

## Chapter 5

### HEALING AND NATURE



FIGURE 5.1 • *Okinawans Do Forest Therapy, Yonabaru Forest*

Nuchigusui: This is the healing forest. This is the healing village of Kunigami.  
—Kunigami Forest Therapy  
English-language promotional brochure

No one in his right mind looks at a pile of dead leaves  
in preference to the tree from which they fell.  
—E.O. Wilson, *Biophilia*

## Introduction

*Nuchigusui* is an Okinawan term that means “to be healed from the heart” (*kokoro kara iyaseru*) or “medicine for life” (*inochi no kusuri*). I became interested in health claims associated with the forest after hearing stories about a local man who had left Okinawa but returned home when he fell sick. The forest, with its “delicious water,” cured his cancer. This kind of testimonial was often invoked by residents and nature guides living in Yambaru as evidence of the intrinsic value of their forests.

What makes an environment “healing”? In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between healing and nature in the context of ecotourism by introducing the practice (and practitioners) of forest therapy and other forms of “intraspecies” (Haraway 2008) encounters in northern Okinawa. Participants in these activities are taught to cherish nature through their engagement in guided outdoor activities designed to evoke a specific kind of transformative sensory experience. The nature of these experiences, however, is not easily defined. I begin by analyzing the external structure of the tours. Expanding upon the themes of localization, movement, and perspective introduced in Chapter 3, the first part of this chapter explains how nature-based tourism is promoted to northern Okinawans as a promising new economic sphere at community meetings and through samplings of state-supported, entrepreneur-driven ecotours. I examine the labor of organizing and implementing ecotourism used by the Kunigami Tourism Association (KUTA) and the Ministry of Environment to encourage residents of Yambaru to see their surrounding biophysical environment as a tourist does—as unique, precious, and ultimately worth exploring and protecting. These tours are simulated, in the sense that they are conducted to give locals a sense of how ecotourism catered to outside visitors provides one strategy for unlocking the economic and community healing potential of the forest.

The middle section of the chapter focuses on guides, whose work is to bring the forest to life through a prescribed set of outdoor, nature-based activities meant to shift the balance of participants’ everyday perceptual tools from primarily visual to tactile and aural. The nature interpreters (*neichaa intaapuritaa*) and forest therapy guides I encountered often claimed to offer privileged access to “real” nature, and many of them derived their sense of authority, expertise, and belonging from their ability to bring ecotourists closer to it. Questions of authenticity in nature frequently emerged when guides discussed their own personal biographies. As I discussed in Chapter 3, for some guides, being native to Okinawa is much more a matter of mindset than place of birth.

We learned in Chapter 1 that nature interpreters are ecotour guides who distinguish themselves from other kinds of tour guides by claiming to have

an especially deep familiarity with nature that enables them to interpret the natural environment for others. In Japanese, the term “guide” (*gaido*) typically connotes a young woman, dressed in hose and high heels and carrying a small flag, leading a group of agreeably passive late middle-aged sightseers on a rigidly scheduled bus tour generally allowing only short stops to photograph scenic spots. A good Okinawan friend of mine who had worked as a tour bus guide in her early twenties joked about having visited the Churaumi Aquarium at least two hundred times; but for her this had been a temporary job, and little more. She did not link her sense of being Okinawan with her scripted narration of popular tourist sights. Nature interpreters, on the other hand, self-consciously claim authenticity and sincerity in their work—an authenticity and a nearness to nature not pursued by more conventional tour guides. Nearness is what qualifies them to interpret nature: They can bring Ishikawa’s frog and the deigo tree new meaning for the ecotourist or student of environmental education by locating these species in the forest, and by explaining their roles in supporting the ecosystem. This authenticity claim is generally linked to the interpreter’s multilingual breadth of local knowledge about indigenous, endemic, and invasive species.

In distinguishing themselves from typical guides, the nature interpreters I interviewed emphasized the hundreds of hours they had spent studying the Yambaru Forest and its denizens. Most, though born and raised in northern Okinawa, did not naturalize themselves as inherently nearer to nature by virtue of their geographic origin. The distinction between native and non-native interpreter becomes clear in the explanation of a self-described “invasive species” interpreter: rather than relying on a passive birthplace-based claim to authenticity, a native interpreter approaches intraspecies nearness by reclaiming or reconstituting lost or fading knowledge about the area. Interpreters often expressed a desire to (re)connect with the forests of Yambaru. As one of my twenty-year-old informants put it when describing his affinity for the Forest School and surrounding area: “I don’t want to be separated from this place.” The nature interpreters I met pinpointed the location and defined the limits of their nature externally, by scrutinizing the origins of certain plants and animals, as well as their own geographical and cultural roots. Whether local or visitor, participants’ nearness to nature was mediated by their interpreters: through plants and animals introduced, senses heightened, and stories told.

Nature interpreters can also be seen as “human technologies” or as “diverse agents of interpretation, agents of recording, and agents for directing and multiplying relational action” (Haraway 2008: 31). Similarly, Noel Salazar’s ethnography of the politics of international tourism refers to expert tour guides as “mechanics of glocalization” (2010: 173) to emphasize the labor-intensive work of highly skilled guides responsible for localizing

global concepts circulated by tourists, and for globalizing local stories and attractions through their tours.<sup>1</sup> Through their embodied actions (walking, talking, diving), the *Aruki* village walkers and community chatters discussed in Chapter 3, and the coral-transplanting stakeholders from Chapter 4, engage in the parallel endeavor of documenting intraspecies encounters.

In this chapter, I draw on E. O. Wilson's biophilia hypothesis and Marc Augé's concept of the supermodern "non-place" to ask a fundamental question: *Why* do we endeavor to get close—sometimes dangerously close—to nature? The people I joined on the ecotours discussed next were expecting to have fun, but some discovered medicine for life.

### **Cherishing Nature**

I first met Mr. Oku, head of the Naha division of the of the Ministry of Environment Nature Conservation Office when I was seated behind him in a two-person kayak on the Gesashi River. We paddled downstream, surrounded by a gaggle of ebullient ecotourists. Undaunted by the unusual setting for our interview, I attempted to make conversation with the back of his head. Taking care not to splash me with his wooden paddle, Oku turned around and explained to me that Okinawa Prefecture's ecotourism charter was created to cultivate in visitors and locals a sense of nature as "cherishable." *Itsukushimu*,<sup>2</sup> a verb he translated as "to cherish," suggests a reverence for nature that comes from direct experience or contact (*fureai*).

In fourteen years of Japanese language study I had never come across this verb, and one of my Japanese colleagues explained that it is an unusual, old-fashioned sounding word that encompasses a variety of emotions: to *itsukushimu* is to love, have affection for, and pity something all at the same time. This, Oku suggested, was a sentiment long cultivated in mainland Japan owing to its long history of overcrowding and natural resource deficiencies.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile the vast majority of Okinawans, he claimed, had lived in predominantly rural settings until quite recently and thus did not appreciate nature in the same way mainland Japanese did.<sup>4</sup> Coming from a *Yamatonchu* (Okinawan term for "mainland Japanese"), this assertion immediately triggered my skepticism—but I had also heard it from an Okinawan. Though he did not use the word *itsukushimu*, Mr. Kuba (of KUTA) reiterated Oku's notion of cherishing when he explained that the objectives of his NPO were to "cultivate hearts that value nature"<sup>5</sup> in people of all ages throughout Okinawa—especially Yambaru youth who underappreciate their surrounding environment as common or mundane, to them. Both men sought to revitalize Yambaru by rendering everyday nature cherishable through carefully crafted native ecotours.

## **Ecotours for Locals**

KUTA was created in 2000 to coordinate and promote sustainable tourism development in the Yambaru region. The organization comprises about fifteen members, including Professor Junko Ōshima, a self-described “nature-lover” (*neichaa raba*) originally from the Tokyo area who has lived in Okinawa since 1998. Other members of KUTA were born and raised in northern Okinawa. At least one of the energetic Chinen brothers (introduced in Chapter 3) was present at nearly every ecotourism event I attended between August 2009 and May 2011. In addition to working for the village office, both brothers also facilitate the maintenance of the Forest School, an environmental education facility in Kunigami built in the mid-2000s on land previously controlled by the U.S. military for use as a jungle warfare training area (discussed in Chapter 2).

Mr. Shimabukuro, a KUTA associate, is a professional photographer whose stunning images of endangered and endemic species, including the Yambaru kuina, the Ishikawa Frog, the Ryukyu Mountain Turtle, and the Pryor’s Woodpecker (*Noguchigera*), are sold as postcards and posters, and are printed on promotional materials that circulate all over Japan. In collaboration with KUTA, Shimabukuro’s son works as a nature interpreter at the Forest School, and his daughter-in-law is a forest therapy guide.

Between November 2009 and January 2010, these KUTA members organized a series of ecotourism promotional events called the Yambaru 3-Village Treasure Box.<sup>6</sup> The events were scheduled to take place in Higashi, Ōgimi, and Kunigami. The organizers staged three monthly themed expeditions—“Mountain,” “River,” and “Ocean”—to teach local participants about the interrelatedness of three distinct ecosystems while introducing them to the ecotourism concept more generally. The museum-sponsored village walks and organized community chats described in Chapter 3 encouraged locals to see their everyday surroundings as a tourist would. These Treasure Box tours, offered to locals at no charge, were designed expressly to gain support and enthusiasm for the expansion of ecotourism in the area.

The advertisement in Figure 5.2, circulated by KUTA, promotes a mangrove kayak trip in Higashi, a waterfall hike in Ōgimi, and nature games in Kunigami:

*Re-discover the region’s beauty! Participate for free!*

Given that these tourism promotional events were limited to local residents, I felt quite fortunate when a colleague invited me to attend. I was unsure where they would place me in the lineup and was surprised when, just as

参加費  
無料

平成21年度 やんばる3村持続可能な地域づくり応援講座

自然体験

# やんばる3村 たまたて箱

地域の魅力を再発見!

ステージ1

**海** 東村・慶佐次 マングローブ  
カヌー体験&自然観察

11月23日(祝・月)  
時間:10:00集合・13:00解散予定  
集合:慶佐次ヒルギ公園  
濡れても大丈夫な服装



ステージ2

**川** 大宜味村  
ター滝  
沢登り体験

12月19日(土)  
時間:9:00集合  
12:00解散予定  
集合:大宜味中学校前駐車場  
濡れても大丈夫な服装  
歩きやすい靴



ステージ3

**森** 国頭村・与那の森  
ネイチャーゲーム

1月17日(日)  
時間:9:00集合・13:00解散予定  
集合:道の駅「ゆいゆい国頭」  
長袖長ズボン・帽子・歩きやすい靴



やんばる3村に  
お住まいの方(小学生以上)  
どなたでも参加できます  
(但し小学生は保護者同伴)

申し込み

- ・定員は30名先着順(各村10名を予定しています)
- ・基本は3回連続参加です。いずれか1回のみ参加も可能ですが、連続参加者を優先させていただきます
- ・申し込みは、裏面の用紙に必要事項を記入の上、FAX・郵送で事務局にお送りください(締め切り11月16日)
- ・各ステージ終了後、地域資源の保全と活用に関するアンケートへのご協力を御願いたします
- ・天候などにより内容を変更する場合があります

主催:環境省やんばる野生生物保護センター  
実施機関:「平成21年度やんばる3村持続可能な地域づくり応援講座」運営委員会

FIGURE 5.2 • Ecotourism Promotional Flier for Okinawans: “Treasure Box” Nature Games

Mr. Gibu had done during the Orion Beer event, Ms. Kakazu from the Ministry of Environment quietly slipped me a “Staff” badge. With no training whatsoever to qualify me for such a distinction, I quickly improvised a role and introduced myself to the participants as their “English language reference guide.” This proved to be a mistake once the nature interpreters began introducing plant and animal species, as I could not yet name most of them in English, let alone in Japanese or Okinawan. Fortunately, the novelty of my presence seemed to override the fact that I was neither expert nor local.

The priorities established during the KUTA planning meetings I attended were that participants would:

- 1) Be safe!
- 2) Have fun!
- 3) Ponder their discoveries and their sense of natural beauty.
- 4) Consider how to protect each place visited.

The kayaking trip up the Gesashi River proved exciting for the roughly thirty participants (ages 4–80, though the target demographic was mainly mothers and children), many of whom had lived in Okinawa their whole lives without ever being in a non-motorized boat. Unfortunately, the Ōgimi waterfall walk was interrupted by inclement weather, leaving participants little opportunity for reflection.

### **Healing “Nature Games”**

On a cool Sunday in mid-January 2010, I accompanied the KUTA staff to a protected forest in Kunigami for the final stage of the Treasure Box Tour, which was advertised as a series of “Nature Games.” Participants gathered in the parking lot of a small nature center at the base of the trail and broke into five groups of roughly ten people each. Before we departed on our journey, one of the nature interpreters handed me a stethoscope. The guide laughed at my puzzled expression and said we would be using it to take the pulse of the trees.

As we trekked uphill along the beaten path, our volunteer nature interpreter Mr. Inafuku, a retired man in his late sixties, stopped to point out different trees and plants that are famous in Okinawa. The *Itajii*<sup>7</sup> tree, he revealed, was actually not indigenous but had been imported in the late nineteenth century. He informed us in a distinctly critical tone that very few of the plants symbolically associated with Okinawa today (e.g., hibiscus, pineapple, dragon fruit) are actually endemic to the area.

Halfway up the hill, our group stopped and dispersed for a quiet moment communing with nature. We were told to plop down in a comfortable spot and listen for the sounds of the forest: the rustle of the wind in the trees, the crunching of fallen leaves by camouflaged ground critters, the trickling flow of a small stream nearby. I chose a large, smooth gray rock just off the path and sat down, feeling sleepy and flat. I wondered how long this next bit was going to take. After about ten minutes our guide roused us from our thoughts and gathered us around him for a moment of group reflection. Participants marveled politely over the various sounds and sensations they had discovered as I tried to recall where my sluggish mind had wandered.

We continued on our trek, and our interpreter stopped every few minutes to point out a rare plant such as a land orchid, or to listen for a Pryor's woodpecker busy chiseling a new tree dwelling. One shrub had leaves that tasted like lemongrass. We approached a giant *Itajii* and Inafuku paused to take the stethoscopes out of his backpack. I watched a mother tenderly teaching her ten-year-old son how to listen for the tree's pulse. After many failed attempts I finally found the tree's muted "heartbeat," which resembled the sound of rushing water or the inside of a conch shell. (I later learned that what we were actually hearing was the crackling, gurgling sound of sap flowing up to the branches.) This tree appeared healthy and robust, but the application of the cold metal device made me feel like we were treating it for something, reverently. At the very least, we were treating it like it like us.

About two hours passed before we descended the hill and sat clustered in circles on the asphalt parking lot of the nature center to reflect on our experience. My group consisted of the mother-son duo, three retired couples, two younger couples, and a single young woman. Participants reported back that it was nice to get outdoors; most had not known they could hike in this particular forest. They also recounted the names of some of the plants they had learned to recognize with the help of our interpreter.

The young woman stood up and volunteered to present our group's feedback to the other tour participants. She listened attentively to their complimentary but predictable comments: "It felt so nice to be outside"; "I learned a lot"; and "I realized how much we need to protect this forest." As the woman began to speak, she trembled and was suddenly overcome with a rush of emotion. She described having problems at work; having "many many" social and family conflicts, and alluded to suffering from a long-standing illness, which, one of the coordinators later quietly suggested to me, was most likely depression. The woman sobbed as she spoke about the sheer relief she felt from noticing the wind on her face, breathing the clean fresh air, and immersing herself in such an unfamiliar and pristine natural environment. She spoke of coming back to life, thanks to the forest.



## **Promoting Forest Therapy**

In late March 2011, I attended a daylong conference at Kunigami's Forest School designed to promote the longstay tourism<sup>8</sup> model to Yambaru residents. Our featured speaker was an energetic executive in her fifties in charge of Mahaina Wellness Resorts Okinawa, a hotel chain leader in the longstay tourism trend since 2000. She opened by reflecting on how amazing it was to hear the call of the Yambaru kuina in the morning when she arrived, how quickly its cries had transported her out of her city life and working state of mind. She raved about the “*pawaa chaaji*” (power charge) she had received from the forest.

Forest therapy (also called forest bathing [森林浴]) might be described most simply as going to a forested area and wandering around. And yet the facilitation of this simple practice provides a small but crucial economic “power charge” for young residents who might otherwise be compelled to leave Yambaru to seek work in Naha or Tokyo. There are forty-two certified forest therapy centers in Japan, but only one in Okinawa Prefecture.<sup>9</sup> The Kunigami Village office spent seven years planning its forest therapy program, building four distinct therapy roads; it has trained nature guides since 2007. Guides are typically recruited out of the local high school, though I met a few non-certified guides who had arrived via a different path: after studying for approximately one month, they flew to Kyushu (the nearest major island to the north), sat for a ¥7,000 (\$80) test in Fukuoka Prefecture, and became certified by the national organization that runs all of Japan's forest therapy programs.

Mr. Tamaki, a youthful looking thirty-something man who coordinates the forest therapy program in Kunigami, presented the key concepts of his program to an audience of about fifty middle-aged men and women from Yambaru: *Kenkō* (health), *Kankyō* (environment), *Kankō* (tourism).<sup>10</sup> Tamaki promoted forest therapy as a thirty-year-old technique supported by scientific research (see Nakamura 2008; Ulrich 1993). The healing modality has been proven to boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, slow the pulse, and even reduce stress hormones (Nakamura 2008). In addition to “power charging” tourists, he described Kunigami's program as “health-making for residents,” in part because venturing into the forest reminds older folks of their childhoods and makes them “*genki*” (spirited or cheerful) (see Figure 5.1).

## **Interpreting Forest Therapy**

Nature interpreters in Okinawa define forest therapy and ecotourism more generally. Local ecotourism promoters with whom I met complained occa-

sionally that foreign tourists (primarily American, frequently U.S. military personnel) would come to their kayak shops and request a discounted rental for a guide-free experience. Mr. Miyagi, director of Higashi's Tourism Promotion Association, explained the relative scarcity of non-Japanese visitors to the area: "Their sense is different." The ecotour guides would never allow this kind of self-directed adventuring because they strongly believed that their natural surroundings could not be properly understood through an outside perspective. In addition to the need to protect their livelihood, these interpreters believed that the legitimacy of their enterprise hinged on their ability to provide an interpretation of Yambaru's nature unavailable through any other medium.

Each of the interpreters introduced in the next section has negotiated his or her professional identity in relation to the guide-interpreter spectrum. Like the locals and researchers introduced in Chapter 3, the "knowing" and "noticing" ecotour guides are diverse in gender, geographic origin, level of ecological knowledge, and degree of social mobility. I include some of my personal reactions to each tour and each guide to illustrate the physical, spiritual, and intellectual discomfort that comes from healing in nature.

### **The Native Novice**

The morning after the Kunigami community chat session, I passed a giant, colorful tourism map on display in front of the town office. I stopped to study it for a while, making sure I knew most of the highlighted destinations. The Forest Therapy Road (森林セラピーロード®) caught my attention, and I entered the office to ask how I could access what I imagined as a rugged, winding trail through the woods. A helpful city worker in a pastel green jumpsuit strongly encouraged the use of a guide. He quickly made some phone calls, and a few minutes later another young man in another green jumpsuit was escorting me to the entrance of the therapy road.

The road wound up the hillside for about two kilometers. As we ascended into the "Broccoli Forest," the dark green *Itajii* trees grew dense. A wooden sign posted at the entrance to the park read "*Mori to mizu to yasuragi no sato, kunigami*" and was translated into English as "Kunigami offers you 'Peace of Mind' from Okinawa's best Forest and Rivers." In my impromptu quest for tranquility, I was about to get a lesson in patience.

I was escorted to Ms. Taira, a northern Okinawan woman in her mid-twenties who kindly offered to take me on an abbreviated (but free) walk on the therapy road. She had just returned from a training session at one of the larger forest therapy facilities in Nagano Prefecture and seemed eager to practice. As we walked, I asked her a few questions about the program:

“Who comes? Retirees? Mothers and children? Patients?” She replied that, while it would be ideal if “*genki ga nai*” (unwell, literally “no spirit”) people came, in fact most of the participants were already in good health. “People who aren’t well can’t be bothered going outside, can they?” Her deadpan response came in startling contrast to the dramatic healing potential Tamaki had touted at the longstay tourism conference.

The forest therapy road was constructed of smooth concrete with white, rubbery zebra stripes painted across it, which made it much more accessible than I had expected. Where was my rugged outdoors? I found the road aesthetically intrusive and began to wonder about its therapeutic value. As if reading my mind, Taira said: “The purpose of this route is not so much trekking as it is being. We don’t want people to slip along the way. The aim is to simply be, in the forest.”

Feeling an equal and opposite need to document the situation, I fumbled for my camera. “First, we want people to touch the trees,” Taira explained as she tenderly petted the soft green moss growing on the side of a tree. I copied her skeptically. We continued walking and she bent down to uproot a small plant. “This one’s great,” she said, holding it up to my nose. “The leaves don’t really smell but the roots are amazing.” I sniffed the white roots and guessed: “Spearmint?” “Actually it’s more like A&W,”<sup>11</sup> she noted. I got the reference and concurred, “Like root beer, sarsaparilla, yes!” Before we had progressed another two hundred meters, she stopped and pointed to the ground. “Look! The *Iju* [needlewood]<sup>12</sup> seeds look like laughing faces!” The rugged evergreen’s large brown dry seeds lay cracked open on the trail, smiling up at us indeed. I picked one up and put it in my pocket.

Ignoring her suggestion to “just be,” I attempted to continue my interview by asking about the documented effects of forest therapy, who sponsors the program, and so on. She replied that she had only been working there for a year and that there were much more experienced guides I should consult. She paused, stooped down again, and produced a handful of bitter acorns for me to sample.

Next Taira led me to a bench overlooking a large pond where a lone duck swam in circles. “Try shutting your eyes for a few minutes. We are always looking at the world, but you feel things entirely differently when you cannot see. Notice the blowing breeze, hear the rustle and the sounds of the insects chirping. This is where we work on breathing. People usually breathe with their chests, but we invite them to breathe with their bellies.” I puffed out my stomach, hoping to feel something.

We nibbled on the lemony leaves of *shikwaasa*, a lime-like Okinawan citrus fruit that grows on sprawling green trees and, when mixed in, makes *awamori* infinitely more palatable. We chewed the cinnamon-like essence out of shiny green *gettō* (shell ginger)<sup>13</sup> leaves as she described how much she

had learned from her tourist customers. She demonstrated how one man had encouraged her to get down on all fours and sniff out the edible plants on the path “just like an animal.”

When Taira mentioned some of the psychological consequences of living “in concrete,” I immediately thought about my tiny grey shoebox of an apartment in Nago. When I had first moved to Okinawa, despite living in the centrally located city of Ginowan, I had actually been tucked away in a very earthy and alive house replete with *shikwaasa* (green papaya trees) and even a *mori no aisu* plant (“ice cream of the forest,” also called *atemoya*), so nicknamed for its white, creamy sweet meat. *Yamori* geckos and giant spiders scaled the walls of my three-bedroom house, inside and out, and a pair of lovebirds flirted the day away on my wooden deck. The walls of my house shook daily from U.S. military planes flying overhead, a source of chronic, blaring noise pollution. There was a Starbucks in walking distance from my place, and the controversial Futenma Marine Corps Air Station,<sup>14</sup> surrounded by barbed-wire fences, was just a few blocks away. And yet, I had unwittingly inherited my landlord’s gorgeous green garden full of wild vines and hibiscus.

Taira asked me what had brought me to Yambaru, and I explained that for the second half of my fieldwork I was determined to get closer to the nature that ecotourists sought. So I moved an hour north to Nago, only to find myself living in a square efficiency apartment mass produced by LeoPalace21, a nationwide chain of cookie-cutter apartments. I was closer to Yambaru’s forests from Nago, but my immediate living environment felt tight and sterile. Friends’ warnings about outdoor toilets and frequent reminders that “Living in the countryside is a pain!” had convinced me to go for clean and new instead of old and charming.

As we completed the therapy loop, we passed by a row of A-frame camping bungalows designed for short-term visitors. These large birdhouse-like huts grew more attractive the more I reflected on my own housing. I wondered how it would be to live as a true nature lover, like Taira, immersed in this kind of living environment day in and day out. I asked her when I could return for a full therapy session with other customers. She explained apologetically that she was moving to the mainland the next month to become a housewife and probably would not have time to meet again.

### **Therapist Close to Fun**

The morning after the longstay tourism symposium I reconnected with Mr. Tamaki and six forest healing participants ranging in age from 25 to 65. All were from Yambaru save for a youthful middle-aged reporter for the

*Okinawa Times* who had driven up from Naha. Tamaki's first question to the group was "How are you doing today?" He was not asking in the polite, empty sort of way we all do but actually wanted us to record any specific physical and psychological (mood) complaints on a before-and-after form he distributed. We sat in a circle on the grass, and he came to interview us one by one with no real pretense of privacy. He approached me last and asked the following questions:

- How many hours did you sleep last night?
- How many hours do you usually sleep?
- How are you feeling today? Is your mood good/average/bad?

I felt quite meek next to the sporty journalist, who reported excitedly that she works every day, never takes vacations, and requires only four hours of sleep. After overhearing the rest of the group's polite answers, I lied judiciously in answer to the first two questions. Then I remembered that this was supposed to be therapy. I told Tamaki that I was in a bad mood (a fortunate coincidence in this case), at which the energetic journalist exclaimed: "Why?!" Tamaki filled out the front and back of my intake form, circling areas of physical discomfort that I indicated on a generic human figure much like those used at a chiropractor's office.

Then we prepared for our walk. Tamaki led us in a cheek and neck "shape-up" stretch, a simple twisting of the head up and down, left to right, which he suggested would be good for us because we were women. This comment did not help my mood, but I took it as an opportunity to ask him why no men had signed up for the tour. This forest therapy course was one of a few half-day outings, each approximately ¥3,000 (\$35), coordinated for attendees at the symposium. We had chosen it over snorkeling, tea making, and a village tour exploring the connections between water and mountains. "Well, I think that women are naturally more interested in healing," he replied.

After a few more rounds of cosmetic calisthenics, we sauntered down the hill and entered the well-marked therapy road. He encouraged us to chat as we walked slowly. He asked us to stop and smell a delicate pink flower reminiscent of a hibiscus. Tamaki described the phenomenon of phytoncide (literally "exterminated by the plant"),<sup>15</sup> wherein the very same aromatic smells that attract humans to certain flowers serve to protect the plants from hungry pests. He pointed out the *Itajii*, the preferred home of the Yambaru kuina and the favorite tree of nearly every nature guide I met. As we continued along the striped path, he reminded us to pause for a moment to check our breathing: "Is it deep and slow?"

Next it was time for tea and (more) chatting in the forest. (Tamaki told us this was “the Yambaru way” of relaxing.) A freshly painted gazebo appeared just off the zebra-striped trail, and we sat down at a table with tree stump-shaped concrete stools. Tamaki produced two thermoses filled with steaming hibiscus tea and a boxful of homemade *Chinsukoo* (Okinawan salty shortbread). Perhaps inhibited by thoughts of drooping chins and stretching necks, each woman took just one cookie then gave the rest to me as an *omi-yage* (souvenir).

After resting for a while we resumed our walk, traversing a narrow bridge that crossed over a large pond with two ducks paddling around. I passed the pond unthinking, when out of the corner of my eye, a wave of glittery wind washed over the water. For a brief and stunning moment, I was flooded with a sense of the numinous. I checked with my neighbor to make sure I was not imagining things; she had seen it, too.

The rest of the group had not seen it, so we kept on walking until we arrived at a wooden sign that explained something about music, *fukisoku* (irregularity), and *yuragi* (shaking). I had no idea what was being discussed until one of my companions explained: “Hikaru Utada’s voice does it.” Something vibrating in the world-famous pop diva’s voice was also in this forest. Apparently, if one stood in that spot long enough, there was some benefit to the parasympathetic nervous system.<sup>16</sup> Tamaki said it was difficult to explain but summarized the healing effect of this station as “relaxation.” Next we engaged in a hammock experience, which was as straightforward as one might imagine. None of my companions had ever sat in a hammock before, and some of them looked quite nervous at the prospect of swinging supine. One woman lay still and stiff like a corpse in distrust of the contraption before finally exclaiming, “This is pretty good!” After approximately three minutes Tamaki asked the group, “Could you relax?”

We soon came to the end of the course, which was only about six hundred meters long, and waited for lunch by some picnic benches near the Welcome Center. Tamaki brought us handmade recycled newspaper *bentō* boxes chock-full of Yambaru delights. Using hand-carved reusable bamboo chopsticks, we feasted on *juushi* fried rice balls packaged in another waxy green shell ginger leaf (*gettō* in Japanese) in lieu of plastic wrap, Okinawan fatty pork, and a lightly sweetened, purplish taro yam dessert.

As we sat down one of the older women remarked: “So that’s *therapy!*” Two participants began discussing the meaning of the loanword for “therapy” (*serapii* in Japanese). Much like the coral monitoring loanword conundrum from Chapter 4, nobody seemed to know quite what it meant. They asked Tamaki, who admitted that he was not entirely sure, either. He mentioned that *iryō* (medical treatment or care) and *ryōhō* (a method of medical

treatment or a cure) were two possible translations, but quickly added that what we were doing was more like “therapy close to fun” (*Fuan ni chikai serapī*). Eventually he settled on describing what we had done as “enjoying the forest” (*mori wo tanoshimu koto*).

As we continued munching, one of the other women asked me, “So ... what does therapy mean in English? Is it medical? Is it personal?” I was stumped as the many uses of the term in English flashed in my mind. I thought of colloquial examples such as “retail therapy,” but there was also physical therapy, psychotherapy, occupational therapy, even hydrotherapy. I replied that it was a very broad term with many meanings, both physical and psychological. “Yes, but what are its nuances?” They were not satisfied. “I think it connotes getting help with, or for ... something,” I mustered. They nodded politely.

Using our conversation as confirmation of his earlier claim, Tamaki summarized our discussion: “Yup, women respond to healing. Men prefer trekking.” He began asking us individually about our impressions of the tour and took diligent notes on the before-and-after forms. The bouncy reporter was following him around and asking follow-up questions of the participants, so I followed her. I wanted to keep my health report card for a closer reading, but he said he needed it for their national database.

We were invited to say what was good about the tour and what could use improvement, but nobody offered any complaints or criticism. The ample positive feedback included:

My stress from work just flew away ...  
Naha City is so dirty [compared to this forest].  
My headache is gone!  
I never look at the sky [when at home in the city].  
The wind!  
I should visit nature more often.  
I could sense the real smells and real colors.  
What a great opportunity to learn about local ingredients!  
... and to ask about our five, six senses!

Tamaki invited us to feel our shoulders and to notice whether any tension had been released. “But what can we do at home? What is the take-away?” someone asked. “Breath” was his answer. We were to focus on our breath. He concluded the session by encouraging us to “think about the health of the forest, not only the health of people.” By experiencing the natural world on a smaller, slower scale, this tour encouraged us to see the trees for the forest. Then we walked back to our cars and drove home.

## Invasive Species Expert

My next visit to the Forest Park in Kunigami was prompted by an advertising flyer for the “Yambaru Wonderland” that read, “Live well with a relaxed stance!! Become one with the pleasant winds of Yambaru.” Mr. Satō met me at the Welcome Center and informed me that I was the only participant that day. He was a handsome, muscular, weathered man in his late fifties with *gomashio* (black sesame and salt) hair and a stately goatee. I studied his business card and saw that he had named his one-man company Yambaru Great Nature Experience: Let’s Play! I pointed to the flier and admitted that I did not quite understand the description of a listed activity: Forest Pole Exhaustion (*Shinrinbō Datsuryoku*). “Oh, that’s just the name I made up for the form of outdoor martial arts I teach,” he smiled. Satō’s approach to guiding (and just about everything else, I quickly learned) matched the “relaxed stance” advocated in his flier. He decided it was too difficult to run a class with only one student, so we went for a nature walk instead. He changed out of his karate garb and into jeans and hiking boots.

We sat on the gleaming wooden floor of the Welcome Center for my orientation. The receptionist brought us hot tea. Satō showed me two short films on his laptop. The name of the first, released by the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK 2006), was “*The Japan that Japanese Don’t Know*” (*Nihonjin no shiranai nihon*), but was translated into English as *Treasures of Japan*. The films in this series showcase places and people considered to occupy Japan’s geographical and cultural periphery, such as the Ryukyu Archipelago (Okinawa), the Ainu (Hokkaido’s northern indigenous people), whales in the Ogasawara Islands south of Tokyo and Kumanokodo, and a series of ancient pilgrimage routes and World Heritage Sites in Wakayama Prefecture.<sup>17</sup>

The second film, *Wrapped in the Yambaru Wind: An Okinawa Photo Poem*, was a lengthy slideshow of beautiful images taken by a local photographer. Mesmerizing scenes of the ocean, beaches, and broccoli forests of Yambaru scrolled past. I felt strange sitting indoors, drinking tea out of a ceramic teacup and listening to the lilting soundtrack of nature from computer speakers while also feeling an actual breeze from a nearby open window.

After watching the orientation films, we entered the forest and began to walk along the wooded trail. Almost immediately I noticed a number of red wire mongoose traps placed at the side of the path. Satō told me he had begun tracking mongooses that had traveled north of the Shioya-Taira line (explained in Chapter 2) and entered the Forest Park long before the government first became involved in mongoose population control and extermination in 2003. We came upon what Laura Ogden calls “state-sponsored apparatuses of capture” (Ogden 2011: 34). The traps were quite small, and I asked how they baited the animals. “Dried squid jerky,” he replied, joking



that the trackers ate more of it than the mongooses did. I did not understand why the traps were located so close to the trail. He explained that, whereas they would normally be placed deeper in the woods, these traps were “resting”—temporarily out of use—due to a lack of volunteer trackers. Satō identified himself as part of the “world of humans,” but claimed some affinity with the mongoose: “we are both invasive species in Okinawa.” He also identified himself as a second-generation atomic bomb victim who had “invaded” Okinawa from Hiroshima twenty-five years ago and never left.

Many of the nature guides I encountered were particular about their titles, so I asked him what it meant to him to be an “*annainin*” (this non-loanword Japanese term for “guide” was printed on his business card). Satō distinguished himself from typical guides and from the nearby Forest School’s nature interpreters—his local competition. Instead he fancied himself a “messenger of the forest.” He elaborated further: “The trees are talking, and I’m their feces” (*Ki ga katatteiru, sono daiben*). I gave him a funny look, puzzled by his choice of metaphor. He smiled and reminded me that *daiben* has two meanings; hence, “the trees are talking, and I’m their *spokesperson*.”

As we walked along the trail he snapped a few photos, explaining the many different ways of capturing a plant using filmic techniques such as backlighting. He invited me to crouch down and look up at the sunlit leaves of a tree from below. Next came the quiz: “Why are the new leaves of the *Itajii* red instead of green?” “To keep bugs away?” (My feeble guess was based on my recent lesson in phytoncide.) He began describing what I knew must be the process of photosynthesis despite not grasping some of the more scientific language he employed. “They’re the tree’s babies. The red color means they don’t need to work yet.”<sup>18</sup>

Just as Ms. Taira had done, Satō asked me to get down on the ground to see the plants from the perspective of an insect or a small animal. “See how the image changes,” he told me. I lay on my belly in the dried leaves and took a few photographs.

His next comment echoed coral activist Karen Magik’s claim that “your experience is different from my experience” (see Chapter 3), less the judgment. “The way we see the world is different. You’re standing here and I’m standing here but what we’re seeing, the reality we are experiencing, is different. My reality is different from your reality. For people who find the *habu* scary, that’s their reality. But I say we are all the same—the *habu*, mongoose, Yambaru kuina, and *noguchigera* [Pryor’s woodpecker].” He paused. “But I respect the earthworm the most because it is eaten by so many different animals. People are ‘*ojamamushi*’ [pests, in the way] in the forest.”

I asked him what he thought about “forest power,” to which he replied, “I believe it is very strong.” He shared the story of a woman healing her own cancer by spending time in the forest, and relayed how a friend had cured

her dangerously high fever just by walking through the forest. He told me that the year before he could barely walk because of a pinched nerve in his spine. His doctors instructed him to check into the hospital, but he went into the forest instead and was healed. “I understand people’s pain. You don’t understand when you’re healthy, do you?”

Satō told me he would do anything to avoid becoming a “sick person,” noting, “Western medicine looks at the body as a thing and doesn’t see the spirit, the heart.”<sup>19</sup> He described his group tour participants standing in a circle. Without holding hands or touching, he explained, he asks them to cup their hands over one another’s to feel their collective *ki* (spirit). “The power of the spirit, the power of the trees—just as the characters read, it’s ‘Forest Power’ (*Shinrinryoku*):

森林力.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to explaining the healing potential of forest power/bathing, Satō told me that we should conduct ourselves with *omoi* toward the forest. There are many ways to translate the Japanese word *omoi*: thought, feeling, wish, desire, or love. He compared human relationships with nature as that of a couple who cherish one another, adding mournfully, “Cutting trees leads to crying trees.” Suddenly he changed the subject to Doomsday and his belief in the Ascension and the dour Mayan forecast for the coming year. I was shocked when he referred to the recent earthquake and tsunami in northeastern Japan (which had struck not two weeks before) as a “message from god saying, ‘You must change your life!—*Kamoshirenai* [maybe].” He also claimed to have seen UFOs in the forest.

Eventually the path led up to some gravel-covered steps. The walk had not been particularly rigorous, but we sat down to rest and he whipped out his harmonica. I was treated to “What a Wonderful World,” “When You Wish Upon a Star,” “Somewhere Over the Rainbow,” and a Hawaiian love ballad. I commented that the songs seemed rather romantic, and he told me that he usually saves the ballads for his night tours. I was tempted to applaud after each rendition but there was something startlingly tranquil about the moment. We sat in silence a while longer and soon we were back on the main road winding down toward the Welcome Center.

When we reached my car, I grabbed my wallet and handed him the ¥2,000 (\$23) fee listed on the flyer. “I’m not doing this for the money,” he said, refusing to accept anything but my gratitude for the afternoon we’d spent walking in the woods. He insisted that he does not charge customers if the “official” class is canceled, so I opted to reciprocate with small souvenirs from the United States. Later another guide criticized me for accepting his generosity: “It causes problems for us when customers don’t pay,” she informed me in a scolding tone that I was unused to as a foreigner. On each

trip, independent ecotour guides like Satō had to navigate the forest trails and the slippery line between informal ecotour and friendly walk.

*“This is my Yambaru.”*

Satō insisted that I return the following week so he could take me on one of his favorite hikes. We met at the Welcome Center and I hopped into the passenger seat of his dirty, beat-up silver van. I immediately noticed the rumpled bed in the back, where he told me he often camped. He had decorated the dashboard with bits of bleached coral, leaves, a few acorns, and other dried seeds I did not recognize. A pair of plastic mom and baby *habu* swayed back and forth like hula dancers as we bumped along the road toward the trail. The first thing Satō said to me was “*Mattari*,” Japanese slang for “take it easy.” To this end he popped his copy of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” into his vintage tape deck. It played on loop until we arrived at the base of Mt. Yonadake.<sup>21</sup> We listened to the song quietly, as if setting the mood for our next adventure.

We parked on the side of a narrow, winding road and entered the trail, which was marked off by a sign on a long swinging gate. “You won’t learn much about ecotours from me,” he said. “I do *erotours*. Eroticism.” I followed him into the forest, only slightly unnerved. The canopied air felt damp and cool against my skin. As we meandered along the trail he began to reflect on some of the differences between mainland Japanese and Okinawan approaches to hiking: “Many older Japanese are ‘peak hunters.’” I was reminded of the time I had climbed Mt. Fuji in the middle of the night, struggling alongside hundreds of others trying to reach the top in time for the sunrise in perpetuation of the famous Japanese saying: “You’d be a fool not to climb Fuji once, and a fool to climb it twice.” Satō continued: “But in Okinawa there are no high peaks so the purpose is different. Rather, people look for the nice flat stretches in the middle of the forest.” This comment reflected the *yukkuri* (leisurely) approach to being in the forest, common to every ecotour I joined, but also aligned with the broader life philosophy espoused by many of my informants, both urban and rural.

A bird called, and Satō pointed to an *Akabige* (Ryukyuu robin) perched in a tree overhead. “We call it the Forest Guide (*Mori no Annainin*) because it doesn’t mind the presence of people and will often hop around in front of them, appearing to lead the way when in fact it’s just looking for food,” he told me. I cracked a smile, and relaxed a bit as I recalled the many “foraging” human forest guides I had met in these woods.

I noticed a conspicuous bald spot in the trail where the bank had been worn down and no plants grew. Some ten years earlier a bunch of roving

pleasure-seekers in jeeps had caused massive premature erosion on the sides of the trail, uprooting trees with their chomping tires. “We need rangers, real rangers like they have in Tanzania, not just the skinny, glasses-wearing kind they have here,” he lamented. “Those guys are really just town office workers with a patch on their arm that says ‘Ranger.’ . . . We need rules!”

We continued on, but soon he stopped me again, pointing to a patch of bright green bamboo stalks and asking, “Where are the bamboo’s roots?” At first I thought he was going to surprise me by revealing that the roots were actually at the tips—this seemed impossible, but I had seen the sprawling Higashi mangroves that grew this way. “China?” I guessed. “That’s right!” Satō affirmed: “Even bamboo, or *hōrai-chiku* in Chinese, is an invasive species. Just like me. You see, the pine tree (*matsu*) is like Americans. It’s a ‘pioneer plant’ that grows in a place where there is nothing else. It goes there first and creates shade so that other plants can move in afterward. Whereas the *Itajii* tree is Japanese—it grows in shy places.”

A large puddle appeared in the middle of the trail. I tiptoed delicately around it, but Satō bent down and began fishing through the dark brown muck with his hands. Soon he pulled up a Chapstick-sized brick-red newt with black speckles and told me to smell it. Nothing. Then he began rubbing its back vigorously, and soon the creature was covered in a foamy white paste. He held it up to my nose—it smelled like rotting vegetables—and then returned it to the puddle. The newt just hovered in the water, making no attempt to escape. “That’s its poison, how it protects itself from predators. It doesn’t have to be fast.”

The most remarkable animal we encountered was dead. Just as I was about to stumble over it, Satō shouted out for me to freeze: “It’s a Ryukyu long-tailed giant rat!” This “rat” is a national protected species,<sup>22</sup> one that I had heard much about but had never seen. It lay on its side in the center of the trail, its long tufts of brown back hair and lengthy black-and-white tail on full display.

Satō poked at it with his finger. “Maybe it was done in by a mongoose . . .” He flipped it over with a stick, but we could find no visible injuries. “Or maybe a *habu* bit it but couldn’t eat it because it’s too large.” He removed his cap and placed it next to the deceased. Interpreting this as a sign of funerary respect, I did the same. Then he grabbed his camera and began snapping pictures of it from all angles, using the hat as a size reference. The mood was slightly less reverent now, so I followed suit.

“It’s still soft,” he marveled. The animal could not have been dead more than a few hours. We admired the creature in silence for a few more minutes, and then he asked me: “Are you ready? Let’s send it to heaven.” He picked it up by its long striped tail, carefully swung it back and forth a few times to gain momentum, and gently lobbed it into a nearby verdant ravine. He

then placed his hands together in prayer position and bowed to the departed. When I later told Mr. Yamamoto from the Nago Museum about our discovery, he frowned at me and said, “I wanted that.” Unfortunately, the eternal life afforded by taxidermy had escaped us in the moment.

We hiked on. Misty gray clouds rolled in as we trudged uphill, and Satō had to announce that we had reached the “peak” of Yonhadake because I could not see out. We sat down, and he produced two grilled-cheese sandwiches and offered me a cup of coffee poured from his silver thermos. Once again he broke out his harmonica, this time entertaining me with “Moon River” and “La Vie en Rose.” He talked about his dream of passing on knowledge about the environment, calling the practice a “baton touch”: “If I can teach this much to someone even just ten years younger, then that person can teach it again, and on down to the children. This is why I do these kinds of activities with people of all ages, but especially children. ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow,’ ‘When You Wish Upon a Star’ ... This is my Yambaru.”

### **Interpreting Interpreters**

My portrayal of these three guides reflects the range of biographies and personalities I encountered in Yambaru ecotourism. I focused the first part of this chapter on the role of nature interpreters because these actors filter local visitors’ and outside tourists’ experiences of nature. Foremost, interpreters impart specific kinds of ecological knowledge by facilitating multisensory experiences. Taira was native to Yambaru but was new to forest therapy—she claimed no particular authority over nature, and spoke more frequently about what she had learned from her customers than what she was able to teach them. Taira was already bound for mainland Japan, and although forest therapy provided her with a temporary job, it did not inspire in her any particular spiritual or health-related vocation. (“People who aren’t well can’t be bothered going outside, can they?”). Most of the young ecotour guides I met related to Yambaru in a more emphatic, “nature-loving” manner, expressed most keenly by Cha-chan when he declared, “I never want to be separated from this place!” Taira’s relatively detached perspective complicated my emerging expectations about who is drawn to forest therapy and why; she reminded me that interpreting nature is also a job.

Mr. Tamaki, also a native of Yambaru, was a forest therapy spokesperson who approached his tours in a rigorous but somewhat perfunctory fashion. He followed the national forest therapy program’s guidelines closely and was more interested in accumulating new data and citing convincing statistics than facilitating a particularly emotive experience of nature. For Tamaki, forest therapy offered healing but also provided a much-needed local business

opportunity. Despite his concern with completing paperwork and conducting forest exit interviews, his depiction of forest therapy as “therapy close to fun,” and his resistance to any overt medicalization of the experience, privileged the touristic aspect of the enterprise. Tamaki’s perspective on his work was consistent with Dr. Nakasone’s characterization of dolphin therapy in Chapter 4: “That was fun *and* my heart has grown lighter.”

Mr. Satō, on the other hand, presented forest power as a transcendent catharsis for the human spirit. He was not a certified forest therapy guide, but an independent competitor who organized trips and tours according to his own intuition and self-taught ecological knowledge. He prided himself on his ability to learn Yambaru’s forests despite being an “invasive species” from the mainland. His passion for the healing power of the forest appeared to feed him more than the frequently canceled tours and workshops he offered did. He carved out a superior position for himself by marketing his “messenger of the forest” persona as a leader even more closely connected to the forest than mere nature interpreters. Other guides I spoke with regarded him as something of a nuisance, in part for poaching their custom but mostly for his renegade approach: “I do *erotours*.” He naturalized his claim to an intimate relationship with the forest by downplaying the remunerative aspect of his tours—“I’m not doing this for the money”—and by trying to inspire others with his own dramatic healing narrative.

Whether guide, or interpreter, or messenger, every ecotourism professional I met constructed the forest as a therapeutic space whose healing potential could be realized only through some form of direct encounter (listening to trees, smelling flowers, or even simply increasing physical points of contact with the earth by getting close to the forest floor). The healing power of the forest, I learned, involves a spiritual and emotional awakening realized through participants’ sensorial reconnection with nature. How else is this kind of healing transformation achieved?

The next section considers the relationship between direct experience and healing events by problematizing the location and limits of Nature I encountered in Okinawa. I include details from one indoor healing modality I explored to illustrate some of the unexpected overlaps I noticed between wellness centers, forest therapy, and more conventional (i.e., non-touristic) therapeutic modalities available on the island.

### *Simulated Nature, Real Healing*

Following my “live” nature encounters with the forest, a giant flat-screen television projecting images of generic paradisiacal beaches and swaying palm trees seemed particularly odd. A pleasant, elevator music-like Hawaiian

luau melody wafted in from the overhead speakers in the waiting room at the doctor's office. I turned to face the other side of the room and noticed yet another, smaller television with scrolling photographs of idyllic lakeside cottages and placid forest scenery reminiscent of the slideshow Satō had shown me at the Forest Park Welcome Center.

The clinic's head nurse, Ms. Higa, smiled through her white mask (a standard accessory in any Japanese doctor's office) as she took my temperature and blood pressure. Higa handed me a "Profile of Mood States" intake survey, and I answered sixty-five questions about whether, on a scale of 0 (not at all), 1 (a little), 2 (moderately), 3 (quite a bit), or 4 (extremely), the way I was feeling corresponded to any of the more than seventy listed descriptors, including: (1) Friendly, (12) Peeved, (37) Muddled, (47) Rebellious, (50) Bewildered, (63) Vigorous, or—my personal favorite—(65) Bushed. The variety of English-language terms available for this survey made me wish I had known how to tell Mr. Tamaki about my "bad" mood in a more interesting way.

When I was called in to see the doctor, he told me that my mood resembled an inverted iceberg. I almost laughed out loud at this choice of metaphor. He then produced a graphical representation of my responses to the survey questions, which indeed formed a crude upside-down "V" complete with jagged edges and a spiky point. He gestured with his hands, softening the shape in the direction of a more ideal "U"-shaped mood state as he offered me some tips on how I could begin to melt away my emotional extremes.

Next I entered the "Relaxation Room" and was surprised to find that the clinic had invested in an Alpha-21DX Body-Mind Health Environment Capsule identical to a relaxation capsule I had sampled at the Motobu Wellness Village following my ethically disorienting Dolphin Adventure. I had another chance to re-enter this encapsulated "environment" when the JICA training group I had accompanied on the whale watch (see Chapter 4) spent a day exploring the many facets of health tourism in Okinawa.

The Alpha-21DX was a smooth, cream-colored vessel reminiscent of a space-age coffin or an enormous capsule of Prozac. First, I selected a scent. From orange, lemon, lavender, and *ylang ylang* (each of which promised a different health benefit), I chose the latter because it reminded me of a beach in Thailand (a popular place of "not work" [Graburn 1983] for international Japanese travelers) and slid eagerly into the soft capsule. Following a long morning of hiking, I relished the blissful complement of a twenty-five-minute heated, vibrating, aromatherapeutic escape.

Nurse Higa tenderly tucked a bib-like towel around my neck, placed a noise-canceling headset over my ears, and slowly pushed the curved lid

down over me. I was all sealed in and ready for takeoff. She dimmed the lights and pulled the privacy curtain around me. An eerie, New Age-meets-melancholy-Disney melody filled my ears and swirled in my mind as the bed began to vibrate. I sank gratefully into a meditative state, made safe and comfortable by a completely climate-controlled environment. I relished every second spent cocooned in the capsule, which quickly had me floating through space.

When the vibration ceased I opened my eyes to find a message on a fluorescent green digital display:

オツカレサマデシタ

At first I did not recognize one of the most commonly uttered phrases in the Japanese language, *Otsukaresamadeshita* (frequently translated as “good job” or “you look tired” and meaning something in between the two), because it is typically written using the *hiragana* syllabary. The unusual use of *katakana*<sup>23</sup> to write such a quintessentially Japanese term compounded my sense of having been temporarily transported into another world with very little effort.

### **Forest of *Avatar***

While explaining how all life forms in the forest are connected on one of our walks, Mr. Satō referenced a 2009 blockbuster James Cameron film that had just hit movie theaters in Japan. His choice of phrasing—“The forest is the world of *Avatar*”—stuck with me because it suggests that the forest imitates the film rather than the reverse. *Avatar* tells the futuristic story of a mid-twenty-second-century world in which human beings, having depleted the earth’s natural resources, are forced to colonize another planet. The film tells a moralized tale of resource abuse and respect for life by connecting humans with nonhuman, extraterrestrial species through the use of hybrid avatars. Characters use the consciousness-transferring “Tree of Souls” to communicate with a vast biological network. The most striking aspect of the film is its ability to cause real, lasting affective shifts in viewers through the virtual simulation of an always already non-reality.

Among the highest grossing films of all time, *Avatar* struck a chord with viewers worldwide not only for its epic tale of right and wrong, but also because filmmakers utilized three-dimensional and stereoscopic technologies to make a simulated wilderness full of giant blue alien creatures feel familiar, and real. A January 2010 report on audiences’ “post-*Avatar* blues” notes:



“James Cameron’s completely immersive spectacle ‘Avatar’ may have been a little too real for some fans who say they have experienced depression and suicidal thoughts after seeing the film because they long to enjoy the beauty of the alien world Pandora” (Piazza 2010). On the online fan forum Avatar Forums, a topic thread entitled “Ways to cope with the depression of the dream of Pandora being intangible” received more than a thousand posts from affected viewers.

After seeing the film twice in 3-D glasses, I could understand why Satō alluded to it in support of his grievance that “Cutting trees leads to crying trees.” This film was compelling enough to provoke a wave of depression among fans following the temporary escape made possible through the “immersive spectacle” (Piazza 2010) of a fantastical, Technicolor nature. *Avatar* is made real by its sophisticated simulation of an otherwise surreal experience of outer space and other forms of life.

### **Natural Healing?**

Our assumptions about the locus of the natural and the simulated inform our experiences and shape our responses to healing moments. N. Katherine Hayles questions the moral valence that often comes with discussions of the natural and the unnatural, and that undergirds much of ecotourism discourse: “bad simulation, good nature” (1995: 410), or what Donna Haraway calls “the authenticity-destroying powers of the artificial” (2008: 251). Hayles offers the example of Yosemite National Park; where “natural preservation” emerges through the creation of artificial borders (1995: 410). From another perspective, as I discuss in Chapter 2, the habu-mongoose fight, real as it is for the combatants, is primarily imagined and experienced by humans as a an entertaining performance.

For Hayles, “when ‘nature’ becomes an object for *visual* consumption, to be appreciated by the connoisseur’s eye sweeping over an expanse of landscape,” it has “already left the realm of firsthand experience and entered the category of constructed experiences that we can appropriately call simulation” (1995: 411). Hayles also points out the problem of assuming that “nature is natural because it is unmediated, whereas simulation is artificial because it is constructed” (418). *Avatar* begins as a visual simulation that becomes real by creating the feeling of direct experience through sophisticated media technologies. Likewise, the carefully groomed “zebra” trails that led us safely into a space for the visual consumption of the forest; the hot tea in a thermos that kept us comfortably, “unnaturally” warm throughout the walk; and of course the reservations made and fees paid for guided paths through the forest all simulate nature.

## **Locating the Self**

Hayles returns the intellectual and perceptual problem of natural versus simulation back to the bodies-doing-the-viewing by first problematizing the location of the self. Hayles (1995: 412) writes, “the self is contracted to some position inside the body and rendered remote from it. The body then becomes equipment that the self has to learn to manipulate. When self is constituted as a raft of awareness awash in an ocean of constructed experience, simulation is at a maximum.” This pelagic metaphor lends itself well to a comparison with the phenomenology<sup>24</sup> of scuba diving (elaborated in Chapter 4), an experience that relies heavily on the manipulation of *external* body-enhancing equipment (“virtual reality gear”) for a “maximum” simulation of sea life. Informants who spoke of scuba diving in otherworldly terms, where one becomes hyperaware through a sensory disorientation that ultimately dissolves the self like salt in water. When awash in the non-metaphorical ocean, the self feels less like a raft and more like a porous sea sponge.

To formulate our self-gear, however, we must examine our eyes as compound, “technological eyes” (Haraway 2008: 250), in some senses an original “prosthesis”—a mediating apparatus that we learn to use just like arms and legs. Hayles locates the “marker” of the self neither internally, nor “unproblematically projected outside [the body]”; and, in “drawing the distinction between simulation and nature, where one places the marker that defines selfhood is crucial” (1995: 412). In Chapter 4, Eva Hayward’s (2010: 581) notion of beholding the world through “fingeryeyes” pokes at the very same spot to articulate “the in-between of encounter” as a space of movement and potential.

Vassos Argyrou scales up theoretical questions of self/other, real/simulated, and authentic/inauthentic by using James Carrier’s virtualism (see Chapter 1) to analyze the logic of contemporary environmentalism. Argyrou (2013: 24) writes that environmentalism, like modernity, “constructs a vision of the world, which it takes to be reality itself, and attempts to make the world conform to it.” The nature-based and simulated healing modalities developed in dolphin therapy, forest therapy, and in a more conventional clinical context each construct idealized, naturalized environments and attempt to capture and reproduce these ideals across diverse biophysical spaces.

## **The Ambiguous Life of Trees**

The nature-based healing described in this chapter comes from trees. Laura Rival uses Carl Jung’s (1968) “philosophical tree,” an archetype of the hu-

man personality that accounts for the “natural growth and gradual transformation of the self” (1998: 11), as a jumping-off point for more grounded and historicized analyses of tree symbolism throughout the world. The act of taking a tree’s pulse by applying a cold metal stethoscope to its bark points to the intellectual difficulties humans face in conceptualizing forms of life that do not bleed red.

The anthropomorphization of trees can come in the form of character attribution. Just as Satō described certain trees as “shy Japanese” or “pioneering American” based on their natural temperament, anthropologist John Knight (Knight 1998: 197) writes that on mainland Japan’s Kii Peninsula (Wakayama Prefecture), trees become a “symbolic medium of human lives.” In Japan’s “tree culture” people and places are frequently named after trees, and wood remains a ubiquitous material in Japanese daily life (chopsticks, shrines, houses, etc.) (199). The foresters Knight met often compared tree growing to child rearing, and imbued their trees with “typically Japanese” moral qualities such as “rectitude, endurance, and sturdiness” (Rival 1998: 11). Rival and Knight build on the widespread observation that “trees are used symbolically to make concrete and material the abstract notion of life,” and are “ideal supports for such symbolic purpose[s] precisely because their status as living organisms is ambiguous” (Rival 1998: 3).

Maurice Bloch (1998: 51) interprets this ambiguity on a continuum explained anecdotally, through the observation that most Westerners are comfortable with the “unscientific” statement “plants are less alive than butterflies,” despite being taught otherwise in biology class. Put another way: Are we more incensed by plant or by animal testing? Bloch suggests that trees are “good substitutes” for human beings because they are different, yet “continuous with humans, in that they both share ‘life’” (40). Bloch’s essay, “Trees, Too, Are Good to Think With: Towards an Anthropology of the Meaning of Life,” contends that, like animals, trees provide intellectual tools that we use to think about and organize human society, a theory first proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1972).<sup>25</sup> Bloch is primarily concerned with the use of plants and trees in religious rituals. He generalizes the purpose of rituals as an ongoing negotiation of continuity, and discontinuity, between different forms of life (in the context of religious rituals, such as sacrifices, these life forms can be imagined as “principal” and “symbolic” entities). Rituals are thus achieved “by connecting related entities, which therefore must have an apparently ‘real’ and convincing unity between them, e.g. animals and people, and then disconnecting them, because of their ‘real’ and convincing difference” (1998: 52).

Forest therapy can be viewed as loosely ritualistic through its set of guided practices, which do not depend on strict adherence to a particular method to achieve specific outcomes. According to Bloch (1998: 53), the success of

a ritual depends on the achievement of a particular kind of nearness between entities—on “the complex demonstrable ‘real’ and convincing proximity, and on the ‘real’ and convincing distance of the symbols and the subjects of the ritual. They must be neither too close, nor too distant and, in fact, the more ambiguous, yet convincing, the relationship, the more it can be evoked.” More than the attribution of human physiological characteristics (blood), or personality traits (shyness), Bloch finds that the presence or absence of attributed intentionality is what makes another organism “fully” alive or not (53). Intentionality assumes the kind of consciousness or self-awareness cited by dolphin activist Rick O’Barry as the main reason these cetaceans should not be killed. This kind of consciousness is much more difficult to ascertain in trees.

Following Victor Turner, Bloch (1998: 53) finds that symbolic objects matter most for their “*transformative potential* during the process of ritual” (my emphasis). With “transformation,” the symbolic object/entity becomes something else (water into wine, tree into human, etc.). The successful ritual also transforms the “principal” (human) entity, from sick to healed, sinful to cleansed, and so on. Bloch’s discussion of trees in ritual and cognitive process lands us once again at the very spot that Hayward (2010: 581) highlights in her discussion of coral interactions (“the in-between of encounter”), which Hayles (1995: 412), discussing the location of the self, describes as the “cusp between the beholder and the world.” Whether writing about trees, corals, or national parks, each of these scholars asks how humans occupy the interstitial spaces of life—how we locate our/selves on conceptual continua such as seeing/unseeing, alive/inanimate, self/non-self, inside/outside.

## **Trees and Cognition**

In Okinawa, the metaphor of the fast-spreading mangrove tree may prove more apt than the image of the “sturdy” (Rival 1998: 11) and “stable” existence generally associated with tree metaphors (Ogden 2011: 90). Rather than “thinking with trees,” Laura Ogden argues that “thinking-as-mangroves” maps the movements of people, animals, and other mobile life forms (90). Scott Atran (1990) contends that our cognition of other life forms is innate. Atran locates this cognitive domain in the nervous system, the product of a shared human genetic heritage (cited in Bloch 1998: 44–45). For Atran, our species possesses “an inborn learning mechanism for biological things, and the details of this framework are gradually filled in and refined through experience” (Atran cited in Joye and De Block 2011: 194). The human capacity to learn things biological is of increasing interest to both social and natural scientists.

## **Biophilia**

Renowned biologist E. O. Wilson defines “biophilia”<sup>26</sup> as human beings’ “innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (Kellert 1993: 20). The biophilia hypothesis, while not a formal scientific theory, posits that human dependence on nature goes beyond essential matters of survival (food, shelter, etc.) to encompass our aesthetic, cognitive, even spiritual needs.<sup>27</sup> Wilson’s hypothesis resists the dominant neoclassical philosophy that values “natural space” as profit-generating capital (Serageldin 1997) and instead advances the notion that the intrinsic value of nature, its essential importance in our lives, is not only a discussion for poets, backpackers, and natural philosophers. Rather, Wilson argues, the human tendency to “affiliate with life” (Wilson 1993: 21) is inherent, hereditary, and biologically based.

Biophilia is also “innately emotional” (Wilson 1993: 31). In Chapter 4, I identified some of the awe-inspiring, cherishable animals sought by ecotourists. With the help of scholars such as Eva Hayward and a host of Okinawan diving coral transplanters, I have tried to put a “fingeryeye” on the ontological source of this positive affiliation. Perhaps these affiliations are adaptive “because an organism had clear evolutionary benefits when it was hardwired to focus on and to respond emotionally to certain survival-relevant living elements” (Joye and De Block 2011: 190).

However, biophilia does not necessarily hold a positive (affiliative) valence, and in fact spans the spectrum of human emotions: “from attraction to aversion, from awe to indifference, from peacefulness to fear-driven anxiety” (Wilson 1993: 31). The negative (aversive) side of biophilia (perhaps more accurately described as “biophobia”; see Ulrich 1993: 76) includes common human fears of sharks, spiders, and snakes. Environmental psychologist Roger Ulrich (1993: 74) suggests that arguments for a genetic component to biophilia “gain plausibility if a genetic predisposition in humans for *biophobic* responsiveness to certain dangerous nature phenomena is likewise postulated.” Biophilia is not purely a matter of survival instinct: it is also a “complex of learning rules” (Wilson 1993: 31) that keeps us alive. We are not born with a fear of snakes, but children do have an “innate propensity” to learn such fear quickly and easily after the age of five (Wilson 1984: 84). As we grow and mature, the snake becomes The Serpent, cementing our awe of an animal Wilson regards as the “most bizarre” (1984: 84) example of our biophilic tendencies.

Chapter 2 asks why snakebites became such a big problem in late nineteenth-century Okinawa, or perhaps more accurately, why snakebites were suddenly prioritized by the Japanese government and later the U.S. military. For Wilson, who grew up in the back country of the Florida Panhandle, the snake problem goes hand in hand with the “colonizer’s ethic” of “push the

forest back and fill the land” (1984: 88). (As discussed earlier, in Okinawa this dangerous task was left to the colonized.) Despite 150 years of “settling” the Gulf wilderness, Wilson writes, there remains an “oddly appropriate” abundance of snakes (89). Ogden’s work on human-animal relations in the Florida Everglades features entanglements with mangroves and “fantastic snakes” (2011: 30) that possess the same human-repellant power that helped to reserve the dense forests of Yambaru for other species.

Fear of snakes is an evolutionary adaptive trait that also manifests in culturally specific ways. In Okinawa, the common sight of snakes “essing” across the landscape has become “embroidered into the lore of serpents,” and leading to some unusual local treatment methods comparable to those described in Chapter 2. (In the Florida Panhandle, “if a snake bites you, open the puncture wounds with a knife and wash them with kerosene to neutralize the poison” [Wilson 1984: 89].) Wilson (1984: 97), also concerned with the structure of the human mind influenced by space and time, writes: “For hundreds of thousands of years, time enough for the appropriate genetic changes to occur in the brain, poisonous snakes have been a significant source of injury and death to human beings.” Over time, the theory goes, the genetic material of those who respond most carefully and effectively to a snake-ridden environment will be passed on more frequently, thus perpetuating the tendency to fear snakes. These “combined biases” thus become what we commonly refer to as “human nature” (101).

For the biophilia theorist, our biophobic aversion to snakes locates deep in our bodies as a feature of our basic genetic makeup. It is easier for us to recognize the evolutionary origins of our aversion to deadly organisms than it is to feel our biophilic attraction to whales, dolphins, and (at least for some) coral reefs. However, our relationships with these charismatic life forms may be equally vital to our well-being and survival.

### **Locating and Loving Nature**

The biophilia hypothesis also claims that, “when human beings remove themselves from the natural environment, the biophilic learning rules are not replaced by modern versions equally well adapted to artifacts” (Wilson 1993: 31–32). Instead, humans “persist from generation to generation, atrophied and fitfully manifested in the artificial new environments into which technology has catapulted humanity” (32). Two key assumptions are in operation here: (1) that it is, in fact, possible for us to remove ourselves from the natural environment, and (2) that our “new” environments are artificial by default.

Wilson’s biophilia hypothesis is founded on what I call the natural historian’s ethic of reason: a set of logics that embraces positivist assumptions,

allowing for “a system of universal truth that reveals the natural traits, and the relations between the elements of nature, that allow us to apprehend an actually existing world ‘out there’” (Lowe 2006: 20–21). Yannick Joye and Andreas De Block critique the biophilia hypothesis for its “anthropocentric environmental ethics” (2011: 190), and for its “vagueness” in defining the objects of human biophilic response: “There is a wide gap between a life-like process and life itself, and ... something that is life-like is not necessarily natural either” (191). What does “life-like” mean? The authors are troubled by Wilson’s neglect of the commonalities and points of diversion between terms such as, “life,” “life-like,” and “natural.” Following Kay Milton (2002), they write: “‘life-like process’ is only a technical term in research on artificial life, and Wilson doesn’t seem to think of life-like processes in that particular technical sense” (Joye and De Block 2011: 191). Further, they remark that “the conservation ethic envisioned by biophilists would work better if biophilia should imply an affective orientation to *actual* life-like elements (i.e., we want to preserve *real* forests)” (207), and propose instead that humans might be more plausibly endowed with “*biomorphilia*.” In this scenario, “our biophilic tendencies [could] be equally gratified by, say, watching National Geographic documentaries that bring wildlife and picturesque views and landscapes into our homes, and are usually much more enthralling and beautiful than the real wilderness” (2011: 207).

What might simulations to feed our “biomorphilia” look like? Haraway (2008: 259–60) explores the phenomenon of the human-animal-technology triad in her discussion of National Geographic’s mid-2000s *Crittercam* television series, a show that attached video cameras to humpback whales to simulate the experience of swimming with whales for viewers in the comfort of their living room: “The Crittercam people offered a means to go with the animals into places humans otherwise could not go to see things that changed what we know *and how we must act as a consequence*, if we have learned to care about the well-being of the entangled animals and people in those ecologies.” Ultimately, Nature may not have to stoke our innate conservation ethic—perhaps a natural environment need not be “real” to heal.

## Conclusion

To the extent that each person can feel like a naturalist, the old excitement of the untrammelled world will be regained. I offer this as a formula of re-enchantment to invigorate poetry and myth: mysterious and little known organisms live within walking distance of where you sit.

Splendor awaits in minute proportions.

—E. O. Wilson, *Biophilia*

Forest therapy offers a “formula of re-enchantment” (Wilson 1984: 139) to reinvigorate the weary body and mind. Forest therapy promises to heal patients internally, “from the heart,” through specific guided encounters with nature, but it is also a social experience. Participants are invited to have intermittent “independent” experiences of the forest (e.g., when we were sent to find a quiet space for reflection). However, these therapy tours are always conducted in groups and share many characteristics with the *Aruki* nostalgic village walks described in Chapter 3.

Lorimer and Lund interpret the mountain walking experience as a “socially acceptable alternative to placing an ad in the personal columns,” likening mountains to the “substrate beneath people’s longing for love, affection, friendship or a soul mate. Passage on foot presents precious time and the social space for getting to know others, for feeling accepted and for fitting in” (2008: 195). Mountain walkers walk and collect to “feel (a little more) whole again” (195).

Forest therapy provides an intensely visual encounter with nature, but participants’ reflections tended to emphasize the novelty of other heightened senses (feeling the wind, smelling “real” smells, etc.). This healing modality centers on walking, an “art” that Lorimer and Lund describe idealistically as “taking people on a journey that leads at least part-way towards greater personal security, reviving lapsed aspirations and life ambitions” (195). In forest therapy, mountain landscapes become therapeutic places where people go to “put their self more in tune with what are commonly perceived as the timeless rhythms, elements, volumes and surfaces of wild, romantic nature. In such visits, however infrequent or weekend-based, there is the promise of a higher life” (195).

The creation of a sense of place through walking, a “counter-intuitive” sense of belonging and security found in “places that are *elsewhere*” (Lorimer and Lund 2008: 195) is critical to the philosophies of nature loving and interpreting I encountered during fieldwork. In forest therapy, losing one’s sense of place (i.e., losing the over-determined comfort and predictability of familiar surroundings) produces a new, placeological sensibility in participants. The forest therapy walks recounted in this chapter were not destination-oriented, but do have a punctuated beginning and end. Perhaps most importantly, the emotional release that can accompany these walks “is not simply a matter of losing your sense of place, nor is there a need for ‘non-place’ to bring it about. Elsewhere can simply mean landscapes that are *not* workaday” (Lorimer and Lund 2008: 195).

The production of a healing *elsewhere* mandates a break from the everyday, and in the minds of participants it is crucial that the place visited and the activities performed are “*not* work” (Graburn 1989: 22). Rather, Nelson Graburn writes, “we imagine our wilderness vacation as *re-creation*, an ex-



perience or set of experiences that are supposed to “renew us for the workaday world” (22). Graburn applies Edmund Leach’s (1961) schematic of “sacred-profane alternations” (Graburn 1989: 25) to touristic phenomena, suggesting that work and travel, home and away can be understood as contrasting dimensions of two lives: “the sacred/nonordinary/touristic and the profane/workaday/stay-at-home” (26). Urbanization is key to understanding these categories. When city dwellers seek non-ordinary things and uplifting, elevating experiences, “nature tourism becomes, perhaps especially for the Japanese, a sacred journey” (Moeran 1983: 93). Rapid postwar urbanization and the consequent loss of “contact” with nature may partially explain the popularity of domestic nature-based tourism in Japan (Moon 1997: 226). In fact, MacCannell (1999) and Graburn (1989) find that nature is believed to have purifying and regenerating effects for city dwellers in every industrialized society. Okpyo Moon (1997: 233) argues that village-revitalizing nature-based tourism actually serves to reify a human/nature relationship in which the two are separated and “man no longer exists as part of nature but outside and above it.” In this configuration, nature becomes a “limited good” to be sold and protected, and summons a new kind of “urbanist” environmental consciousness couched in an ethos of reverence for Nature.

When theorizing sense of place, it is also good to think with the conceptual opposite of “place”: “non-place.” Postmodern theorist Marc Augé imagines place and non-place as “opposed polarities,” arguing that “the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed” (2000: 79). Augé defines the “non-place” as a space that is not “relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (77–78). These non-places might include parking lots, rest stops, and highways—spaces generally overlooked (“un-placed”) for their lack of memorability. Augé’s dynamic theory of place complicates the spatial aspect of the sacred-profane binary espoused by Leach and Graburn. Augé also draws on the metaphor of the palimpsest (see Chapter 1) as an always already politicized surface “on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten” (79). By imposing a kinetic relationship with the landscape, walkers softly resist the proliferation of “supermodern”<sup>28</sup> non-places in their communities.

Keith Egan’s essay “Walking Back to Happiness?” describes the contemporary tourist pilgrimage as a palliative for conditions of modernity such as the disorientation and despair expressed by the depressed walker in this chapter. Contemplative walking also serves as a “corrective for the maladies of modernity,” such as the privatization of public spaces, by allowing for a “more authentic pedestrianism to counteract the existential inertia of contemporary civilization” (Solnit [2002] quoted in Egan 2012: 101). Egan finds that pilgrims on Spain’s Camino de Santiago are, like Okinawan walkers, determined to “[cast] off certain aspects of their identity and obligations

in order to rediscover a sense of purpose, direction, and momentum” (Egan 2012: 100; cf. Rapport 2003). Aruki village walkers and forest therapy walkers alike reproduce local knowledge, reclaim public places, and reinscribe their history and identity with their footprints.

The biophilia hypothesis suggests that human place-making is best understood when we “look to the very roots of motivation and understand why, in what circumstances and on which occasions, we *cherish* and protect life” (Wilson 1984: 138–39, my emphasis). In his analysis of the roots of the “Conservation Ethic,” Wilson (1984: 138) argues that “a healthful environment, the warmth of kinship, right-sounding moral strictures, sure-bet economic gain, and a stirring of nostalgia and sentiment are the chief components of the surface ethic,” but that these factors alone do not amount to sufficient cause to compel us toward the preservation of biological diversity.

One purpose of forest therapy is to teach participants how to cherish life anew. If the technology of new and “artificial” environments leads to atrophy of our biophilic tendencies, could we reawaken them via “naturalized” methods such as guided forest tours? I engage biophilia in this chapter not to prove or disprove its validity, but rather to suggest that current trends in “natural healing” possess an import that runs much deeper than the “surface ethic” of a healthful environment and “sure-bet” economic gain (Wilson 1984: 138). Understanding the potential for economic gain is, of course, also essential to understanding Okinawans’ interest in new forms of forest development. Krishna Sivaramakrishnan’s (1998) study of collaborative forest protection efforts by villagers and the Indian state of Bengal finds that, much like mainland Japanese advocates for village revitalization (*mura okoshi*) in Okinawa (see Chapters 1 and 3), proponents of “joint forest management” use the language of “community resurgence” and “rural awakening” (1998: 284) to characterize their conservation projects. And like the Japanese and Okinawan forest therapy promoters described in this chapter, activists and government development specialists in Bengal regard joint forest management as an opportunity for a “recharging of energies through self-renewal” (285). Sivaramakrishnan critiques the rhetoric of reawakening an “innate conservation community” (292) in villages as a colonialist discourse that locates indigenous groups inherently closer to Nature than other populations (cf. Moore 2010; Walley 2002).

While Othering discourses are prevalent in Okinawa’s history of colonization by Japan and the United States, it is important to recognize the agency claimed by Okinawans who embrace the notion that “something is lost” in their connection with the natural environment. Along with Gerald Figal (2012), I adopt Erve Chambers’s argument that authenticity should be evaluated by “the degree of agency that a community has in deciding to change (or not change) its social settings” (Figal 2012: 89; cf. Chambers 2000). The

quest for a renewed sense of place—that is, the desire to be recharged by forest power—is made authentic by the participants’ enthusiasm.

This chapter has explored the interpreter-inspired practice of negotiating and (re)locating sense of self vis-à-vis nature by shifting the walker’s focus inward. My account for the non-economic motivations that propel the popularity of nature-based and touristic therapies in Okinawa today. Dr. Nakasone, the dolphin therapy expert introduced in Chapter 4, described this practice to me most simply as “relocating to recuperate” or, more simply: “changing place therapy.” In Yambaru, “therapy close to fun” is made possible by therapy close to tourism. In Okinawa, the simple act of walking through the forest has the potential to become therapeutic; an enchanting experience of nature worth cherishing.

## Notes

1. For further discussion of the poetics and performance of interpretative guiding for international tourists, see Salazar (2010).
2. In Japanese, 慈しむ.
3. This problematic discourse pervades a body of Japanese literature known as *Nihonjinron*, which propagates myths of Japanese uniqueness.
4. For discussion of Japanese exceptionalist ideologies of harmony with nature, see Moon (1997) and Berque (1988).
5. “自然を大切に作る心を育てる。”
6. やんばる 3 村玉手箱. This Japanese folkloric reference to a “Pandora’s Box” was included to make the trips sound mysterious and exciting (cf. Love 2013).
7. *Castanopsis sieboldii* or evergreen chinkapin.
8. “Longstay tourism” is hotel terminology for any visit lasting more than four nights. Most visitors to Okinawa never make it further north than the Churaumi Aquarium in Motobu, and those who do reach Kunigami stay an average of only one to two nights.
9. Akazawa Natural Recreation Forest in Nagano Prefecture is considered the 1982 birthplace of forest bathing, but forest therapy in Japan did not gain official recognition and sponsorship by the government-affiliated National Land Afforestation Promotion Organization until 2006. Forest therapy centers are certified only if researchers find scientific evidence of their relaxing effect (Nakamura 2008).
10. This conceptualization is reminiscent of the frequently cited “3-k” economic structure of Okinawa Prefecture: *kichi*, *kankō*, *kōkyō jigiyō* (bases, tourism, and public works).
11. There are A&W restaurants all across the island, sometimes referred to as “*Anata to Watashi*” (You & Me) by Okinawans in reference to the U.S. military presence that led to the chain’s expansion across Okinawa (and elsewhere) during the postwar period.
12. *Schima wallichii*.
13. *Alpinia zerumbet*.
14. Futenma is controversial mainly for its location in the middle of a densely populated urban area; in addition to noise pollution, accidents as well as fatal plane and helicopter crashes that occur outside the boundaries of the base have stoked local protest against the

air base. Despite decades of local political resistance, including vocal opposition from Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga, as of early 2017 the Japanese government has resumed construction that will ultimately relocate Futenma to the northern village of Henoko (Kyodo 2017). This proposed solution to the danger Futenma currently poses does not satisfy protestors, who demand that bases on the island should be reduced, rather than relocated (see Figure 1.1).

15. Phytoncides are antimicrobial organic compounds generated by plants including pine, oak, and tea tree, as well as certain spices, onions, and garlic. They are used in Japanese holistic medicine and aromatherapy. Some forest therapy advocates believe phytoncides possess healing qualities.
16. The parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) is responsible for the stimulation of a number of bodily functions ranging from sexual arousal and salivation to tears (lacrimation) and defecation.
17. Three Natural Heritage Sites (*Sekai-san*) have been designated in Japan since 2004: Shiretoko Peninsula in Hokkaido, the Ogasawara Islands, and the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa Prefecture).
18. The direct translation of the Japanese word for baby (赤ちゃん, *akachan*) is “little red one.”
19. Okpyo Moon (1997) identifies this kind of essentializing rhetoric—i.e., Japanese as existing in “harmony with nature” versus Westerners as separate from/controlling/dominating nature—as central to ideologies of *Nihonjinron* (studies of Japaneseness) (228). Discourses of *Nihonjinron* have been used to create distance between Japanese and Westerners, as well as between Japanese and Okinawans (recall Mr. Oku’s explanation of nature as more “cherished” by Japanese at the beginning of this chapter).
20. The radical component of the ideogram “forest” (森林) is (木) (*ki*) “tree.” The first two characters, “forest” (森) and “woods” (林), commonly appear in Japanese surnames, supporting John Knight’s theory of Japan as a “forest culture” (1998) (discussed later). The third character, “power” (力), is also a radical component of the ideogram “man” (男). “*Shinrinryoku*” is very similar to “*Shinrinryoku*” (森林浴) or “forest bathing,” which involves stress management through a combination of the techniques I learned from all of my nature interpreters.
21. I use the term “base” loosely: The highest peak is 503m in elevation (Yamada and Sugimura 2004: 118).
22. In Japanese, 天然記念動物. The nocturnal, roughly possum-sized Ryukyu long-haired rat (*Kenaganezumi*, also known in English as the Ryukyu long-tailed rat) lives in the trees like a squirrel. Its English name does not do this magnificent animal justice.
23. As I touched on in Chapters 1 and 3, katakana is the Japanese syllabary traditionally reserved for loanwords and formal scientific nomenclature.
24. Here I use Paul Ricoeur’s (1979: 27) definition of phenomenology as “an investigation into the structures of experience which precede connected expression in language.”
25. See also Marvin Harris’s counter-argument that animals are “good to eat” (1985) and Douglas (2003). For Haraway, these animals are agents and entities also “good to live with” (Haraway 2015: 160) because their liminal characteristics can reinforce the interdependence of the human and the non-human (cf. Kirksey and Helmreich 2010).
26. Wilson is credited with popularizing biophilia, but Joye and De Block (2011: 190) claim German philosopher and psychologist Erich Fromm as its originator.

27. Yannick Joye and Andreas De Block (2011: 200) cite a vast literature linked to the biophilia hypothesis: that vegetative environments and elements such as trees, flowers, and plants are able to “elicit aesthetic responses in human beings” and can have a “stress-reducing or ‘restorative’ effect on them, as opposed to urban or [hu]man-made environments.” For empirical examples that support the biophilia hypothesis, see Kaplan (1995) and Kahn (1999).
28. Augé’s term “supermodern” refers to a modernity focused on movement, transitoriness, and impermanence. Beth Notar mobilizes Augé’s “non-place” to explain local forms of resistance to the touristic rewriting of history in Dali, China. For an insightful analysis of place-making as political resistance to hegemonic nostalgia and the tourism imperative in the postcolonial Chinese context, see Notar (2006).