

## ■ Nature and the Smiths in Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*

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### Abstract

Hayao Miyazaki is a keen observer of ecological problems. What he bears in mind and tries desperately to deliver, through his animated films, is a simple but critical message: to survive by coexisting with other beings. Following the steps of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, an earlier work that depicts a way to survive nuclear bombing, Miyazaki's animated film *Princess Mononoke* deeply conveys the human aspiration to survive. However, the film ends with a seemingly harmonious but uncanny equilibrium, a kind of a draw between nature and the human. We are in the dark regarding what will happen next. *Princess Mononoke* leads the audience to ponder the future: when ecological crises have become daily fare and when the uncanny balance between nature and the human has reached a critical turning point, how can humanity survive? This question leads us to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concepts of eco-philosophy and the smiths (metallurgists). The dilemma faced by the smiths in Tatara town epitomizes what human beings encounter in their daily lives. On the one hand, humans subordinate themselves to the state apparatus, whether politically, economically, or culturally, and have a tense relationship with it; on the other hand, they exploit nature regardless of the consequences such as the incessant ecological catastrophes (global warming, depletion of ozone layer, and many others). *Princess Mononoke*, though criticizing humanity, still portrays a sustainable coexistence of nature and mankind, showing how nature and humans are already entwined and how the smiths, though often forced by the empire to follow its orders, possess the ability to turn their arborescent space

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(Received 5 June 2018; Accepted 22 March 2019)

into a mediating holey space where real communication and affect can take shape. In a way, this Deleuzian route solves the conundrum of the conflict between nature and the human since the smiths function as the mediators that can unlock the fixed relationship between nature and humans.

**Keywords:** Deleuze, Guattari, Miyazaki, *Princess Mononoke*, ecophilosophy, smiths, holey space

Hayao Miyazaki deals with ecological issues in many of his animated films, such as *My Neighbor Totoro*, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Ponyo*. These animated films raise viewers' awareness of ecological disasters and humans' roles in them. In each of these films, Miyazaki depicts this relationship in a different way. For example, there is a sharp contrast between the films *Nausicaä* and *Princess Mononoke*. In *Nausicaä*, humans have a much closer bond with nature than in *Princess Mononoke*. Instead, *Princess Mononoke* shows the complicated relationship between nature and humanity via its ambiguous ending. Miyazaki seems to depict the dichotomy between nature and humanity, but under the surface, something more complex is going on. Shishigami takes control of nature while Princess Mononoke, San, serves as its guardian. On the other hand, Eboshi reigns over Tatara town and serves as a representative of humanity. Miyazaki creates another character, Prince Ashitaka from the Emishi clan, who functions as the mediator between nature and humans, thereby making the plot more complex and nuanced.

In *Princess Mononoke*, the integration of human activities, interventions, and politics becomes a consideration of ecological sustenance, since nature and culture are already interwoven as "natureculture," as Donna Haraway claims (12). Embracing nature no longer ensures the survival of either the natural or the human world, since there is no pristine nature for human beings to return to for redemption. The survival of nature and humanity depends not on single-mindedly embracing nature or technology, but on being aware of how human history and natural history are interconnected.

The human aspiration to survive is the main theme in Miyazaki's animated films. *Nausicaä* reflects how the Japanese strived to survive after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear bombings (Akimoto 56).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, *Spirited Away* portrays how Sen struggles to regain her name and Haku's name and survives in an alienated capitalistic land. Furthermore, Ashitaka in *Princess Mononoke* profoundly conveys the human aspiration to survive. When Ashitaka kills one of the boar gods, a tatarigami, he is exiled from his village because the dying god casts a curse on him. He is propelled to proceed on a journey of healing and salvation. The shaman tells him, "When you go to the West, remember to see everything with unclouded eyes. Then you might find the way to survive." *Princess Mononoke* ends with a seemingly harmonious but uncanny equilibrium, which acts as a kind of a draw between nature and humanity (Napier 189), leading the audience to ponder

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<sup>1</sup> Many critics point out the analogous relationship between *Nausicaä*'s toxic jungle and nuclear winter after the nuclear bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For example, Daisuke Akimoto claims that "although Director Miyazaki did not explicitly mention nuclear issues, the film reminds the audience of the image of nuclear war and nuclear winter."

the future: when ecological crises become daily fare and the uncanny balance between nature and the human has reached a critical turning point, one begins to ask how humanity can survive. This question leads us to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concepts of ecophilosophy and the smiths (metallurgists). Though the smiths do not live in a cave or tunnel like the smiths depicted in *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari, in this paper I still treat them as smiths that live in holey space because they still follow, in principle, the spirit of the smiths. For example, they retrieve metal, encounter nomads, and build a hideout for themselves in Tatara town to protect themselves from the empire.

The first section of this paper deals with how Miyazaki's ecological philosophy delineated in *Princess Mononoke* echoes Deleuze's concept of naturalism (ecophilosophy). Deleuze is well aware of the impossibility of humans returning to a pristine nature (Hayden 124) and the interconnectedness between nature and culture. His concept of "naturalism is not an essentialistic theory nostalgically seeking a return to some pristine nature that is an object apart from human existence, conceptualization, and intervention" (125). Likewise, Miyazaki is aware of the interconnected relationship between nature and culture. Tracey Daniels-Lerberg and Matthew Lerberg claim that "*Princess Mononoke* avoids the sentimental trap of pure nostalgia often associated with what Lawrence Buell identifies with the romantic pastoral, and instead exposes the problematic western fable in which taking sides as it pertains to environmental disaster might lead to a satisfactory resolution" (59). Single-mindedly embracing nature or putting human technology and welfare above nature seems unpromising in the process of solving global and local ecological problems.

Miyazaki creates the character Ashitaka to explore the possibility of dealing with ecological problems, the conflict between nature and humans. Ashitaka's role as a mediator or "inbetweener" in *Princess Mononoke* endows him with the ability to see through the special situations and needs of local space, in this case, Tatara town. His love for San triggers him to pay attention to the local ecopolitical problems related to Tatara town. In Tatara town, we see a factory where they mine iron ore so as to make weapons. Ore mining and deforestation have impacted San's natural world tremendously. When the smiths ruthlessly sabotage nature and when Eboshi beheads the Forest Spirit Shishigami, there is an immediate ecological catastrophe. After the ecological catastrophe, Ashitaka plans to rebuild Tatara town with Eboshi in the hopes of rescuing humanity and protecting his lover San at the same time. Ashitaka's trajectory demonstrates a possibility for the coexistence between nature and humans. He keeps ecological sustainability in mind while developing technology and tries to save the natural and human worlds simultaneously. Under his influence, Eboshi eventually realizes that "her adversaries saved her,"

which “implies a change in her approach” (Daniels-Lerberg and Lerberg 70).

Ashitaka's survival strategy for the coexistence of nature and humans is viable because he employs the specific advantages of Tatara town and satisfies its needs. Tatara town is mainly composed of minority groups, some of whom are ex-prostitutes or lepers, who have become smiths with the skills to mine ore and make firearms. The metal retrieved from the forest allows the villagers to negotiate with the empire and survive on their own. This resonates with Deleuze's environmental strategy and the importance of focusing on “the specific needs and alternative possibilities within localized situations” (Hayden 123). Ashitaka notices what Eboshi neglects: the strategic and mediating role of the smiths themselves. That is, though the smiths know how to retrieve metal from the forest, they should learn how to establish a bond with the nomads in the forest and thereby strike a balance between nature and humans.<sup>2</sup> Once the smiths know how to cooperate with the Yamato court and the nomadic natural beings in the forest, they can employ the metal and lead a prosperous and peaceful life. However, how can this be achieved? The smiths should appropriate the chaotic force of the nomads and the striating force of the Yamato court at the same time. The second section of this paper explores these concepts in more depth.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari explore how a particular group, smiths or metallurgists, can create a “holey” space that combines and employs the forces of striated and smooth space (413-15). The smiths mediate between the state apparatus and the nomads, striated space and smooth space. For Deleuze and Guattari,

[t]he state apparatus is propelled by the overcoded coordinates of a particular ordering—either the creation and maintenance of closed boundary projects or, more recently, the reterritorialization of matter-flow in the name of market logic. The essence of the nomad, on the other hand, is to “occupy and hold a smooth space,” the provisional and positive territorialization of an unstable multiplicity always on the threshold of following a line of flight to the outside. (Hantel)

Hantel explains that striated and smooth space both embody territorializations. However, you can distinguish them by their boundaries: they are either “unstable lines of flight or overcoded sedimentations.”

If we interpret *Princess Mononoke* in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the smith, we can see the Yamato court as a state apparatus that dominates stri-

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<sup>2</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari propose that the nomad “has a territory; he follows customary paths”; for him, “every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the *intermezzo*” (380). The nomads' lives are characterized by movement and change instead of being striated by state apparatus.

ated space, whereas the beasts and the animal gods represent the nomads roaming smooth space. While the empire wants to control and condition the fluid force of the smiths, the smiths brilliantly position themselves as double agents. On the one hand, they follow what the empire ordains, while on the other they plan to escape from the empire's conditioning by retrieving the metal from the nomadic forest. The nomads' deterritorializing force could help them to gain lines of flight and a holey space that can trigger changes. This exhibits a complex relationship between the smiths, the state apparatus, and the nomads.

The holey space created by the smiths functions as the power to resist the rigid system. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "holey space" is the kind of space created by mining (Adkins 212). As H el ene Frichot explains: "Holey space facilitates the pace of a groping experimentation, stopping and starting again across a plane of immanence, but in connection with local material conditions" (177). Frichot illustrates how the flight of the refugee can constitute an act of creating holey space, a way to resist the dominant state apparatus. In *Princess Mononoke*, the iron town of Tatara town serves as the base for an experiment of resistance, resisting the appropriation of the Yamato court. Ashitaka helps Eboshi and the smiths to reconcile humanity with nature and rebuild Tatara town with ecological sustenance in mind. This act represents a willingness to respect material conditions in the local space and its entwined relationship with nature. In one of the scenes, Ashitaka asks Moro, the wolf god and San's foster mother, "Moro, is there any way that the forest and humans can coexist without conflicts? Is it really true that there is no other way?" (Miyazaki). This poignantly reflects the conflict and dilemma between humans and nature. The combination of the local ecopolitics, nature, and the mediating smiths creates the dynamic quality of holey space; taken together, these elements allow for a tentative reply to the question of how humans can survive in our turbulent, catastrophic age.

### **The Sustainable Coexistence of Nature and Mankind**

It is necessary to be aware of Miyazaki's implicit message of, in Patrick Hayden's words, the "conjunction of naturalism and politics" (123) in *Princess Mononoke*. Miyazaki's philosophy echoes Deleuze's concept of ecophilosophy. Miyazaki, like Deleuze, calls for attention on not only the bond with nature but also the local economic and political situation, as well as their impact on the balance of the ecosystem. Hayden points out that Deleuze casts doubt on the naive claim that it is possible to restore pristine nature. Deleuze tries to develop his own ecophilosophy. He does not call for a return to a pristine, divine nature,

but for a political philosophy “articulated in ecological terms” (Hayden 123).

What is Deleuze’s ecophilosophy? First, he follows Nietzsche in stressing the importance of a “de-deification” of nature. Likewise, in *Princess Mononoke*, we witness the process of “de-deification” of nature via Eboshi’s defiant act of beheading the forest god, Shishigami. Furthermore, Deleuze refuses to consider nature as “the site of divine purposiveness, static essences, and transcendent moral ideals” (Hayden 125). Deleuze criticizes static nature. For him, nature is not composed of static elements, but rather it is a constant flux and formation of contingent assemblages with other elements (Herzogenrath 3).<sup>3</sup> Along with this concept, Deleuze develops a second principle: he highlights the blurred boundary between nature and humanity, claiming that we should be aware that “[h]uman history and natural history are therefore caught up together in the same immanent movements of change” (Hayden 125). In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari propose that “Nature = Industry, Nature = History” (25). They claim that this is possible because they subvert the dichotomy between nature and humanity and treat elements in the world as machines. We can say that “*Anti-Oedipus* seeks to discover the ‘deterritorialized’ flows of desire” (xvi) and sees everything as a machine. For them, “[e]verything is a machine” (9). In fact, “[e]verywhere it is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections” (8). The distinction between human and inhuman is blurred: “There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing-machines, desiring-machines everywhere” (9). The whole cosmos is composed of machinic assemblages. If every element, organic or inorganic, human or nonhuman, is deemed a machine, then the world or the cosmos is composed of machinic assemblages that ceaselessly converge and diverge.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the relationship between nature and humans is complicated and full of economic considerations and political interventions.

Before we discuss the possibility of linking nature and humans in *Princess Mononoke*, we have to show how the film begins by presenting the relationship

<sup>3</sup> According to Bernd Herzogenrath, “the natural environment is in itself turbulent, far from equilibrium” (3).

<sup>4</sup> Eugene Holland summarizes it beautifully: “the whole (the cosmos) is composed entirely of contingent assemblages nested contingently within other, equally-contingent assemblages, of which the human (and other) species’ situation within the biosphere is one among many.” This concept resonates with Henri Bergson’s concept of duration: man is only one of the durations among many (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 33). This concept also finds its counterpart in Timothy Morton’s concept of the “mesh,” meaning that everything is interconnected. Of course, we can see the subtle differences between their concepts; nevertheless, the convergence is intriguing.

between nature and humans as antagonistic.<sup>5</sup> We can see the dichotomy between nature and humanity in the film. Shishigami and Princess Mononoke, San, function as the guardians of nature while Eboshi represents humanity. Prince Ashitaka from the Emishi clan functions as the mediator between nature and the humans in *Princess Mononoke*. This seems to follow the western dichotomy between nature and humanity.

Miyazaki moves on to complicate the story by blurring the boundary between nature and the human and shows the possibility that humans can coexist with nature.<sup>6</sup> I will use four examples to illustrate a sustainable coexistence of nature and humanity. First, San's identity as half human and half animal shows that nature and humans are not totally separate, but rather they form sets of assemblages. Second, Ashitaka's contagious relationship with the tatarigami indicates the connection between humans and animals via a virus. Third, Eboshi's complicated relationship with nature reveals the interconnectedness between nature and humanity. Fourth, I will explore how the disaster caused by Shishigami's beheading is simultaneously a natural catastrophe and a social event.

The first case regarding the sustainable coexistence of nature and mankind is San's identity as half human and half animal. This resonates with Haraway's concept of "natureculture." Critics use San's process of becoming-animal to show how the boundary between humanity and animality is arbitrary (Wu 100; Daniels-Lerberg and Lerberg 64). Though San's identity oscillates between humans and animals, she refuses to identify herself with humans and associates "almost exclusively with animal gods" (McHugh 8) since her human parents have abandoned her to be raised by the wolf god Moro. She speaks for the beasts and animal gods in the forest. Likewise, Daniels-Lerberg and Lerberg claim that "San's alliance with the wolf clan, therefore, stems from linking (and) rather than defining (to be). She becomes part of the pack, an assemblage of human, non-human, history and myth" (64).

Second, Ashitaka oscillates between the two poles (nature and the human) and reveals their coexistence if we consider his infection at the hands of the demonic boar god, the tatarigami, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of contagion, demonstrating the possibility that two beings can interpenetrate each other.<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>5</sup> Miyazaki's nature refers not to a homogenous entity, but a turbulent, self-transforming whole that can form symbiotic alliances with other elements. For example, in *Princess Mononoke*, the forest is heterogeneous, full of different kinds of kamis and animals, such as Shishigami, the tatarigami, boars, apes, kodamas, and many others.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, it is not only the dichotomy between nature and humans. We can see the three elements interacting in the animated film: humans, animals, and animal gods (McHugh 8-14).

<sup>7</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari propose the concept of contagion to explore the possibility for viruses to connect two beings. Tracy Daniels-Lerberg and Matthew Lerberg also explore Ashitaka's contagious relationship with Nago, the tatarigami, via Deleuze and Guattari's concept of contagion.



*Princess Mononoke*, Ashitaka's right arm is marked by the tatarigami's curse, which is shown as a snake-like shape. The curse caused by hatred is the virus that links Ashitaka and the tatarigami: Ashitaka tells San and Eboshi that "these snakes live in my body and take the form of a hateful grudge" (Miyazaki). The demonic possession ironically forces Ashitaka to bond with the tatarigami in a certain way.

The virus in *Princess Mononoke* echoes Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the virus in *A Thousand Plateaus*. They explore how viruses link two beings, breaking the model of arborescent descent. They use the example of "Benveniste and Todaro's current research on a type C virus, with its double connection to baboon DNA and the DNA of certain kinds of domestic cats" (10) to lay bare the possibility that evolutionary schemas can be rewritten and follow a rhizomatic pattern. Type C viruses trigger one being to form a rhizome with other animals. We see, for example, unlikely alliances such as "a becoming-baboon in the cat" (11).

In *Princess Mononoke*, Ashitaka's relationship with the demonic boar god, the tatarigami, can be analyzed as a contagious one that renders possible the communication between them. While Ashitaka is infected with the tatarigami's curse and vengeful hatred, he can understand its (and, by extension, nature's) rage caused by human destruction of nature, regardless of the survival of the ecosystem as a whole. Though he strives to rid himself of the curse and searches for healing, he is instead forced to recognize the heart of darkness within himself and humanity in general. The curse helps him understand the complicated and interconnected relationship between nature and humankind and the related link between "humans, animals, and animal gods" (McHugh 8). His mediation helps humans attain the sustainable coexistence of nature and humanity: "Ashitaka mediates other hybrid relations that involve his animal companion Yakkuru and his newfound love interest, the Princess Mononoke" (McHugh 8). His bond with Yakkuru and Princess Mononoke, San, shows that unlikely alliances can be formed: the "[t]ransversal communications between different lines scramble the genealogical trees," in addition to effective communication and symbiotic coexistence (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 11).

The third example regards the sustainable coexistence of nature and mankind: Eboshi's complicated relationship with nature. Eboshi is a complicated character.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Many critics are aware of Eboshi's complicated characteristics. Freda Freiberg mentions that it is not the heroines but "the adult women, such as Kushana in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds* and Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke*, against whom the heroines fight, who are truly feminists." Eunjung Kim and Michelle Jarman do not consider Eboshi as a feminist; rather, they consider her as an imperialist, who exploits oppressed women such as the prostitutes and the disabled such as the lepers (147). On the other hand, Alice Vernon recognizes Eboshi's contribution to the community. She mentions that "where she fails to take care of nature, she steps in to take care of those who are shunned by the rest of society" (114).

Though she is sometimes treated as a villain since she allies with technology and launches an attack on nature, she is a tragic character forced to fight to protect her utopian collectivity (Napier 185). Eboshi is not only destructive but also constructive. She cares for the sick and the outcast. When Ashitaka visits the shed for manufacturing the guns, an elderly person tells him that Eboshi is kind in many ways. For example, he says, “If Eboshi sees girls who have been sold, she can’t help taking them in” (Miyazaki). One of the lepers adds, “She has treated us as human beings. She is the only one who has” (Miyazaki).

Miyazaki’s detailed depiction regarding how Eboshi protects the people in Tatara town reveals the complexity of human motivation to exploit and conquer nature. Through Eboshi, Miyazaki investigates how human beings fear nature and rationalize how they exploit it. Eboshi makes excuses for destroying the forest: she says, “If the Sun God ceased to exist, Mononoke and her friends would also cease to be gods and become just animals. She adds that “Princess Mononoke would become human again” (Miyazaki). This serves as her justification to invade the forest.

Her actions reveal how human, political, economic, cultural, and technological developments influence natural milieu directly and vice versa. In her case, we learn that the survival of her own town depends on natural resources. They are eager to retrieve enough material to manufacture the guns so as to prevent themselves from being exploited by the emperor or the feudal lords. The relationship between political considerations and the sustainability of nature is highlighted here. To protect her utopian community from being annexed by the emperor or feudal powers in the area, Eboshi has to cut off Shishigami’s head and control the forest in the hopes of producing weapons for self-defense. Promoting the technological development of her town risks the balance of the ecosystem. If she chooses to place emphasis on preserving natural resources, the result would be a lack of resources for manufacturing weapons and the town’s inability to defend itself. From this dilemma, one can see the solution is not simple and in every case requires sacrifice. It is not about returning to pristine nature or destroying nature, but instead it is about resorting to the specific needs and situations of local space.<sup>9</sup>

With the considerations of local political and economic situations taken into account, people in Tatara town might survive. However, Eboshi fails to strike a balance between the sustainability of nature versus humanity’s well-being. It is only after she repents for the destructive acts that she promises to rebuild Tatara

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<sup>9</sup> For Deleuze, “there is no such thing as ‘the balance of nature’ that human industry could have upset; or rather, there is only a plethora local balances and imbalances which have to be assessed not from some global perspective, but from myriad local ones – hence Bogue’s reference (in the title of his essay) to ‘A Thousand Ecologies’” (Holland). The fundamental return to the specific needs and situations of the local space functions as a possible reply to the nature/human conflict.

town with nature in mind and cooperate with Ashitaka: "Let's make this a good village together" (Miyazaki).

Ashitaka plays an important role in propelling both Eboshi and San to realize the importance of the coexistence of nature and humanity. While both women are trapped by the dilemma of the survival of nature or the humans, Ashitaka serves as the mediator who tries to solve the problems they both face, including incessant catastrophes caused by conflicts between nature and humanity. For example, when San raids Tatara town in an attempt to ruin the ironworks and kill Eboshi, Ashitaka makes efforts to both stop and save her. He exclaims, "Princess of the mountain dogs, go back to the forest! Don't die unnecessarily!" When Eboshi and San are fighting, Ashitaka warns them: "There is a demon inside you and inside the girl too" (Miyazaki). Ashitaka realizes it is the same demon that possesses the tatarigami. The snake-like mark on his right arm reflects his hatred and evil side. When San asks Ashitaka why he interfered, Ashitaka replies, "Because I didn't want to let you die" (Miyazaki). San retorts, "I'm not afraid of dying! If the humans are driven away, I don't care about my life!" (Miyazaki). Ashitaka answers with one simple message: "Live" (Miyazaki). This is also what Miyazaki wants to convey to the audience. Ashitaka's willingness to sacrifice his life to save San changes her: "Ashitaka's love for all creatures dissolves San's hatred of the selfishness and cruelty of human beings. She turns to help Ashitaka to reconcile the conflict and antagonism between humans and natural beings at the end of the film" (Tseng 60). Most importantly, his selfless act changes Eboshi, who repents her destructive acts and promises to make Tatara town a good village. Of course, she changes because of not only Ashitaka's act but also her concern for the survival of the villagers.

Ashitaka's actions show that surviving means understanding that humans and nature are interwoven (Hayden 125) and that "Nature = Industry, Nature = History" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 25). With his actions, Ashitaka helps Eboshi and the audience perceive the sustainable coexistence of nature and mankind so that they may see the ecological problem in a larger scope with sufficient local details to prevent a reductive dichotomy of nature versus humanity. In the end, Eboshi realizes that the death of Shishigami (the nature god) brings about the collapse of the whole world—both natural and human—which teaches her the importance of reconciling humans with nature.

Fourth, the disaster caused by the beheading of Shishigami is another example showing the capacity for the sustainable coexistence of nature and humanity. I attempt to illustrate how this disaster is not only a natural catastrophe but also a socio-political event. Eboshi's ecopolitical and social considerations propel her to function as a predator in nature. She decides to behead the lord of the forest, Shishigami, partly because she wants to protect her people and partly because she wants to form

a bond with the emperor. Eboshi is persuaded by the monk Jikobou to kill Shishigami because “Asano (the lord of the samurai) wants the Spirit’s head as a present for the Emperor who bears the presumption that it will grant him eternal life” (Wu 99). Shishigami’s beheading disturbs the order of nature supported by it and leads to an apocalyptic end, affecting both natural and human worlds. After its head is cut off, Shishigami’s “black slime spreads out through the forest and kills everything it touches” (Tseng 30). The natural disaster itself is already influenced deeply by human interventions.

Neil Smith claims that “there is no such thing as a natural disaster. In every phase and aspect of a disaster—causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction—the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus.” What are at first sight natural disasters are, in fact, influenced by human interventions and operations. For example, John Protevi, along with many other environmental geographers, considers Hurricane Katrina both a natural catastrophe and a social event. Hayden’s ecological thought resonates with this concept, proposing that “when considered ecologically, all life is social life, provided that sociability and the composing and organizing of what Deleuze and Guattari term ‘collective assemblages’ is not considered an exclusively human activity” (Hayden 123). The inorganic elements or nonhuman modes of activities are also social since they are already implicated in the human economic and political activities. When we refer to sociability, “[s]ocial should be understood to encompass the various reciprocal interconnections of human and nonhuman modes of existence” (123).

A disaster is not only natural but also social. In “Katrina,” Protevi points out that “Hurricane Katrina was an elemental and a social event. To understand it, you first have to understand the land, the air, the sun, the river and the sea; you have to understand earth, wind, fire and water; you have to understand geomorphology, meteorology, biology, economics, politics, history” (165). Likewise, in *Princess Mononoke*, to understand the ecological catastrophe, we are compelled to keep in mind how the interactions between the forest, the ore, the river, Shishigami, the beasts, the kamis, the kodamas (tree spirits), the earth, economics, politics, history, and many other elements result in this event. The choreography between the different beings shapes a world that is natural and social.

### **The Mediating Smiths in Tatara Town**

In *Princess Mononoke*, Miyazaki portrays how the smiths in Tatara town, torn between different forces, have difficulty in surviving and coexisting with natural

beings and the Yamato court.<sup>10</sup> Its specific local situations and needs ensure it is a territory steeped in conflict. On the one hand, the Yamato court wants to lay its hands on Tatara town's mining profits, while on the other, *kamis* and animals in the forest want revenge on the smiths in Tatara town, who destroy the forest ruthlessly. Tatara town's dire situation is epitomized by the final conflicts: the samurai attack the town while Eboshi leads her people to fight against *kamis* and animals in the forest. Both parties, samurai and forest creatures, attack the smiths. One is left wondering how, faced with crises like these, the smiths in Tatara town are able to survive.

*Princess Mononoke* not only delivers a cautionary tale about what will happen if we do not take ecological sustainability into account, but it also implicitly offers a viable alternative vision. Ashitaka serves as the agent to present a feasible alternative. Unlike Eboshi, Ashitaka is more capable of leading Tatara town away from the battles with the empire and the forest. He tries desperately to negotiate with the nomadic beings in the forest and finds ways to coexist with nature. First, he poignantly asks Moro, one of the animal *kamis*, "Can't the forest and the humans reach a settlement without a fight?" (Miyazaki). Second, at the end of the animated film, Ashitaka and San collaborate to return Shishigami's head and save both the natural and human world. Third, after the catastrophe, Ashitaka negotiates with San, who is unwilling to forgive human beings, and says: "That's ok, you live in the forest and I will live at the ironworks," conceding that coexistence is perfectly feasible (Miyazaki).

Miyazaki does not illustrate what exactly is done after the catastrophe in *Princess Mononoke*, thereby compelling us to ponder what can be done. The animated film implies that, in order to survive together, Ashitaka has to collaborate with Eboshi and natural beings to invent an alternative means of withdrawing material from the forest without collapsing the ecosystem. The survival of nature and the human in Tatara town depends not on single-mindedly embracing either nature (as the boars or apes imagine) or technology. Rather, it relies more on how humans integrate ecological sustainability into their activities, interventions, and politics. To do this, one has to not only be aware of but also employ the strategic position of the smiths. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the smiths provides a viable way for the smiths to tactically negotiate an eclectic space where real communication and symbiosis between humans and nature can be formed. Holey space is the space that enables the coexistence of the two parties. In a way, this Deleuzian route solves the conundrum of the conflict between nature and humans since the smiths can function as

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<sup>10</sup> Since Tatara town is a mining town, I will consider the people in the town as smiths in general in order to explore how they mediate between the forest and the empire.

the mediators who unlock the fixed relationship between humanity and nature, thereby formulating a continuum with potentially infinite possibilities of assemblage in response to spatiotemporal fluctuations.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari's illustration of the role of the smiths provides fuel for reflecting on the relationship between the smiths in holey space, the Yamato court (state apparatus) in striated space, and the nomadic forest dwellers in smooth space in *Princess Mononoke*. They propose that the nomad is not striated by the state apparatus, but rather featured by movement and change. Metaphorically, in this paper, I treat the animals and kamis in the forest in *Princess Mononoke* as nomads since they live freely without being controlled by the imperial state apparatus. Nevertheless, they possess another side. According to Deleuze and Guattari, if "[t]he primary determination of nomads is to occupy and hold a smooth space" (*Thousand Plateaus* 410), we shall be aware that they also encounter striated space. The nomadic beings in the forest such as the boars and monkeys striate space by invading a territory and trying to establish a hierarchical structure. On the other hand, the state apparatus striates space in order to control others. However, it also smoothes space. For example, the monk Jikobou deterritorializes the boundaries of the state, Tatara town, and the forest, causing the catastrophic end. His acts crack open striated space and form holey space in the empire.

Deleuze and Guattari explain the differences between striated and smooth space. For them, "[t]he striated is that which intertwines fixed and variable elements, produces an order and succession of distinct forms, organizes horizontal . . . lines with vertical . . . planes" (*Thousand Plateaus* 478) while "[s]mooth space is filled by events of haecceities, far more than by formed and perceived things. It is a space of affects, more than one of properties . . . it is an intensive rather than an extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties" (479). From the surface, we notice that striated space suggests order while smooth space chaos. While decoding space in real life, we encounter the interplay or coexistence of the two spaces in many cases. For instance, the sea is considered as a typical smooth space. But when the battleships from different countries striate the sea into different districts, it turns into striated space. After the striation, the submarine activities once again convert it into smooth space. Thus, we are reminded of the complexity of the two spaces and their implicated relationship. In fact, smooth and striated space are not fixed, but mixed. They "only exist in mixture. The nomadic thought and the arborescent order are not dialectic opposites since they coexist in all social formations" (Normark). Smooth space will be reterritorialized while striated space will be smoothed or deterritorialized.

At the beginning of *Princess Mononoke*, Eboshi's fight with the nomadic forest dwellers sabotages the relationship between nature and humanity. The smiths, led

by Eboshi, instead of forming alliances with the nomads in the forest, fight against them, reducing their own force. Eboshi's relationship with the empire is ambiguous and more problematic. She partly follows the empire and partly deviates from it since she is too ambitious to subordinate herself to the emperor. If the smiths continue to fight against the empire and the forest dwellers simultaneously, their doom would be certain. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the smiths seems to offer them a way out. Their concept of the smiths enables us to explore what goes wrong in how Eboshi and the boars in the forest separate nature and humans, and what can be expected from Ashitaka's interventions which may lead to a new policy.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari point out how the smiths rely on "the celestial functionaries of the empire who overcode those communities" to survive. The striated empire protects the smiths. On the other hand, the smiths develop a close relationship with the nomadic "forest dwellers" because "they must establish their workshops near the forest in order to obtain the necessary charcoal" (412). They cannot find a mine in the "valleys of the empire-dominated farmers"; instead, they have to cross the deserts and explore the forest to locate the necessary natural resources. The nomads living in a smooth space enable the smiths to gain resources that can help them to lead a life of self-reliance.

In *Princess Mononoke*, the empire attempts to appropriate Tatara town's profit from the mining and control the village. At the same time, the empire will protect the smiths from being attacked by the natural beings in the forest. The smiths' problem stems from the fact that they alienate themselves from the nomads, who might offer them lines of flight to escape from imperial control. They fail to form an alliance with the nomads, unlike the smiths illustrated by Deleuze and Guattari.

Deleuze and Guattari's smiths are more strategic. They explain how the smiths in Spain and North Africa find that mines "are a source of flow, mixture, and escape with few equivalents in history even when they are well controlled by an empire that owns them" (*Thousand Plateaus* 412-13). They can employ the metallic force for their benefits: "[e]very mine is a line of flight that is in communication with smooth spaces" (412). In *Princess Mononoke*, the smiths in Tatara town retrieve metal and borrow the forces of smooth space represented by the mine in the forest to negotiate with the empire (Yamato court) and escape its control and conditioning. However, they do not cooperate with the nomadic beings in the forest; instead, they fight against them and thereby cause disasters.

Before we explore the complicated relationship between the smiths, Yamato court, and the nomads, we have to bear in mind two things. First, we cannot eulogize the smiths without properly exploring their misdeeds. Sometimes, they also execute "movement of clandestine exploitation" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 413). Second, it is not a one-way passage, going from striated space (empire) to

smooth space (forest). Rather, the interplay between striated space and smooth space is important since the smiths need both types to survive. Without imperial support and protection, the smiths are vulnerable to attack by different parties. Without the mine offered by the forest, which is smooth space, they have nothing to use when negotiating with the empire and cannot negotiate or maintain their independent status.

The oscillation between striated space (empire) and smooth space (forest) helps explain Eboshi's complexity. She shifts between the empire and the forest, which echoes what Deleuze and Guattari claim: "There is always a constant interchange between smooth and striated space" (Normark). Since Eboshi wants to escape from the emperor's and the samurai's control, she resorts to mining materials she needs to manufacture firearms, allowing her the power to fight against the state apparatus. Mining, most importantly, helps her to approach the forces of the forest, turn to smooth space, and seek lines of flight. Sadly, along with the smiths in her town, she fails to develop a close relationship with the nomadic forest beings in smooth space. Rather, the smiths exploit and even kill the kamis and animals in the forest ruthlessly, reducing their power, especially the power against the empire.

It is not until Ashitaka's interventions and mediation that the relationship between the smiths, the state apparatus, and the nomads is dramatically altered. It is not only love that allows Ashitaka to change the situation, but also his ability to roam and transgress the spatial and specific boundaries to escape from striated space so that he can link striated space with smooth space and, more importantly, holey space. His transgression and deterritorializing acts initiate him into the complicated relationship between the state, the smiths, and the forest dwellers. After Ashitaka gradually understands the complexity of the situations facing Tatara town, he starts to sympathize "with the complexities of this community—whose profits are used to buy the freedom of prostituted slaves and to provide care for lepers, and whose production facilities are designed to provide desirable jobs to members of otherwise outcast groups" (McHugh 8). On the other hand, after he approaches nature via San and other nomadic forest beings, he realizes how human greed and ignorance destroy nature. It dawns on him that the outcasts in Tatara town, the kamis and animals in the forest, San, and he are all deemed to be "Other" by the Yamato court. They are all considered as "Other" or outcasts from the society. For example, Ashitaka is cursed and becomes an outcast while the smiths are also cursed by their status as outcasts or minority group. They all seek salvation. The curse propels Ashitaka to leave his hometown searching for salvation. Love for San impels Ashitaka to fight, mediate, and finally gain salvation. Metal propels the outcasts or minority people to leave their hometown and search for salvation. The



profit gained from mining metal seems to promise salvation; however, it is the beginning of destruction, not only for the forest but also for the human's world, epitomized by Tatara town. What can be done for the smiths to seek salvation? Ashitaka educates all of the smiths on the importance of forming alliances with each other to survive, rather than fighting among one another.

Here, Ashitaka's intervention helps the smiths, especially Eboshi, to realize that mining or metallurgy allows the smiths to create a mediating holey space between striated space (empire) and smooth space (forest) and to form alliances with each other in *Princess Mononoke*. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "'holey space' is the kind of space commensurate with metallurgy. 'Holey space' is the space created by mining" (Adkins 212). They claim that "[h]oley space is the subsoil space of 'swiss cheese'" (413) that allows the smiths to oscillate between smooth space and striated space instead of being fixed. For example, residents in holey space such as "[c]ave-dwelling, earth-boring tunnellers are only imperfectly controlled by the State, and often have allied with nomads and with peasants in revolts against centralized authority. Thus, the machinic phylum explored in holey space connects with smooth space to form rhizomes, while it is conjugated (blocked) by State striation" (Bonta and Protevi 95). The smiths can establish close relationships with the State and the nomads via holey space.

How is holey space formed? It is, of course, created by the smiths' mining in *Princess Mononoke*. However, it is also formed by other forces. For instance, in *Princess Mononoke*, after the nomadic boar god, the tatarigami, is killed by Ashitaka, its craziness releases the chaotic force of nature, deterritorializes the territory, and triggers the formation of the holey space. Moreover, when Ashitaka is infected by the tatarigami's virus, he also possesses the chaotic and rhizomatic force, thereby influencing and smoothing the smiths' space. The chaotic force from Ashitaka and nature turns Tatara town into a holey space. It is only when Ashitaka appropriates and employs the chaotic force that it can be used in holey space and the metal explored in holey space can function as the deterritorializing force that triggers the villagers to form a rhizomatic relationship with other beings.

Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, observe metallurgists and claim that the metallurgists or smiths, in accordance with the forces gained from smooth space, can create holey space. In the contemporary world, "[t]he previously positive relation of holey and smooth space has turned around, however, now that States are able to create a smooth space of surveillance and global military intervention. Holey spaces have flourished, for the only way to escape the spying eyes of State intelligence is to go underground" (Bonta and Protevi 95). For Bonta and Protevi, the space of the Al Qaeda network illustrates how one can escape underground to evade the surveillance from countries like America (96). Therefore, the

force of deterritorialization does not necessarily lead to a positive end. We find that there are two kinds of holey space.

In *Princess Mononoke*, we can also detect two kinds of holey space. The first kind of holey space is formed by the deterritorializing force of the nomads, while the second by the monk Jikobou representing the state apparatus. For example, the monk Jikobou roams among the State, Tatara town, and the forest, deterritorializing the boundaries and causing the catastrophic end of beheading Shishigami. He causes the formation of the holey space in the striated empire. The holey space in the empire is negative and different from the holey space in Tatara town. It fights against the chaotic force in the forest and causes a disaster. How can we transform such negative holey space into a positive one?

Maybe what Deleuze and Guattari term as metallic affects serve as possible catalysts that can help the smiths to transform such a relationship. What is affect? Deleuze's affect refers to the interactions of two bodies: one is an affecting body while the other is affected. It is pre-individual or pre-personal forces that allow the boundaries between different beings to dissolve and affect each other. Different from the nomads or the sedentaries (State), the itinerant smiths or the ambulant metallurgists can "form an assemblage with the machinic phylum of matter-flow to invent new affects—metallic affects" (Hantel). When they follow "the contingent history of water, air, minerals and metals to bore holes through the earth and create dynamic possibilities of inhabitation and movement that existed virtually in the earth's capacity" (Hantel), the affective relationship between nature and humans can be formed. Its purpose is not to dominate nature but to follow and co-evolve with the rhythm of nature.

In *Princess Mononoke*, redemption might be possible if the smiths extract minerals with the sustainability of nature and affect in mind. Also, if, instead of fearing the Kamis and animals in the forest as "Other," the smiths can trust them and see them as beneficial, then coexistence is possible. This ability to form a rhizomatic, symbiotic relationship with other elements poses a possibility for the smiths to follow the rhythm of nature, coexist with other beings, and form an affective relationship with nature.

Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* shows that, instead of treating ironworks as a site of power contestation and cold-blooded ecopolitical calculation, where the smiths are torn between the empire and the forest, the smiths can employ the metallic force, rather than exploit it. They can invent metallic affects and forego their exploitative relationship with nature. If metal at first triggers them to fight and destroy nature, then they should learn to harness the force of metal and find a way to coexist with it. Protevi "outlines a geohistory of water that challenges the dominant, molar model of hydraulic empire-building" such as dams and channels

(Chisholm).<sup>11</sup> He goes on to explain that the processes of harnessing water sources “always involve nomadic war machines that are aligned more fluidly with the earth’s flows and forces than the State’s highly-segmented hydraulic apparatuses” (Chisholm). Like water, metal propels the smiths to follow the natural rhythm and interact differently with other beings. Metal propels them not only to fight, but, most importantly, to bond. It leads to destruction as well as salvation if connected with affect.

The smiths should take sustenance from the forest—where the mineral resources are extracted in order to manufacture guns—into consideration and form an affective relationship with all the elements while developing Tatara town. Metallic affects can serve as the medium to trigger affects among Ashitaka, San, Eboshi, the smiths, kamis, animals, kodamas, and many other beings. In effect, “the machinic phylum or the metallic line passes through all of the assemblages: nothing is more deterritorialized than matter-movement” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 415). This deterritorializing force traverses and transforms the human and the inhuman, choreographing a dynamic, symbiotic, and affective earth.

If the smiths continue to extract metal from the forest, one is left wondering what is changed at the end of *Princess Mononoke*. Love for San impels Ashitaka to fight while metal drives the smiths in Tatara town to fight. In his animated film, Miyazaki tries to experiment with the combination of love (affect) and metal. When love is combined with metal, is it possible to change the catastrophic situation? Metal has two effects. It is negative when it propels the smiths to destroy the forest and the emperor to covet the mine and the firearms made of metal. However, it is positive when it produces metallic affects that bond different beings. When affect softens human greed, there is a possibility to form a symbiotic relationship with nature. Ashitaka’s love toward San manifests one possibility to bond metal and affect and lead the smiths toward the same route.

## Conclusion

The dilemma faced by the smiths in Tatara town epitomizes what human beings encounter in their daily lives. On the one hand, humans subordinate themselves to the state apparatus, whether politically, economically, or culturally, and have a tense relationship with it; on the other hand, they exploit nature regardless of the consequences such as the incessant ecological catastrophes (global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, and many others). Miyazaki is a keen ob-

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<sup>11</sup> The opposite of the molecular.

server of ecological problems. He tries desperately to deliver, through his animated films, a simple but critical message: to survive, humans need to learn to coexist with other beings. He illustrates how humans encounter ecological disasters in different situations (in the sea in *Ponyo*, in the toxic jungle in *Nausicaä*, in the forest in *Princess Mononoke*) and find ways to reconcile with them. First, we witness how *Princess Mononoke*, though criticizing humanity, still portrays a sustainable coexistence of nature and humanity. Second, the smiths, though often forced by the empire to follow its orders, possess the ability to turn their arborescent space into a mediating holey space where real communication and affect can take shape. Metal functions as the affective catalyst that deterritorializes the originally fixed human-nature relationship and helps different beings to form assemblages. Metallic affects can be employed to subvert the arborescent force of the Yamato court and render coevolution and coexistence possible.

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## 宮崎駿《魔法公主》中的 自然、鐵匠與洞孔空間

### 摘要

宮崎駿導演的動畫常以敏銳的觀察力探討生態問題。他竭力提供一個簡單而重要的信息：要生存、要共存。繼《風之谷》這部描繪核爆炸倖存者的作品之後，《魔法公主》深刻傳達了人類企求生存的渴望。《魔法公主》最終呈現出自然與人類之間一種看似和諧卻詭異的平衡，引領觀眾思考未來：當生態危機常態化，使自然與人類的關係到達關鍵的轉折點時，人類該如何生存下去？這個問題將我們引向了德勒茲和瓜塔里的生態哲學和其中所論述的鐵匠概念。塔塔拉城的鐵匠們所面臨的困境是人類當代情境的縮影。德勒茲和瓜塔里所刻劃的鐵匠職業的特殊情況在我們當代的世界中已經被常態化了，而且與生態災難息息相關。一般評論對《魔法公主》的結局是否走向人類可以與自然共存保留較多的懷疑。本文則提出《魔法公主》雖然批判人性，仍然對人類的未來抱持希望，並描繪了自然與人類間永續共存的可能性。鐵匠雖然常被納入國家體制，遵從其秩序，但他們也可能將從屬於帝國的樹狀空間變成一個中介的洞孔空間，形成真正的溝通與情動力。德勒茲式的路線解決了自然與人類之間矛盾的難題，我們可從動畫中阿希達卡或鐵匠作為中介者看到解決問題的可能性，他們的中間性得以解開自然與人類之間僵化的固定關係。

**關鍵詞：** 德勒茲，瓜塔里，宮崎駿，《魔法公主》，生態哲學，鐵匠，洞孔空間