

Watering a Flower

SIDE A - TALKING: Chit-chatting This and That About You

SIDE B - GROWTH: About Growth in Relation to Cities

By Haruomi Hosono

First of all, this collection of sounds exists only because I didn't decline Michio Akiyama's offer to create some background music to be played in MUJI stores. In September 1983, for no reason, all I wanted to do was to play music that just "talked" and had a discursive quality to it. I didn't know anything about fractals and with no particular ideology, I just decided to record this "talking." So, I don't say I created. I just recorded. Ever since this experience, I have been very intrigued by the songwriting process of "immediately recording without thinking" as soon as I sit in front of an instrument or computer.

TALKING: Chit-chatting This and That About You

What I mean by "talking" here is the act of saying the same sentence in many ways through different intonations. If anyone asks me, "Talking to who?" I would respond in a Michio Akiyama-esque way and say that it can be to you or you or you or the flowers, forests or mountains, or myself or the entire world. Once the "talk" is recorded and re-played, those sounds will reverberate in a part of the world, however subtle it may be. It could reverberate through people or through cats and furthermore, the air. In other words, you may not be alone in hearing the sounds from the music. If that's the case, perhaps it's necessary to be careful about what sounds to select. It just so happened that when I was recording, I was in a state in which I was able to have a subjectivity that led to objectivity. I think that's why I managed to not be a nuisance to the earth.

GROWTH: About Growth in Relation to Cities

This was recorded on the same day as "TALKING." I recorded one more song that day but that one didn't make it onto the cassette. I think "GROWTH" was made from a slightly different disposition to the others. This song was made because Mr. Akiyama asked for one more bonus track. I actually lost the data for this song so I don't remember what kind of program I used on the computer. All I did was press a key with my forefinger to prompt the transposition of sounds against the repetition made by the computer. All of my feelings were concentrated on how to press the keys and I was not concerned at all about how to write the song. As a result, when I played back the song, I felt that not mine, but somebody's feelings were alive in it. I connected this feeling with the plants that spread their roots densely under the concrete that covers over Tokyo and how they continue to grow for decades without giving up.

In fact, I first began to wonder about the earth through the signals I received from the plants that are forced to grow under these undesirable circumstances. One day, when I was taking a walk in the neighborhood I grew up in, I was curiously moved by my reencounter with an alleyway I used to play in as a child. Back then, the street was made of dirt and sand but when I saw it paved over with concrete as if it had always been that way, I first felt a refreshing sensation of being a time traveler. Then, from between the cracks of the untended artificial stones, I saw weeds from my childhood peaking out, still looking the way I remembered them. The moment I saw them, I found myself suddenly empathizing with all of the vegetation that grow underneath our cities across the world. For the first time in my life, I became afraid of the cities.

Ever since then, when I'm on a flight at night and I see the fleeting city lights underneath me, the lights look like bacteria spreading across the earth. At the same time, it allowed me to reconfirm the magnitude of the destruction of nature. In the same way that humans have a symbiotic relationship with E. coli, I think the earth is turning a blind eye towards the "cultural activities" that humans are doing in it. However, when the two sides of a symbiotic relationship stop communicating with each other, one of them begins to crack. These days, I can't help but to feel that the infinite multiplication of cancerous cells is similar to the relationship between humans and the earth.

That was how I unintentionally found myself starting to think about communicating with the earth. So, at the beginning of last year, I decided to walk on soil. The day after I made this decision, it was suddenly decided that I would do a talk with the anthropologist and philosopher Shinichi Nakazawa and walk all around Japan with him. This was how I first reconsidered the idea of "sightseeing" and it eventually led to the creation of "sightseeing music."

Through this nomadic methodology, I experienced the meridians of the earth and spent a sleepless night due to my excitement. That day, I was strongly compelled to draw a line in a map so I bought one in Kashihara, Nara Prefecture and drew a line when I got to Kyoto. I came to live on that line and after walking along that line with Mr. Nakazawa, I was left with one conviction. That conviction was that the earth's meridians were like everybody's heartstrings that all have their individual frequencies. Making them resound is to communicate with the earth. Our hearts are given shape through sounds and words. Right now, this is a major event for me. Right now, I am unable to avoid my desire to move around even more. We have found ourselves living in a time when every one of us should know that in order to communicate with the universe, we must merge our consciousness with Gaia, our mother earth; Maria, the spirit of the earth; and Jizo, the guardian of the earth and children. If you listen for it, you can hear the voices of the people who have been saying so.

This kind of story is so chaotic that it could indeed be stroke-inducing but it has been calmly wrapped within the theme of this cassette-book: Watering a Flower. Masahiko Kuboyama gave me the phrase "watering a flower" and his writing also appears in this book. He told me that the phrase is also a theme in his life. All explanations may lose their power against this phrase but I think that it is the feeling of trusting in the words "Watering a Flower" that gives birth to the sounds that I seek.

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