Exactly a hundred years prior to 2023, a devastating earthquake which we now refer to as the Great Kantō earthquake (関東大地震, Kantō dai-jishin) shook the main landmass of Japan. As cities were swept up in flames and millions were rendered homeless, martial law was declared by the Home Ministry (内務省, Naimu-shō). Perhaps, however, there was more tragedy to be found in the murderous human tendencies that ensued quickly after the 1st of September 1923 when the earthquake hit: ethnically minoritized workers were blamed for causing fires and executed alongside other suspected dissidents. The magnitude of the earthquake was a shattering 7.9 Mw and was caused by the plates of the earth colliding deep in the sea—one plate emerging above another that slid calamitously below.

Thinking of “emergence” evokes our human-centered thinking. How could the shifting of plates beneath planetary waters be about people? Of many life-shattering changes we experienced or heard about in the past year, “emergence” is especially reminiscent of our anthropocentric gravitation towards reflecting on life through the chasms within and among us in society. We are not exactly like Itō Noe at the time of the earthquake 100 years ago; she was an activist, writer, and translator born in 1895 who fought for women’s liberation, love, and anarchy and one of those murdered by the secret military police for allegedly inciting disorder not just during a time of disaster, but against imperial rule.1 As students in 2023, how do we express our emergence from what people before us have experienced?

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard once said in an essay that “the spirit of the times is surely not that of the merely pleasant: its mission remains that of the immanent sublime, that of alluding to the non-demonstrable.”2 You will find that the writers, illustrators, photographers, artists and editors of Komaba Times’ Issue 12 “EMERGENCE” echo the deep-seated grumblings of the Earth in our own uniquely stimulating demonstrations. We are University of Tokyo students who have hailed from around the world and have excitedly spent opportune months to compile this magazine. After collective years of introspection under COVID-19-induced quarantine and beyond, we hope that you enjoy the exploration of our shared desires for positive change, as well as the unraveling of each of our own intertwined networks built with others, the city, our memories, and with the wider world at large.

No cheer can be loud enough to represent the seismic gratitude, love, and acknowledgement owed to the work by the contributors, the student team, and our faculty advisor, for the ever-evolving, student-oriented, cross-campus, and interdisciplinary collaboration underway for Komaba Times. May our readers find something they resonate with in this issue.

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1 Hiratsuka, Raichō. In the beginning, Woman was the sun: The autobiography of a Japanese feminist. Columbia University Press, 2010.
Be like Alice; come out of the campus sanctuary!

Alyssa Castillo Yap

Anti-Emergence:
The Forgotten History of Student Autonomy in Komaba-Ryō

Chiu Chien-Cheng (James)

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Priya Mu

集カフェ (Shuu Cafe)

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I Cut My Nails at Night: The Burden We Bear as Daughters

Misha Cade

Where Do We Go When We Fall Asleep?

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The Spring, here

Suyog Garg

Reflection

Kouka

What does “Emergence” mean to you?

Komaba Times Issue 12 Team
The Year of the Rabbit has begun. You’re sitting on the green chairs of Building I at the Komaba I Campus next to your best friend quietly dozing off. The sky starts to turn a pinkish hue and your professor simply will not let you go until they read you the lengthy scroll of final instructions for your Period 5 class. You heave a deep and wary sigh. Every Todai student who has spent even one day on campus must have felt this urge to hop away from a long day of classes and fall into their very own rabbit hole of wonderment and discovery. What nearby wonderland can a Komaba student explore like Alice?

Don’t tell on me, but I have always thought of my senpai as my personal Hookah-Smoking Caterpillars. Each of my seniors has a personal space they have claimed as their favorite place to study or to escape reality after classes. Competing for my love of books and our institution’s library, I think a common PEAK favorite must be the Kono Bookstore which is right next to the Komaba-Todaimae konbini. Also, being so close to the Chiyoda line stations of Yoyogi-Koen and Yoyogi-Uehara, one should absolutely take the opportunity to try out new local shops scattered along the big streets on sunny days! In honor of the Red Queen, I want to enjoy a quiet day with nature, head to Yoyogi Park which is only a 15-minute walk from the Komaba I Campus through the back gates. Alternatively, you can enjoy the breeze while reading a book or having a picnic with friends at Komaba-koen between Komaba I and II campuses. Here you can also take a peek into Of Marquis Maeda. Of course, Komabano Park by the International Lodge (which looks best in autumn) is always open too!

Try not to use the online maps and wander the parks near campus! Photo by Alyssa

The Disney version of Alice in Wonderland starts off with a cozy reading session between sisters. If you’re not really the type to spend money after a long week of studies and you just want to enjoy a quiet day with nature, head to Yoyogi Park which is only a 15-minute walk from the Komaba I Campus through the back gates. Alternatively, you can enjoy the breeze while reading a book or having a picnic with friends at Komaba-koen between Komaba I and II campuses. Here you can also take a peek into the 1929 Western-style mansion of the family of Marquis Maeda. Of course, Komabano Park by the International Lodge (which looks best in autumn) is always open too!

Visit the cozy stores, cafes and bakeries close to campus! Photo by Alyssa

When I graduated from Komaba I Campus in the summer of 2022, I was left with haunting Shinjuku Ni-chome, famously known as the queer district of Tokyo, I found myself peeking into the dynamism of Tokyo’s diverse spaces and interviewing the varied array of people who occupied these vibrant areas. The juxtaposition between my academic inquiry, Ni-chome, with my campus undoubtedly swept me off my feet at break-neck speed. In the summer, I did not yet know if I was going to continue my studies in Japan, so I had to believe that my dream spaces could happen anywhere. Somewhat inwardly looking into my status as a Komaba student, I noticed that our school’s campuses, Komaba itself, and its neighboring spaces could happen anywhere. Somewhat inwardly looking into my status as a Komaba student, I noticed that our school’s campuses, Komaba itself, and its neighboring spaces needed much more work to become inclusive.

There is no way for me to individually get to know each reader who picks up this magazine, but I hope this article has given you a taste of Komaba and its vicinity’s familiar aura. It is a place where one can experience the proximity to Shibuya Crossing, one of the busiest and most photographed Tokyo attractions. If you’re looking for constant stimulation (and do not mind being shoved a few times like Alice down the dining table at the Hatter’s mad tea party), the 5-minute train ride or 25-minute walk to Shibuya from Komaba I Campus is always worth it. Even after years of living near Shibuya, you’ll never run out of museums, theaters, clothes and novelty shops, Michelin star restaurants, or old kissaten to discover.

What other way could one shake off the unfortunate creepiness of Alice’s authorship than to scavenge for quirky secondhand items likely carrying the darkest secrets of their previous owners? It is especially well suited for music-lovers as live music resounds everywhere from the Odakyu line buskers to basement concerts. Shimokita reeks of nostalgia for me; I used to hang out with my friends here the most, and now I mostly talk to owners of shops I frequented as they share their lamentations about new machi-zukuri developments. While I find it unfortunate that the town is undergoing extreme gentrification, Shimokita is still home to some of my favorite secondhand clothing shops, vinyl stores, restaurant-cum-bars, and antique finds.

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Edited by Zihan | Layout by Pedro
Anti-Emergence: The Forgotten History of Student Autonomy in Komaba-Ryō

Chiu Chien-Cheng (James)

Back when I lived in the Komaba International Lodge and the rent was still a benign 42,200 yen, I always referred to the dormitory as komaba-no-ryō or komaba-rojji rather than the more natural-sounding komaba-ryō. Komaba-ryō translates to “Komaba dorm” in English. Komaba-no-ryō, on the other hand, translates to the rather convoluted expression “the dorm in Komaba,” and komaba-rojji to the somewhat eccentric official name “Komaba Lodge.” I avoid referring to the Komaba International Lodge as komaba-ryō because komaba-ryō was a dorm nestled within the Komaba Campus until the 2000s. The splendid and profound history of komaba-ryō remains unknown to many, buried deep under the skeletons of futile resistance.

In the Komaba Campus, the area consisting of the cafeteria, co-op shop, and library appears much newer and more modern. Its facilities are advanced and its designs are simplistic especially compared to the rather shabby (“historic,” some might argue) Building 1. If you observe carefully, though, you will notice a relic of an arch standing alone in the shadows of the trees. This Gothic-style arch, surrounded by the modern minimalist buildings, looks rather uncanny, as if trying to assert its own existence amid the hectic, whimsical stories of a long-forgotten past.

This arch-like ruin was part of the komaba-ryō, built in 1935. At that time, the Komaba Campus was still the First High School (daiichi-kōtō-gakkō), but komaba-ryō was demolished in 2001 after the Komaba Campus had become the College of Arts and Sciences. If you are courageous enough to step into the tall grasses and read the introduction written on the monument, you will notice that the komaba-ryō does not quite fit into modern expectations of a “dorm.” The introduction tells you that back in the years of the First High School, the komaba-ryō was an autonomous dorm governed by students with independent executive and legislative systems. Indeed, the political system of komaba-ryō paralleled the political system of Japan, and the debates that took place during its meetings were said to be as intellectual as those that took place in the Diet. However, the text on the monument ends abruptly, explaining that after the First High School was abolished in 1949, the Komaba Campus became the University of Tokyo’s College of Arts and Sciences, and “the autonomous governing by the students persists in the komaba-ryō as part of the University of Tokyo.” You do not have to be a professional historian to sense the oddness in this abrupt conclusion. The written story ends in 1949, but the history of komaba-ryō obviously does not end there.

What happened after 1949? Why was the komaba-ryō demolished, and by whom? Most importantly, what happened to the “student autonomy” (gakusei jichi) when its inevitable death was decided?

Put simply, the komaba-ryō was full of vitality and charged with intellectualism even after 1949. The stories of komaba-ryō demonstrate to me a group of college students who did not treat studying as simply a task to fulfill, nor were they single-minded in the pursuit of internships or jobs. They possessed a sincere curiosity to learn, an energetic mind to critique, and a persistent concern for values rather than wealth or social status. They served as an antithesis—me, an ideal one—to the university students today. In the 1990s, however, the university decided to demolish the komaba-ryō, a decision which the students heavily resisted.

Unfortunately, the university was determined in its decision. In 1996, the university cut off the power and water, hired security guards to shatter the windows, and destroyed the furniture of the remaining students. Eventually, the university sent in excavators to tear down the buildings altogether. The Gothic architecture, built two years after the construction of Building 1 (which is now designated as a cultural heritage site), vanished from the Komaba Campus along with the dormitory’s culture of student autonomy.

I cannot help but feel a sense of insincerity in the introduction written by the university. The text affirms the student autonomy represented by the pre-1949 komaba-ryō while simultaneously evading the university’s own violence against the post-1949 komaba-ryō. In doing so, the university confines the notion of student autonomy to a distant past that we can only treat as a spectacle.
The underlying message is this: “student autonomy is good, but it belongs to a past that is no longer relevant, so don’t try to imitate it!” When the text on the monument avoids mentioning the violence conducted by the university, the connection between the past and the present is lost. We are encouraged to treat the history of komaba-ryō as an artifact of the past rather than a useful tool to critique the university’s violence and power which persists today. What I intend to propose here is, therefore, the notion of “anti-emergence.” Its rationale is simple: one thing is new because something else has disappeared, been replaced, or been demolished. The modern-looking buildings and the transformation of space are often intertwined with our memories and evaluations of the past. The renewed, stylish Miyashita Park in Shibuya puts a veil on the relocation of homeless people who had lived in its previous form. The construction of the large road, Subsidiary Route 54 (hojyo-gojyoyon-gō-set) in Shimokitazawa is likely to one day conceal the memories of the protest movements against its realization.

As Milan Kundera puts it, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.” Remembering is not easy. Memory is, itself, a form of resistance and can entail rediscovery of the past. To remind myself of this, I will continue to refer to where I had lived as the convoluted komaba-no-ryō or the eccentric komaba-ryō.

One thing is new because something else has disappeared, been replaced, or been demolished.

Edited by Sherene | Layout by Ohyun

Have you ever wondered where to refill your water bottle on campus? In Issue 10 of Komaba Times, I painted a pretty dismal picture of the state of water servers on Komaba I Campus, which stood firm with over 64 buildings but only 10 drinking water fountains1 for over 9 thousand students and staff members. Today, persistent student-led activism is changing this reality. Like a couple of recent triumphant campaigns such as the trimming of lesson times from 105 to 90 minutes and the provision of free period products in some washrooms on campus, a small group of students has managed to achieve what seemed impossible just a few years ago: 12 new water servers have been approved and installed on Komaba I Campus!

So, how did we get here? We must go back to 2021, when my team in “Phase I” of the university-wide Global Education for Innovation and Leadership (GEfIL) program began looking into the issue of plastic waste on University of Tokyo campuses. What we found with our primary research in Komaba was not surprising: student usage of water bottles was low, and awareness of refill locations was nearly non-existent. Our surveys revealed that many students were unsure about whether water from these refill locations was safe to consume. Respondents were also unsatisfied with the water’s taste, and the unhygienic appearance of the servers themselves. Coupled with a pandemic that only amplified hygiene-related concerns, which led to shiyokushin ("Use Prohibited") signs being plastered on the few servers that did exist, what you’ve got is a perfect recipe for an exacerbated single-use culture on campus.

Targeting this issue, my GEfIL team proposed the idea of installing bottle-refill-type water servers on campus to reduce plastic waste. Our hypothesis was simple: encouraging students to use their own bottles through these servers could reduce plastic waste, and may be a gateway into the wider adoption of a more environmentally conscious lifestyle.

Incidentally, Akari Nomura from the Todai Sustainable Campus Project (TSCP) student committee also proposed the same idea, and Leah Han, part of the TSCP student committee and a teaching assistant in GEfIL, connected Daiki Yamaguchi from my GEfIL team and I with Akari. Members of the two environmental circles at the University of Tokyo, namely ECHO and Kankyo Sanshiro, also joined our small but burgeoning initiative, thus leading to the launch of “P0001 Water Server” as the pioneer project for the UTokyo Sustainable Network (UTSN).

To begin implementation, however, our newly formed team of students needed to gather more information. Who was or would be responsible for installing and maintaining the new water servers on campus? We emailed anybody and everybody who seemed mildly related, yet to no avail — as it turns out, management of the servers did not quite fit into anyone’s job description. How do we obtain the stats to make our proposal convincing? The Co-op store provided us with data on the sales of bottled beverages in 2019, and we continued by gathering student opinions and preferences on the project. We scavenged every floor of every building on campus to identify potential refill locations, and wrote a research-based 45-page proposal in Japanese. Unfortunately, the TSCP team, with its focus on greenhouse gas emissions reduction, decided not to fund us because the emission reduction impact of the project was not significant enough.

Quenching our thirst for change: Transforming Komaba Campus into an oasis

Mahi Patki
such as the Center for Global Commons and Race to Zero in 2021. An opportunity eventually arose to deliver a 4-minute pre-recorded presentation at the Future Society Initiative (FSI) Advisory Board meeting in November, where the President of UTokyo himself praised our project. Our spirits were at an all-time high after this meeting, yet no action followed from the university’s side. So, we decided to change strategies and approached the Komaba Jichikai (Student Union) to request funds for a trial installation. However, the proposed trial exceeded the Jichikai’s budget, and so they were only able to appeal for it in the student negotiations agenda.

Almost a year later in October 2022, UTSN (somewhat miraculously) received an email from Professor Masahiro Sugiyama, who was an active member of Kankyo Sanshiro in his student days and has continued his related advocacies with the university ever since. He notified us that the university was moving forward with the project and the newly launched Green Transformations (GX) Student Initiative team would like to have an informal meeting with the UTSN water server team. Apparently, UTokyo Executive Vice President Tatsuya Okubo really pushed to realize this project. In this meeting with GX and administrative staff, held in November 2022, we discussed the list of potential water server installation locations. In January 2023, we met with Mr. Kazuyuki Akita from GX and a representative from a company called “Water Stand” to discuss the makeup and the UTSN-led design of the cabinet in which the new water servers would be placed. After what seemed to be glacial progress, finally, a dozen water servers were installed at locations 1 to 12 (see map) by mid-February 2023! With this project, we are really trying to change the culture of superfluously buying sugary and caffeinated beverages in single-use plastics, which is detrimental to both human and environmental health. Some critical next steps include raising awareness about the locations of water servers, promoting the use of water bottles, and educating about plastic pollution. I look forward to finding out what methods will be most effective and discovering what it takes to spark behavioral change.

To ensure that the university will continue to fund the project and expand it to other UTokyo campuses, the impact of the servers must be monitored. This includes quantifying water consumption through the attached water meters, analyzing the change in beverage sales at the Co-op store and vending machines, and gathering student feedback. In my opinion, once there are sufficient water servers across all campuses we could even nudge the university to reduce the number of beverage vending machines. Maybe then, everyone will be less tempted to buy into the lure created by the most polluting, unethical, and profitable corporations in the world such as Coca-Cola et al. Today I urge you to join the reusable revolution (if you haven’t already). Sip delicious water from your reusable bottle to reduce waste, save money, and improve your health! You probably already have water bottles neglected at home that you could befriend. Of course, if you don’t have one, please invest in a good quality bottle that suits your preferences for color, size, and material, and use it for as long as possible. A hot tip to make water taste even better is to clean your bottle regularly!

The time is ripe at UTokyo for change. Hope for campus sustainability is rising with the emergence of UTSN and the GX student initiative. But, there still is a lot to do, and we need a student team with the same recognition as Jichikai that is entirely dedicated to sustainability-related projects for the university to streamline the implementation of such initiatives.

I invite you to be a catalyst and take action for anything that you feel passionate about!

1 While writing the article for Komaba Times Issue 10, I had initially only found 9 servers. It turns out there was actually one more—a discovery that affirmed just how tricky they are to find even for a water server enthusiast like myself.
I have always been a vegetarian and therefore conscious of my food choices. However, I decided to become even more of a conscious consumer after coming to Japan, a haven for fish and meat enthusiasts. I was well aware that a new lifestyle of veganism was going to be put to the test, but I was eager to embark on this adventure awaiting unexpected experiences, challenges, and triumphs.

One of the first experiences that surprised me was the prevalence of non-vegan ingredients in even the most common dishes. I learnt that many restaurants in Japan add chicken bouillon to dishes like pasta arrabiata, which I had never encountered in any other part of the world. This was just the beginning of my journey to discovering the difficulties of being vegan in Japan.

Navigating social situations when deciding on a restaurant with non-vegan friends if we were eating out was another challenge. Most restaurants in Japan do not offer vegan options, and even when they do, they are generally more expensive. Moreover, vegan restaurants are not something that non-vegans are excited about due to stereotypes. This made it difficult for me to join friends for dinner and created awkward moments when I had nothing to eat at restaurants.

In weathering through these challenges, I found myself becoming more versatile and flexible in my eating habits. I learned to be content with whatever vegan options were available, and stopped complaining about the lack of options. Becoming vegan was a choice I made, and one that only a small percentage of the population makes. This choice meant that in many situations and events, there may be no food to eat for me unless I brought it myself. As a result, I now always come prepared, either by bringing my own food or eating before I go out.

On a visit to a Buddhist temple in Kyoto, I had an unexpected discovery. I learnt that in ancient Japan a vegan diet was practised by Buddhist monks as a form of asceticism. This culture of a plant-based diet is known as “shojin ryori,” which translates to “devotion cuisine,” and was passed down through generations. This traditional vegan cuisine is centred around seasonal ingredients and is considered a form of spiritual nourishment. However, with the modernization of Japan, the focus shifted towards meat and seafood-based diets. While some traditional vegan restaurants still serve shojin ryori, veganism is not as widely understood or practised in modern Japanese culture.

Veganism in Japan connected me to the philosophy of “wabi-sabi,” which embraces the beauty of imperfection, impermanence, and the passing of time. In a world where fast food and heavily processed ingredients are readily available, the appreciation of the simplicity and naturalness of foods devoid of animal products is my rebellion against perfectionism in food. I started to recognize that imperfections in locally sourced and seasonal ingredients bring depth and richness to food. Similarly, veganism celebrates the idea of using whole foods that are grown and produced without harming animals or the environment. Japan taught me to reject the preference for perfect, polished food over nourishing, honest meals that are in harmony with nature.

As I continue to deepen my understanding of food, I have come to re-conceptualise veganism to be a celebration of the cyclical, changing, and impermanent aspects of life, rather than a strict set of dietary rules. Until now, being vegan in a non-vegan world has taught me to be more adaptable, patient, and appreciative of the simple things in life. I am still on this learning journey in Japan, where I am discovering new things about myself, life, and the culture and people around me.
When you hear the word “Cyber”, what do you imagine? A community space like Twitter, or Facebook? Something related to security or war? Or an “upgraded” space alien from the planet Mondas? Nowadays, we hear things with “Cyber” all the time, along with other high-tech terminology.

For someone who is currently in their early twenties, Cyberspace is something you grew up with, and based on my (limited) experience, I’d like to share what Cyberspace means to me and how it became part of my life.

When I was a little kid living in Japan, I recall watching my father use the computer as a tool for his work. Although he sometimes let me play with it, he only allowed me to do so on a limited basis. So, when he was away, I’d often jump onto his computer to make up for his “stinginess”.

At that time, I didn’t understand the concepts of Internet or Cyberspace, but thanks to the phone and annoying email notifications announcing, “You’ve got mail”, I probably recognized it as a “mysterious machine” which could send and receive information.

About 5 to 10 years later, people started to actively use apps like Skype and YouTube, with only YouTube remaining popular until this day. There was a famous video streamer on YouTube (now referred to as YouTubers): Chinese Backstreet Boys (aka The Back Dorm Boys). The YouTube videos that launched their fame were performance videos with them lip-syncing to the Backstreet Boys’ “I Want It That Way” as well as the cover version of “Da Da Da”, which was later used as promotion for Pepsi during the 2006 World Cup.

Their videos went viral around the world, and Japan was no exception. One famous Japanese TV show, featuring well-known Japanese idol “V6”, invented a new term for lip-syncing, “Air-Vo (エアボ)”, short for “Air Vocal (エアーボーカル)”, and solicited lip-syncing videos from their television audience and fanbase. Although I never sent videos to the show, I was one of many Japanese influenced by them, and ended up making a few “Air-Vo” performances of my own at the time. I should also note that this was all before the debut of the iPhone, and people were still using flip phones.

In the early 2010s, my friends at school started to use smartphones and Social Network Services (SNS) such as Twitter and LINE. Back then, you could even access the Internet from game consoles such as Sony’s PlayStation Vita, Nintendo’s 3DS, and Wii. Some kids used it to tweet, to play online games, or to watch some “artistic” images. By that time, I had come to more fully understand the concepts of Cyberspace and Internet... with how we used the Internet virtually the same as how we use it today.

These days, we see some digital content on Instagram and TikTok featuring beautiful scenic views as well as music performances. The interesting fact is that the fundamental content itself has never really changed, basically repeating the same things that people did in the early 2000s. But we are not just rehashing the past, we are improving on it by changing the platform or sometimes the user interface.

In other words, from my point of view, cyberspace or the Internet is something old, but something new.
I always wanted to live in as big a city as possible. When I first arrived in Tokyo, however, I did not know what to expect. I had barely ever stayed in a city bigger than 500,000 people, so living in a metropolis like Tokyo was certainly an experience I’ve never had before. I didn’t even have ways of fully understanding what it meant.

What struck me most when I first arrived was an overwhelming complexity and sheer diversity of life. Every area of Tokyo was a whole new world by itself. Even within the small radius of my regular commute along the Inokashira Line, I got to see so much more than what my hometown could ever provide. I couldn’t stop looking out of the train windows. The metro system in particular was fascinating to me—which is only natural I suppose—since life in the entire city relies on and revolves around its intricate network of train lines. Whenever I had time after my classes, I would go out and try to understand Tokyo through the method I knew best: photography.
Pretty soon, I began to focus on one particular time and place as the subject of my pictures: Inokashira Line’s Shibuya Station during the rush hour. What I saw when I took photos there was the life of the city emerging from the subway cars. It was like a cross-section of Tokyo was presenting itself every time the doors of the trains opened before me. I saw people from all walks of life, sharing moments of slightly uncomfortable to extremely cramped social interactions. Everyone trying to accommodate each other—everyone just wanting a little bit of space for themselves.

The train lines of Tokyo are infamous for being densely packed and often overcrowded, especially during rush hour. Yet despite the close physical contact with everyone else, the people in the trains are all trying to keep to themselves, with most passengers wrapped in their own protective bubbles, checking their phone, staring vacantly out of the windows, or simply being fast asleep. Nobody notices the miracle of the moments.

After photographing these people in the metro cars, packed like sardines in cans, I headed home. Stepping into the train bound for my local station, I became one of them.
Yasha Lai

make a pot

a. connect the steps with a line
b. find the pot and circle it
I drew this illustration to represent my brain when I feel like I have been separated by two or more personalities. I became aware of this feeling after entering university, and wondered whether other students in Komaba felt the same way. To me, this piece portrays “emergence” from oneself, which in turn is formed by other elements. This emergence can be from the stereotypes that people attach to you – for example, being a smart straight-A student, and so on. However, being conscious of your inner self is not always easy and safe, and you might suffer from an identity crisis. You may even lose something that you always had in mind. Through this piece, I wish to show others the importance of breaking self-imposed limitations and how it is vital to use your time as a student to be a better version of yourself.

Hiroka Sakurai
I woke up on June 16th with one goal: climb Excelsior Falls. Long story short, I failed. I fell 5 meters down a waterfall, tore a 20 centimeter gash in my butt, and caused a small landslide.

It had started out as a normal Tuesday: a weekday off that I typically used for hiking waterfalls with friends. I had selected June 16th to conquer a particularly adventurous waterfall, Excelsior Falls. I woke up, packed my backpack, picked up my girlfriend, Moe, and started the 45-minute trek to Excelsior Glen near Watkins Glen, NY where the waterfalls were.

It was my second summer hiking waterfalls in the Finger Lakes, and I was confident enough to consider myself an advanced hiker. My presumed skill level in mind, I was unfazed when my waterfall guide, NYfalls.org, listed Excelsior Glen as “Very Difficult.” The drive there was serene, and after 45 minutes, we spotted the trail entrance just off NY Route 414 and parked down the road.

The walk to the trail was straightforward, and after whacking through some tall grass, we found ourselves on a creek, where we heard the first waterfall in the glen, Emerald Falls. Emerald Falls is a 10-meter waterfall with a weak flow and shallow basin. According to NYfalls.org, experienced hikers have a reasonable chance of ascending the waterfall. Seeing the falls up close, however, I realized that I may have already bitten off more than I could chew. Emerald Falls was, in fact, not a series of cascades as the blog indicated. It was a cliff. I knew that neither Moe nor I could ascend safely, so we begrudgingly exited the creek and managed to find a steep yet hike-able alternative path to the top of the waterfall. In retrospect, Emerald Falls was a clear sign that this hike was not going to be as straightforward as we had anticipated. Emerald Falls called for an all-out expedition for which we were clearly not prepared, as we had little more than a backpack, swimsuits, and water shoes. Nevertheless, we continued hiking up the creek.

The following 2-kilometer hike was beautiful. The water maintained a brisk pace but was relatively low, allowing us to easily hike upstream. The heat of the summer morning balanced with the cool water, and insects hummed all around us. Moe and I kept high spirits with jovial conversation throughout the hike. These conversations, however, came to an abrupt end when we reached the base of our day’s goal, Excelsior Falls. As it turns out, it was not one, but three separate waterfalls stacked on top of each other: Excelsior Falls, High Falls, and Sullivan Falls. Each was 10 to 15 meters high, and the entire rock formation was roughly 37 meters tall. We knew that these falls were not going to be small, but we were admittedly surprised by the steep, slippery cascades that lay before us.

We pushed forward in spite of our hesitation and made it up the first tier of approximately 13 meters with relative ease. The second tier was about 17 meters, very steep, and far less inviting. There were two possible ways to get up: one, climb straight up the mossy, slippery waterfall, or two, go around the left side of the falls and scramble up a dry, crumbly incline. Neither option seemed ideal, but we decided to explore the first option: the waterfall. I took the lead in aiming for a small ledge 3 meters up, which would serve as a good stepping stone. I made it up alright but was unsure of how to approach the remaining 14 meters ahead. I decided to press on from the ledge, finding small foot holds where possible. After only a few meters of progress, one of my feet gave out. I slid 5 meters back down to the top of the first tier where Moe was fortunately able to help me stop before I unwillingly went cliff jumping.

The slide had left my butt seriously bruised, but I was determined to conquer this waterfall, so I decided to try the dirt hill to the left of the falls. Unsurprisingly, I fell again, this time carrying a couple fallen trees with me. It was at this point with a sore butt and a terrified Moe that I decided it was time to turn back.

After negotiating our way down the first 14 meters of the falls (first tier), I asked Moe to take a look at my “bruise” only to find a bloody, dirt-filled, 20-centimeter open gash. We used most of our clean water to debride my mangled butt cheek, and I used my shirt as an impromptu bandage.

Over the 2-kilometer hike back to my car, the 45-minute drive home, and the following weeks (during which I could neither stand up nor sit down without wincing in pain), I wondered where I had gone wrong. Maybe I hadn't done my research, or maybe I didn't have good enough gear. I realized, however, that I had spent so much time hiking waterfalls that I had forgotten how much respect they deserve. Waterfalls are not goals over which a person can triumph. They are moving, breathing, and living. I approached Excelsior Falls with arrogance, and it showed me that it was a creature worthy of admiration and observation. I bear the scar from that June morning, carrying with it a newfound appreciation for the natural world and renewed intent to explore nature thoughtfully and respectfully.
Quite a while back I went to a second-hand furniture shop in Hongo to get a chair for my study desk. I came across an antique wooden cabinet with a lot of drawers and text on each compartment written using outdated kanji characters. I got curious and asked the shopkeeper what this cabinet was.

“People used this to store herbs and medicines in old times,” he said.

“Oh... Like in Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi (Spirited Away)?” I asked him.

“Ahh sou sou sou,” he agreed with a nodding smile.

As I stood there taking a closer look at the cabinet, I forgot about the chair and momentarily teleported to Kamaji’s boiler room. The excitement that I felt exploring the cabinet lingered for a long time even after I left the place.

The phrase “God’s in the details,” is often attributed to the German Architect Mies van der Rohe, but the origin of the phrase is still debated. I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin here. The phrase manifests the idea that I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin. The phrase “God’s in the details,” is often attributed to the German Architect Mies van der Rohe, but the origin of the phrase is still debated. I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin here. The phrase manifests the idea that I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin.

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While this applies to anything and everything, whatever one does should be done thoroughly. The phrase “God’s in the details,” is often attributed to the German Architect Mies van der Rohe, but the origin of the phrase is still debated. I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin. The phrase manifests the idea that I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin here. The phrase manifests the idea that I’m more concerned about what it means than the origin here.

I asked him.

“Ooooh... Like in Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi (Spirited Away)?” I asked him.

“Ah! sou sou sou,” he agreed with a nodding smile.

As I stood there taking a closer look at the cabinet, I agreed with a nodding smile.

When it comes to imbuing life in anime, there are so many crucial elements such as the character design, voice acting, screenplay, etc., but I believe the pièce de résistance lies in the details of the drawings. Anime series with abstract backgrounds can also make me feel like I am part of those fictional worlds, possibly because of their long duration, but I don’t think they have that transcending effect where random everyday moments can feel almost magical, like my experience at the second-hand furniture shop.

Realistic backgrounds are a trademark of Japanese animation and can be found in almost all anime, but I am particularly drawn to the realism portrayed in the ethereal drawings of Kazuo Oga (Studio Ghibli), Mamoru Hosoda (Wolf Children), Satoshi Kon (Tokyo Godfathers), Hiroyuki Okiura (A Letter to Momo) and sometimes Makoto Shinkai (Your Name.). Shinkai uses a little too much light flare for my taste. All these movies are masterpieces in their own way, but the movie that has a special place in my heart is Okiura’s A Letter to Momo (Momo e no Tegami). It is a simple story of a young girl (Momo) and her recently widowed mother (Ikuko) moving from Tokyo to Ikuko’s hometown, an island Southeast of Hiroshima. Every single frame, including the animation, was completely hand-drawn taking the movie seven years to complete. The details, such as the wall clock that stopped working and how Ikuko looks at it, the shrine in the mountains where Momo always goes to hide from the rest of the world, the streets, the shops, what the shops sell, the clouds, the rain, and just everything, everything is part of the story portraying the grief, regrets, love, and hope the characters experience. The subdued watercolor backgrounds, so detailed and so delicate, manage to effortlessly teleport me to the islands of the Seto-inland Sea every single time I watch the movie. I haven’t yet traveled to these islands, but when I do, I bet it won’t feel like it’s the first time.

One common aspect about the animators and their works mentioned here (except for Tokyo Godfathers) is that they bridge the real world to a world of fantasy. The interweaving of fantastical elements with everyday life makes these earthly objects and places transcend into a magical world, and whenever I come across these places or objects in real life, the magic spills out into the real world, making me want to believe in Yōkai, forest spirits, and Suzuwatari (aka Makkuro Kurosuke - Miyazaki’s dust bunnies). While the possibility of an alternative universe filled with these mystical elements gets me thrilled every time, the drawings that make my heart clenches are the ones that portray the mundane and quotidian aspects of Life in the city or the countryside. Tokyo-Sunsets from the windows of Yamanote Line, empty trains on Sunday afternoons, the bridge to Enoshima, futons hanging on the balcony, hidden shrine in the middle of the city, the long stairs that lead to the shrine, the flickering lights of vending machines, old Japanese houses, particularly in the countryside, and more. When I come across them, I often experience a momentary glitch. A glitch that seems to have in it a placebo for the illnesses that come as the side effects of contemplating Life. Though life in Japan is not just endless anime backgrounds or magical encounters, and there are countless moments where I feel insecure or plainly empty, these glitches, woven into the fabric of reality, often help me take a deep breath and remember how to talk about my dreams without adding sentences that start with a “but.”

Edited by Vedoant | Photos & Layout by Priya

GOD’S IN THE DETAILS

Priya Mu
集カフェ
Shuu Cafe
Alyssa Castillo Yap

―もうちょっと。今から、もうちょっと動きたい。
“A little more. Just a little more. I want to move.”

―なんで今になって言うの。ばあちゃん?
“Why do you only tell me this now?”

―私が乗りたかった車はね。じいちゃんが好きそうなものではなかったんだよ。
“You know, the car that I wanted to ride is not something your grandfather would like.”

―どうしてダメだったの?
“Why not?”

―寒くなるし、雨の日は実用的じゃないだろうし。それに、とにかく自分のことは話さなかったの。だから寂しかったんだ。今になってわかったのは、こういう風に男の人と話をしないといけないこと。若いうちはそうやって心のバランスをとっていくものなんだよ。でもね、これからは自分の好きなようにして生きようと思う。
“It would have gotten cold and it would actually be impractical in the rain. Plus, I never talked about myself anyway. That’s why I was lonely. You have to talk to men like this. This is how one finds their heart’s balance when young. At last, I want to break away and do what I want.”

―なにがあった?
“So, what happened?”

―ある日、じいちゃんは羽田の近くで道に迷ったんだ。あのバス停を覚えているかい?二度と見つからなかったんだよ。だって、もう死んじゃったんだもん。でもね、ばあちゃんから去ったときは迷子じゃなかったんだよ。みんなが言うけれど、記憶を失っていないと思うよ。そんなことはない。
“Just one day he got lost near Haneda. Don’t you remember the bus stop? Then, we never found him again. He’s dead now, but when he left he wasn’t lost per se. I don’t think he lost any memories like people say he did. Nothing like that.”

―なるほど。
“I see.”

―今、働きたいんだよ。この話を口に出すのは初めてだよ。過去はね、マッチングアプリを使ってるんだよ。知ってる？でも、マスクを取ったら、じいちゃんがそっくりだ！
“I want to work now. I never said that out loud. I use a matching application now. Do you know about them? He took his mask off and looked just like your grandpa!”

Listening to conversations that you are not a part of feels more intimate than speaking with someone directly. Japanese may not be a language I know by heart, yet it fueled thousands of explosions that reverberated clearly into me one-by-one; it seemed to amplify the weary sighs of a good listener, the dry gulps of a fast-talker, and all the inflections of a shaken woman’s voice telling her thirty-something granddaughter how to love and live. I have never tried harder to fill in blanks. Are we always listening to each other?

This might be that Beat-inspired lust for life Iggy Pop sang about long before I was born. This grandma who had never spoken about herself was finally rising from her personal flood. As she did, I heard imaginary waters fill my lungs. I felt an apocalyptic and revelatory urge to abandon my pile of library books, storm out of the overpriced coffee shop, and maniacally wander Shinjuku and all its chomes to splurge on my underdeveloped emotions. I thought I had transcended many forms of violence and indulged in the most luxurious freedom I may ever know, but these streets never stop nipping you in the bud and shooting you as if you were a kid.¹ I fell for the promise of a city beaming with infinite space and orientations.

Who’s afraid of wallowing in commodified gloom? Why, misplaced affections are a shame, grandma. I know that those gifts that crawled back to me, minty, unused, and forgotten, had disfigured me into a materialistic contradiction. Grandma’s confessions about grandpa’s neglect reminded me of the oxymoronic and sweltering months of the 2000s, when my Catholic skirt and girlish benediction encouraged only a slow, grumbling descent into godlessness. Her confessions reeked of the rusty, poorly maintained swings I once joblessly swayed away on while regretting on age-inappropriate books (i.e., my bootlegged Bible): it is like talking about your childhood memories to someone who has never felt the grains of playground sand you once screamed in. Surely grandma knows better now than to believe in perfect exchanges.

ばあちゃん² I’ll be that modern girl too! New friends communicate with me simply by looking like a film I have seen many times before, speechlessly setting my path into orgastic novelty ablaire. No boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past in Kabukicho. Walk one street and find tens of mysterious Ferraris, hundreds of green lights, thousands of parties, and the buzzing whisper of grandma’s million-yen handheld matching game. In Tokyo, one can forget the dangers of recklessly satisfying desires. Would T.J. Eckleberg ever stand a chance against Godzilla’s cinematic anti-nuclear bust?

It was only January, just before the official start of the Year of the Rabbit. I had my palms read once when I first came here four years ago. The predictions ended in 2022, and I am now a Master’s student facing an unknowable abyss. I blissfully dream of hopping away, forgetting estranged friends, and ridding myself of unread texts. It is a youthful privilege, the desire to experience familiar corners, signs, and words completely anew, but it is expiring. Unlike grandma however, I cannot stay silent about all the things I want to fight for besides myself. Even nameless and without value, I hope I will always know ways to emerge full of love.

¹ Like Kenzaburo Oe’s first novel芽むしり仔撃ち Memushiri Kouchi, which he wrote at 23.
² “Grandma” in Japanese.

Edited by Zihan | Layout by Pedro
Illustrations by Sherrene
I Cut My Nails at Night: The Burden We Bear as Daughters

Misha Cade

I cut my nails at night. To do so is largely considered bad luck, a harbinger of death perhaps, in East Asian culture. Our superstitious mother is always quick to warn us against it: “Be mindful of when you cut your nails,” she would exclaim, “or you won’t live long enough to visit me at my deathbed.”

But as daughters, we are not as naive as she would like to believe. What she does not realize is that we have already attended her wake, twice: once in the delivery room where we let out our first cry to mourn the potential of whom she could have been; and once as grieving, parentified teenagers, laying the mother we thought we had to rest. As daughters across the world, we all have different backgrounds but come from the same mother.

When she held me tight in her arms to look down at me for the first time, I wonder if she loathed the fact I inherited my father’s eyes. It was our mother who made room, leaving her career and shifting her organs, for a child. It was she who split into two to deliver us safely, usually without the luxury of an epidural. And yet it is his name that we are ascribed: we become his legacy and his property. Who was she before “daughter” and “wife”?... was calling her “mother” the final nail in the coffin? I don’t doubt that she loves us, but our shoulders carried the weight of her resentment before our fragile bodies could even hold up its own neck.

We entered this world through a veil of her screams and I sometimes wonder if that is also how some of us may have been conceived. If her walls could talk, what would they say? Would they testify against the countless acts of trespassing and forcible entry? The reality is that it only takes one push: one push from a man with a broken ego for her to be bound eternally to domesticity, to a household she may not have necessarily prayed for. It is difficult to celebrate the miracle of birth when it is all too easy to weaponize her reproductive capacity against her. What if I was the life she had to be convinced to want?

She hears a child, but we bear her burdens. As children, we bear the burden of never being good enough because she wasn’t. We are raised in a purgatory where we are somehow too little and too much, invisible yet conspicuous. She looks the other way but notices the weight we gain; we speak in whispers and she complains about the noise. Our mistakes are tallied on the wall where our certificates should have been hanged. My mother loves me but I’m not sure she likes me very much. Everyday I promise to be better and yet all I see when I look in the mirror are remnants of her. I am her and she is me — we cannot escape the destiny that the patriarchy has written for us.

And that is why I cut my nails at night, in fear they will grow so long that I will finally reach you, only to grasp an echo of you. So I will store the burden of being your daughter next to the place where you put your resentment in me. I will cut my nails at night in hopes of cutting myself off from you, from the longing that leaves such a bitter aftertaste. All we ever wanted was to be your concern. But until then, we will cut our nails at night, finding ways to emerge as a woman who can forgive you for the burden your mother made you carry, too.
Where Do We Go When We Fall Asleep?

William Patrick Guzman

Nitrogen erupts around dead leaves.

Dirt exhumed buzzes louder than the freeway.

Roots, rocks, leaves, and acorns – woven tighter than capillary beds.

The swing hangs on green limbs over a child’s grave.

The graveyard is assaulted by trees, grass, and squirrels.

“Formaldehyde is a ubiquitous, naturally occurring substance produced by every living organism.”
- The American Chemistry Council

Leaking fuel from my car poisons sacred soil.

Leaves fall in the cemetery Let’s take a picnic! :D

Photo by Moe Wakai | Layout by Priya
The traveller sits there
Admiring the view vast
Stretches before him
The special spring cast

Imminent like a daydream is
The novel view of the seasons’ king
As if seated on sakura stems

Are colourful mirrors of celestial origin

There at horizon near the sea
The water kisses the heaven's gate
Yonder in pond's shallow waters
The fish is also eager to mate

Greenish are the yellow autumnal leaves
Spread now are the dwarfed lotus leaves
Clambering, come clouds combined
Dip dip drip the raindrops blind

Whoosh pass gushes of willowy wind
Hither-thither fly passengers primed
Slowly creeps the twilight's hue
Closely fly birds homeward due

Stranger stands startled suddenly
A wish has popped inside presently
Must be a reason that nature adores
All this won’t it else abhor

Perhaps, points the sky's blue
Your name would be written someday anew
Thus walks disguised in Earth’s patience
The triumphant traveller who admired the view
REFLECTIONS

Kouka

2019
Ambition
Dreams big, expectations high
The excitement of new beginnings
What will next year bring?

2020
Despair
Ambition gone
People, businesses, dreams killed
The survivors bound by restrictions and fear

2021
Fatigue
Alas, will it ever end?
Keep your guard up but remember to be kind
And stay inside

2022
Hope
New conflicts yet new opportunities
Movement, activity slowly resuming
Cautious but optimistic

2023
What awaits us now?
A light at the end of the tunnel?
Are we there yet?
Oh well!
After this long journey
At least, now I know
Where there is a will
There is a way

I took these two photos at Enoshima during sunset.
Both were snapped seconds within each other, but the focus of the camera changed the look of the lighting, thus making the brighter version look like sunrise (the “emergence” of day) and the darker one sunset (the “emergence” of night).
What does ‘EMERGENCE’ mean to you?

"My first significant encounter with the word 'Emergence' was in a systems theory class. To partly quote Brian Goodwin, eminent mathematician and biologist, 'Each tree has several leaves that look similar but on looking deeply each leaf is unique and has its own freedom of expression. What we see here is a phenomenon that is an expression of maximum freedom to the parts and maximum coherence to the whole. We have a kind of paradox that each part is free to do as it pleases but it keeps up its relationship with the whole (...) And that's emergence.' Reading this affected my world views quite a lot, particularly how I saw myself in this world. Everything I think, feel, and do, I do it with the maximum degree of freedom I could afford. 'If you were used to this.' Whatever 'this' was had the stench of romanticised perfection, as if I myself were an unmoving chamber to be haunted. While working with the KT Team on Issue 12 I had provided me with valuable experience while prompting me to consider ways to further improve my leadership and teamwork skills for the future."—Maddy

"Emergence can mean the appearance of something from nothing, but to me it also means the re-appearance of something new from something existing. For me, this was the first Utopia extracurricular I participated in as a student, and it represents a sort of 'breaking out of my shell'—emergence in its best sense. Working on this issue was incredibly stimulating as I interacted with pieces straight from some of the university's brightest and most unique minds, with visions that I couldn't have ever have imagined on my own."—Sunwoo

"For me 'emergence' contains multiple meanings. First the word signifies our emerging out of the COVID-19 pandemic chaos. Second, it refers to the coming of Spring when the whole surroundings take on a new colour. And third, it points to the emergence of Japan as a global contender in the field of Gravitational-Wave Astronomy, with the first KAGRA observations and a possible detection commencing this year. My best take away from working on this Komaba Times issue has been the interactions with the amazing team, with whom I would love to work with again."—Sayog

"If 'emergence' could be psychologically felt, it would be similar to the cold I once felt from one hemolytic facial flush when a conversational sparring partner confided: 'I could have used that with the opportunity to enrich my life, and to read and visualize their values to be published.'—Ohyun

"For me, emergence implies a sudden change or appearance that has a great impact on the whole. Though it includes the adaptation efforts and processes to better blend into the new change. The last year was thus a year of emergence as I started living in Tokyo as a university student. It completely changed my lifestyle, habits, and surroundings but I still am well after the changes. Being a member of Komaba Times Issue 12 was one of the best decisions I ever made; it was amazing to be able to integrate with others in turn providing me with the opportunity to enrich my own perspective. For that, I am forever grateful."—Joanna

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"To me, 'emergence' is about facing challenges head-on, persevering through them, and emerging stronger at the end of the long and dark tunnel. Working on this edition of the Komaba Times gave me an opportunity to express these ideas and meet new people—something I am very grateful for!"—Aditya
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Thank you to everyone who worked on Emergence!