

A COMMUNITY THAT PENETRATES THE DARKNESS

(1972)

Yoshida Yoshie

IN A DIALOGUE BETWEEN Fujieda Teruo and Lee Ufan, published in the August–September issue of this magazine [*Bijutsu techō*],¹ there was a discussion of Matsuzawa Yutaka, in which the two lamented that it is utterly irresponsible to favorably evaluate Matsuzawa Yutaka in connection with Conceptual Art and to devalue him when the word loses its validity. I cannot be more surprised to read this, wondering: Does such a trend or a phenomenon really exist? All I see in Matsuzawa is unique thinking, which predicated on one hypothesis, gradually and consistently went through purification during the postwar years. Only with a journalistic mind can one consider “favorable evaluation” or “the word’s validity,” which have nothing to do with Matsuzawa himself. Suppose Conceptual Art should lose validity, what becomes invalid only concerns the “-ual” suffix that makes an adjective out of “concept,” not the relationship between “concept” and “art.” Moreover, in the case of Matsuzawa, his art corresponds to the space of *kannen*² that serves as the theory of civilization and that of matter, transcending the kind of art whose fashion constantly changes. Such an art increasingly moves away from the suffix -ual, while pushing forth art as the method of thinking about reality (matter and civilization). If there exists an aesthetic trend called Conceptual Art, this merely represents a part that appears to assimilate a flow coming from elsewhere into the mainstream. By seeing Matsuzawa from the side of such a trend, one gets his priorities backward. So far as I can see from their dialogue, Lee and Fujieda seem to talk about the treatment of Matsuzawa as a part of trendy event in order to critique the kind of art criticism or art journalism that follows fashionable phenomena.

What feels important here, however, is the fact that Matsuzawa’s is the ultimate method, including things concept-*ual*. In the above dialogue, Lee declares he rejects Conceptual Art because it thoroughly negates imagination, which I again cannot understand, but I have to agree that conceptual expressions that more or less follow the artistic trend generally suffer from poor imagination (though this is not limited to Conceptual Art). Still, Matsuzawa’s prophetic imagination reveals its character as a heroic antithesis whereby his concept, as art, fully engages the entire anti-materialist course ranging from immediate interactions to the vision of future civilization.

The above dialogue is not an exception. Many see Matsuzawa from

¹ [Lee Ufan and Fujieda Teruo, “Taidan: Sakka no shisei to sonritsu no kiban” [Dialogue: The attitude of the artist and the basis of existence], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 358 (August 1972): 54–73.]

² [*Kannen* in Japanese has a double meaning of “idea,” as in modern metaphysics, and “meditative visualization,” as in Pure Land Buddhism. As opposed to Conceptual Art (which was translated as *Gainen geijutsu* in Japan in the 1970s), Matsuzawa by 1964 established his own unique version of “art of *kannen*,” whose complex and long gestation began while he was still an architecture student in the mid-1940s. In this translation, *kannen* is rendered as a transliteration without English translation.]

a narrow establishment perspective or a realistic materialist context. I am well aware that some of the most zealous opinions, which are more weary than accusatory, characterize him as “an unscientific telepathy believer,” “a pious Buddhist dilettante,” “a mystic who pulls the wool over people’s eyes,” and “an enchanting guru presiding over a secret society of blind followers.” These repulsions are probably not completely baseless. However, let us pay no attention to the establishment tendencies but consider his intellectual genealogy, and we should be able to understand that his art is neither unscientific nor mystifying. Those repulsions, then, begin to sound even humorous. For example, Chagall’s painting world is said to strongly reflect the mysticism and Jewish Kabbalah, while Dalí pursues the vehement hypotheses of paranoia critique and fanatic mysticism. Yet, it is impossible to laugh them off because of these facts. Matsuzawa offers to us his sheets of paper with aphoristic texts that merely throw us into a vast ocean of imagination. Not coincidentally, in 1964, Matsuzawa commented on Dalí’s exhibition as follows in response to critic Hariu Ichirō’s question: “I am so interested in Dalí’s world. I agree with his analysis and interest in the contemporary world. But he is too much of a painter and that disappoints me. Or, rather, while Dalí is a 100 percent painter and steeped in materiality, I am not. I have a different position.”³

At any rate, the worst misunderstanding and distortion of Matsuzawa’s thought and hypothesis apparently derive from an ignorance of the fact that he has nothing to do with any kind of fanaticism and instead aspires to base his art on rational and scientific thinking in the most accurate sense of the word. Still, what he tries to approach as far as possible is the irrational, and he does so with a rational methodology, tracing antimaterial processes with a scientific attitude.

In Matsuzawa’s thought, not paradoxes about the phenomena but the fundamental ideation itself, as well as every other phenomena including the civilization that surrounds us, are regarded as a medium of negation. As material civilization and highly developed technological society accelerate to reach their apogee, his thinking is structured in a way that conversely descends and purifies. It is in the circuit of his penetrating gaze resulting from this purification that a vision of the future is foreseen that could be described with the void (*kū*) derived

³ [Hamaguchi Tomiji, Matsuzawa Yutaka, and Hariu Ichirō, “Zadankai: Fukashi na kūkan e no shikō” [Thinking oriented toward invisible spaces], *Bijutsu journal*, no. 51 (October 1964): 30.]

from Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, glimpsed on the other shore from the course civilization is rushing through.

The “knowledge” of the well-cultured that Paul Gauguin, Romain Rolland, and Hermann Hesse arose from the strife of rationalist civilization and its modernization offers strangely little urgency to us. It feels as much wrapped by a pale romanticism as today’s hippie communes are. In Gauguin’s *Noa Noa*, I found a memorable description concerning how he was moved by the story of cosmic genesis recounted by his Tahitian “wife,” Tehura: Māori people believe, “The Earth will perish, humans will die . . . But the moon will not perish . . . However, humans have to die.”⁴ Gauguin’s surprise was honest.

We have a strange inferiority complex that our process of modernization did not take place through the suppression or struggle of traditional rationalism and materialism. This continues to compel us to deny, say, Buddhism as a cancerous “unscientific” (premodern) superstition. It is either rejected as a dangerous reversion or, conversely, accepted as an article of total faith in an unscientific and blind manner. We have never experienced a path to the void in which we persist in the belief that it urgently contradicts rationalism and materialism. I think we have kept avoiding, in a way far more remote than our politically motivated rejection of China and Korea, the confrontation with the origin of the void that has historically become part of the everyday. Struggling to choose between either a reversion to the East or modernization, we must have completed the process of eclectic modernization in such a haste that we never heard the sound of its collapse.

Matsuzawa did not *revert* to the religious world as a clichéd pattern of thought. He aspires to arrive at the void as the logical conclusion of his effort to pursue a hypothesis which he postulated as an antithesis to materialism and civilization. He once said that, in the space of *kannen*, the total sum of the “reality” that surrounds him and the “unreality” that enlivens his gray matter is nil, and that art is orientated toward this nil. In this case, needless to say, the reality, too, is part of his gray matter, but we barely know what the corresponding unreality may consist of for the artist. It is thus worthwhile to trace his intellectual genealogy.

⁴ [The original text in French is as follows:

“la terre finira, l’homme mourra . . . la lune ne finira point . . . l’homme dut mourir.”

Paul Gauguin and Charles Morice, *Noa Noa* (1901; repr., Cambridge, UK: *The Modern Humanities Research Association*, 2017), 75.]

I HAVE IN MY CHERISHED POSSESSION a copy of *Chijō no fumetsu* [Immortality on the earth], an anthology of his poems, which he told me he no longer had in his possession. Measuring twenty by twenty-nine centimeters, it is slightly smaller than the A4 size and coarsely made, consisting of mimeographed pages with backing paper. Eight poems are printed on nine sheets of paper. It has no colophon, but according to his record, it was published in 1948,⁵ only three years after the end of World War II, when the cities still bore the scars of fire-bombings. Things like “Issued by the Ministry of Education” are printed in number six type on the corner of the backing papers. It was produced when the artist, born in 1922, was twenty-six.

It is ironic that *Immortality on the Earth* was the first book of poetry produced by this artist who now invokes the aphorism of “Vanishing of Humans” almost like a mantra to penetrate the cracks in civilization. However, all eight poems are filled with the tense premonition of collapse, darkly mocking the hollow image of immortality on the earth. They reveal no solid sign of discords or scars. They conjure an image of ominous dregs in the ruins that would rustle even under the faintest waft of air.

5 [The year of publication is noted as 1949 on the Matsuzawa Yutaka Psi Room Foundation website. Matsuzawa Yutaka Psi Room Foundation, “Yutaka Matsuzawa Biography and Exhibitions.” Accessed February 16, 2023. <https://www.matsuzawa-yutaka-psiroom.com/%E6%9D%BE%E6%BE%A4%E5%AE%A5%E5%B9%B4%E8%AD%9C/>]

That was nowhere / With snow falling from the sky that looked like a shadow of the dead / A grimy path was muddy / Men and women passed it in a hurry / A few broken dead trees stood / The sun sluggishly rose every morning / Whether happy or not / No matter / Everyday thinking was done / Stones on the roof of a dilapidated house were blown off / There were holes in the *shōji* screens of a gloomy room / And humans after humans endlessly walked around, each with a bored face // One morning / Somebody was sobbing enclosed in the old *shōji* screens of such a world / It was a dark room, but did he think the world was too bright? / For three days, four days, one month, ten years / Somebody / Would not open his eyes / People surrounding him said / But Nevertheless / And put somebody in a cave // That was nowhere / Small street lights were lit / Water flowed in a not so deep stream that was not even so deep / Mud accumulated at its bottom / No grass grew on the stone hedges / It flowed for ten years, twenty

years / People made a rickety bridge over it / Going back and forth over it silently // No such words as “present” or “past” or “consciousness” were used there / Somebody did not have to think he was he / Since his birth / Old pieces of his face / Hanging here and there / But people thought that things will work out, that they will work out, sooner or later / And indeed / They did work out as expected

In this poem, titled “Tanjō” [Birth], our everyday as the surrounding reality is neither solid nor brilliant, lacking the tension of “birth” that sunders such a space and entrusting itself to the process of dissolution as an idle landscape. The baby, called “somebody,” who cries in the landscape of non-time and non-consciousness, represents the artist. He does not “have to think he was he,” that is, he has no self at all. Yet he is no objective “somebody,” but an unnamable “somebody,” swaying in and assimilating into the landscape with old pieces of his face hanging here and there. At the same time, by being called “somebody,” he prepares himself for an unanswerable question. This is how I interpret this poem.

This symbolic poem was apparently based on his own birth: for fourteen days after his birth, his eyes did not open, so his parents and older sisters placed him in a dim room with no sunlight coming in and considered to raise him to become something like a *kengyō* [blind court official in the Heian and Kamakura periods]. His name Yutaka [written with the character 裕] is customarily given to Shingon monks. He would later recall that this unexpected accident gave him a complex as a child, prompting him in the future to say that he thinks that it formed a point of departure, namely the belief that what we can see is not worth believing.

Such an anecdote adds to the artist’s mystique and prompts people to regard him as an enchanting guru. However, he himself chose an opposite direction by steadily continuing on the path of logical thinking. He entered Waseda University in Tokyo to study architecture, and upon graduation in 1948, he was briefly affiliated with an architecture office. However, we would not see Matsuzawa the architect, because he quit the job for he considered “the solidness of iron and concrete is not worth believing in.” That is how we come to encounter the imagery of

Immortality on the Earth imbued with the vacuity and dissolution of the everyday.

Now we finally brush against the outermost part of his act of “anti-reality,” or understanding of “unreality.” He never allowed this to seep into an emotive membrane but advanced a more analytical purification, devising katakana formalist poetry and eventually exploring the world of *Symbol Poems* not mediated by language as a member of such poetry groups as VOU and APA. (These poems and fragmentary notes were included in *On Another Work in Another Container or On Cutting*, a small brochure distributed at the 1963 *Matsuzawa Yutaka Solo Exhibition According to Ψ* at Aoki Gallery.)

A triangular structure that consists of his distrust of materiality as exemplified by architecture, his earnest dissolution into darkness as expressed in *Immortality on the Earth*, and his rigorous attempt at communication that led him to reduce language to signs serves an important role in shaping the character of Matsuzawa’s thinking, hinged upon the interaction within this structure that keeps him from emotionalizing his desperate image directed toward the external world and draw it back to a calm analysis. Over time, these tendencies go through extreme purification, pushed the hypothesis to its extreme in terms of a rejection of the entirety of civilization, and forced him to endeavor to transform a world that is impossible to communicate into something that can be communicated. In fact, when Matsuzawa utters the term “communication,” I get the feeling that I have to breath it in together with fine transparent sand that has been thoroughly grounded or something like a mist left behind by the removal of all conceivable sense of materiality and form of things. As opposed to communication, what is left is an invisible yet strict connection, which may be called signification.

In 1951, upon recommendation of the late Abe Nobuya, Matsuzawa joined Bijutsu Bunka Association, and presented the method of Three-Dimensional Painting (*rittai kaiga*) at the association’s annual exhibition in the following year. The work consisted of fifteen or sixteen pipes assembled to form a cubic space, on which he wound vinyl bands embellished with colored signs. As the viewer moved the eyes, the space of imagery would fluidly change. This seems to have served as a distant archetype for his later “apparatuses” such as *Psi Chamber*

(1961) that provided a bridge to a more non-material and non-sensory world. Around this time, he also began to present his works to the annual Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, some of them being etched in my memory as enigmatic *objets*.

“My thinking is neither new nor strange,” wrote Matsuzawa in 1952⁶ in an essay entitled “On *Meaning of Psi and Psi Chamber*,” which was printed as a flier and attached to his objet, presented at the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition.

“My intellectual predecessors include Seuse, Wessel Gansfort, Nicholas of Cusa, Savonarola, as well as Śubhakarasiṃha and Amoghavajra, and further Eusapia Palladino, G.H. [*sic*] Rhine⁷, and others. In a different sense, my predecessors are Saccheri, János Bolyai, Klein, and N. Wiener.”

Among them, Heinrich Seuse is a fourteenth-century German mystic; Nicholas of Cusa, a fifteenth century theologian, also German, who philosophized on the coincidence of the opposite concepts such as the maximum and minimum; Girolamo Savonarola, as is well known, an Italian friar burnt at the stake; Śubhakarasiṃha, one of the Eight Patriarchs of the Doctrine in Shingon Esoteric Buddhism who brought its teaching from India to China in the seventh and eighth centuries; and Amoghavajra, a monk who spread the teaching in Tang-dynasty China (Kūkai was taught Shingon Buddhism by Huiguo, Amoghavajra’s disciple.) Furthermore, Palladino and Rhine are parapsychologists respectively in Italy and the U.S.; Giovanni Girolamo Saccheri is a seventeenth- and eighteen-century Italian mathematician who proposed a view that stood between Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry; Bolyai is a nineteenth-century Hungarian who founded non-Euclidean geometry; and Felix Klein and Norbert Wiener are very well known (I know nothing about Wessel Gansfort, perhaps a mystic?).

There are different kinds of spaces of *kannen* that can be inferred from this intellectual ancestry, but Matsuzawa organizes them into a hypothesis and method that are inseparable. The two are on the same horizon: the hypothesis is about the rejection of materiality, while the method relates to the postulation of an apparatus that he calls Non-Sensory Painting. Both orientated toward nothingness (toward Nirvana), they are in an incessant process and constitute a method with an inevitable physical contradiction that involves things even

⁶ [The year was actually 1961.]

⁷ [G.H. Rhine most likely refers to J.B. Rhine of Duke University, whom the artist mentioned in his 1960 essay, “Saibanetik-kusu kara mandara made” [From cybernetics to mandala], *Geijutsu Shinchō* (October 1960). He could have conflated J.B. Rhine and another well-known parapsychologist G.H. Estabrooks, as kindly suggested by William Marotti.]

when the sum of “reality” and “unreality” of *kannen* is zero. According to Matsuzawa, the world of hypothesis should have an active force of hypothetical poetry, but cannot go beyond the circle of thought; it must ideally have as little material mediation as possible; through the development of thinking and imagining powers, it can be purified in the effort of gaining omnipotence of thought (unlimited thinking power). By escaping the dominance of materiality, the freedom of ideas and communication can be explored. From around 1953 or 1954, Matsuzawa’s active effort toward purification seems to have reached a phenomenal degree of incisiveness. He rejected the physical effects and aesthetics of Three-Dimensional Painting and instead moved on to works such as *Psi Chamber*, his apparatuses that serve as a door to a non-sensory world, that is, a world that is “seen” extrasensorially without relying on the senses. These apparatuses correspond to a worldview that arrives at nothingness, transcending the “six sense organs” that cause passions in the people.

His bold hypothesis that material civilization is nothing but a crucial mistake of humankind has evolved from around 1955, when he went to the United States to study, following more or less the course described as below. In sum, the way contemporary physics explores matter by, for example, studying elementary particles in the super-microscopic realm, differs fundamentally from the real world that can be perceived through our five senses. The same can be said of the super-macroscopic realm. We exist in a multilayered structure in which these different sensory dimensions are synchronized; hence, the materiality we perceive through our senses is transitory, plain, and thus not worth believing in. The image of the cosmos or the elementary particle cannot be perceived through the sensors, and can only be constructed in *kannen*. By using mathematics and language, contemporary natural sciences have confirmed the presence of such realms. Non-Sensory Painting is part of an experimental process intended as a tool to explore a state similar to these realms, which would offer us the occasion of an extrasensory encounter between the apparatus and *kannen*.

Between these prototypes of a hypothesis and the physical apparatuses lies the enigmatic function of *objet*, but the fact that he needed physical presences constituted an inevitable contradiction. A

leap enabled by the extrasensory must be made available. His stay in the U.S. appears to have spun a strange experience around the axis of his thought.

He went to the U.S. as a Fulbright student,⁸ but he served as a lecturer at Wisconsin State College [now University of Wisconsin-Superior] and researched religious philosophy at Columbia University's graduate school. However, what attracted Matsuzawa most was the fact that academic-level research of parapsychology was conducted at the psychology department of major universities, patterned after G.H. [sic] Rhine's work, putting significant efforts in amassing controlled statistical experiments. One night, at his apartment on Broadway, he caught a strange panel discussion on late-night radio.

Later, in 1965, when *Independent Art Festival* was held in Gifu along the Nagara River, Matsuzawa was invited as a speaker and he talked about this experience in a very curious tone.

At the time, I took notes of the lecture, but regrettably I cannot include it here due to space constraint.

In any case, what Matsuzawa heard was a late-night program on WOR, a station in neighboring New Jersey. The panel discussion was moderated by the radio show host Long John [Nebel], with a panel member who studied UFOs. Night after night, the program invited medical scientists, physiologists, astrologists, spiritual mediums, yoga philosophers, hypnotists, and well-known university professors, as guests to discuss the possibility of reincarnation, paranormal phenomena like levitation, teleportation, poltergeist, and telepathy, and other such curious topics as species residing in the earth's crust. The passionate discussion ran from 1 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. over days and months. Matsuzawa's daily life accordingly was completely reversed, as he slept during the daytime, while staying awake from the small hours to dawn.

Matsuzawa's account of this episode presented under the theme of "Is Art Possible in Contemporary Times?" at *Independent Art Festival* in Gifu left a particularly strong impression on me.

Needless to say, Matsuzawa's interest lay in the future vision of an extrasensory world glimpsed in telepathy.

I have no room to discuss telepathy here, but this academic field finally came to be seen as worthy of systematic experiments in the late

⁸ [Matsuzawa was not a Fulbright student but a Fulbright fellow, part of the grant program for professionals.]

nineteenth century. Starting from the definition of Frederic Myers, who coined the term, telepathy in such research is now defined as “a whole or partial correspondence of the mental pattern of person A with that of person B that occurs in such a way that excludes the possibility of clairvoyance and unexplainable by sensory perception, guesswork, or accident,” as exemplified in the well-known experiment with pictures devised by Mary Craig Sinclair, wife of the writer Upton Sinclair. In the Soviet Union too, experiments of telepathy were made public in 1960, hinting at the many potentials of perception (for example, the possibility of perception via unknown sensory organs or neurons in our brain, circumventing regular sensory organs), as reported in the writings of Leonid Vasiliev.

Needless to say, what I want to convey does not concern my own cursory knowledge of telepathy but Matsuzawa’s unusually strong interest in perception and his pursuit of a systematic hypothesis about it.

So, in the aforementioned talk, what he intended to do was not to present a new set of knowledge on telepathy but to designate as art those “Anti-Civilization acts,” which humans equipped with the “omnipotence of thought” would engage in as an ultimately unconstrained activity, following the liberation from sensory perception bounded by matter.

His stay in the U.S. from 1955 to 1957 might have offered a useful occasion for him to understand the state of affairs on the spiritual front and confirm that the interest in supernatural phenomena was beginning to be organized as an experimental system and discipline. Within a few years, Matsuzawa began to adopt concrete methods in order to pursue the “immaterialization [*hi-jittakika*] of art.” One such example is his *objet mandalas*. (For example, one *objet* mandala was made by arranging eighty-one photo collages representing absurdity, which he covered with sheets of paper in five colors that had been exposed to the elements for eighty-one days and became tattered. Below the center of the mandala, he laid a jar whose opening symbolized an entrance to the void. According to the artist, this represents the principle of vanishing of matter; and opening up beyond the entrance to the void is the Nirvana space, that is, the future space of humankind.) His *objet* mandalas correspond to the mandalas that represents the

worldview of Esoteric Buddhism. Our ritual-like engagement with his mandalas presented like discarded objects would induce an “act of nothingness” that transcends things. Around this time, he began to remove things from his objet mandalas by devising a flier-like format consisting of a three-by-three mandala grid, and filled each square with text. For example, for his solo exhibition *Ah, Nil, Ah, A Ceremony of Psi's Secret Embodiment Drowning in the Wilderness* (1965) at Naiqua Gallery, he produced a flier by embedding the essays contributed by Takiguchi Shūzō and Nakahara Yūsuke into some of its squares.

Here is another example.

From this part (*Pillar in Pillar*⁹), the achromatization of the world begins. It will spread to a neighboring pillar, a neighboring room, a neighboring zoo, a neighboring industrial city, a neighboring nation, like an epidemic. They will lose colors like the color-blind, lose light, that which is visible will become invisible, that which is invisible will become visible, and the dematerialization of the world will begin. At this very moment, it is discovered that human civilization is utterly mistaken, deluded, and worthless, and this is a beginning of a reformation happening from this part, now! Numerous pegs inserted in the numerous holes in this part constitute the beginning of the structure of a non-sensory world yet to be seen by the eye. Don't believe in that which is visible to the eye, but believe that which is invisible to the eye. Hurry up with the *dépaysement*¹⁰ of everything. That which has been considered valuable is valueless. That which has been considered meaningful is meaningless. That which has been considered good is evil. Beauty is ugly. Abhor grotesque nonsense. Abhor everything except for certain things that can be of use (for example, elementary particle theory, cybernetics, Nirvana principle). Abhor politics and economics. Simple allocation based on calculations by artificial intelligence will suffice. Warfare is child's play. So is exploitation. So are conveyer belts. So are stocks. So are highways and high rises. What is that? In the middle of slick *yātokosa*.¹¹ Let's go. See through the end of

⁹ [This work was Matsuzawa's contribution to *Tokyo Art Pillar*, a group exhibition at Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in July 1965, in which participating artists placed their works on a gigantic eight-meter-high square pillar constructed in the sculpture gallery at the museum by the organizers, Avant-Garde Art Society.]

¹⁰ [Matsuzawa here uses the Surrealist concept of dislocation.]

¹¹ [*Yātokosa* is a kind of chanting often done while dancing.]

presidents. See through the end of mammonists. OK, will do. But still, what on earth was overproduction? It was madness. Stop working. Just meditate. Meditate on the rewardless, on the irrational, on every letter of the alphabet, on death and life. Ah, the day is breaking. A daybreak for humankind. Humans, go back to your bed and sleep forever. If awake, take a nap. This is a hypothesis. A great hypothesis. Those who don't understand it should be ashamed.

The above aphoristic manifesto is arranged in a three-by-three grid mimicking the Nine Realms of the Diamond World Mandala, with each square containing nine characters for each of the nine lines, which makes eighty-one characters altogether. The circle in the flier, too, corresponds to the mandala's origin. The total number of characters should be 729, that is, nine times eighty-one, when we add the four characters of the artist's name and a period [松沢宥。 placed at the beginning of the text]. If you have time, count them all!

As a side note, it is worth remembering that these aphoristic statements are not made in today's world where seemingly everyone is calling for an escape from civilization and pollution, but were persistently repeated by Matsuzawa for some ten years, that is, of course before the "trend" of Conceptual Art. In fact, those works that could be described as conceptual feel far less concept-driven than the fliers accompanying *Non-Sensory Painting* and *Psi Chamber* prior to them.

IN DECEMBER 1964, Matsuzawa organized *Independent '64 in the Wilderness*, an exhibition of completely formless (imaginary) works, at the wetland of Nanashima Yashima Infinite Highland in Nagano Prefecture.¹² I will not say much here because I have previously made an account of it.¹³ However, notable in the list of anti-world works of this terrifyingly prescient program is "A soundless structure in time-space. Experience Nirvana (vanishing) in the erased sound. Imaginary music." (My aforementioned account includes only a part of the list that I have). Prefiguring his later *On'e* (Sound Gathering),¹⁴ this exhibition constitutes an important moment in the development of his thinking, together with the subsequent idea of the open-call exhibition, *Anti-Civilization Exhibition*.

¹² [Nanashima Yashima Infinity Highland is an imaginary place Matsuzawa made up and named after Yashima Highland, sometimes called Nanashima Yashima Highland, near his residence.]

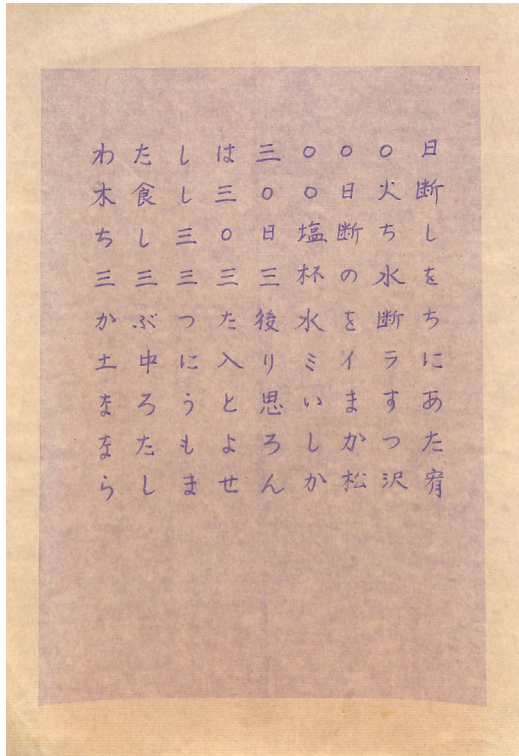
¹³ [See Yoshida Yoshie, "Tandoku kōisha no chō-gekijō" [Solitary actors in an ultra-theater], *Bijutsu techō*, no. 335 (December 1970): 53–54.]

¹⁴ [*On'e*, literally "Sound Gathering," was a kind of sound art event held at Sensuiiri Meditation Platform on July 10 and 11, 1971.]

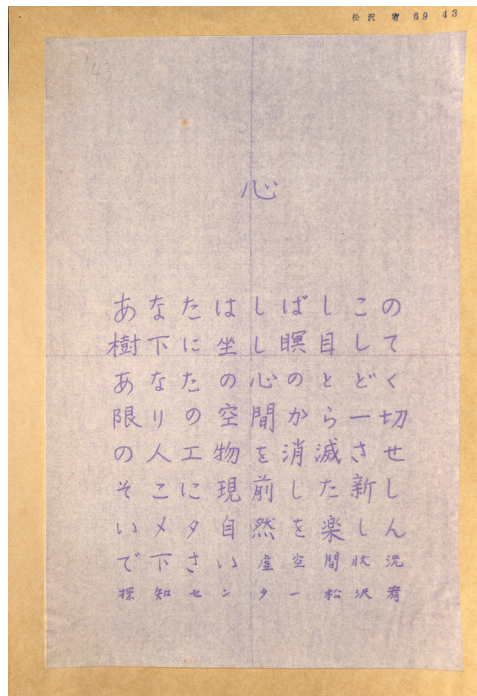
Matsuzawa conceived the open-call *Anti-Civilization Exhibition* for Modern Art Center of Japan, which I had founded [in 1966]. The open-call exhibition was planned in conjunction with *Matsuzawa Yutaka's Ritual for Vanishing of All Matter 1966*, held that year. (In this work, a white canvas is placed on an easel with a chair in front of it. Over the period of one year, from January 28 to December 28, the canvas used for each event was reduced in size, and the viewer would be seated on the chair one day every month to envision an image of Anti-World. Left in the aftermath would be just one chair and ten canvases that materialized the process of vanishing. This ritual vanished after three installments, due to an unexpected vanishing of the venue!) The call was made for works each occupying no more than one square meter of the floor and the wall and weighing no more than one kilogram, and retaining minimal material trace of matter, which of course meant that invisible expressions, unrealistic expressions, and expressions in imaginary space-time were desired. It should also be noted that Matsuzawa planned a collective tentatively called Immaterialization Group by proclaiming "Immaterialization Group pursues not XXXX but the *kannen* of XXXX." This was in early 1966. In five years, these plans would be realized as *Nirvana Exhibition* and *Nirvana Commune*.

IN NOVEMBER 1968, at an avant-garde symposium held at Mainichi Shimbun Hall in Kyoto, Matsuzawa was invited as a speaker and distributed the flier *Psi Art Gathering*, which was a version of *Anti-Civilization Exhibition* limited in time-space.

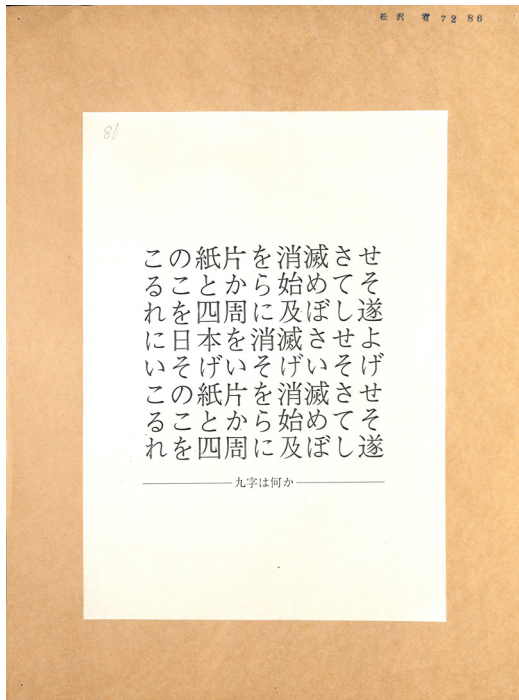
In the following August 1969, at Nagano Prefectural Shinano Art Museum, Sunohara Toshiyuki and others organized the exhibition *End of an Illusion That Is Art*. Twelve artists participated in this exhibition, including Maeyama Tadashi, Inumaki Kenji, Narita Katsuhiko, Usuda Hiroshi, and Takeda Kiyoshi, along with Sunohara and Matsuzawa. Nakahara Yūsuke exhibited a one-page lead essay intended for the catalogue as his participation in the exhibition. Mizukami Jun contributed a Happening as "voluntary participation." Matsuzawa distributed a flier that instructs, "Draw a pure white square in your mind. Drink the water out of it with your hands," to the participants and visitors. These led to *Nirvana Exhibition* in August 1970 at Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art [now Kyoto City Kyocera Museum of Art].



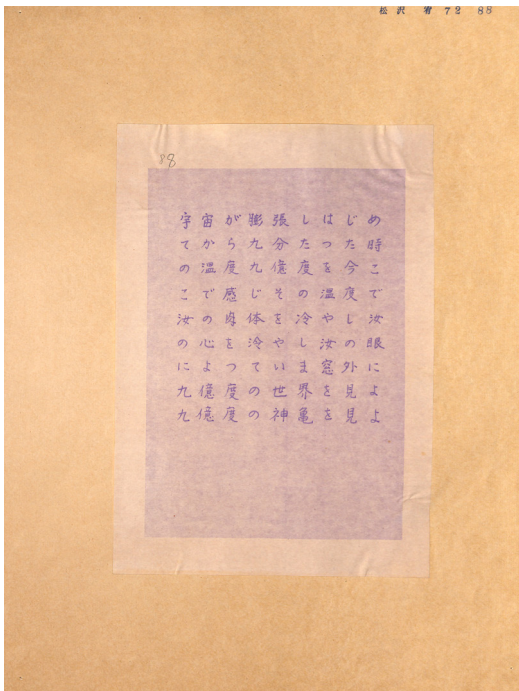
Matsuzawa Yutaka, *For 3000 Days, I Will ...*, 1969



Matsuzawa Yutaka, *Mind*, 1969



Matsuzawa Yutaka, *Let Us Begin with Vanishing This Sheet of Paper*, 1972



Matsuzawa Yutaka, *Since the Universe Began Expanding*, 1972

On this occasion, Matsuzawa proposed a “free commune” and its realization began with the building of a meditation platform at Sensuiiri in the mountains in Shimosuwa. Mediated by Adriaan van Ravesteijn of Art & Project gallery in Amsterdam, a strange agreement was made between Matsuzawa and the Dutch artist Stanley Brouwn for the latter to acquire a one-square-meter land from the former with Psi yen. Thus, the land was turned into an immaterialized entity, and a spiritual community of willing participants was quickly formed to collaboratively build a meditation platform there.¹⁵

Sensuiiri Meditation Platform, which can be reached by climbing the mountain behind Suwa Shrine, commands a splendid view over Lake Suwa. It is surrounded by soaring cedar trees, with the ground covered by striped bamboos. It consists of a tree house built on a tree supported by some other trees, and its roof is covered by reeds harvested from the lakeside. A series of “free parties” were held: *On’e* in July 1971; *Yamashiki: Yuki no kaiza* [Mountain ritual: *Kaiza* on the snow] in February 1972; and an event by [theater group] Yakōkan in July 1972. Each time, participants joined to form a free commune.

Members have so far remained literally free from regulations or secrets of association. Its membership is fluid, with a few unknown faces coming and going all the time. Since Matsuzawa is a local, his residence has offered some room and board, but there is no financial backer. Necessary costs are collected through contributions or split evenly. Outside the above gatherings, some have visited the meditation platform to meditate or perform an act, the remnants of which can be occasionally seen. No particularly religious overtone is observed: some are ordained monks and some others, like myself, keep maundering at the mercy of earthly passions.

If we should seek any commonality, the members are strongly against material civilization, seek to see the “invisible,” and pursue a future Nirvana rather than a clichéd reversion to religion. Many of them are indeed practitioners of expressive acts.

Although it is Matsuzawa who originally put forth the idea of a free commune, each participant carries their own theories of “anti-civilization” and “immaterialization.” Aside from the fact that they gather around Matsuzawa, the commune is more like a mixed freedom zone, wherein they silently observe each other’s acts. Since they spend

¹⁵ [For more about the land transaction, see Nakahara Yūsuke, “Me ni mienai geijutsu” [Invisible art], *Bijutsu techō* (May 1971): 51–52.]



Sensuiiri Meditation Platform

nights in the mountain, some sort of labor is inevitable, but without being ordered, they voluntarily help and care for each other.

Matsuzawa deploys sheets of paper to communicate his concepts, as has been discussed. Over its long history, his method subtly shifted from the straightforward presentation of ideas in the early period, to the somewhat explanatory and didactic presentation of the contents, and to the more aphoristic texts. Most recently, as in his mantra, “Humans, let’s vanish, let’s go, let’s go, *gate, gate*,” his linguistic style is more like an announcement, and may even be construed as an order. (In this work, *gate* is a Sanskrit word [pronounced *gyatei* and taken from the concluding mantra of the Heart Sutra], which although the artist translates as “let’s go,” originally meant “to remove” attachments and enhance a self-awareness toward emptiness.) As a result, he may sound like a guru, but in my opinion, what he is saying is “let us do it together,” a serious proposal toward the grounds shared by those in the unorganized community orienting toward the void. That is why their free commune can be better understood with its alternate name “Nirvana Commune,” which stands for a communal space orienting toward the idea of Nirvana. In the postwar decades, Matsuzawa has consistently sought to take as much distance as possible from matter and to expose the mistake of civilization that developed along materialist obsessions. To this, he added his will to “immaterialize art” around the early 1960s. His “hypothesis based on unreality” now sees a rapid “realization,” which is closely tied to the commune movement. In this respect, the free commune has a great potential to infinitely expand its perimeters from the meditation platform at its center. Sensuiiri Meditation Platform is thus an imaginary of “immaterialization,” reflected in the faraway skies of Nirvana and underscored by the concept and love, similarly to the Two World Mandalas. All the more so, in this mountain enveloped by milky mists, where various rituals of vanishing that lead to the void are meticulously exchanged, we can hear the flapping of the Psi Bird in an infinitely expansive space of meditation. It is Gary Snyder who recently said “Knowing that nothing need be done, is where we begin to move from.”¹⁶ Indeed, numerous *invisible* meditative communes are spreading all over the world.

Whether one visits the meditation platform or not does not, in this case, necessarily correspond proportionally to the spiritual proximity to it.

16 [Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), 102.]



Nirvana Commune, Yamashiki: *Yuki no kaiza* [Mountain ritual: Kaiza on the snow], 1972.

Documentary photographs of performance art. Private collection.





Nirvana Commune, *Yamashiki: Yuki no kaiza* [Mountain ritual: Kaiza on the snow], 1972.

Documentary photographs of performance art. Private collection.



Takiguchi Shūzō once fixed these transitory words in eighteen lines of [the flier of] *Ah, Nil, Ah, A Ceremony of Psi's Secret Embodiment Drowning in the Wilderness*:

Slipping into the inner shrine from *Psi Zashiki Room* I dreamed of Moreau's jewel don't be surprised the master has already turned into a colorless transparent triangular pyramid that's just like him with this body he picks white bones in the wilderness look let a pink water-dripping cone be three by three is nine, and times two makes eighteen lines language is the unbecoming signs of an imprisoned person now I just wish to meditate on the drowning ritual in a calm sea and have a momentary dream in Matsuzawa Yutaka's temporary residence
Takiguchi Shūzō

Takiguchi visited *Psi Zashiki Room* nine years before *On'e* was held at the meditation platform. In a bedroom of Matsuzawa's residence, he wrote that it was "refreshing" to feel "the wings of Psi Bird delicately touching my body." Since then, he has continued to quietly transmit his words toward the meditative platform.

Kaneko Shōji is a painter who resides near Lake Suwa, and received an honorable mention in the 1955 criticism competition of the magazine *Bijutsu hihyō*. After withdrawing from Bijutsu Bunka Association in 1955 together with Matsuzawa and Komaki Gentarō, with whom he found the group Arufa Geijutsu-jin [Alpha Art Camp] in 1954. In February 1971, he dug a ten-square-meter hole in the backyard of his house. From this act of producing an immaterial symbol of a *tabula rasa*, he founded Shiroi Toki no Kai [White Time Society], which would serve as a switchboard for traveling thinkers. At that time, nine participants communicated with this White Container in a mandala-like manner: Kawatsu Hiroshi, Hyūga Akiko, Sunohara Toshiyuki, Takiguchi Shūzō, Takeda Kiyoshi, Mizukami Jun, Matsuzawa Yutaka, Tanaka Kōdō, and myself. Their feast to celebrate their departures was joined by Maeda Jōsaku, Hayashi Kiichi, Aoki Seikyō, Kusuno Takao, and Parinibbāṇa Pariyaya-Body. It was in this occasion that a proposal for *On'e* was made. Kaneko is currently trying to open an ecotopia (a word compounding "ecosystem" and "utopia") as a historical and



Hanaga Mitsutoshi, Matsuzawa Yutaka's
Psi Room, 1969

experiential commune based on the reverence for soil and trees. To me, he appears as the foremost pan-naturalist in the mold of Snyder in the Nirvana Commune.

17 [Kawatsu borrowed the Sanskrit sound रु, transcribing it as る (ru).]

Another resident near Lake Suwa, Kobayashi Kiichi is an unusual high-school art teacher, who was once a recluse in the remote Iiyama region of northern Nagano. He hosts Taika-en [Devolution feast], which proposes to “devolve” humankind that has supported material civilization into “primitive men.” His handmade udon noodles, made in his *Hyakuneri chigiri no gi* [Ritual of one hundred kneading and one thousand tearing], is a treat indispensable at Nirvana Commune.

Mizukami Jun, who calls himself an “archaic pan-ritualist,” literally combines solemn ancient-style rituals and a meditative event in order to ablate things and matter. For *On’e*, he brought water scooped from the temple Nanzenji in Kyoto, performed the act of “transferring the water from one vessel to another,” and produced sounds that penetrated our travelers’ minds. He lives in Nagoya, actively organizes impromptu groups around the concept of immaterialization in the Kansai area, and teaches the production of Japanese flutes such as *shakuhachi* and *tenpuku* as a Bigakkō lecturer.

Known for his *Meditative “Ru” Samādhi Cave Monastery* (1971), Kawatsu Hiroshi is a painter and teacher at Nagasaki Prefectural School for the Blind. While being in contact with the world of the blind every day, he gives the tentative name *ru* to the tactile will felt at the very limit of the human body.¹⁷ He immerses himself in the pursuit of the world of *gan* [wish], a paranormal sense that would extend the *ru* consciousness to the hundred-thousand realms. In order to keep his feet in direct contact with the earth, he comes to Suwa from Kyūshū barefooted.

After his participation in *On’e*, Shukusawa Ikuo of Shini-gata Kōbō [Death Model Workshop] went around such islands as Nii-jima and Awasji-shima to perform Island Rituals. What attracts Shukusawa to the islands is, above all, the fresh sense of surprise that primitive peoples would have felt when they first saw an island floating on the sea (what about the images of invasion and inferiority complex as recounted in the land-pulling myth of Japanese mythology; second, the circular transmigration, that leads us from sea to island, from island to sea, and around the island itself; and, third, an interest in the mind’s qualities to

assimilate itself into uncivilized nature. At any rate, he is a pan-death ritualist who layers the death of an individual over the island and nature to seek a form of death.

Taii Ashizawa hosts Goma Kōbō [Goma Workshop], wherein he creates an interaction between extra-senses and nature through the *goma* (fire-burning) ritual in Esoteric Buddhism. He also directs Seishin Kōkan Kyōkai [Stars Communion Association], aiming to establish a correspondence between the cosmos and humans through fire, which is the experiential essence of *goma*, derived from the Sanskrit *homa*, meaning casting into fire.

Along with Shukusawa and Ashizawa, Kuriyama Kunimasa, a.k.a. Hoshibe, aspires to establish correspondence with the cosmos. Not unlike Buckminster Fuller's idea of Spaceship Pollute,¹⁸ he acts as a merciful Bodhisattva who performs the chanting ritual lest the planet earth should become a pollution star in the Six Paths of Transmigration. Kuriyama and the others appear to follow traditional rituals, but the way extrasensory sensitivities and concepts meet are strictly contemporary and pertain to theories of civilization. With general knowledge of the rituals, it is not too difficult to understand their intentions and concepts. An allergic reaction to their works is caused precisely by a sickness of modernity.

Additionally, Tanaka Kōdō, very much trusted for his role as secretary of the Nirvana Commune, is the director of Matai Kōbō [Matai Workshop] who explores a new way of communicating through concepts and information. He once said that the term *matai* (literally "magic womb") is an acronym of Mankind Accord Thinking And Information. He recently foresaw a *matai* Stone Age, and walked along the Fossa Magna (the great rift lowland) spanning the Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line, while inscribing magic characters on ten-thousand stones along the way. Among those I know around me, he stands out for producing brilliant ideas and for his talent, and embodies a combination of science-fictional cosmic ecology and Esoteric philosophy, as seen in his dense conceptual performances.

Sunohara Toshiyuki, known for his *Final World Center*, who is presently hiding in Europe, attempts an anarchic experimental act which consists of depriving matter of its names, assigning ○○○○ in their stead, to abandon civilization, power, and institutions. With this

¹⁸ [Both "Spaceship Earth" and "Planet Polluto" were Fuller's concepts. Yoshida appears to have mistakenly conflated the two. For the latter, see *The Effect of Channelization on the Environment: Hearing Before Subcommittee on Flood Control—Rivers and Harbors of the committee on Public Works*, 92nd Cong. (1971) serial no. 92-H24: 298–99.]

principle, he has organized such exhibitions as the aforementioned *End of an Illusion That Is Art* and *Hirakareteiru* [Being open] in the past March [1971].

Ikeda Tatsuo, who contributed to the postwar genealogy of Surrealism in Japan and captured the internalized postwar ethos through intense realism, is currently absorbed in his *Asarat Olives Ring Plan*. The project consists of sowing olive seeds harvested from the olive tree in the garden of Takiguchi Shūzō's Rose Sélavy House at eighty-one spots Mount Asama at more than 1000 meters in elevation, as though laying a necklace of olives around the mountain. When a glacial age strikes this planet again, a pigeon would pick a branch of the trees and fly away, just like that pigeon which brought back a branch of olive to Noah in the story of Noah's Ark.¹⁹ After the first sowing on this past January 6, he is in the process of executing the plan by inviting witnesses such as Nakanishi Natsuyuki, Tanigawa Shuntarō, and Takemitsu Tōru, who have accompanied him in turn. For the past August 15 session, I was his witness; also present was Parinirvana Paryaya Body, who buried their own bodies and landscape around them together with the olive seeds.

Furusawa Taku objectifies the gaze on his body which he pushes to its limits in order to transform it into matter. At the meditation platform, he endured the weathering of his body while synchronizing his breathing to that of the earth. He is presently part of the theater group Yakōkan, under the name Doki Kū,²⁰ and subjects his body to the fire that will consume the entire world.

Born in *Psi Zashiki Room*, Parinirvana Paryaya Body consists of three bodies: Suzuki Yūko, Sekido Rui, and Tsujimura Kazuko. It sometimes multiplies as conceptual bodies, sometimes even severs individual bodies, appearing in many places to perform the immaterialization of butoh, eliminating the waves of the audience's appreciative gazes. Among them, Sekido became a monk, dancing toward the other shore and mingling his body with the sky, among trees, and into the soil; Tsujimura refines her paranormal senses, dancing an invisible invaginate dance to impregnate the eye virgins; and Suzuki spins threads of caress to arouse the space. With these acts, they are vanishing butoh and the body.

The group Yakōkan made a pilgrimage in Shikoku by going

¹⁹ [Takiguchi named his olive tree "Noah's Olive," and gifted olives harvested from it to his friends and artists. Inspired by Takiguchi's practice, Ikeda conceived the project and coined the word Asarat, combining Mount Asama and Mount Ararat, the mountain associated with Noah's Ark.]

²⁰ [The reading of the name 土器空, rendered here as Doki Kū, could not be confirmed.]

around the eighty-eight temples in reverse order, and is now passing a treacherous path of Kiso to Nagano. One night, warmly received by the members of Nirvana Commune, they rang bells and sang the *Hymn to Jizō*.²¹ They are currently traveling northward pulling a two-wheel *daihachi-guruma* wagon heading toward the Shimokita Peninsula.

In addition to the above, the artists below are also included in the exhibition *Catastrophe Art From the East*, curated by Nakahara Yūsuke and held at Galleria San Fedele in Milan, from October 28 through the end of November. Kazakura Shō, who has recently given a series of events titled Kabbalah (he secretly visited the meditation platform after On'e, created an instrument by stretching piano lines around, which would make sounds that would faintly resound, and left his strange handmade instrument made of cat skin, *Nengemishō* [literally “telepathic smile,” it refers to the Flower Sermon], and went home); Fujiwara Kazumichi, known for *Echo Location*; Kawanaka Nobuhiro, who filmed *On'e*; Kashihara Etsutomu; and Takamatsu Jirō. The total participants are twenty-one, with an eighty-page publication being planned.²² The exhibition will also be held concurrently at Pinar Gallery in Tokyo (November 4–13).

Art & Project in Amsterdam is preparing an anthology of messages from Nirvana Commune.

As mentioned above, these are not the sole members of Nirvana Commune. Such individuals as Maeda Jōsaku, Hanaga Mitsutoshi, Tanaka Sanzō, Iwasaki Yōji, and Imura Takahiko also flew around the meditation platform and visited the nest of Psi Bird. At any rate, it should not be hard to imagine that they did not fly there to recoil their wings and withdraw themselves into the nest. These people have not gathered around Matsuzawa Yutaka, but to share a view of the milky misty sky of Nirvana, but the darkness that falls around is all too deep.

²¹ [Called *Sai no kawara jizō wasan*, it is a medieval hymn for children who, after death, must suffer in a limbo at the shores of the mythological Sanzu River that must be crossed to reach the afterlife, and are eventually saved by Jizō Bosatsu (Kṣitigarbha), the Bodhisattva and guardian deity of children.]

²² [The book was published as Galleria San Fedele, *Catastrophe Art from the East: Information, Projects and Documentation* (Milan: Centro Culturale S. Fedele, 1973).]

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