


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# “The way to things”: contentions over materiality and politics in the non-west between Kobayashi Hideo and Maruyama Masao

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(Received 16 January 2022; revised 31 August 2022; accepted 2 September 2022)

## Abstract

The recent surge in materialist thought, namely New Materialism, has significant implications for political theory. They challenge the fundamental dichotomy upheld in the modern West between human agency and inert nature by revealing the affective quality of nature and granting it the status of the agency. However, does the non-West face risks if it attempts to overcome the modern Western notion of inert nature? If so, is there any way to avoid these risks? To pursue these questions, I take up the writings of political thinker Maruyama Masao (丸山眞男) and literary critic Kobayashi Hideo (小林秀雄) on the political implications of materiality. Maruyama ascribes Kobayashi's alleged collaboration with Japan's World War II policy to his passive acceptance of the felt reality. Regarding such passive acceptance as endemic to Japanese thought, Maruyama traces it back to the notion of an early-modern Kokugaku thinker Motoori Norinaga, “the way to things.” Against Maruyama's criticism, I argue (1) that Kobayashi's interpretation of Motoori's “way to things” resonates with the current New Materialism, and (2) that Kobayashi's materialism does not necessarily lead to passive acceptance of the external world, but rather can be pursued in a more productive way.

**Key words:** Kobayashi Hideo; Maruyama Masao; Motoori Norinaga; New Materialism; Political Theory

Over the last decade, the revival of materialist strands of thought – New Materialism and, to a lesser degree, speculative realism – has invoked reappraisals of materiality and materialist orientations in literature, arts, culture, society, and politics. New Materialists criticize the conventional dichotomy advanced by modern Western thinkers (e.g., Newton, Descartes, and Kant) between inert natural object and autonomous human subject. By criticizing this conception, New Materialists reveal that seemingly autonomous and independent human subjects are in fact formulated from within dynamic nature (Barad 2007) and that material objects such as rocks, plants, animals, and climate act upon our lives and can be seen as having political agency (Bennett 2010). Furthermore, upon such a modified image of active objects, New Materialists challenge the human-centered notion of politics prevalent in modern Western political thought, arguing that we can better respond to current crises stemming from climate change by becoming attentive to the active and affective roles material objects play in the world (Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010).

Nonetheless, what is “new” in New Materialism can sound curiously familiar – and alarming – to students of modern Japanese political thought. On the one hand, New Materialism sounds familiar because criticism of the modern Western notion of inert nature was popular among Japanese intellectuals during the early twentieth century. The identification of Western modernity with Cartesian

subject and nature as inert object was a common understanding in the much-discussed “Overcoming Modernity” roundtable of 1942, in which representative intellectuals from various groups – including Kobayashi Hideo, who is a protagonist of this article – gathered to discuss the limits of the modern West (Calichman 2008). In addition, the notion of active materiality resonates with traditional views of nature such as Japanese Shinto.

On the other hand, the reappraisal of active materiality sounds alarming because in twentieth-century Japan, these attempts at reappraisal were accompanied by chants of nationalism and, worse, Japan’s World War II ideology of a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere.” The “Overcoming Modernity” roundtable was held to highlight the significance of the Pacific War as a world-historical event, and thus to support the war. The attending intellectuals mainly regarded the war as an instance of overcoming Western modernity, including its view of nature. Government officials often appealed to the traditional, namely Shinto, orientation towards nature and society, claiming their superiority over the modern West.

The Japanese experience therefore raises a set of questions concerning the current materialist revival: Given the political consequence of the reappraisal in Japan around World War II, should we stick to the modern conception of inert objects, or is it possible for those in the non-West as well as the West to pursue the appraisal together without falling into the trap of wartime Japanese intellectuals?

To pursue these questions, I take up two seminal thinkers in the twentieth-century Japan, political thinker Maruyama Masao (丸山眞男, 1914–1996) and literary critic Kobayashi Hideo (小林秀雄, 1902–1983), focusing on their contrasting views over the political consequence of sensual materiality. Maruyama began his career as a historian of Japanese political thought, and after World War II, he became known as a modernist (*kindaishugi* 近代主義) public intellectual who admired modern Western liberal democracy and supported the post-World War II Japanese democracy (*sengo minshushugi* 戦後民主主義). In the late 1950s, Maruyama argued that by having “faith in felt reality” (*jikkan shinkō* 実感信仰), Japanese intellectuals in the 1930s and 40s – of whom Kobayashi is a representative figure – fostered anti-political attitudes, which ironically led them to nationalism and support for the Japanese invasion of Asia and the Pacific War, implying that they should rather heed a universal standard that – separated from the world of sensuality – would enable autonomous human individuals to act upon objective reality.

In so doing, Maruyama attributed Kobayashi’s “faith in felt reality” to an early modern national learning (*kokugaku* 国学) thinker and an admirer of the ancient Shinto myth, Motoori Norinaga (本居宣長 1730–1801), namely Motoori’s words: “There is only the way to things (そはただ物にゆく道こそありけれ).” Motoori wrote this phrase in the eighteenth century to attack the theoretical intellect he detected in Confucianism. According to Motoori, the Confucian pursuit of a theoretical “way” separated us from our self-sufficient reality. By criticizing Confucian intellect as “Chinese mind (*kara gokoro* 漢意),” Motoori defended Japanese mind, claiming that Japanese people in ancient Shinto myth lived peacefully under the emperors’ rule without relying on any theoretical abstraction. In Maruyama’s diagnosis, because Motoori supported the native Japanese Shintoism and the rule of ancient emperors, Kobayashi denied intellectual abstraction of (and separation from) sensual materiality as foreign to Japanese tradition, thus falling into nationalistic support for the war.

Kobayashi never responded to Maruyama. But certainly Kobayashi’s attitudes towards the modern form of politics and the war showed a higher degree of ambiguity. He became known as a leading literary critic in the late 1920s with an essay criticizing Marxism, which his intellectual contemporaries regarded as the most sophisticated and scientific political doctrine. In defending the autonomy of literature against Marxism’s call to mobilize it for revolutionary purpose, he often appealed to medieval Japanese literature. In so doing, Kobayashi maintained an equivocal relationship with Japanese war-time policy and ideology that oppressed Marxism and admired native Shinto tradition.

Without referring to Maruyama’s criticism, Kobayashi began writing a series of essays on Motoori in 1965 that he combined into a monograph in 1975. In these essays, Kobayashi favorably analyzed Motoori’s notions of “the way to things” (*mono ni yuku michi*) – the notions Maruyama had criticized.

Kobayashi's interpretation of the writings of Motoori emphasized the active quality of things (*mono* 物) that formulate human subjects.

Although he could hardly be called materialist – he was known as a rather harsh critic of historical materialism – Kobayashi shows some affinity with New Materialism in finding active power in materiality. In addition, he was deeply influenced by Henri Bergson, whose notion of the vitality of things inspires New Materialism (Bennett 2010, Ch. 5). If Kobayashi's orientation toward things influenced his criticism of politics and alleged support of the wars, could this mean the similar notion of vital matter in current materialism has dangerous political implications in the non-Western world?

In the following, I begin by briefly looking at Maruyama's criticism of Kobayashi. To assess the scope of Maruyama's criticism, I turn to Kobayashi's orientation toward things, which he developed in his final monograph, *Motoori Norinaga*. Although Kobayashi's understanding of *things* resonates with current materialist thought, namely New Materialism, the notion of social order that Kobayashi extracted from things attested to the problematic belief in felt reality that Maruyama criticized. Nonetheless, I argue that the appraisal of active materiality does not necessarily threaten critical engagement with political reality. To counter Maruyama's criticism and to pursue a viable orientation towards materiality, in the final section, I develop an alternative interpretation of Kobayashi's writings. Although Kobayashi did not pursue this alternative line of thought, his writings – in particular his early writings, which engaged with Marx's materialism – evince a possibility of critically and communicatively dealing with material objects while affirming their active force.<sup>1</sup>

This article aims at contributing to two ongoing debates. The first concerns the debates over the political relevance of materialist orientations. New Materialism criticizes the human-centered conception of politics and pursues the possibilities of nonhuman agents. Critics of New Materialism discuss whether it can be complemented or superseded by other approaches, namely historical materialism (Choat 2018), and how materiality and mind interact (Rekret 2018). However, few have assessed the consequences, if any, that the materialist orientations would bring by replacing the conventional human-centered notion of politics. In addition, a few have attempted to address the possibility of materialist politics in non-Western contexts.<sup>2</sup> By examining Kobayashi's view of materiality vis-à-vis Maruyama's defense of a human-centered notion of politics, this article will help fill this lacuna.

The second debate concerns Kobayashi's political thought. Although numerous studies discuss Maruyama and Kobayashi, respectively, only a few address the political dimension of Kobayashi's thought and the relationship between Maruyama and Kobayashi. When they do, they regard Kobayashi as an anti-political thinker or a conservative liberal akin to Edmund Burke or Michael Oakeshott. Despite differences among them, these studies agree with Maruyama's influential diagnosis that Kobayashi ignored mundane political practices held by plural actors.<sup>3</sup> In addition, when studies endeavor to compare the two figures, they usually follow the framework set by Maruyama in regarding their opposition as between politics and literature or between progressive Westernized modern politics and conservative attitude.<sup>4</sup> Against these tendencies, I focus on a rarely discussed dimension, that is, their different orientations toward things.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, I will show that Kobayashi's writings evince –

<sup>1</sup>For Kobayashi's writings, I use the *Sinchōsya* edition of *Complete Works* (Kobayashi 2002–2010). When available, I consult Anderer's translation (Kobayashi 1995), whose pages are shown after the page of the Japanese edition (e.g., 1:139; 1995, p. 24).

<sup>2</sup>In one of the few studies, Kwek (2018) compares New Materialism and Zhuangzi (莊子).

<sup>3</sup>Dorsey (2009) regards that Kobayashi's writings (and politics) were driven by his longing for lost home. Morimoto (2002) points out an aestheticized vision of politics in Kobayashi's writings in the 1940s. Kim (2010) analyses how Kobayashi naturalized nation. Tsuzuki (2011) categorizes Kobayashi as a liberal individualist similar to Michael Oakeshott's.

<sup>4</sup>Re-examining Maruyama's criticism of Kobayashi, Nakano (2021) presents Kobayashi as an essentially political thinker who commits to individual liberty, cultural tradition, and practical wisdom – a political thinker reminiscent of Edmund Burke.

<sup>5</sup>Etō Jun's seminal study on Kobayashi stands out as not only one of the earliest and most comprehensive monographs on Kobayashi, but also as an extensive analysis of the role that "nature" and "things" play in Kobayashi's writings. Etō summarizes Kobayashi's view of nature and things as the world of death (Etō 2002, p. 95). Located outside society, things

albeit in an inchoate form – a political vision that not only acknowledges the plurality of perspectives but also complements political orientations of New Materialism.

Before moving to the analysis of Maruyama and Kobayashi, I would like to add some caveats concerning the scope of this article. First, I do not aim at offering a general account of materialist orientations in the non-Western context or in Japan. Such a work would be impossible. Instead, I aim to present a case-study of a materialist orientation at a time when “Western modernity” was contested against the backdrop of war and defeat. Second, I do not develop comprehensive accounts of Maruyama’s political thought or Kobayashi’s. I discuss Maruyama’s thought only so far as it concerns criticism of materialist orientation among Japanese intellectuals, namely Kobayashi. In other words, Maruyama’s criticism is important because it sets the framework of the interpretation of Kobayashi’s politics by focusing on materiality. Kobayashi plays a greater part in my analysis, because his thought evinces both the possibility and the risk of materialist politics. Nonetheless, I do not aim to offer a thorough picture of Kobayashi’s thought. Instead, I only suggest one possible line of interpretation of Kobayashi’s writings, which is different from Maruyama’s and the current scholarship.

### Maruyama’s criticism of Kobayashi

In 1957, Maruyama published two articles that critically examined the characteristics of modern Japanese thought: “Japanese Thought” and “Politics and Literature in Modern Japan.” Both articles were later published as *Japanese Thought* along with two other essays (Maruyama 1961). In these essays, Maruyama criticized modern Japanese thought as lacking a traditional axis that would enable intellectuals to act as autonomous agents by distancing themselves from given environments: “The country nourished no tradition of thought that would force connection among ideas and thoughts of all historical periods and serve as a core or *axis* in relation with which all kinds of thought can be *historically* situated – even if through negation” (Maruyama 1961, p. 5, emphasis in original). Although Japan imported various strands of Western thought in attempting to Westernize and modernize after the Meiji Restoration, Maruyama contends, these strands of thought did not take root. As multiple strands of thought flooded into Japan nearly simultaneously and detached from their original historical contexts, modern Japanese thought failed to digest or develop them. Instead, multiple strands alternated without dialectical development (Maruyama 1961, p. 8). Modern thought, for example, was regarded as obsolete soon after its introduction, with criticism of modern thought imported almost simultaneously. This tendency accelerated because Japan had not formed a traditional axis long before its modernization (i.e., Westernization). In the early modern period, Confucianism did not play the central role in Japan that it enjoyed in China (Maruyama 1961, p. 10). Rather, various schools of thought (Buddhism, Confucianism, and *Kokugaku*) coexisted without being repudiated. As such, modern Japanese people were able to absorb almost every kind of thought, as long as they were not seriously challenged against each other. Moreover, because such absorption had been ongoing long before modernization, it was easy for critics of modern thought after the Meiji Restoration to find corresponding ideas in these sedimented premodern schools. For example, as I mentioned earlier, critics of the Cartesian notion of inert nature as extension often admired traditional notions of nature appearing in Shintoism. (Although Maruyama does not mention it, Kobayashi also found a correspondence, which we will discuss later, between Bergson’s idea of “image” and an early modern *Kokugaku*’s notion of “forms of things.”) Maruyama (1961) summarizes that “the characteristic of Japanese ‘modernity’ lies in its unique combination of super-modernity and pre-modernity” (p. 5, emphasis in original).

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drive Kobayashi’s writings toward the admiration of the aesthetic vision beyond human affairs. Although I agree with Etō that some of Kobayashi’s writings present an aestheticized and static vision of nature, I argue that Kobayashi also sees nature as comprised of dynamic and active forces that interact with each other.

The lack of an axis, Maruyama further contends, made faith in felt reality a prevalent attitude among Japanese intellectuals. In importing multiple strands of thought one after another without employing them systematically and critically to assess our real-world experience – that is, our conduct and surrounding environment – Japanese intellectuals did not embrace diversity of thought, but nurtured cynicism towards the power of thought over the real-world experience. As a result, faith in felt reality – “absolutization of facts and adherence to direct sensation” (Maruyama 1961, p. 53) – persisted.

Maruyama detects the root of “faith in felt reality” in Motoori’s Kokugaku. As stated earlier, Kokugaku thought, emerging and burgeoning in the Tokugawa period, aimed at reviving Japanese tradition – Japanese poetry (*waka* 和歌), Japanese ancient mythology, and the Shinto religion – as distinctive from (and superior to) foreign Confucianism. Motoori was a representative figure of the Kokugaku School. Early in his career, he published works on Japanese poetry and medieval literature, notably the *Tale of Genji*, but his magnum opus was *Kojiki-den*, a philological study and commentary on a source of ancient Japanese myth, the *Kojiki*. Motoori and his fellow Kokugaku authors highly evaluated *Kojiki* as more native than the other classic myth, *Nihon Shoki*, because *Kojiki* was based on oral tradition and written in deviant Chinese writing (*hentai kanbun* 変体漢文, which was written solely in Chinese characters but follows the syntax of Japanese instead of orthodox classical Chinese), whereas *Nihon Shoki* was written in orthodox classical Chinese and imitated the style of Chinese historiography. Aiming at rendering the idiosyncratic texts in deviant Chinese writing intelligible, Motoori’s *Kojiki-den* is devoted to the philological exegesis of these texts. However, in the first volume of *Kojiki-den*, entitled *Naobi no Mitama*, Motoori declares the underlying aim of his exegesis. There, Motoori criticizes Confucianism’s pursuit of the way (*michi* 道) as “intellectual artifice (*sakashira* さかしら) driven by ‘Chinese mind.’” In China, Motoori contends, thinkers and rulers had to rely on the way as a fundamental ruling principle to disguise their evil and greedy intentions. In Japan, however, ancient people lived peacefully under the emperors’ benevolent rule. “At that time, there was no discussion of the way.... There was only the way to things” (Motoori 1986, p. 43; cf. Motoori 1997, p. 215). In Motoori’s view, ancient Japanese people did not need to employ “intellectual artifice” in practicing the way because the way simply laid there as it was.

Interpreting Motoori’s rejection of intellectual artifice as “adherence to direct sensation and denial of abstraction,” Maruyama sees a quintessential expression of the “faith in reality” in Motoori’s phrase quoted above, “There was only the way to things” (Maruyama 1961, p. 21) – a phrase resonant with materialism. Motoori may not have been materialist, but his frequent use of the word “thing” and related notions such as “the pathos of things” (*mono no aware* 物のあはれ) resonates with some materialist orientations such as that of New Materialism.<sup>6</sup>

According to Maruyama, this sensitivity to things and direct sensation comes with political setbacks, for it leads to passive subjugation to existing political authority (Maruyama 1961, pp. 20–21). Where theoretical abstraction is not available, we cannot criticize existing political authority from a universal, abstract standpoint separated from reality. Instead, faith in a felt reality accepts existing authority as a brute reality that cannot be changed.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Motoori appears to Maruyama to have introduced “faith in felt reality” as a long-lasting characteristic of Japanese thought (or the characteristic of a lack of thought), Kobayashi for Maruyama is a modern representative thinker of the “faith in felt reality.” Maruyama emphasizes that Kobayashi’s intellectual activity was driven by criticism of abstract theories. Kobayashi’s 1928 essay, “Multiple Designs,” which made him a leading Japanese literary critic, criticized theories and literary trends

<sup>6</sup>The word *mono* (物) connotes a thing or object more generally, whether it is real or not, or whether it is material or ideational. Moreover, Chiba (2011) argues that Motoori’s phrase “the way to things” does not contain normative or philosophical meaning, but merely means a literal road. If Chiba’s point is correct, then both Maruyama and Kobayashi are mistaken in interpreting Motoori’s phrase. In fact, when the phrase is translated into English as “there was merely a ‘way’ which led one somewhere” (Motoori 1997, p. 215), then it is actually closer to Chiba’s interpretation. Nevertheless, in examining Maruyama and Kobayashi, the adequacy of their respective interpretations does not matter.

<sup>7</sup>Scholars agree that Motoori’s political thought is conservative in general, preferring the status quo (cf. Noguchi 1986).

that were fashionable in the period as mere “designs.” These theories claimed a universal standpoint from which the quality of artwork could be judged. In so doing, Kobayashi argued, these universal theories missed the particular quality of artwork: “Has there ever been an artist who has stalked this monster, *universality*? Artists without exception seek the particular.... It has been the artist’s wish only to narrate as completely and faithfully as he can particular truths” (1: 135–6; 1995, p. 21). Artwork moves the audience by virtue of it being a singular event emerging from an artist’s “destiny” that formulates lived experiences. Kobayashi stipulated that literary critics should grasp this singular event instead of universal theories.

Kobayashi singled out Marxism as an exemplary case of such a universal theory that lost touch with artists’ lived events. Marxist theory, which was popular among Japanese intellectuals in the 1920s, judged artwork according to its proximity to the truth of historical materialism: Good artwork must represent class struggles and encourage people towards revolutionary action. Marxist writers decried the discrepancy between the reality of material production (as analyzed by historical materialism) and people’s subjective consciousness (false consciousness). Kobayashi criticized Marxists rather from the standpoint of people’s consciousness – that is, common sense. Although Marxists elaborated a detailed theory of historical materialism, Kobayashi argued, the theory did not profit people’s lived reality, which he called “common-sense life” (*jōshiki seikatsu* 常識生活; 1:148).<sup>8</sup> For Kobayashi, Marxists’ claim that commodities rule modern capitalist life is not so much a new idea as a common sense concept already shared by people (1:149; 1995, p. 32). Here we find in Kobayashi’s defense of common sense life that which Maruyama called “faith in felt reality.”

Maruyama argues that Kobayashi’s “faith in felt reality” had negative consequences not only in thought, but also in politics. By attacking Marxist literary criticism, Kobayashi appeared to his contemporaries as a defender of literature against Marxism as well as against politics, because to the Japanese writers, Marxism seemed to subjugate literature to Marxist political goals. However, Maruyama contends that Kobayashi’s antipolitical attitude was misguided because he identified politics with a totalizing worldview of universal theory. To Kobayashi and his contemporary Japanese intellectuals, Marxism seemed to dictate every corner of life toward its political goal of proletarian revolution. Yet politics flourishes when people with plural interests and values contest, negotiate, and cooperate with each other. Maruyama distinguishes ideological politics driven by a worldview that claims to control every corner of life as “big politics” and the mundane politics characterized by interaction among plural actors as “everyday politics” or the “political process” (Maruyama 1961, pp. 97–98). To Maruyama, the problem with modern Japanese intellectuals (including Kobayashi) lays in recognizing the political only in the sense of big politics and identifying it with Marxism’s totalizing theoretical worldview.

Under this equation of politics with theory, denial of a theoretical standpoint slipped into an irrationalism in which people’s felt reality defeated theoretical rationality *and* caused a retreat from politics (Maruyama 1961, p. 92). Nonetheless, in so doing, Japanese intellectuals succumbed to another type of big politics that mobilized an irrational feeling among people to transform modern politics fully – that is, the big politics of fascism. Whereas Marxism dictates the world totally with its “rational and scientific” historical materialism, fascism aims at penetrating every corner of life with ideology that appeals to irrational passion. However, both forms of “big politics” negate “everyday politics.” Maruyama diagnoses that the identification of Marxism with politics, coupled with antirationalism, prevented Japanese intellectuals from addressing “everyday politics.”

In Maruyama’s view, Kobayashi in the 1930s and 1940s increasingly slid into his faith in a felt reality, and coupled with the denial of Marxist big politics, he finally fell into an irrational affirmation of Japanese wartime policy. Kobayashi’s criticism of theoretical intellect culminated in “On Evanescence” (*Mujō to iu Koto*), published six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Discussing the beauty of

<sup>8</sup>Anderer (1995) translates the phrase *jōshiki seikatsu* as “everyday life” (p. 32).

medieval Japanese art, Kobayashi in “On Evanescence” repudiated any attempt at theoretical interpretation. Claiming, “Only those who stand still and resist any interpretation are beautiful” (7: 359), Kobayashi attributed this idea to Motoori’s orientation. Kobayashi’s repudiation of interpretation concerned not only the realm of artwork, but also historical facts. Maruyama calls readers’ attention to the following words of Kobayashi in “On Evanescence”:

Once upon a time, it looked very difficult to escape from the idea of new views and new interpretations of history, for they lured me with their seeming charm. As I watched more closely, history appeared to have an irresistible form. No new interpretations can even move the form. History is not so fragile for interpretations to break down. Understanding this, history seemed more and more beautiful to me. (7: 358–9; cf. Maruyama 1961, p. 119)

Denying any attempt at theoretical interpretation of reality, Kobayashi – according to Maruyama – followed Motoori’s teaching that “there is only the way to things” (Maruyama 1961, p. 120). In other words, Kobayashi fell into passive acceptance of reality in the name of history.

Accompanying his acceptance of irresistible history, Kobayashi accepted his surrounding reality of the war by appealing to nationalistic sentiment resistant to theoretical inquiry. The later 1930s and 1940s, when Kobayashi gradually strengthened his faith in felt reality, coincided with the Second Sino-Japanese War and World War II. Thus, his acceptance of historical reality led him to accept the wartime policies more easily. Maruyama quotes several statements by Kobayashi that evince his support for war. For example, in an essay titled “On the Word *Kamikaze*,” Kobayashi asserted that only patriotism survives skepticism against ideology and concepts:

Do cast doubt on everything whenever you can. You will see the movement of things that play tricks with the human psyche. And you will see your egotism, which is as beyond doubt as sexual desire; that is, your patriotism. Only these two will remain. In the time of emergency, you need to reestablish yourself from these two. (6: 531; cf. Maruyama 1961, p. 120)

For Kobayashi, “patriotism” was as certain as biological function (“sexual desire”) and concrete materiality (“movement of things”).

In this way, by denying rationalistic “big politics” (Marxism), Kobayashi succumbed to another type of big politics – that of irrational fascism and nationalism. Lacking a universal standpoint and a language with which to judge politics and reality, Maruyama concludes that Kobayashi fell into decisionism along the lines espoused by Carl Schmitt. Decisionism lies in choosing a perspective (norm, standard, or worldview) without rational comparison among available options. Decisionists claim that under a state of emergency, where given standards of reasoning, judgment, and communication are no longer able to settle competing claims, we should simply decide without evaluating the outcome (such evaluation is impossible without a reliable standard). Schmitt called for a sovereign to make decisions by stating, “Sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception” (Schmitt 1985, p. 5). Kobayashi, too, must have felt he lived in a state of exception, where multiple theories and interpretations grasped neither the reality of artwork (“Multiple Designs”) nor history (“On Evanescence”). Thus, he simply decided to believe in the reality that was before him.

### **Kobayashi’s *Motoori Norinaga***

Maruyama regards Kobayashi as a representative figure of the “faith in felt reality” endemic to Japanese thought. In rejecting intellectual abstraction and sticking to the “way to things” – adherence to sensual materiality beyond interpretation – Kobayashi followed Motoori. In so doing, Kobayashi fell into the decisionistic support of wartime Japanese nationalism. But is Maruyama’s criticism legitimate? In this section we turn to Kobayashi’s writings, namely his *Motoori Norinaga*. Kobayashi never

responded directly to Maruyama's criticism.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, we can read some of Kobayashi's writings as a reply to Maruyama's criticism. Kobayashi began writing essays on Motoori in 1965 (four years after the publication of Maruyama's *Japanese Thought*). These essays were later published as a monograph, *Motoori Norinaga* (1977), which was to become Kobayashi's final monograph before his death in 1983.<sup>10</sup> In his thorough study on Motoori's life and thought, Kobayashi affirmatively analyzes orientations Maruyama found problematic, namely, anti-intellectualist affirmation of materiality that culminates in Motoori's notion of "the way to things." By examining Kobayashi's *Motoori Norinaga*, we can better understand his orientation towards materiality as well as assess the degree to which Maruyama is correct in linking Kobayashi's thought to Motoori's "way to things" and, moreover, to "faith in felt reality."

### Materiality

Following a shared understanding of Motoori, Kobayashi's *Motoori Norinaga* discusses Motoori's life and thought around two pillars: (1) studies on Japanese poetry and the medieval work *The Tale of Genji* and (2) studies on the ancient myths of the *Kojiki*. Concerning both of these pillars, Kobayashi singles out "things" as a key concept: Along the first pillar, Motoori's notion of "the pathos of things" plays a central role; along the second, Kobayashi focuses on Motoori's words *the way to things*. As Kobayashi admits, Motoori did not emphasize the word *things*; the word *things* instead signified objects in general (14: 140). However, Kobayashi pays special attention to the term *things* and discusses it extensively. By so doing, Kobayashi's study resonates with current materialist strands such as New Materialism.

Let me begin with the first pillar, Kobayashi's analysis of Motoori's "pathos of things." Motoori developed the notion of the pathos of things in his search for the foundations of Japanese poetry. Motoori did so most extensively in *Shibun Yōryō* (1763), his study of *The Tale of Genji* (in which Japanese poetry plays an important role), as well as his study on Japanese poetry, *Isonokamino Sasamegato* (written in 1763, posthumously published in 1816). According to Motoori, Japanese poetry sprang from Japanese people's "knowing the pathos of things" (Motoori 1983, p. 280; Motoori 2007, p. 172), and "knowing the pathos of things" lies in "[being] stirred by things" – that is, being moved to deep emotion (Motoori 1983, p. 283; Motoori 2007, p. 173).

Kobayashi interprets Motoori's view on the pathos of things as the primordial interaction between things and consciousness prior to our will and intellect: "Poetry [*uta*] is the first thing consciousness encounters" (14: 245). The interaction is primordial because we experience it only passively. "Will and emotions are opposed with each other. When things move us toward emotions, we indulge ourselves into things and leave ourselves. But in order to will, we need to establish ourselves" (14: 395). In other words, "the pathos of things" strikes us as a presubjective experience. Kobayashi calls this experience of nonself (*mushi* 無私) a vision of "exceptional anonymity" (14: 154), which constitutes "fundamental human experience" (14: 143). As such, the pathos of things evades intellectual grasp. Once we equip ourselves with intellectual notions, the experience of the pathos fades away.

<sup>9</sup>As a Rare occasion of referring to Maruyama, in a short 1963 essay on early modern Confucian thinker Itō Jinsai (伊藤仁齋), entitled "Philosophy," Kobayashi mentioned Maruyama's *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (Maruyama 1974). Although Kobayashi confessed that he had learned much from Maruyama's analysis of the process in which rationalistic Neo-Confucianism had been replaced by "irrationalistic" studies by Ito and Ogyū Sorai, he claims the need to understand emphatically Ito's "faith" underlying his seeming irrationalism (12: 395). Kobayashi's emphasis on faith is consonant with his orientation toward Motoori in his *Motoori Norinaga*.

<sup>10</sup>The monograph omits some of the essays published earlier and adds some modifications to them. He also published two more complementary essays, "Motoori Norinaga Hoki I" [Appendix 1 to *Motoori Norinaga*] (1979) and "Motoori Norinaga Hoki II" [Appendix 2 to *Motoori Norinaga*] (1979). Many (e.g., Hashimoto 2007) point out the abrupt ending of *Motoori Norinaga*, where Kobayashi states, "I would like to stop here," suggesting that the work is incomplete or had failed. Here, I do not join the debate over the completeness of the work, but merely suggest that Kobayashi could have developed his thought along different paths.



How is it possible that things actively affect us? What is the thing that moves us to emotion, the experience of the pathos of things? According to Kobayashi's interpretation, things are capable of spontaneously affecting us because they have minds (*kokoro* 心) as their essence (*katachi* かたち). "To taste everything in one's mind is to know the mind of events [*koto* 事], to know the mind of things, to know the pathos of things" (Motoori 1983, p. 125; cf. 15: 154).

When we move to the second pillar, Motoori's interpretation of the ancient myth, we find Kobayashi detects the same notion of active things in "the way to things." Whereas some commentators on Motoori distinguish the pathos of things from the way to things, sometimes finding tension between the two, Kobayashi regards them as closely connected. For Kobayashi, both notions suggest "the concept of an empirical given" (14: 367), which was given to sensation and thus preceded conceptual understanding.

Moreover, according to Kobayashi, in elaborating "the way to things" Motoori developed the understanding of things as "forms [*aru katachi* 性質情状]."<sup>11</sup>

Instead of relying upon theory in vain, it suffices to receive things as they are, as "Heaven and earth [*ametsuchi* 天地] is simply *ametsuchi*, female and male [*mewo* 男女] is simply *mewo*, and fire and water [*himizu* 火水] is simply *himizu*." Everyone has this simple and most certain relationship with things, within which, everyone has an unshakable basic wisdom. In Motoori's words, "Each of these has its own form." (14: 366, cf. Motoori 1997, p. 39)

Things as "forms" constitute the primordial order of things. As such, they affect us.

In granting affective quality to things, Kobayashi argues, Motoori shares Bergson's orientation towards the concept of "image." In an interview on *Motoori Norinaga*, Kobayashi states that "forms" should be the correct translation of Bergson's term *image* (14: 540–1). Bergson (1988) introduced the concept of image to describe the characteristic of things that can be reduced to neither inert objects nor ideational concepts. Kobayashi, like Bergson, regards things (or images) as active objects that can affect other images, including human agency. Here it is noteworthy that prior to *Motoori Norinaga*, Kobayashi worked on a series of essays on Bergson, entitled *Impressions*, where he intensively discussed Bergson's concept of "image." Although Kobayashi finally aborted the project of *Impressions* and prohibited posthumous publication, it is possible that Kobayashi pursued the same idea of active materiality in both *Impressions* and *Motoori Norinaga*. (The first essay of *Motoori Norinaga* appeared in 1965, two years after Kobayashi suspended [and finally gave up on] *Impressions* in 1963.)<sup>12</sup> In fact, Kobayashi in his essays on Bergson intensively discusses the notion of image, emphasizing its capacity to affect people (Appendix 1).

Kobayashi's notion of affective materiality resonates with that of active materiality in the current materialist strands, namely New Materialism. Both see constituting forces in materiality that can be reduced neither to inert objects nor to human agency. Kobayashi also aligns with New Materialists such as Jane Bennett in finding inspirations for their ideas of active materiality in Bergson (Bennett 2010, Ch. 6).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Wehmer's (1997) translation of *Kojiki-den* translated the phrase *aru katachi* as "characteristic."

<sup>12</sup>Kobayashi published 58 essays in the literary magazine *Shincho* from 1958 until 1963. He stated that he had aborted the project because "[my study on Bergson] failed. I got exhausted and stopped. I could not overcome my lack of knowledge" (25, p. 184). However, the essays were later made available as the first volume of appendices to the *Complete Works of Kobayashi Hideo*.

<sup>13</sup>It is noteworthy that Kobayashi made a favorable comment on Deleuze's *Bergsonism* (1988). According to Gunji's memoir (1993, p. 262), Kobayashi in 1979 stated, "The book titled *Bergsonism* by a young author named Deleuze is good." It is impossible that Kobayashi's essays on Bergson were influenced by Deleuze's *Bergsonism*, because Kobayashi's final essay on Bergson appeared in 1963, three years before the publication of *Bergsonism* (1966). But the very fact that Kobayashi read Deleuze's work even after he gave up writing on Bergson suggests Kobayashi's continued interest in Bergson as well as Kobayashi's affinity with Deleuze, a philosopher influential among New Materialists and Speculative Realists. Moreover, Kobayashi and Deleuze show some resonances in their readings of Bergson: (1) Both interpreted Bergson's view as ontological, not epistemological or psychological; (2) whereas Deleuze took up "intuition" as Bergson's philosophical method,

Sure enough, differences exist between Kobayashi and New Materialists. First, Kobayashi throughout his career did not regard himself as materialist. In exploring Motoori and Bergson, Kobayashi spends more pages discussing the “intimate interaction between mind and things” (14: 154) than things themselves or the integration of the mind under materiality. In fact, Kobayashi regards Bergson as maintaining dualism between mind and materiality, although Kobayashi does not exclude the possibility of unification (Appendix 1: 322, 370–3). In addition, Kobayashi pays little attention to the vitalist vision presented in Bergson’s *Creative Revolution*, whereas the vision inspires New Materialism (Bennett 2010, Ch. 6). In the end, Kobayashi may appear to be interested in subjective experiences (as exemplified in his encounter with ghost) than in the ontological quality of things, materiality, and reality.

Despite all these differences, Kobayashi shares the same interest in the ontic order of things with New Materialists. As we have seen, Kobayashi’s analysis of Motoori culminates in things as “forms.” In his exploration of Bergson, too, Kobayashi attempts to grasp the reality of things that appears in the duration of things. If Kobayashi privileges subjective experiences in his writings, then he does so to criticize the commonly held Newtonian understanding that sees things as inert object, not to defend subjectivism. It is noteworthy that Kobayashi takes up quantum physics in his essays on Bergson toward its abrupt suspension.<sup>14</sup> In comparing quantum physics and Bergson, Kobayashi may have intended to reveal Bergson’s view of reality as akin to Heisenberg’s, or Kobayashi may have even tried to articulate his own view of reality by drawing upon Bergson and Heisenberg – for Kobayashi, to discuss the works of others is nothing different from knowing himself (1: 135) – but did not succeed in the task. Referring to Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, Kobayashi claims that quantum physics tells us no difference exists between a human subject and a natural object and that separation of the observing subject from the observed object is a human artifice (Appendix 1, 357). In other words, Kobayashi thinks that the dynamic world of things involves both human and nonhuman agents and that the distinction between a human subject and natural objects is not fixed but dependent on the existence of human beings, which themselves are part of the natural objects. In so doing, Kobayashi’s view appears close to that of another representative view in New Materialism, Karen Barad’s “agential realism.” Drawing upon Niels Bohr’s interpretation of quantum physics, Barad, too, regards the world as constitutive of intra-active agencies that are never fixed (Barad 2007).<sup>15</sup>

### Social order

How does the affective capacity of materiality change the way we conduct politics? As we have seen in Maruyama’s criticism of Kobayashi, Kobayashi’s orientation towards politics is different from New Materialism: Kobayashi, in retreating from the big politics of Marxist theory, accepted the big politics of Japanese fascism instead, whereas New Materialism supports democratic and progressive politics. Does Maruyama’s criticism apply to Kobayashi’s postwar writings on Motoori? Why did Kobayashi follow a different path? Maruyama attributed Kobayashi’s subjugation to fascism to his faith in felt reality. Is Maruyama correct? If so, is New Materialism on a politically slippery ground? I address these questions by first showing that Kobayashi’s orientation in *Motoori Norinaga* only underscores

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Kobayashi emphasized the role of “common sense” in Bergson’s philosophy. In addition, Maeda (2015) maintains that Kobayashi shares Bergson and Deleuze’s preoccupation with qualitative differences within an object as well as the distinction between the virtual and real.

<sup>14</sup>At the 49th essay, Kobayashi turned his focus from Bergson to the history of contemporary physics, namely the development of quantum physics, and continued addressing it until the 54th. After suggesting the similarity between Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle and Bergson’s concept of image, he suspended the essays on Bergson at the 56th. Yamazaki (1997) argues that contemporary physics deeply influences not only Kobayashi’s essays on Bergson but all his writings.

<sup>15</sup>Despite their similarity, Kobayashi and Barad differ in their understandings of quantum physics. One of the differences concerns Kobayashi’s identification of the world of quantum physics with the standpoint of common sense. However, as I discuss in the following, Kobayashi’s common sense is open to several readings, at least one of which can coexist with Barad’s. Another difference is that Kobayashi took Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle as an ontological principle, whereas Barad repudiates the principle merely as an epistemic principle.

Maruyama's diagnosis: Kobayashi fell into the decisionistic faith in felt reality. In the next section, however, I pursue a different possibility in Kobayashi's thought.

A key to understanding Kobayashi's faith in felt reality lies in his reliance on "common sense" (*jōshiki* 常識). From early in his career, Kobayashi affirmatively employed the term "common sense." But he further elaborates the notion in *Motoori Norinaga*, where Kobayashi claims that our primordial experience of things constitutes our sound common sense. According to Kobayashi, Motoori criticized theoretical abstraction as the "Chinese mind" and called attention to the "form of things" to revive a "sound and common state," the "quite common life of ordinary people" (14: 366). Kobayashi also sees a similar affirmation of common sense in Bergson. For Kobayashi, Bergson's "image" is nothing but a depiction of our common sense understanding of things and experiences (Appendix 1: 141).

Trusting common sense may not always lead to a conservative political vision. In fact, for Kobayashi, "common sense" connotes the reality of subjective experience that can include extraordinary rather than widely accepted views. As mentioned earlier, Kobayashi suggests his ghostly experience is affirmed by Bergson's view. In other words, the ghost is a part of his common sense.

Nonetheless, Kobayashi's seemingly extraordinary common sense is not only subjective but also communal. The communal quality plays an important role in Kobayashi's discussion of *Kojiki-den*, Motoori's interpretation of ancient myth. In *Kojiki-den*, Motoori took at face value all extraordinary episodes in the ancient myth *Kojiki* as true. These episodes include, for example, a story on the origin of the world in which a god descended upon the Japanese archipelagos to become the first emperor. Even at the time of Motoori, his belief in the ancient myth was criticized as unscientific and groundless. Some contemporaries of Motoori questioned the truthfulness of these myths by drawing upon Western science, which was gradually introduced to Japan as "Dutch Learning." Although familiar with novel scientific knowledge, Motoori was adamant in defending the myth as the recording of *true experience*. Kobayashi took Motoori's attitude as belief in the ancient common sense: *Kojiki* depicted the experiences of ordinary people in the ancient period as they were. As such, Kobayashi argues there is no use denying their experience by appealing to scientific knowledge.

Kobayashi's defense of Motoori's attitude results in a vision of harmonious social order, for Motoori defended the ancient myth as narrating the way ancient people had lived peacefully under the ancient emperors. Motoori attributed such ancient peaceful order to the "natural Shinto." Ordinary ancient people, *as a matter of common sense*, lived in a harmonious social order and had no need to rely upon theoretical intellect. Kobayashi, following Motoori, affirms such common sense as a "fact beyond any analysis" (14: 365–71). In accepting the fact beyond doubt, Kobayashi falls into what Maruyama named "faith in felt reality."

Nevertheless, the question remains: How can we know that *Kojiki* recorded the common sense or felt reality of ancient people? Kobayashi provides two answers. The first is the notion of authentic language. Kobayashi maintains a clear distinction between spoken language and written language, claiming that the former retains the lively presence of history as "word soul" (*kotodama* 言霊) (14: 488). Motoori and Kobayashi regard *Kojiki* as preserving this lively language because, as mentioned earlier, *Kojiki* was written in deviant Chinese writing, which is thought to represent the oral sounds of ancient Japanese instead of following Chinese syntax.

However, Kobayashi's response here seems insufficient because the idea of "word soul" merely transports the question onto another level: Why can we regard *Kojiki's* writing as partaking in the authentic "word soul"? Anticipating this question, Kobayashi moves to the second answer: faith (14: 478). According to Kobayashi, Motoori had to believe in the words of *Kojiki* to set out to interpret them. Kobayashi called Motoori's faith a "decision" (14: 426). In the end, decisionism sustains Motoori's orientation as well as Kobayashi's interpretation.

### An alternative interpretation of Kobayashi

The examination of Kobayashi's *Motoori Norinaga* in the last section seems to underline Maruyama's criticism of "faith in felt reality." First, Kobayashi's faith in common sense as felt reality led him to

affirm Motoori's uncritical acceptance of mythological stories as "facts." Second, in affirming Motoori's faith in the mythological past, Kobayashi assumed a harmonious community under the name of common sense. Such harmonious social order denies politics in either the form of rule of theoretical knowledge or the interaction of plural perspectives and interests.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Kobayashi's faith in common sense led to Schmittian decisionism because, without reflection, there was no critical standpoint from which to judge the common sense. The only possible language was the authentic "word soul," which also had to be believed by decisionistic faith.

Criticizing Kobayashi's "faith in felt reality," Maruyama (1961) calls for two orientations he thinks are lacking in modern Japanese thought. The first is an "axis of thought" that would serve as a universal standard by which we judge our reality as well as offer a universal medium for communicating our views. Maruyama finds its representative cases in the West, where Christian tradition served as an axis that when confronted led to the emergence of modern thought. The second is the affirmation of "everyday politics," which would enable plural perspectives and interests to compete and negotiate with each other. By acknowledging plurality, "everyday politics" can prevent us from being subjugated to "big politics" that would govern every corner of life under a single perspective, whether it might be a rationalist vision of Marxism or irrational fascism.

Maruyama's criticism of "faith in felt reality" and antidotes to it are relevant to the current materialist strands, namely an attempt to introduce materialist orientation in the non-West. First, Maruyama's call for the traditional axis suggests the risk of introducing the criticism of Western modernity prior to the establishment of modernity. As I pointed out earlier, Maruyama saw in Japanese modernity a unique combination of super-modernity and pre-modernity (Maruyama 1961, p. 53). Kobayashi seems to attest to this combination when he found Motoori's notion of things resonating with the Bergsonian "image." Second, subjective belief plays an important role in New Materialism as well as in Kobayashi. New Materialism often appeals to imagination and a sensibility that help us look beyond the world of inert objects. For example, Bennett affirms anthropomorphism – "the interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics" – to uncover a vital materiality in things (Bennett 2010, 98–9). To do so, however, causes the risk of "seeing only a world in our own image," as Bennett rightly points out (2010, 99).

However, Maruyama's call raises a question regarding the compatibility of the two orientations. Although Maruyama calls for a unified perspective under an "axis," he emphasizes plurality of perspectives in "everyday politics." How can these stances go hand in hand? I do not pursue this question further in this article, the purpose of which is not to illuminate Maruyama's thought, but the political implication of the materiality.<sup>17</sup> Instead, I take this dissonance in Maruyama's thought as a clue to repudiating Maruyama's criticism of Kobayashi's "way to things." Is there any possibility that Kobayashi's notion of materiality evades the decisionistic faith in felt reality? I argue that Kobayashi's writings contain ambiguities that allow an alternative reading different from Maruyama's interpretation. In the following, I pursue such an alternative interpretation relating to the following five points: politics, common sense, faith, language, and materiality.

### Politics

Maruyama regarded Kobayashi as an anti-political thinker. In fact, Kobayashi affirmed a concept of politics that was rather similar to Maruyama's "everyday politics." In 1951, Kobayashi published an essay entitled "Politics and Literature," one of his extensive discussions on the topic. In the essay, Kobayashi asserts, "I simply dislike politics," claiming that it is a matter of his disposition (10: 78). Kobayashi's assertion may seem to vindicate Maruyama's observation that the faith in felt reality denies any intellectual reflection or communication with others. In addition, when Kobayashi uses

<sup>16</sup>Maruyama did not discuss Kobayashi's *Motoori Norinaga*. However, on a couple of occasions, Maruyama mentioned the work, expressing the complaint that Kobayashi failed to address political aspects of Motoori's thought. See Maruyama (2005, pp. 63–64).

<sup>17</sup>On Maruyama's two orientations, see Sugita (2010).

“politics” to mean political ideologies that dissolve individuals into anonymous group members (10: 85–6), he underwrites Maruyama’s criticism that Kobayashi mistakenly identifies politics with the rule of totalizing theory. According to Kobayashi, politics concerns groups in which individuals melt into anonymity (10: 85). Against politics thus understood to treat people solely as anonymous masses and groups, Kobayashi defends the value of individuality. Whereas politics addresses abstract and anonymous ideologies, individuality is based on individual experience that cannot be abstracted into general ideas. For example, Kobayashi claims to approve of Dostoevsky’s thought on freedom as based on Dostoevsky’s individual experience while repudiating liberalism in politics.

Ironically, the realm of individuals Kobayashi defends appears close to what Maruyama conceives as the realm of “everyday politics,” where the plurality of individuals flourishes. Kobayashi, without using the word “politics,” affirms the views and interests emanating from respective individual experiences. Then is it not possible to read Kobayashi’s defense of individuality as a defense of politics – that is, Kobayashi’s political thought?

In *Motoori Norinaga*, Kobayashi even appeals to a political concept of democracy in defending individuality. Kobayashi dedicates an entire chapter to Nakae Toju (中江藤樹), a Confucian scholar in the early seventeenth century. Originally born to a farmer’s family and later resigned from serving his master, *daimyō*, he lived as an independent scholar of Confucianism in a local village. Although Nakae was not a Kokugaku (national learning) scholar, but a Confucian, Kobayashi counts Nakae as a precursor of Motoori, arguing that their studies stemmed from needs in their lives. Most early-modern Confucian scholars worked for their masters, and their teachings were made for the business of ruling. But Nakae studied Confucianism for his own sake, to pursue his own interest. In ascribing Nakae’s independent stance *vis-à-vis* political authority to a lasting atmosphere of the Sengoku period (the time of civil war in the fifteenth century), and namely to the practices of “the low overcomes the high” (*Gekokujō* 下剋上) – the practice of overthrowing someone with a higher position by force – Kobayashi likens Nakae’s activity to “democracy” (14: 92–3). Kobayashi justifies this seemingly odd equivocation between the military practices in the Middle Ages and democracy by referring to a dictionary entry that states, “*Gekokujō* can be understood as democracy” (14: 84). Kobayashi’s point is clear: Nakae’s activity was democratic in his emphasis on his personal perspective stemming from his individual experience. In other words, the individuality that Kobayashi defends against totalizing politics can be seen as constituting democracy in which individuals with different experiences interact without a ruling political authority.

### Common sense

With his emphasis on individual experience, Kobayashi’s notion of *common sense* appears more ambiguous than just being a mere basis of “faith in felt reality.” As we saw in the previous section, Kobayashi’s reliance on common sense led him to affirm the vision of harmonious social order that would resist any critical reflection, the “Chinese mind.” However, we have also seen that Kobayashi defended his personal experience of specter in the name of common sense (Appendix 1: 268–273).

Kobayashi’s *common sense* thus seems to contain two different notions. On the one hand, it implies a shared common ground, *to which* we should *return* from theoretical intellect. When Kobayashi defends the ancient harmonious community as practiced by ordinary people’s common sense, he uses the term in this sense. On the other hand, while resistant to theoretical intellect, common sense means subjective experiences *from which* our study should *start*. When Kobayashi begins his study on Bergson by narrating his personal encounter with the specter, Kobayashi uses the term *common sense* in this sense. Kobayashi invites us to ask, if we accept the spectral experience as real, then what would the world and human experience would look like. And for Kobayashi, Bergson is a thinker whose philosophical investigation begins from the experience of common sense.

In fact, common sense in this latter sense of being subjective as the starting point of inquiry appears in Kobayashi’s discussion on the ancient harmonious community, jumbled together with the former

sense of the word. In presenting the harmonious community in *Kojiki* as the product of common sense, Kobayashi cautions that the common sense of the ancient people was different from our “common way” (*jōdo* 常道). Kobayashi further states that Motoori *started* from believing in the common sense of the ancient people. For Motoori, too, the harmonious community was not an ideal to which we should return, but the starting point of investigation. As such, Kobayashi’s common sense assumes the plurality of common senses.

### Faith

When we take Kobayashi’s common sense as a starting point of inquiry into the reality of others, and as varying according to the plurality of environments in which others live, Kobayashi’s seemingly decisionistic belief in faith implies another interpretation. As we have seen, Kobayashi appeals to faith in accepting common sense – whether it means the harmonious ancient community under the emperor’s rule or people’s sensed reality – as *the* reality that is beyond doubt. Furthermore, Kobayashi often depicts the reality thus accepted as the product of destiny beyond human control. For example, artwork is the product of destiny that its creator cannot control. In “Multiple Designs,” he explains the notion of *destiny* as follows:

A person comes into the world embracing various possibilities. He may wish to become a scientist, a soldier, or a novelist, but he can never become other than who he is – a marvelous human fact. To put it another way, a person can discover a variety of truths, but can never entirely possess these truths that are discovered. Multiple truths, in the form of ideas, may reside in the cortex of someone’s brain. But there is a single and unalterable truth that courses through the veins of his body. Clouds make rain, and rain makes clouds. The dialectical statements seem to unite disparate facts and signify the true existence of destiny in the world. (1:136; 1995, pp. 21–22)

Although we may have had multiple possibilities, we are forced by our environment to become who we are, of which reality lies in its material existence. The task of criticism is to reveal this *destiny* underlying numerous possible interpretations as the true shape of the artwork. In discussing destiny, Kobayashi seems to accept it as *the true reality*.

However, if we interpret Kobayashi as acknowledging the plurality of environments, common sense, and perspectives, and if Kobayashi had to have faith in the other’s common sense to respect their perspective, Kobayashi’s faith does not mean to project common sense as the singular true reality. Rather, Kobayashi’s faith appears as a preparatory procedure of positing the perspective of other as reasonable. In addition, Kobayashi’s *destiny* can be interpreted as allowing plural perspectives. In the quote above, Kobayashi suggests that a person has multiple possibilities that are not realized by their destiny. These possibilities now take on a different shape. By revealing how our material environment beyond our control affects our lives, Kobayashi’s *destiny* can point to multiple possibilities that underlie the fact that although a person becomes who they are, they could have been otherwise.<sup>18</sup> Kobayashi’s *destiny* implies the contingency of the world.

### Language

When we reinterpret Kobayashi’s notions of common sense and faith in a pluralistic way, one question arises: How can we communicate across different perspectives? As we have seen, Kobayashi in *Motoori Norinaga* presents the idea of the “word soul,” the authentic language that reflects the reality of “forms of things.” If the authentic language existed, we would have no problem in communication, although the authentic language would not allow plural realities. In fact, Kobayashi has only a decisionistic faith in the authentic language.

<sup>18</sup>Sakaguchi Ango (坂口安吾), Kobayashi’s contemporary ally and critic, argues that Kobayashi’s deterministic logic of “destiny” can be loosened so as to allow other possibilities. Cf. Otohe (2020, Ch. 3).

However, in his early writings, Kobayashi offers a different notion of language that can help us communicate across plural perspectives. In addition, interestingly enough, Kobayashi develops this notion of language by drawing upon Marx's materialism. In several writings in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Kobayashi likens language to Marx's notion of *commodity*.<sup>19</sup> According to Kobayashi, language functions as a commodity in two respects. First, as commodities dominate society, language dominates our minds (1: 226–7). Our minds cannot cognize, think, and communicate without language. Second, in ruling our minds, language is reified, and it becomes the object of our fetish. Because commodities appear to us to have their internal and objective values under their reified forms, language appears to express *the* objective reality: language as a commodity lures us into believing it is always authentic. Simply put, the notion of language as a commodity helps us to develop the pluralistic interpretation of common sense and faith further. In ruling our minds, language determines and constitutes our intersubjective reality. As such, our realities vary according to the language we use to describe them.

How, then, does Kobayashi's language as a commodity enable us communicate across various perspectives? In criticizing Kobayashi, Maruyama argues that Kobayashi needs a universal language with which we can distance ourselves from our sensed reality. Certainly, Kobayashi's language as a commodity cannot serve the role of universal medium. To Kobayashi, language is not universal – it does not reflect the objective reality. What is necessary for Kobayashi instead is to demystify the language, as Marx did in his analyses of commodities. Kobayashi calls this demystification the search for “absolute language 絶対言語” (1:227). The absolute language, which Kobayashi also calls “naked language,” is not the objective medium for our transparent communication. In fact, the absolute language becomes universal when, stripped of being fetishized as a transparent medium, language appears as a specific object (1:229).<sup>20</sup>

Kobayashi refers to two examples of the search for universal language: symbolism in poetry and Miguel de Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*:

Both Poe and Cervantes putatively had the same disgust and dislike against the lies [that is, the fetish] of language. Poe cleansed language of its sociability and currency-like quality and tried to escape the lies of language, believing that he could approach the purified substance of language. Cervantes, on the other hand, did not believe in the autonomous poetic language, and instead chose to turn the lies of language to his advantage, accepting the lies of language in society as they were. (1:246)

Both symbolist poetry and Cervantes' novel pursue absolute language, but in different ways. Here I want to focus on the latter, Cervantes' strategy, because Kobayashi's literary criticism mainly features novels rather than poetry. Kobayashi pays attention to the unnatural conversation between Sancho and Panza in *Don Quixote*. Their conversations sound strange to modern readers, while Sancho and Panza have no problem in communicating with each other. According to Kobayashi, *Don Quixote* denaturalizes language by showing how much a given language depends upon implicit contexts, understandings, and environments in appearing as a natural medium for transparent communication. Thus the search for absolute language here means neither the pursuit of a transparent and universal medium nor having decisionistic faith in the sensed reality that Sancho and Panza were supposed to face. Rather, for Kobayashi, it means revealing that a given language is nothing more than a contingent product of its environment, one of many possible languages.

<sup>19</sup>Morimoto (2002) emphasizes Marx's influence on Kobayashi's notion of language in the 1930s (pp. 59–62). Dorsey (2009) points out that Kobayashi's idea of language is similar to that of Saussure (p. 139). See also Otake (2020), pp. 157–60.

<sup>20</sup>Morimoto (2002) develops a detailed analysis of Kobayashi's “absolute language,” focusing on the influence of French Symbolist poetry.

### Materiality

Finally, we need to address the kind of materiality upon which the alternative interpretation developed so far is based. In *Motoori Norinaga*, Kobayashi presents the notion of *forms of things*, which affects our minds by prefiguring the primordial order of things. According to this view, the power of materiality lies in its containing the true reality of the world. Such an essentialist notion of *forms of things* cannot withstand the pluralistic interpretation of Kobayashi's writings pursued in this section. Is materiality irrelevant in the pluralistic interpretation, or is there any other orientation towards materiality compatible with the pluralistic interpretation?

Kobayashi's early writings on absolute language and destiny, with his frequent reference to Marx's materialism, suggest a different notion of materiality that affects us with its movement. In explaining absolute language, Kobayashi relates it to nature: "The way to absolute language is the way to absolute nature, and the way to absolute nature is nothing but a way to the absolute particular. Universality is no different from the absolute reliance on the particularity" (1:229). Although this passage may sound idiosyncratic, our reinterpretation so far makes Kobayashi's point clear. In denaturalizing a given language, we realize that a language, as well as other objects (and subjects like us), is a product formed by its specific environment. As such, any language remains a particular rather than universal medium. In so doing, the particularity of a given language reveals the possibility of other languages – and thus of perspectives. "Absolute nature" refers to nature's capacity to produce an infinite number of perspectives.

The same logic holds true when it comes to Kobayashi's notion of destiny. As we have seen in discussing his notion of faith, Kobayashi explains how destiny forms individuals by using material terms: "Multiple truths, in the form of ideas, may reside in the cortex of someone's brain. But there is *a single and unalterable truth that courses through the veins of his body*" (1:136; Kobayashi 1995, pp. 21–22, emphasis added). This materiality, however, does not imply a deterministic force. Because the natural environment forms particular natural phenomena, it also forms our particular individuality out of infinite possibilities. Nature here acts as a *protean* force that affects us as well as natural objects rather than as a *primordial order of "forms."*

### Conclusion

By affirming active materiality, do we overturn our orientation toward politics? If so, does it come with risks? Are the risks more imminent in the non-West? I posed these questions in the introduction. Maruyama would answer these questions in the affirmative. For him, if we lack the axis that Western thought has had, we risk falling into passive acceptance of the felt reality in the name of "the way to things." Also, Kobayashi's *Motoori Norinaga* seems to underwrite Maruyama's criticism that in affirming affective materiality, Kobayashi fell into a decisionistic faith in the harmonious order backed up by the "forms of things." In addition, Maruyama's criticism can apply to the current materialist strands such as New Materialism.

Against Maruyama's criticism, in the final section, I pursued an alternative interpretation of Kobayashi, focusing on his early writings in the 1930s. According to this interpretation, active materiality rather enables our critical engagement with objects by evincing the protean forces of materiality, and as its consequence, the plurality of languages and common sense.

Surely enough, Kobayashi did not pursue the line of thought explored in the final section. Rather, in his later writings – including *Motoori Norinaga* – he leaned increasingly towards the decisionistic faith in the reality assumed as "the forms of things." In addition, his early writings remain ambiguous, allowing the alternative interpretation while in most cases showing affinity with his later writings.

Nonetheless, such alternative interpretation not only can rescue Kobayashi's orientation toward materiality from his alleged decisionistic faith in reality, but also contribute to contemporary debates over materialism. Kobayashi's contribution lies in his notion of language as a commodity. New materialists often distinguish their views from poststructuralism by repudiating the latter's reliance on constructivism (Coole and Frost 2010, p. 3). To new materialists, constructivism turns away from



materiality by focusing excessively on language. However, New Materialism does not deny the role that language plays in constituting the object (cf. Coole and Frost 2010, p. 27). Thus, it remains a task to assess the relationship between language and materiality. Kobayashi's notion of absolute language will help to fill this lacuna because Kobayashi pursues a way to situate language in the world of affective objects without dismissing the materiality of language.

**Acknowledgements.** An earlier version of this article was presented at the Workshop on Materiality and Materialism held at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I am grateful to the organizers and attendants of the workshop, especially Laikwan Pang for her encouragement and rapid and acute feedback on my draft. I also thank Naomi Ellis, K. C. Lo, Satofumi Kawamura, Hitomi Koyama, Viren Murthy, and the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments.

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