

They can't *really* be gaining on me, of course. Perhaps their speed is an optical illusion, or some sort of senile delusion on their part. To believe otherwise would be to believe that I am running dead last in a field of 4,000 — or, I think grimly, 3,999. The fat man, at least, is history.

Forty K! Great! I'm flashing right along now, resting only briefly at each tree, and thus probably recovering huge chunks of lost time, thinking only of the ineffable specialness of this race, and of the T-shirt waiting for me. But one thing is certain: no T-shirt for the fat man.

"Heyyyyeee buddeedeede." A strangled rasp of words, a rubbery purple diffuseness zooming and wowing in and out of relevance, a blackness expanding and contracting direly in the middle of the purple, from the blackness further fatman words, resonating in my throat with a vile synaesthetic tang to them like some hell-melting of mothballs and tinfoil. "Heyyyyeee, hellooo, anybody homomome? Listen buddy, don't look nowowow, but you are really fucked."

Blooming through the icy fog a raging flame of awareness: the fat man! Impossibly, my past has caught up with me! The fat man is here and can't be! Therefore he's a hallucination. But, he doesn't *smell* or *feel* like a hallucination, with his arms under my mine — *as though I needed some kind of support!* — and his reeking beer-breath scorching my cheek, and his whiskers raking the back of my neck. Therefore the fat man is real — but a ringer! Suddenly I see it all, in a flash of insight: he's a ringer! My vile twin is himself a twin! *Of course:* he's been lurking here all day by the 40K marker, while his swinish simulcrum, who pretended to start the race, is by now no doubt roistering in some drinking-hell, roaring out the story of their evil prank. How could they do such a thing? And *why?* To discourage me, that's why — to psyche me out, to ruin my special race!

"Hah!" I scream, snapping my head back into his nose. "I'm onto you!"

"Ouch! Hey, no kidding, buddy, you better —"

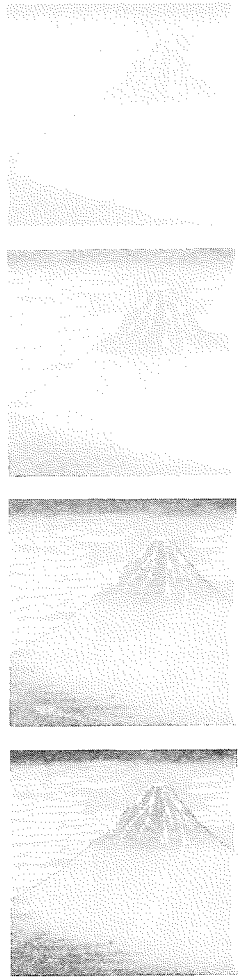
"No T-shirt for you! Or your brother."

I shake him off and leap at him puma-like, fangs bared, a spark of red murder in my otherwise frozen heart. But now his

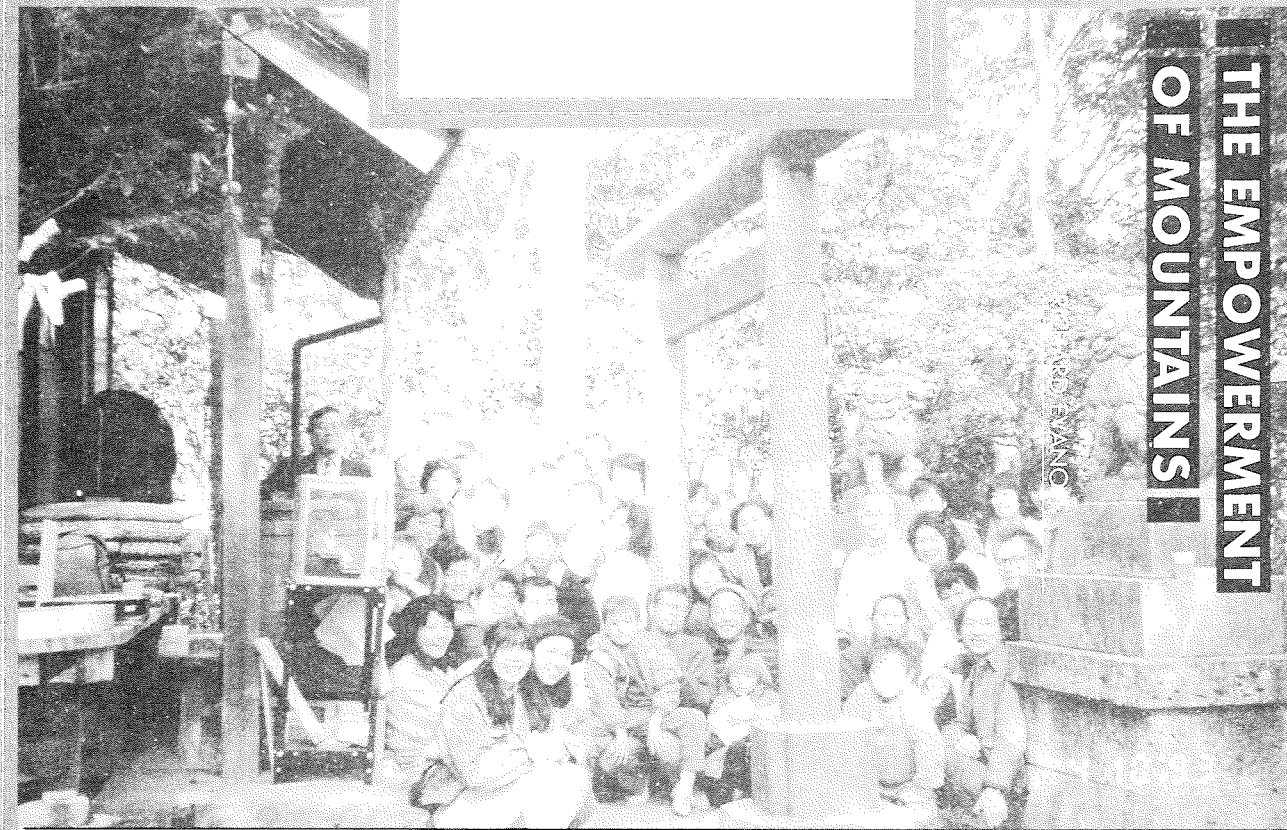
giant quadripartite hams appear to be gusting and billowing ahead of me, looming huge as the Fujis but seeming to diminish in the distance, although that's probably just a Doppler effect, or maybe a doppelganger effect, because I couldn't really be following *him* across the finish line, and then trailing around Linus-like in some numb fog roiled upon us from the flanks of the great gray cones, and deriving flashes of transcendental insight from these Primal Polarities above, nothing kaleidoscopic correspondencies below in the form of dualities which attenuate themselves before my eyes like strings of noumenal paper cut-out dolls, and feeling this Whatness of the Is wash through me, and grasping the ironically opened nature of this my vision quest, and dragging my metasymbolic T-shirt through proliferating multiplicities and mud for some indeterminate period of time, before feeling the hundred fatman hands upon me — *to despoil me of my prize* — and then hearing a horrid fatman hypothermurmur as blackening mystic flashes multiply and grow and intersect, while my phenomenal person battles the myriad murmurous muggermen, just before we all achieve benightedness.

Now, my dear, do you understand? Now can you comprehend the preciousness of this T-shirt and all of them? As long as I have them, I can't forget. As long as I have them, I can spread them out like this and meditate upon their stains and stanches, read the message in their eloquent cuts and rips, recall their mute but luminous adjuration, so often in the past forgotten or ignored, to wit: don't ever, ever, ever even think about entering another god-damned marathon. Besides, you never know, I may wear these T-shirts again. Don't laugh. I'd put one on right now and show you, if I could get it over my stomach. ▲

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THE EMPOWERMENT OF MOUNTAINS



On New Year's Day a year or so ago I climbed a mountain near my house in western Tokyo to see the sunrise. Konpirasan is part of a chain of mountains that form the western boundary of the Kanto Plain. As I was climbing, I realized how difficult it is to keep up both American and Japanese customs — staying up late New Year's Eve with a bottle of champagne and getting up early New Year's Morn to see the sunrise from a mountaintop.

The sun wasn't up yet when I reached the summit, but the horizon was already bleeding with the colors of daybreak. Facing east I could see Tokyo rising up from the shadows. Skyscrapers came into focus on the distant horizon. The entire Kanto Plain began to fill in with buildings, highways, and railway lines. As the sky slowly grew brighter, the city itself seemed to be oozing up to the mountaintop-island I was standing on, slowly hardening into a scab of concrete and pavement. By nature I'm not misanthropic, but I'll admit that I was tempted by the thought of being able to pick off that scab in order to give the raw earth underneath a chance to heal in the open air. Looking out across Tokyo from the top of Konpirasan it was easy to see why in English we use the word "blight" to describe unchecked urban development. The mountains rimming Tokyo's western edge seemed to be containing the disease. But for how long?

I couldn't help wondering if civilization is a cancer that will eventually suck all the life out of its host organism and die with it.

Konpira-san is just one of many mountains in the Takao area of western Tokyo that have been threatened by development. About seventeen years ago a high school in Tokyo purchased part of the mountain for the purpose of building a new campus and sports complex. The plan was to dynamite a third of the mountain before the construction began. About 250,000 cubic meters of rock were to be removed, adding up to something like 45,000 eleven-ton truckloads over a five- to six-year period. The only thing that stood in the way of these plans was a 250-year old Shinto shrine that rested on the top of the mountain. The shrine is dedicated to Konpira, an alligator god who guards sailors and merchants. And it was at this shrine that the faith to move mountains confronted the faith to preserve them.

By Japanese law a shrine and the area surrounding it cannot be destroyed if the shrine is actively maintained. Mountains have always been regarded as sacred places in Japan, and the tradition of building shrines on top of them goes back a long way. Before the Meiji Period any "secular" use of mountain areas was tightly controlled. The custom of *iriai* (which literally means "to enter collec-

tively") regarded non-arable lands such as mountain forests, marshes, riverbeds, and bamboo groves as being owned in common by the villages located near them. Local people were permitted to enter these areas, but there were strict regulations on the use of resources. No one could collect more than their fair portion of edible plants, roots, firewood, and other forms of vegetation.

These days custom, tradition, law, and even the gods themselves rarely get in the way of development plans, especially when there's big money to be earned. The tension between profit-seeking developers and undeveloped areas can be dated from the 1870's when the Japanese government adopted a "modern" landholding system in which lands owned by the public under the old *iriai* system were confiscated and placed in the hands of private owners. The private owners could exploit the resources as they saw fit. Collusion between the government and development interests with regard to land policy has been going on ever since — one only need witness all the recent scandals involving politicians and construction firms for confirmation.

It came as no surprise, then, when the Hachioji City Government approved the plan to dynamite Konpira-san in 1984. In 1990 the Tokyo Metropolitan Government added its blessing, and the construction company Kumagai Gumi was



hired to begin blasting the mountain. When local citizens heard of the plan they decided to organize an opposition group, forming the Association to Protect the Nature of Takao and the Arakawa River on October 10, 1991. Under pressure from voters, the metropolitan government told the construction company that several conditions had to be met before Konpira-san could be dynamited, which included replanting endangered plants found on the mountain, assessing the impact of the project on local water supplies, and establishing an agreement with local residents.

The Shinto shrine on the top of Konpirasan had fallen into disuse, but in December 1991 the citizens group officially registered it with the national government. Many local residents, including a number of foreigners who live in the area, joined the newly formed shrine association. A Shinto priest, Tadamori Yamakoshi, was called in and began holding monthly rituals on the mountain. Construction was scheduled to begin on January 15, 1992 with the removal of the shrine, but since the shrine was now officially registered and in use, the dynamite couldn't touch it. The construction company wanted to move the shrine, but wasn't able to without the permission of the shrine association.

Festivals were held on the mountain throughout the following year, featuring traditional Japanese dance, magic shows, folk songs, and singing. An archeological investigation revealed that the mountain had been the site of a medieval fortress. Moreover, a network of tunnels had been dug under the mountain during the Second World War, which were used for manufacturing and storing munitions. The historical significance of the mountain, both ancient and modern, lent weight to the arguments to save it. Lawyers on both sides of the issue and city officials wrangled over what should be done.

Matters were complicated when the builders put up a fence around the construction site, which impeded access to the shrine and trespassed on the property of a landowner who had refused to sell a wedge-shaped parcel of land to the developers. The school eventually redesigned its facilities around this wedge-shaped piece of land, but not before numerous attempts had been made to

persuade the landowner to sell through intimidation and character assassination. In addition to the cozy relations between politicians and construction firms already mentioned, it's interesting to note the connections that *yakuza* frequently have to development interests.

The threats (e.g., that his business would be ruined) and accusations (e.g., that he had numerous mistresses) did not scare off this particular landowner, but they did scare off a number of potential supporters of the Konpira citizens group. At first there were only a dozen or so members in the core group, and suspicions were aroused about our motives and tactics. We were frequently red-baited as "communists" who were opposed to "free enterprise" and the rights of owners to do whatever they damn well please with their own private property. In fact, a city councilor from the Communist Party was one of our few supporters in the Hachioji City government; the other parties were apparently more interested in representing a minority of corporate executives in faraway offices than the majority of citizens who actually live in the area.

In our group itself, however, there were a variety of people with a variety of work, educational, and political backgrounds. In fact, many people in the group regarded themselves as conservatives — not in the sense of supporting the existing status quo and the ideology of unwiped development, but in the sense of wanting to *conserve* local traditions, customs, landscapes, and environments. Steve Hesse, an environmental columnist for *The Japan Times* who is also active in the group, once told me he regards this usage of the term "conservative" as being the most appropriate. There is no reason why the pro-development politicians and corporate execs constantly rattling about economic and technological "progress" should be permitted to coopt the "conservative" label. The truly dangerous revolutionaries are not the Greens, but rather those "mainstream" business executives and political leaders who propose and traditional the environment and traditional social values in the name of progress and technology.

Despite initial misunderstandings about our group's purpose, the group began to grow. On October 10, 1992, just one year after the citizens group had been formed, more than 500 people showed

up for a rally on the top of the mountain. Empowerment for us was not the brute force of the bulldozer, but the inner strength that comes from fighting for a cause we believed in. And this inner strength wasn't purely personal, but was also collective, expressing itself in our solidarity with each other. We became a community. We got to know our neighbors. We were no longer isolated individuals living in separate box houses, going to our separate jobs in the morning, anonymously brushing elbows on the train, and returning home in the evening to those same separate boxes to sit in front of the T.V. for a few hours before starting the cycle all over again. We repudiated the whole logic of modernization that encourages isolation, competition, and the artificial sense of "community" created by the mass media.

Global capitalism disempowers people by making them more interested in the titillations of entertainment and consumer goods than in having democratic control over what's happening both in their communities and in the global environment; it promotes a weakened citizenry by making people dependent on political and economic elites whom they must beg "rights" from instead of giving them a sense of self-reliance and concern for others that equally emphasizes responsibilities.

As I see it, "people power" in Japan is as much about restoring traditional Japanese notions of responsibility and genuine cooperation among people as it is about democratic freedoms and rights. Japan is not one big homogenous group; such cultural overgeneralizations feed nationalistic stereotypes and do more harm than good. The primary dividing line is not between Japan and the West, but rather between those forces that support unimpeded development and economic growth and those forces that support ecologically sustainable lifestyles and societies.

Since I have something of an interest in religion, I asked the Shinto priest, Yamakoshi-san, after one of the rituals on the mountain, "Where is God?"

"Where is God not?" he replied, touching the leaf of a nearby tree with his fingers. "God is right here, in every



leaf and flower. Everything that's alive has its *kami* — its own divine power."

In the modern way of thinking we cut the divine off from nature and regard God either as some kind of a supernatural being that lives apart from the world way up in "heaven" or as simply dead. Either way nature comes to be seen as nothing but brute matter, a source of raw materials and natural resources that humans regard as having only instrumental value. This view of nature has its origins in the rise of Western science and the Enlightenment tradition which takes as its root metaphor not "nature as organism" but rather "nature as machine." The rise of capitalism and the unleashing of technological forces in the Industrial Revolution contributed to the idea that the good life consists of producing more material goods and consuming more of nature's resources.

The humanistic idea that science and technology can insure infinite human progress remains the dominant paradigm in our society, despite the fact that the mechanistic worldview on which it is based has increasingly come under attack. Einstein's theory of relativity has replaced Newtonian mechanics and naive views of unlimited "progress" have foundered on the Second Law of Thermodynamics: the more "progress" we have, the faster we use up resources, the more quickly energy moves from an organized state to a disorganized state, and the sooner we approach entropy, i.e., death. In the long view of history, whatever conscious life forms succeed us will view modern civilization as nothing more than a *hanabi* (sparkler) that burned brightly and spectacularly before fizzling out into the black nothingness of night.

During the past few decades, however, a new organic worldview which emphasizes equilibrium and measured balance over infinite "upward progress" (i.e., "downward regress") has been struggling to be born. Ecologists have tried to replace the view that nature has only instrumental value with the view that nature also has intrinsic value. Moving beyond individual egotism and greed toward a sense of responsibility to others and to the planet is also a theme frequently found in ecological thinking (see, for example, Warwick Fox's new book



Richard Evanoff

Toward A Transpersonal Ecology). In days past, religion was the primary repository of this point of view. The Zen Buddhist sense of No-Self can also be taken as self without boundaries, self that is able to extend in compassion toward all sentient beings. The Shinto notion that all things are animated by *kami* means that all things must be regarded as sacred. In the West we hear the pagan Neoplatonist, Plotinus, speaking of Soul (the Greek *psyche*, which the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson called Oversoul) as a divine presence that fills all things. Christian mystics fled institutionalized religion and society to find God in the wilderness. St. Francis was able to extend this love to all of creation, and to regard the sun, moon, water, and fire as his brothers and sisters. The problem is that we have ravaged our religious traditions as much as we have ravaged the environment. Instead of actively and creatively revitalizing our religions so that they speak to the problems of our times, we have either rejected them outright or gone off in search of new religio-mytho-symbolic universes to plunder (observe in native Americans, for example, the mostly negative reaction to non-natives who occupy sweat lodges and undertake vision quests). As a result of our own inability to recreate religious meaning, the religions we grew up with ossify at the level of dogma and superstition, and are left in the hands of charlatans and hucksters.

In many religious traditions, mountains have been regarded as symbols of transcendence, of experiencing a wider sense of Self. The mountain we climb is ourselves. There is the struggle to reach the top, a stripping away of physical and mental fat and flab, a honing of sensitivities. And the closer we climb toward the top, the closer we are moving towards the center where we not only "find ourselves," but where we also find God. If God is at the center of everything that exists, then God is also at the center of ourselves. By contemplatively looking within we confront all the dark terrors of our inner selves — all the hatred, greed, fear, and insecurity that traditional religion calls illusion and sin — but if we look carefully enough we will also find a divine spark of light struggling to become a mighty flame. We can either allow that flame to grow or we can extinguish it.

Why look for God in the faraway heavens, if God is already here with us? The problem is that most of us are no longer able to experience the world as sacred. In the West a mystical sense of the immanence of the divine has largely been lost. Instead of experiencing the divine within nature, within ourselves, and within other people, we have elevated God to the status of a majestic, omnipotent isolate king and disempowered everything else by regarding humanity as "totally depraved" and nature as nothing more than "brute matter." A sense of the sacredness of nature has

Why

also been lost in Japan, however, where "love of nature" often degenerates into sentimentalism and the attention of most people is directed toward acquiring ever more extravagant lifestyles. Despite Japan's professed "love of nature," the forces that would willingly dynamite a mountain such as Konpira-san in the name of "technology and progress" are all too strong in Japanese society. We need to preserve these mountains precisely because they help us recover a sense of the sacredness of ourselves and nature. Mountains are where we go to meet God face-to-face, to hear the still small voice within, to be transfigured.

How can we bring this sense of empowerment, that we experience on the tops of mountains, back with us into the valleys? Do we remain on the mountaintops? Do we build shrines on them so we can bask in the light of our own transfigurations? Or do we return? Do we come back down out of the mountains with a new vision, a new spirit of compassion and love? Are we able to become bodhisattvas and suffering servants, turning our backs on the highest heavens in order to descend once again to the valleys of greed and destruction? Just as degenerate religion splits God off from creation, so we too have split the world into sacred and secular domains. We split nature off from humanity and see the two in opposition to each other, with no possibility of rapprochement. We allow the mountains to be sacred; we have transformative experiences on their summits; but forget about redeeming the rest of the world.

In "Good, Wild, Sacred," an article which appeared in *CoEvolution Quarterly* before the magazine changed its name to *Whole Earth Review*, Gary Snyder marvels at the pockets of ancient climax forest that surround Shinto shrines in Japan, made possible by the fact that the land on which they are built cannot be destroyed. In the same article, however, Snyder also describes how a range of hills ten miles south of Kobe was leveled to supply the earth to create the artificial "New Island" in Kobe harbor. It took a full twelve years for the dirt to be carried from the hills to the harbor, and when the work was finished the leveled area was

Why climb a mountain?

Look! a mountain there.

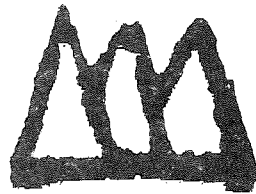
I don't climb mountain.
Mountain climbs me.

Mountain is myself.
I climb on myself.

There is no mountain
nor myself.
Something
moves up and down
in the air.

Nanao Sakaki

From *Break the Mirror*,
North Point, 1987



used for a housing development. Evidently no shrines had been built on the tops of these mountains. "In the industrial world, it's not that 'nothing is sacred,'" Snyder writes, "it's that the sacred is sacred and that's all that's sacred."

If we begin to regard everything that exists as holy, then all of the land in the valley is holy too — all the plains and forests and coastlines and wetlands. Why regard the stones on the mountains as holy and the stones of the valley as expendable? Aren't we able to hear both types singing to us, to see the sacredness of each with our inner eye? Why do we allow ourselves to have self-righteous feelings of spirituality on the summits of mountains if we aren't willing to roll up our shirt sleeves once we return to the

valleys, and create a society that stands in genuine harmony with nature instead of constantly trying to dominate it? Why do we retreat to nature in order to escape from civilization, instead of directly confronting the system that makes us want to escape in the first place? Why do we fight to keep the mountains "holy" but tolerate an economic system that openly admits to being based on greed and the unlimited pursuit of opulence?

The "environmental crisis" is not some future apocalyptic event. It is already here. The question is not how much longer can we go on with our overconsumptive lifestyles before the situation gets "really serious." The situation already is really serious. People are already dying from pollution; our quality of life has already deteriorated; the lines of battle over the future control and use of resources are already being drawn. The only way we can continue to believe in the "rightness" of our present social system is by closing our eyes to all the poverty, crime, drugs, homelessness, sexual abuse, racism, violence, and ecological devastation it has already generated. If this is the best that our present capitalistic system can do with all its wondrous technology, then it's time for a change.

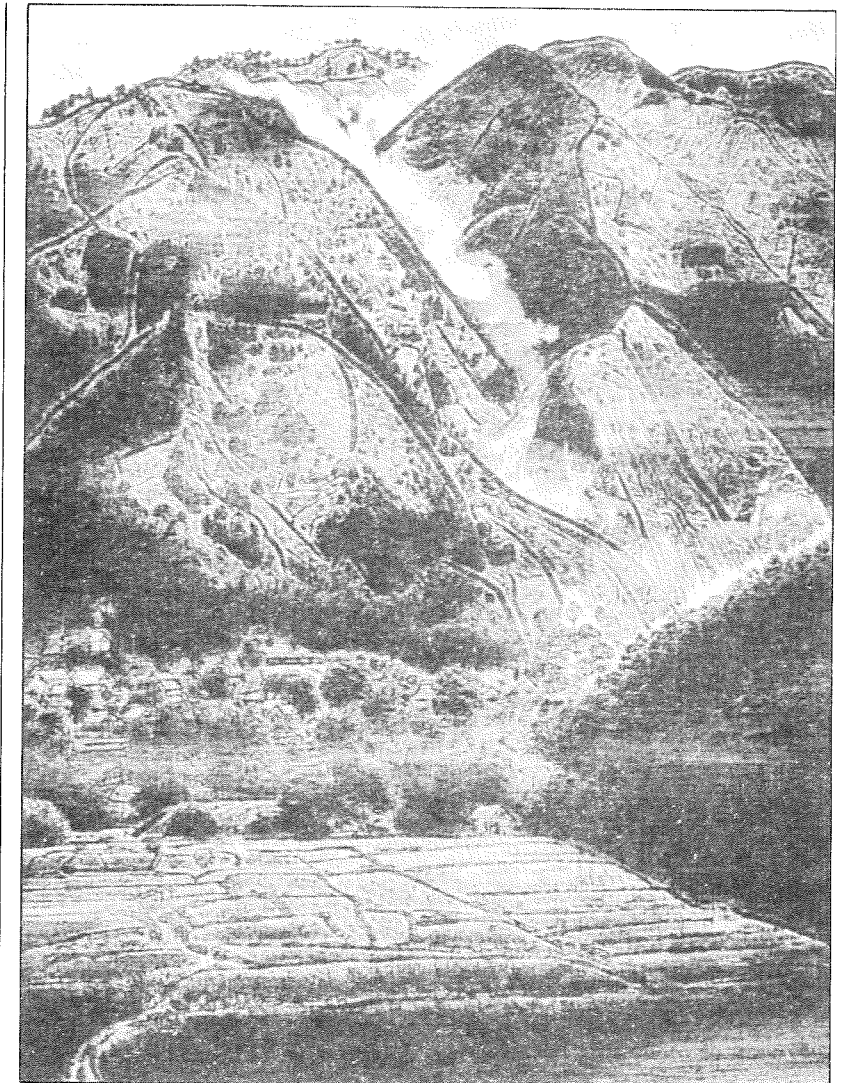
In the case of Konpira-san, the local citizens group finally won. On May 21, 1993 the school that had planned to dynamite the mountain formally abandoned the project. The presence of the shrine, the historical significance of the mountain, and the inability to reach an agreement with local residents were cited as reasons. The Konpira issue provides a small but significant example of local citizens taking power back into their own hands, instead of leaving it in the hands of government officials and business leaders. Unfortunately, however, the citizens movement is a mere David standing before the Goliath of industry and government bureaucracy. In Zushi, for example, local citizens have roundly rejected plans for the U.S. government to build military housing on forested land, by democratically electing an anti-development local government. Japan's national government nonetheless supports the plan to build the housing, and has bulldozed over Zushi's local government by giving permission for construction to begin.

Whose democracy is the U.S. military and Japan's national government presuming to defend and uphold?

In Takao we face similar pressures. Konpira-san has been saved, but the construction company hired to dynamite the mountain still has plans to develop the forested area south of Takao by building a golf course and condominiums to house 20,000 people. There are also plans to build a spaghetti-style interchange and a tunnel through Mt. Takao to provide an exit ramp for the *Ken-o-do*, a proposed loopway that would connect the outlying areas of Tokyo. Not only would plant and animal life be destroyed, but the people who live in the area would also face more traffic jams, loss of scenery, and a degraded environment. Nonetheless, powerful business interests stand behind these projects, and the national government stands behind them as well. Only the local residents stand opposed.

Konpira-san is one of the first mountains a traveler sees when heading west out of Tokyo. The mountains extend south to Tanzawa, north to Okutama, and west to Mt. Fuji, and many of these areas are under threat of development. Mountains are already being flattened to make housing projects. Despite Japan's refusal to import foreign agricultural products, on the grounds that it needs to maintain food self-sufficiency, valuable farmland is increasingly being paved over by development projects. The proposed linear motor car (Maglev) will cut a swath of ecological destruction through these mountains all the way from Kofu to Tokyo. The propaganda supporting all this development claims that more houses and faster train service will help to improve our overall "quality of life." Certainly those who stand to profit from these development projects will be richer than before, but the rest of us will have to contend with even more congestion, even higher land prices, and ever-shrinking housing space. More development will not improve our quality of life, but only help to make Tokyo eventually look like something out of *Bladerunner*.

I've been hiking through a lot of these mountains, trying to travel as extensively in my own area as Thoreau did in Concord. I keep a record of all the paths I've been on and figure there are enough trails in



Natsuyama (Ohara, summer) Komatsu Hitoshi, 1957. Shiga Museum of Modern Art

these mountains to keep me busy for the rest of my life. Like Thoreau, I believe that we need to stand momentarily outside of civilization if we are to really come to a true understanding of ourselves. We each have a wild untamed part of ourselves that can't be imprisoned in office buildings and straightjacketed in business suits. Like the sages and desert saints of old, the wilderness is where we go to conquer the demons within us and hopefully also to meet the divine. Mountains can empower us, they can transform us. And that same power can be used to transform the world.

Walking home one evening recently, I saw the sun slipping down behind Konpira-san. The mountain was still there, just like it's been for ages and just like I hope it'll be for a long time to come. The sun was a nimbus of gold behind it; the entire horizon was bathed in the light of dusk. The divine is here with us, the earth and everything in it is sacred. ▲

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