind; their mouths, wide open. They come in waves, each wave breaking over the next, as they head my way. They surround me and turn the shop into a sea of black. The sound of their own movements appears to have awakened them (Ito, 145).

Attributing to the clothes anthropomorphic features—feet, eyes, mouths—and qualities of disease and degeneration, Uto evokes a scene that can only be visualized by focusing on its

isolated parts. We see the clothes unfolding or the mouths opening and closing or the crowd pressing close like a “sea of black,” but to sustain all of these images at once would require a nonsensical suturing. This passage presents a jumble of metonyms: the clothes evoke the people who wore them; the “eyes” and “mouths” summon their absent bodies; the “sea of black” insinuates an abstract collective life-form, as a crowd suggests humankind itself. However, juxtaposed as they are, these metonymic pieces become more vital than the generalities they represent. “Awakened” by “the sound of their own movements,” the walking, talking, clutching garments have come unhinged from their figurative purpose. They are not only images in which broader concepts distill but also active agents that assert their own ontological status. As such, they produce a feeling of “crazed” fear in Uto, manifested in a hysterical need to flee (145).

The “crazed” feeling that the textiles elicit from Uto anticipates the ambivalent mixture of terror and excitement that Hayles describes as a common response to the advent of the posthuman (Hayles, 283). The talking and walking textiles perform the dispersal of subjectivity as well as the collapse of the past and the future, both of which instigate a sense of the posthuman or the extra-human. Not only does the encroaching crowd of clothing call to mind the threat of the masses to the integrity of the individual human, a longstanding trope in modernist literature, it also displays a consciousness distributed among objects typically relegated beyond the limits of cognition and sentience. In a very literal sense, clothing constitutes the periphery of the human form; it lies on the surface of the body, existing outside of the person’s boundaries and therefore exacting no claim on its agency. Here, however, the fabric moves and asserts its will in the absence of flesh and bone. The non-living, non-human periphery becomes a receptacle of subjectivity without the guiding authority of a human housed

within. The episode of the walking clothes demonstrates a selfhood that congeals at its fringes rather than emanating outward from a core.

Moreover, as remnants of the dead, the masses of clothing perform the simultaneity of past and future that produces an anxious sense of claustrophobia for Uto. The hanging garments that evoke the gallows make omnipresent the deaths of those who wore them, even though those deaths occurred in the past. At the same time that they recall these deaths, however, the clothes' speech and their gestures bring the dead characters back into the text as animated presences. Neither alive nor dead, neither present nor absent, the textiles-as-ghosts create an inescapable sense of recurrence, and in fact—as second-hand items for sale—they belong to an economic circuit that ensures a pattern of return. For Uto, the prospect of buying one of these garments is synonymous with accepting and integrating the disturbing reminders of his past into his sense of self. The merchant calls to him, “How about buying both the slip and the *hakama* as mementos of your notorious past? Ah, come on, you know what I'm talking about—they're mementos of the man that you were a decade ago” (Ito 143). Since both items of clothing are possessed by the spirits of women whom Ito has wronged, this sales pitch excites a mixture of terror, guilt, and narcissism. Uto attempts to flee from the hanging clothes, not only because they reinstate his past but because they smother the possibility of a future that departs from the patterns already established in Uto's life.

Reconsidering the “Post”

In the final scene of *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*, Uto encounters a crowd of unnamable creatures that seem to represent the spawn of an accelerated zoological retrogression. First

appearing in the room of a prostitute whom Uto visits and subsequently following him out onto the street, these “strange creatures” surround Uto and “fill every inch of space” so that he is completely hemmed in (Ito, 164-165). Described alternately as “silkworms or caterpillars” and as “plankton,” these animals echo the speech of Hisae and of every other apparition that has accosted Uto throughout the story: one by one they demand that Uto acknowledge them as associates from his past. As Uto succumbs to the terror of these solicitous creatures and tears into them in the throes a violent delirium, he disperses their body parts, “grabbing them and ripping their flesh apart” (Ito, 165). In this graphic scene, Uto reinvents the violence of dispersal leveled against him by the society that relegates him to a peripheral status, but he also remains the victim of that violence, as it is his own subjectivity that inheres in the grotesque mass.

While this final episode depicts dispersed subjectivity as a phenomenon that reveals the self-loathing encoded in acts of marginalization or exclusion, it also highlights the possible folly of inscribing a temporal movement through the term “posthuman.” Hayles optimistically suggests that the emergence of the posthuman has the potential to lead toward social and cultural progressiveness. She argues that developing a comprehension of distributed cognition and moving beyond humanism will enable people “to fashion images of ourselves that accurately reflect the complex interplays that ultimately make the entire world one system” (Hayles, 290). In contrast to this embrace of the posthuman as a promise for a more enlightened future, Ito represents an inescapable and compressed present from which his protagonist is unable to extract himself. Though Uto urges himself on in the narrative’s final sentence —“You must get out of this place and get on with your life! You must live!”—his words resound with hopelessness as the swarm of creatures closes in on him (Ito, 165). This sinister ending manifests a deep suspicion toward the promises of enhanced sophistication and satisfaction tied to modernization.

Uto's dilemma suggests that, while the dissipation of the human subject works to unhinge the center and periphery designs so essential to imperialist maps, it also produces a nightmarish space in which the self, whether abjected or narcissistic, is omnipresent and inescapable.

ⁱ Marinetti, F. T. *Founding and Manifesto of Futurism*. pp. 51. Marinetti also hails the "beauty of speed," which he sees reflected in the automobile. His emphatic praise of technological innovation is one aspect in which he differs from Ito Sei, and this difference begs a more detailed interrogation of these writers' relationships to urban, industrial, and mechanical transformations generally. That *Streets* does not reiterate in the optimistic, albeit apocalyptic, embrace of modernization found in Marinetti's writing is evidence of Ito's ambivalence toward the spread of Western nationalist sentiment, which was frequently conflated with Futurism.

ⁱⁱ Ito's representation of simultaneity participates in the modernist trope of prolonged present that appears in the work of Gertrude Stein, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust, among others. While the interpenetration of past, future, and present often manifests as a liberating or exuberant experience in the work of these other modernists, in Ito Sei it brings about a nightmarish sense of claustrophobia. This difference highlights the notably pessimistic tone of *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* in its portrayal of modernization, of the city, and of memory and temporality. Whether this sense of imprisonment in simultaneity reflects the specific cultural context of Japan, or Hokkaido more particularly, is a question that begs further investigation. Seiji Lippit's *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, which suggests that Japanese modernists conveyed the city as a site of dislocation from the past, is a helpful starting point for such a study.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shu-Mei Shih describes a Eurocentric trend in modernist studies that has historically considered modernist writings in non-white, non-Western cultures to be appropriations of the forms produced in Western metropolises. As an amelioration of this hegemonic viewpoint, Shih examines the physical and cultural exchanges that occurred in multiple directions among China, Japan, and European locations.

^{iv} See introductory material to Ito Sei. *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts*. Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan 1913-1938. Ed. Tyler, William. pg. 105. The trial surrounding the banning of *Lady Chatterly's Lover* became a famous case and led to Ito Sei's legacy as a champion of freedom of speech.

^v For a more thorough description of the political and aesthetic atmosphere of Japan in the early twentieth century, see Toshiharu Omuka's article, pp. 245-246. Toshiharu explains in depth the sense of unrest that characterized Japan in the wake of the 1904-1905 war with Russia and relates this tense political mood with the avid reception of Futurism.

^{vi} That Uto is pursued by the ghosts of women, many of them past lovers, signals a connection with Leopold Bloom of Joyce's *Ulysses*, whose walk through the city is punctuated by encounters, both real and imagined, with women whose influences inform his subjectivity.

^{vii} The representation of an aquatic, dispersed subjectivity in *Streets of Fiendish Ghosts* supplies a literalized version of the stream-of-consciousness trope favored by certain Anglophone and European modernists, James Joyce in particular. There is a phantasmagoric scene in Ito's narrative in which this literalization reaches its apex. The Myoken-Gawa River becomes a flood of mouths that articulate Uto's past deeds, and the rushing water carries a series of ghosts who

testify of the heartache he has caused them. The flood comingles an abundance of speech and signification with a repetition of images, especially weeping women, in order to simulate the ungovernable flow of consciousness. Much like Joyce, Ito represents consciousness as a messy conglomeration of social, cultural, physical, and personal elements. Unlike Joyce, however, Ito dramatizes this consciousness rather than recreating its effects in experimental prose.

^{viii} This instance of a constitution of subjectivity through electrical apparatus begs comparison with Hagiwara Kyojiro's claim that the poet is replaced in modern Japan by the "electric-radio advertising tower." Both literary representations of human consciousness as that which advanced technology appropriates and radically alters reflect the enthusiastic technophilia of the Futurists but also add a dimension of paranoia regarding the disappearance of human agency or authenticity.

^{ix} In another scene, Uto attempts to purchase a train ticket to Tokyo and is denied by the salesman because of his provincial background. A genealogical chart posted at the train station classifies Uto as a descendent of the indigenous Ainu people and functions as an official record of his dispossession. The distribution of space on this diagram recreates Uto's peripheral status, relegating his name to the page's margin. This episode also brings into focus the geographical setting that reflects the center and peripheral structure of imperialism: Tokyo is the center, Otaru the semiperiphery, and Esashi the colonial fringe.

^x The innuendo of reverse insemination invoked in this scene invites a cross-reference with Joyce, particularly with the episode of *Ulysses* in which Molly Bloom feeds Leopold the seedcake from her mouth. However, while Bloom's experience eventuates in conception and transmits an affirmation of vitality, Uto's follows the abortion of his offspring and evokes this preemptive fatality as a recurring and inescapable condition.

^{xi} See Carlyle, Thomas. *The French Revolution*. Carlyle describes the French proletariat mob as an organic entity animated by ungovernable, primal energies. A cross-reference to Carlyle is pertinent here because, like Ito, he presents the crowd as a form of life that inhabits the border between humanity and monstrosity (or that reveals the commensurability of these categories).

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