

From Correlation to Corroboration: When the Weather Makes Sense of Death

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The term ‘Anthropocene’ appears once in Makoto Shinkai’s film *Weathering with You* near the end of the film. The title ‘Anthropocene: Education for the “New Geological Age”’ shows up as a course theme in an entrance guide the protagonist is consulting for an agricultural and engineering college. Its appearance in the film marks a transition from forms of knowledge associated with legend, myth, and folklore, which he navigated as a teenage boy to those associated with rationality and institutionalized education. The term appears here in the moment when the film suggests that the main character is about to transition into adulthood.

Shinkai’s animated films are wildly and globally popular with adolescent audiences. I suggest that this is not simply because his films, like this one, thematize adolescent experiences of crushes, romance, and running away. Instead, *Weathering with You* offers something that most films related to the Anthropocene – usually associated with the genres of documentary and science or speculative fiction – don’t. It advocates for the importance of psychic relief from the pressure of the concept of environmental crisis. The film explores the mechanics of achieving this relief rather than attempting to mobilize feelings of loss or crisis in service of any assumedly political imperative.¹ In what follows I argue that Shinkai’s narrative mobilization of adolescent fantasy can help

us to tease out the limitations of the idea of the Anthropocene when it is conceived of as a redescription of political and historical, rather than psychic, reality. Part of what I am suggesting is that the discourse of the Anthropocene inadvertently imagines a subject who will experience, witness, and/or study it. Psychoanalytic theory can help us to consider what psychological challenges – like depression, impotence, and feelings of grandiosity – face this subject, while films that engage this subject at the level of fantasy can help us contend with the political and affective challenges of living with the Anthropocene.

Prehistory of Anthropocene discourse

The discourse of the Anthropocene often presents the concept or idea itself as the culmination of maturational processes and a certain triumph of human reason over environmental conditions. The concept might seem to us like something new, but the impulse to produce it is not. Antonio Stoppani, the Italian geologist and formerly Catholic priest who coined the term ‘Anthropozoic era’ described a transition he saw required in the methods of geologists in order to account for the impact of human activity. In 1873 he wrote ‘if current geology, to understand finished epochs, has to study nature irrespective of man, future geology, to understand our own epoch, should study man irrespective of nature. So that future geologist, wishing to study our epoch’s geology, would end up narrating the history of human intelligence’ (Turpin, 2012: 40). In shifting to study the geological present, instead of the past, Stoppani imagined the future geologist would redescribe human history as geological history. Two and a half centuries later geologists are still working to complete the transition Stoppani suggested. This transition

would transform the observational perspective of geological methodology into this future one, cantilevered over the present, which can assess the indelibility and irreversibility of human inscriptive activity on and within the surface of the earth.ⁱⁱ

Accepting that the Anthropocene involves a shift in the capacity to read in the surface of the earth the effects of an open-ended present means accepting that the imprint of human activity will not be reversed or, at least, erased. It is, and will remain, legible. At the same time, the Anthropocene carries along with it a sense of the potentiality of inscription, that things could have happened differently, at the level of the species. The Anthropocene, understood as a conversion of the contingency of human history and environmental phenomena into legible and predictable narrative takes a couple of identifiable forms that I will track in this paper.

On the one hand, understood in this way, the Anthropocene suggests a capacity for a kind of species-level writing on the surface of the earth which can be read before it is written. This capacity requires an automation of perception – the future geologist that Stoppani suggested and which geologists continue to invoke. Imagining this future geologist’s perspective means imagining that human perception and the geologist’s capacity for observation might be made to issue from artificial structures or methods, from methodology itself, such that the gap between perception and normativity disappears. What will be seen in the future is what one ought to see now. On the other hand, the ‘Anthropocene’ suggests a corresponding frame for reading within which even an incidental shift in the composition of the earth’s surface appears readable in relation to human

activity.ⁱⁱⁱ This trajectory of the thought of the ‘Anthropocene’ recapitulates the history of European philosophical thought, which established the ‘force of necessity [as] the operational element in the post-Enlightenment philosophical infrastructure and political (juridic, economic, ethic, and symbolic) architecture’ (Silva, 2022: 47). Immanuel Kant’s own characterization of enlightenment as a trajectory of leaving the comforts of adolescence behind (‘It is so comfortable to be a minor!’) suggests how closely this trajectory of thought recapitulated in the development of the ‘Anthropocene’ is tied to an imperative to experience discomfort in the transition to adulthood (Kant, 1996: 17).

I suggest that the ‘Anthropocene’ often appears as a framework for interpreting and understanding environmental crisis which itself has emerged as a product of political, scientific, and historical development. The self-objectifying subject witnessing the Anthropocene, projected by geologists and animating the concerns of many Environmental Humanists, seems poised to achieve the Enlightenment’s promise of making a difficult transition from childhood to adulthood, similar to that transition characterized in psychoanalysis by the imposition of the reality principle. In some psychoanalytic traditions, this transition is thought to culminate in the forfeiting of ‘omnipotent fantasies’ which ‘dissolve’ into the omnipotence of ‘conditions’ (Ferenczi, 1950: 122). The film *Weathering with You* makes an argument about what forms of indeterminacy, and which capacities for enduring these, are lost and must be mourned if a transition to the ‘Anthropocene’ is to be witnessed and accepted. It allegorizes this transition to the end of adolescence, and its attendant losses.

I'm interpreting Shinkai's film in light of the way that psychoanalytic theory approaches fairy-tales as being stories about psychological realities, in particular the way that Sándor Ferenczi considers fairy-tales to provide information about the 'forfeited situation of omnipotence' present in the womb which, in child development, is compensated for by a series of omnipotence fantasies (Ferenczi, 1950: 127). Psychoanalytic theory offers one way of thinking about the history of the development of human intelligence which holds open the indeterminate space between voluntarism and determinism that many narratives about environmental destruction close off. Moreover, psychoanalytic theory complicates and, in some cases, diagnoses the Enlightenment fantasy of a shattered subject of history 'remade only insofar as it accepts itself as an object and a node' (Terada, 2023: 148-9). Shinkai's film allegorizes some of the losses which follow from accepting the Anthropocene and the subject it projects. In this way it offers an alternative to narratives of environmental crisis and natural disaster, including those thought to result from anthropogenic activity. As a fairy-tale, it imagines a subject of environmental crisis who prioritizes psychological relief and relational attachments over repairing the world (a traditional political and ethical motivator), and so might push us to question what passes for politics and ethics, in light of the Anthropocene, at all.

In the first half of the film *Hodaka Morishima*, the main character, abandons his high school education and runs away from home, leaving the remote island of his birth behind and moves to live on the streets of Tokyo. After a difficult start, he finds employment and housing in the apartment of a small business owner,

Keisuke Suga, whose firm produces gossip stories on paranormal activity for a tabloid magazine. Hodaka agrees to work for this man in exchange for room and board and is tasked with investigating the case of 'sunshine girls', who are rumored to be able to change the weather. Hodaka eventually meets a so-called 'sunshine girl', Hina, who is also living on the fringes of society as an underage orphan supporting her little brother in the city. They go into business together, making money off the fact that Hina's prayers can stop the rain. In that moment everything comes together, and a story of mysticism and love begins. An important piece of context for this story is that Tokyo has been beset by unparalleled levels of rainfall for at least a year. As a result, people are desperate enough for sunshine to risk the strangeness of paying a couple of kids to hold off the rain for a few hours. As one client admits, 'we may as well rely on luck.' Despite their incredulity, the risk pays off. Hina and Hodaka make money all around Tokyo bringing sunshine for special events as well as personal family memorials and birthdays.

While the sun appears without fail wherever Hina prays for it, she is thought of more as a bearer of good luck and thus positioned neither exactly as the purveyor of a service, nor as a kind of weather goddess that people can believe in. Instead, she is an intercessor, someone who can stabilize the relationship between chance and fate, mediating the possible and the inevitable. What Hina fails to disclose to Hodaka is that her body is turning slowly transparent, the more that she uses this mysterious ability, and that she is destined to become a human sacrifice. In fact, she begins to disappear the more that Hodaka starts believing she is not just lucky, but that she actually has a physical connection to the sky.

Along the way, while the reporters are conducting their investigations into the rumor of the sunshine girl, they meet a grandfather figure who admonishes the reporters who insist on the abnormality of the recent heavy rainfall. 'The news makes a big deal out of everything', he says, 'They always say things like record breaking, but when did their records start? 100 years ago?' Countering this perspective with his suggestion that the painting on his ceiling of a weather spirit is 800 years old he concludes that what this longer perspective suggests is that 'the weather can suddenly change on a whim, regardless of our human needs, so we cannot tell what is normal and what is not.' Suggesting that humans used to be more aware of this indeterminacy and undecidability in the past, he nevertheless affirms that weather maidens have the ability to 'mend the ailing weather', delivering the 'peoples' wishes to the sky.' According to the legend, one girl with these abilities is born into each village in every generation, although her use of these powers for the benefit of villagers eventually leads her to be sacrificed. When Hina finally disappears, seemingly due to this sacrificial logic, the rain that has been afflicting Tokyo stops, the sun returns, and the implication is that a kind of environmental balance has been restored. It seems like the figure of the sunshine girl was only necessary in an unbalanced world, the supernatural disturbance of whose climate was counterbalanced by her supernatural ability to intercede. The negation of her existence is the existence of a sunny Tokyo with balanced seasons. In this sense, the film argues that the idea of climatological balance requires the sacrifice of intermediary figures who hold open the intermediate space between chance and determination.

The gendering of the story of the ‘weather maiden’, as well as the supplementary role Hina plays in the development of the film’s male protagonist, deserves some consideration. Rie Karatsu has argued, with regard to Shinkai’s preceding global blockbuster of an animated film, *Your Name* (2016), that that film conservatively presented the reestablishment of a kind of equilibrium and the successful averting of natural disaster as having been ‘regained through the reinstatement of gender roles and norms’ (Karatsu, 2021: 282). In Karatsu’s reading, the normative gender roles involve an urban male savior figure for whom the female character, Mitsuha, associated with the countryside and who is positioned as a victim, also serves a merely supplementary role. Karatsu suggests that the association in this earlier film of ‘traditional femininity’ with the countryside, and with victimhood, as well as the female character’s position in binary opposition to the city and to the agency represented by the male protagonist, is continuous with State-sanctioned national discourse generated in the wake of the 3.11 tsunami and Fukushima disaster (Karatsu, 2021: 279). As Japan’s submission to the Academy Awards’ category of ‘Best International Feature Film’, *Weathering with You* deserves also to be read in light of the way that it has served as a vehicle for particular national values and cultural norms. Associations of femininity with practices of land and cultural stewardship, as well as with the nonhuman environment, have been mobilized ambivalently by feminist discourses. It might be argued that the supplementary and quasi-deified roles played by female figures in these two films prevent them from becoming fully formed protagonist figures in their own rights. At the same time, from psychoanalytic and materialist perspectives, the kind of reproductive labor involved in child development and often

performed by mothers, aligns femininity, or at least caregiving, in many cases with a kind of environmental function through and against which children and other dependents develop. For my part, I am not sure that were the gender roles in *Weathering with You* reversed, and the protagonist a female character, we would not still have to contend with the role that reproductive labor plays in constituting what counts as reality.

Weathering with You shows how the thought of global climate disaster, even as it is conceived of by environmentalists and climate scientists, is indebted to structural modes of thought, which eliminate the space between the possible and the inevitable.^{iv} These structural modes of thought facilitate the relationship between human history and a method for schematizing and interpreting it that seeks to make itself non-human. They call for affective responses like anxiety, sentimental approaches to loss, and a kind of coming-to-clarity which, construed as frustrated desires for improved conditions and political action, seem to vouch for the impoverishment, and hence realness of, reality itself. These modes of thinking forego considerations of psychic relief in favor of maintaining fraught states of complicity with history construed as fact. I think that films like *Weathering with You* might be so successful with younger audiences not for thematic reasons, but because they insist on the importance of psychological relief rather than political action, while retaining an image of a world in need of repair. Hina, as a character, holds open the space between realness and reality, between the possible and the inevitable, between what exists and taking responsibility for it. While it is true that everywhere that she prays for it, the sun appears amidst otherwise solid clouds, the film concedes that

the weather is uncontrollable. It remains undecidable whether Hina was overwhelmingly lucky, in the right place at the right time, or whether she actually had power over the local environmental conditions. As a figure, she emblemizes the difficulty of distinguishing external conditions (contingency, managed by luck and anticipation) from internal conditions (omnipotent power). When Hodaka begins to believe in the determinate nature of Hina's existence – that her existence as a sunshine girl is a kind of compensation for an unbalanced climate, her body, and this space between the possible and the inevitable, disappears from Hodaka's world.

Structural perspectives work to make environmental harm empirical and historical. This work relies on assumptions about the continuity of the non-human environment. Or, perhaps even better put, they rely on a conflation of the non-human environment with continuity even, or especially, as it is figured as that which continues to sustain damage. Evidence-based perceptual models of environmental harm demonstrate the accumulation, through time, of determinate violence.^v However, these perspectives limit the ways that people can relate to environmental destruction and to the loss associated with local instantiations of what is framed as a global problem. The options we seem to be left with by historicism and empiricism are affirmations or denials of complicity with historical preconditions both of which recur to the givenness of a global community. Makoto Shinkai's disaster films target the limits of historicist perspectives by focusing on sites of environmental damage where memories of those who experienced crises like meteor strikes, or the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, must be recuperated by future generations. Local environments in his films

house relics, ruins, or shrines where intergenerational memories threaten to burst sometimes literally out of the ground unless the locations are returned to or attended to. The task of keeping damage in the present involves reproducing the idea of an undamaged past. In order to keep this separation between past and present intact, the characters in Shinkai's films engage in an endless and intergenerational task of returning to and mourning sites of damage.^{vi} This work, in *Your Name*, *Weathering with You* and the more recent *Suzume* falls predominantly to feminine figures, often aligned with rural life and the countryside.

In *Weathering with You* the shrine gate is located at the top of a building in Tokyo which Hina passes through at the beginning of the film by accident, thereby becoming a sunshine girl. When she finally disappears and sunshine returns to Tokyo, Hodaka, who has fallen in love with her, refuses to leave things the way that they are. He returns to the dilapidated building housing the shrine despite being pursued by a variety of police and a quasi-parental authority figure who insists that he grow up and accept reality. Finally, he succeeds in making a kind of pilgrimage trek up to the roof where the gate is located. On crossing the threshold, he is able to locate her and bring her back with him from the world of the sky spirits to Tokyo. Upon returning, her sacrifice is reversed. The diluvial rains begin again, eventually flooding and sinking the city. Hodaka's understanding of this reversal as establishing his complicity in the order of things, in this case of having disrupted the balance of natural systems, haunts him through the rest of the film.

Omnipotence and Balance

After bringing Hina back, Hodaka is sent by the authorities to his rural hometown on an island far away from Tokyo where he finishes his high school education. Three years later he returns to what is left of the city to contend with the implications of his decision to save Hina and plunge Tokyo into the sea. On visiting an old woman and former client, however, who has been displaced by her family home due to the flooding, he finds her unwilling to accept his apology. The old woman rejects his attempt to take responsibility for sinking the city. 'Why are you apologizing?' she asks. 'Did you know', she continues, 'the entire area of Tokyo used to be under the sea? I think, until about 200 years ago. It was called Edo. Little by little, humans as well as the weather changed this landscape. Look at it now: it's sort of reverted back, back to its original self.' Here, two conceptions of climatological balance compete. Hodaka can only understand his decision as his own failure to save the city of Tokyo from sinking by accepting that Hina's disappearance represented a kind of sacrifice. Because Hodaka let the city sink, Hina can become just another person and is relieved of her exemplarity. Her position as supernatural intercessor is replaced by her givenness, she is just like any other girl now.

In Hodaka's fantasy of omnipotence the idea of a possible (if forfeited) restoration of environmental balance is dialectically linked to a logic of sacrifice. This fantasy mirrors much of the political environmental discourse generated in light of the idea of the Anthropocene: if the future were to be imagined as containing a technologically or politically achieved improvement on the present then death (for example

death associated with climate disaster) and the indelible damage left in the geological record must be understood as sacrificial, and thus recuperable in some way. The old woman's perspective, on the other hand, while parallel, demonstrates a couple of differences. For her, the idea of balance is still present, though on a longer timescale. By her account a certain kind of environmental balance has been restored as Tokyo was returned to the sea, although she does not conceive of her own displacement as a sacrifice. We might consider her to be more mature, well-adjusted, and further along the developmental path than the younger main character. She seems to understand her place in the world in a more passive sense – she has only been affected by forces beyond her control, and of Hodaka's.

In his articulation of the 'Stages of the Development of Reality' the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi articulates the periods of psychological development that a child passes through on the way to developing a 'reality sense', including different periods of omnipotent fantasizing activity such as the 'Period of omnipotence by the help of magic gestures' and the 'period of magic thoughts and magic words' (Ferenczi, 1950: 117). These periods involve the child's ability to distinguish between internal and external reality and culminate in a developmental 'epoch' when the 'feeling of omnipotence gives way to the full appreciation of the force of circumstances' (Ferenczi, 1950: 122). In the film, Hodaka is suspended on the threshold of accomplishing this last task of childhood. The film portrays Hodaka's belief in Hina's determinate existence, such that her disappearance would restore balance to the world, as a kind of resistance to reality and the susceptibility of human life to the 'force of

circumstances', which the older woman seems to have completely embraced.

While, for Hodaka, climatological forces (rain and sunshine) corroborate human emotions, especially his own, for the older woman climatological forces corroborate themselves. Hodaka represents a kind of Hegelian figure who believes that the historical continuity of a present time and space *has been enabled* and protected by the sacrificial negation of other times and spaces. The old woman's suggestion, on the other hand, that Tokyo has simply reverted to a prior state that appears on a longer timeline makes Hodaka's obsession with his own complicity in the weather's shifting patterns seem like a childish overblown fantasy of his own omnipotence. While Hodaka seems to think that things might have turned out differently if he had restrained his selfish impulses to bring Hina back, the woman's comment leads the audience to wonder whether the sunshine which appeared when the girl disappeared was just a coincidence, itself a smaller divergence in a longer and more inevitable pattern of Tokyo sinking back into the sea. The old woman represents a kind of relativizing environmentalism that is in tension with the idea of the Anthropocene. This perspective seems to offer the relief of erasure – that human influence, civilization, and damage might well sink back into the sea like the city of Tokyo in the film, that the longer temporal frame of the earth guarantees a horizon of human insignificance.

At the end of the film Hodaka rejects the woman's suggestion. What he observes in the landscape is not a restored equilibrium caused by the force of circumstances. Ultimately, refusing to forfeit his fantasy of omnipotence, on catching sight of Hina

again he verbalizes this resistance, exclaiming ‘No! They’re wrong. That day I – we changed the world. I made a choice. I chose her. I chose this world, and I choose to live in it!’ Hodaka’s omnipotent fantasy disappears, but in exchange he acquires the capacity to find his own traces everywhere in the landscape of the submerged city. In this way the film suggests that historicist approaches to environmental destruction and its relationship to conceptions of ecological balance limit our ways of thinking not only about the environment (for example, on the larger temporal scale that the older woman suggests) but of loss.^{vii} The givenness of the observable world that would resolve into a history of indelible human inscription is actually invested with the vestiges of omnipotent fantasy. Although it is tempting to say that geological history is now internal to human history (or, even, vice versa as the human becomes geological agent), this requires accepting the sense that human history has been inscribed on a surface which can both receive damage and retain its inscription. The film suggests that reading the givenness of the world and the empirical nature of the data which can be observed in its surface requires an assumption that something persists beyond human history. Who or what is this surface? Here, the question of gender emerges again, for while environmental damage may seem to constitute a sphere of action and of responsiveness on the part of humans at both an individual and collective level, another question arises of the scale of reproductive labor that persistently constitutes a reality that might be seen as affectable and as able to be destroyed.

While the older woman’s perspective seems to offer relief to the obsessive child convinced of his omnipotence, it only represents a renunciation of the omnipotent fantasies which are a part of human

development and, as Ferenczi would have it, the residues of the impact of geological changes on developmental psychology. That Hodaka resolves these two perspectives into an investment in the empirical world and the externalization of his internal conflict suggests that he will go on to be a good climate scientist. A psychoanalytic approach, however, suggests that the accomplishment of a transition into the Anthropocene relies on representing loss in a determinate way, thereby limiting a conception of truly irreversible loss, loss ‘as minimal as the passing of time’, which inheres psychologically as the ‘internalized aspect of the external world’ (Trapp, 2021: 3).^{viii}

Reality Principle – Omnipotent fantasy and the weather

In April 2020, the Los Angeles Times reported on several years of intensifying drought conditions in the U.S. state of California, recharacterizing the ongoing dry spell as a ‘megadrought.’ With the framing provided by a study by the Earth Institute of Columbia University, the reporters suggest that the previous years’ drought conditions represent the beginning of a longer stable period of drought, a ‘megadrought’, which could no longer be reversed by a couple of years of higher-than-average rainfall (Duginski, 2020). Based largely on studies of tree rings, some of the closest biological material to rock in terms of its age and ability to hold inscriptions, researchers had apparently encountered the existence of four decades-long megadroughts over the last 1200 years, the longest of which had lasted a century. Although only in its early stages, the recurrent droughts in the 2010s were compared with these historical ones on the basis of climate models which suggested that the earlier

megadroughts had begun in similar ways. Here the climatologists find themselves in a similar position as the geologists studying the Anthropocene as they interpret data which has not yet resolved into the historical distance where traditional methodologies of observation and interpretation would pertain for historically 'completed' phenomena. The current drought, or 'megadrought', the article reported, 'is more widespread and more consistent', than others, 'which researchers attribute to global warming' (Duginski, 2020). Here, human impact is characterized by the increasingly 'widespread and consistent' nature of a phenomenon which, nevertheless, may have occurred before.

Nevertheless, despite the several periods of intense drought experienced in the state during the twentieth century, a former climatologist at NASA's Jet Propulsion laboratory suggested, based on these findings, that the century as a whole could in fact be characterized as 'the wettest in the last 1,200 years' (Duginski, 2020). This reframing seemed to suggest that, despite drought conditions intensified by human-induced climate change, these conditions actually represent a return to what appears more like a drier resting state over the longer time period. From this perspective, mid-century estimations of the region's water resources for future planning seem to have been overly 'optimistic' (Duginski, 2020). In this article the Anthropocene is never mentioned but is at the same time presented as a kind of triumph of human consciousness which, seemingly negated by the perspective of a future observer simulated by the technology of climate modeling, can understand its future past errors and become historical. The upshot is an ability to make more conscious, i.e. sustainable, decisions about resource management, or to agitate

for the removal of insufficient, dangerous, or damaging systems. I am not trying to negate the importance of those activities, but seeking to open a different space which considers climate crisis not as empirical and historical fact, but as a psychological fact.

A year later, in April of 2021, the newspaper again reported on drought conditions in the state, once again contextualizing recent climate conditions within longer multi-century frame while being sure to mention the exemplarity of this most recent ‘megadrought’ as one intensified by human activity. According to some researchers, the article states, this time that ‘human-caused climate change is driving its severity – and will make it that much harder to climb back out of’ (Wigglesworth, 2021). According to a bioclimatologist quoted in the next paragraph, ‘If this drought was totally due to natural variability, then we would at least have the comfort of knowing at some point, good luck is very likely to show up again and this is going to end’ (Wigglesworth, 2021). Here, as in much reporting on human-driven climate change, the effects of human activity are associated with an exemplary status of observed climatological shifts. These phenomena are no longer merely observable but are taken to be exemplary of an increasing irreversibility of such shifts. Whereas ‘natural variability’ to which the bioclimatologist refers is characterized by shifting luck and the possibility for reversal, the variability of climate conditions due to human activity (this article cites a quantified estimate that ‘human-caused climate trends have accounted for about 40% of the average soil moisture deficit in the 2000s’) is deemed exemplary because these shifts are no longer reversible on the basis of ‘good luck’ or chance (Wigglesworth, 2021). From this perspective

luck and chance are expelled from an understanding of human-driven climate change as something already accomplished and inscribed, whose trajectory is insulated from external or non-human environmental factors or shifts. It's worth saying that I'm not trying to contest the findings and heavily qualified predictions of the climate scientists cited in these articles. Rather, I'm interested in what image of human behavior and history results from the representation of human-induced climate change as exemplary on an extended biological or geological scale.

The old man in *Weathering with You* admonishes the reporters who think they know what normal and abnormal rainfall are, suggesting that placing human activity within a larger timeframe might illustrate a kind of capacity to be affected by the weather which 'can suddenly change on a whim.' The weather maiden holds this space open, of a relation between collective human intentions and the capriciousness of the sky. While narratively exploited for her position between subjective and objective reality – a position that, I argue, is associated with the way that reproductive labor constitutes environmental continuities – she shows the capacity for changes in the weather to corroborate human emotions and historical narratives. The givenness of the observable world is a result of her disappearance. In a more recent L.A. Times article from this year, also covering the drought patterns, an invocation of John Steinbeck serves a kind of admonishing purpose, suggesting that too much short-term thinking and reactivity gets in the way of longer-term sustainable thinking and planning. The article emphasized the continuity of past drought years with the expanded frame of the 'megadrought' paradigm, insisting in the headline that the state is 'between droughts right now' (Fonseca, 2023). One

hydroclimatologist referenced a line from John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden*, which reads 'And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry year. It was always that way' (Fonseca, 2023). The idea of sustainable resource management conflates observation and speculation, suggesting that the indeterminate space between human activity, and human susceptibility to climatological shifts, can be resolved through conservation, management, and the imposition of instrumental reason. The limitedness or perceived failure of this idea opens questions about human capacities for anticipation and understanding the continuities and capriciousness of the empirical world, writ large.

In *Weathering with You*, the 'Anthropocene' hovers in the background as an object of potential study for the main character once he forfeits his fantasy of omnipotence. The problem that seems to face Hodaka as he confronts the prospect of his own 'education for a geological age' is what to do with these fantasies. From the perspective of a global environmentalism which would read geological history as a 'history of human intelligence', as Stoppani originally suggested, the idea of an interceding figure like the weather maiden appears as a myth (Turpin, 2012: 40). But what also disappears, as Stoppani concedes, in the conversion of geological history into a history of human intelligence, is nature itself. As he wrote, in this case, 'man must be studied irrespective of nature' (Turpin, 2012: 40). Psychoanalytic accounts of loss and the environment would disagree. From the perspective of rationality, the idea that some of the non-rational aspects of non-human nature, like the indeterminacy of the weather, might actually be internal to human experience is externalized in the form of mythical figures. *Weathering with You* stages the main character's entrance into rationality as a forfeiting of fantasies of omnipotence, but it also suggests

that these fantasies might persist in our sense of the givenness of the world. I would like to follow critic Anne-Lise François and philosopher Frederic Neyrat in asking: is it possible to have an account of environmental destruction without a narrative of all-pervasive environmental harm?

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ⁱ When read this way, it might seem that I am arguing in favor of a kind of complacency about environmental crisis to which some viewers see the film contributing. In shifting environmentalism's focus away from redress or repair towards a prerogative of achieving relief in a damaged world, it might seem that I am suggesting that there is nothing to be done to solve the problems that climate crisis introduces. All I can say, provisionally, here, in response to this concern first raised to me by Rachel Haejin Lim, is that I am interested in what a politics that emphasizes the difficulties and importance

of achieving psychic relief might be. This position may seem to return us to a neoliberalist emphasis on individual comfort over or in exchange for practices of collective action. However, I would argue that accounting for the difficulties of achieving psychic relief is required for adequately diagnosing problems – environmental and political – that threaten collective life as well as for considering what does and can constitute a collective.

ⁱⁱ In their book *Planetary Social Thought*, Nigel Clark and Bronislaw Szerszynski frame this shift in geoscientific perspectives, explaining that ‘To attain formal recognition for the Anthropocene, “the ‘geological Signal’ currently being produced in strata now forming must be sufficiently large, clear and distinctive” (Anthropocene Working Group 2019). Not only must this “footprint” be an effectively permanent addition to the lithic composition of the Earth’s crust, it also needs to be geosynchronous – that is, distributed across the planet’s surface at approximately the same time’ (Clark, 2021: 18). To make this determination, stratigraphers ‘must orient themselves towards the lithographic signals that may or may not be discernible to a hypothetical observer far in the future, bringing a strongly speculative element into the debate. [They] find themselves in the novel predicament of attending to contemporary or recent activities in order to predict which will be the best candidates for long-term fossilization’ (Clark, 2021: 18).

ⁱⁱⁱ This reading practice supplants a need for religious paradigms, which would invoke teleological ends for naturalistic phenomena, replacing these with a givenness of what Frederic Neyrat calls the ‘unconstructable earth’ much as geology supplanted Catholicism for Stoppani.

^{iv} The structural perspective works to make environmental harm historical and, in so doing, limits the ways that people can relate to environmental harm and to the loss associated with local instantiations of what is most often understood as a global problem. Ramachandra Guha similarly traces the negative dialectic of radical strands of environmental thought, showing that the thought of ‘ecological degradation’ is inseparable from an idealization of a world without humans (Guha, 1989: 2). His critique is a partial one, however, substituting a clearly limited environmentalist dialectic of human and environment for a politically instrumentalizable and so, for him, preferable, dialectic of ‘economic and political structures’, positing ‘sheer survival’ subsistence relationships to local environmental resources as external to and, thus, similarly determinate negations of global capitalism and Western environmental ideology (Guha, 1989: 2). In this case subsistence, rather than ‘wilderness’, is ‘the term that is asked to provide imaginaries of continuity, timelessness, and consistency’ (Baginski et al, 2018: 3).

^v These perspectives can of course be valuable in demonstrating the continuity and interconnection of forms of structural violence which take an environmental toll (e.g. environmental racism). For example, structural approaches to determinate violence can connect a history of damage caused by imperial U.S. military violence (fallout from nuclear testing) in the Marshall Islands, to the increased threat posed by sea level rise, which will

lead to increased leaching of plutonium from the Runit Dome constructed there to contain nuclear waste, intensifying the threat to islanders' livelihood and health (DeLoughrey, 2019: 101).

^{vi} In keeping with a popular and overly idealistic conflation of Shintoism with contemporary environmentalism, Shinto shrines, and Torii gates figure heavily in the films as these sites where the past seems capable of bursting into the present and the flow of time easily and cataclysmically reversed. The association of the space of the shrine with a space of conservation – whether of traditional (gender) values or of local ecology represented by shrine forests – makes them places where the separation of church and state or religious and secular education seems to present issues for understanding and administering the relationship between human affairs and the non-human environment. *Weathering with You* was released in 2019. In June, 2014, representatives of major world religions, as well as the UN and major NGOs were welcomed at the Shinto shrines of Ise for a conference titled 'Tradition for the Future: Culture, Faith and Values for a Sustainable Plane.' Shortly thereafter the Assistant Secretary General of the UN, Olav Kjørven, published a reflection on his time at the event, describing it as 'a ceremony that committed the Shinto to the cause of building a more sustainable and peaceful world, drawing on their unique vision of humanity's oneness with nature' (Kjørven, 2014). Shintoism has been idealistically associated with contemporary environmentalism since the 1970s both in Japan and abroad. Western environmentalists have frequently turned to non-Western spiritual framings of the relationship between human and an animistic non-human nature as a kind of palliative substitute for more guilt-driven conceptions of human history. This desire surfaces in Kjørven's reflection as an appropriative desire for otherness. He states in a parenthetical question about his grandfather, a farmer, '(I sometimes wonder if my grandfather was at least partly -- and, again, unknowingly -- a Shinto?)' (Kjørven 2014). Shinkai's film, following on his global blockbuster film *Your Name*, clearly capitalizes on these recently reinvigorated associations. The relationship between Shintoism as a religion and environmentalism is not straightforward or clear and claims for its 'indigeneity' mostly rest on instrumental reconstructions of a distant cultural past have been mobilized as often in service of conservative nationalist ideology.

^{vii} Funnily enough, Ferenczi anchors the universality of his theory of child developmental psychology to 'geological changes in the surface of the earth' (Ferenczi, 1950: 125). It's possible for him to generalize about the 'development of the reality-sense.... To which mankind was compelled' because of a more general subjection he imagines of the development of the species to environmental conditions (Ferenczi, 1950: 125). Psychological development doesn't just happen for its own sake but was 'made necessary' and entailed 'adjustment to a demanded renunciation' (Ferenczi, 1950: 125). In this sense, for Ferenczi, psychological 'development' as a generalizable characteristic of human existence was itself compelled by changes in the surface of the earth. The catastrophic consequences of these changes for 'primitive man', and their 'temporal localization and intensity', he suggests 'may have decided the character and the neuroses of the race' (Ferenczi, 1950: 125).

viii 'Our act of "destruction" of the environment (pollution) is also a recuperative effort, and while we might consider recuperation as overcoming the effects of destructiveness, Searles helps us to see how disavowing the destructiveness of recuperative work prevents us not just from understanding but from experiencing the conflict between these internally. The experience of this conflict, the ability to have a strong "inner world", figures as the ability to tolerate "our most primitive conflicts" rather than externalizing and reifying them, which contributes to a cycle in which these primitive anxieties are "evoke[d]" by the world (by the realities of climate change, for example) and also then projected onto the external world in order to "assuage" those anxieties. For Searles, this "delusional" promise to assuage anxieties is what is on offer from technology, which takes from us these human experiences of anxiety and our capacity to tolerate internally the destructive, omnipotent aspects of our human being. As Searles would have it, the crisis of the nonhuman environment is not brought about by the hydrogen bomb or by the "slowly lethal effect of pollution from our overall technology" but by "the pull upon us to be omnipotently free of human conflict"' (Trapp, 2021: 242).