Introduction

As elsewhere in the world, 1848 was a time of some significance in Japan. The years leading up to 1848 had been chaotic: inflation and contradictions in economic policy coupled with ruinous crop failure caused by bad weather had led to bankruptcies of hereditary officials and widespread famine among the peasantry. Economic breakdown was accompanied by political unrest at almost all levels of Japanese society. The 1830s had already seen the greatest outpouring during the 250 years of Tokugawa rule of ikki protests and rebellions, some of which aimed at specific reforms, while others were more abstractly protesting the general order of things. Incidents such as the Shonai affair in 1840, in which the government ultimately had to back down from a leadership appointment for a domain that was hereditarily related to the Tokugawa leaders, made clear that the shogunate was increasingly unable to manipulate and control the larger political geography of the state.

State horizons were challenged from without, as well. By the 1840s, shogunal rulers had heard of the decisive military victory of the British over the Chinese in the opium war, and of the trade treaty imposed on the Chinese. In 1844 the king of the Netherlands wrote a letter to the shogun, warning him that Japan, too, was threatened, and asking to expand trade. In 1846, U.S. Captain James Biddle arrived with a similar request, as a precursor to the infamous black ships of Commodore Perry that would reach Japan in 1853. Historians continue to cite Perry’s arrival as the event that “opened” Japan, first of all to increased trade with the West, but also by extension—in an incipient way—to the political, social, and cultural conditions of modernity.

In the midst of the crises in the 1840s, the shogunate took the remarkable step of sponsoring a public noh performance. The noh was the official
ritual of state—the shikigaku—and so it is not altogether surprising that the shoguns would do this. But the scale of this performance was unprecedented. With planning begun in 1846 and the performance itself held in 1848, it was the largest and most spectacular noh performance ever held, official or otherwise. It was a “once in a generation” (ichiyo ichidai) performance, so called because only the head of the top-ranked noh family was allowed to hold such a performance, and at most only once within a given generation.2

The program consisted of fifteen days of performances spread out over a period of several months.3 Representatives from every official school of noh, from most regions of the state, performed. During the performance days, the shogun ordered the closure of the kabuki theaters and the misemono market spectacles, and all sectors of the population were encouraged to attend the noh; approximately 5,000 people attended on each day, and in all, well over 50,000 people saw the performances.

Clearly this was meant to be a momentous occasion. The significance of the event was formalized when, upon its completion, the shogun commemorated its great success by declaring the start of a new era: Kaei (嘉永), or “the Celebration of Eternity.”4

Although one might expect the shogun to benefit monetarily from a large noh program like this one, and almost certainly he did receive some earnings, generally the proceeds for these kinds of performances went directly to the head of the principal noh school.5 Furthermore, as sponsor, the shogun would have to contribute resources that by 1848 had become

1. It is unclear precisely when the noh was officially decreed to be shikigaku—most likely it was in 1615—but its status as the ceremony of state had already been put into practice with the investiture of the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. This practice was maintained for every Tokugawa shogun through to the last, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, invested in 1866.
2. Ikeuchi lists only five other such performances that were permitted in the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule. Ikeuchi Nobuyoshi, Nōgaku seisaku, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Nōgakukai, 1925), 200.
3. The first performance was on the sixth day of the second month of 1848, and the last was on the 13th day of the fifth month. The program was not originally planned to extend for such a long period. Performance dates were postponed in a number of cases for a variety of reasons, from shogunal convenience to rain.
4. Brief mention of this fact is made in Komiya, Kaikoku hyakunen kinen bunka jigyōkai, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Ôbunsha, 1956), and Keene, Nō and Bunraku (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 42.
5. The bulk of the earnings seem to have gone to the head of the Hōshō school, Hōshō Yagorō; including preparation fees and profits from the performances, he was given between twenty and twenty-five thousand ryō.
scarce and precious. Why then, under near-cataclysmic conditions, would the shogun have invested heavily in, and attached so much to a noh performance? It may be logical enough that the shogun would have wished to signal the start of a new and hopefully more auspicious era. But why the noh? What value—money aside—did the noh hold for the shogunate? What value did it have in the concrete historical context of 1848?

This book focuses on these basic questions of value, especially as a means of understanding the importance of the 1848 noh performances (known as the Kōka kanjin noh). As background to this event, the following chapters range widely in the discussion of Edo-period noh, as it was re-shaped and repositioned—including in relation to kabuki—by the early Tokugawa shoguns. The questions that frame this work derive from, and are therefore limited to, the 1848 noh event. At stake in the problem of value, though, are changing conditions of Tokugawa power, and more generally of social form.

The focus on value is, first of all, simply one way of historicizing the noh. Twentieth-century institutional divides have tended to encourage approaches to the noh that isolate it, as an autonomous realm of theatrical or sometimes ritual art with its own “cultural” (or art) history.

More importantly, the categorical distinction between economic, political, and aesthetic value was not wholly present in Edo-period Japan. These

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6. Despite the prospect of limited monetary return, the shogunate expended substantial funds on preparations for the performance and considerable energy in assuring strong attendance figures from all segments of the population. It is difficult to quantify the strictly financial outlay that came from the shogunate. For a performance of this magnitude the costs would have been high, for everything from salaries and construction costs for the performance grounds, to the seemingly endless series of gift-giving ceremonies prior to and during the performances, to the costs of entertaining visiting imperial and domain elites. There was substantial income to help offset these costs, including fees collected beforehand from the various wards of Edo, ticket sales, and fees paid by young “student” noh actors who appeared in some of the performances. Even these ticket sales and fees are difficult to calculate, however, especially insofar as in many cases they were effectively ceremonial payments, which were subsequently refunded by the shogun. The main point is that the shogunate not only had to make substantial financial commitments, but more generally clearly attached great value to this performance. For details on some of the fees and payments, see Ikeuchi, Nōgaku seisūki, vol. 1, 205–215.

7. At the popular level, these divides have helped the noh to become a repository of a more transcendently essentialized Japanese identity. Raising the question of value necessarily returns the analysis to historically immediate and broad relations of social and political form. This would seem to be especially appropriate with the noh, given that so many of its characteristics that are now taken to be definitive of it, from the specifically classic poetic language and the slow pacing to the stage structure, were elements of a political ritual (the shikigaku) that was carefully legislated by the Tokugawa shogunate.
distinctions are themselves modern, with the notion of an independent realm of aesthetics emerging even later in Japan than in the West, and are tied to specific social and economic orders—capitalism in particular. These distinctions, therefore, and the social and economic orders in which they were embedded, were also part of what was at play in the noh in general and in 1848 more specifically; the question of value highlights this. Consideration of these distinctions, including the possibility for independently “economic” or “aesthetic” realms of value is thus critical to an understanding of the developments in 1848, and to the changing grounds of coherence of the early modern Japanese state.

It is important therefore to begin with an expanded concept of value. One way to think of this would be in terms of the critique of a “restricted economy.” This is part of a critique that goes back at least to Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille. In the restricted form, economics is limited to the rational calculability of value in a secular realm of society; it is assumed that people are motivated by rational calculation in a world of scarcity—excess, and the impulse to squander and spend, are not determining factors. Underlying a restricted economics are a set of dualisms, including moral good versus practical utility, and the sacred versus the profane; capitalism is generally taken to be the principal catalyst of a restricted economy.

Even if these dualisms were emerging in Tokugawa-era Japan, the assumption that they were not fully present in the shogun’s economy already means that the question of the shogun making money from the 1848 performance has less relevance, or


9. See for example Bataille, for whom the idea of a “general” economy was based on a notion of expenditure, which could break the dualisms of a “restricted” economy. Capitalism, by this argument, restricts “nonproductive” expenditure by the delay and deferral of consumption through the reinvestment of surplus (la part maudite, or “the accursed share”). This creates false but systematic closures and totalizations. The general economy allows for an expenditure of pure loss that breaks with utility and the apparent identity of exchange value; in other words, it more easily and truly allows for difference. The potlatch is taken as a typical example of this kind of expenditure. Nonetheless it has long been known that there is on the one hand real waste in capitalist expenditure, and on the other hand the supposedly nonutilitarian expenditures of such examples as the potlatch nearly always are made with practical returns in mind. Any kind of freedom of the “general economy,” including as a grounds for critique of modern capitalist divides, therefore strikes me as elusive. However, the idea that the mode of expenditure, especially of surplus, is important, and may have played an important role in determining social form in the Tokugawa era, will be addressed. Aesthetic form, too, embodies similar questions of “expenditure,” identity, and closure.
at least should not be asked from the standpoint of practical, rational calculation alone. Similarly, more general debates as to whether official shogunal noh was a religious rite or a newly secularized social ritual make sense only to the limited extent that this opposition was already present for the shogun.

Furthermore, although it may now appear unnatural to think of economic value as being also in some sense “aesthetic,” again—at least from the perspective of value orientations—a more generalized approach to economics allows for aesthetic form to be conceived of as existing on the same level as utilitarian economy. This is so especially given that aesthetics and economics were not at that time conceived of as autonomous; art was itself in a sense “economic,” and not a secondary superstructural effect of a more material economic base. By these terms, aesthetic form is a material, embodied, and integral aspect of both value and social life.

Value, as employed here, thus involves a judgment that is at once moral, economic, and aesthetic. In the simplest of definitions, value is a privileged orientation of social and cultural form. Bakhtin’s idea of the chronotope is still useful here. As the term itself indicates, a chronotope implies a structure of space and time, but a space and a time that are produced and oriented around a specific point of view within time and space. 10 The noh, for example, finds its privileged place of orientation in an eternal past, which because unchanging, founds a closed and unchanging cyclical time. Bakhtin’s chronotope can be expanded to include monetary economic value—rice as a supposedly divine value form, for example, anchoring the shogun’s economy—and ultimately the measure of moral worth, goodness, and the “truth” of things in general. Specific chronotopes hence ground and orient specific orders of time, space, and social relations between people. Value, then, has to do not only with the type of measure, but also with the cultural form produced—with the cultural form judged valuable. 11 Further, insofar as the chronotope orients general relations, and defines general parameters of what is good, then the “value” of an act or a thing also has to do with the capacity or potential to create that general order of relations of which that act or thing is a part. Accordingly, the value of money in a capitalist economy can be defined not just in terms of its ability to purchase a commodity, but in terms of its ability to embody the larger chronotopic order that capitalism defines.

11. For a somewhat similar point in a quite different context, see Nancy Munn, The Fame of Gawa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 8–11, 20, passim.
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Capital investment, for example, and its capacity for a future return that itself can then be reinvested, is premised on a specific point of value, that creates a specific future-oriented temporality, that also implies specific orders of social relations, and so on.

Nor do these value orientations consist of static relations. Value, as Marx and others have demonstrated, lies in transformation. Specific forms and orientations of value imply specific modes of transformation. Thus, insofar as the geography of a state embodies a certain kind of value, then a particular mode of transformation and change is built into that body of the state. For example, capital value emerges and exists only in specific processes of transformation of money or products into investment returns or profits. A capitalist order is defined by these modes of transformation, as would be a state that is based on a capitalist economy and capitalist orientations of value.

In the same way, it can be said that social form consists of particular modes of transformation. The point can also be made in terms of historical change: social form is not merely found in history, but rather is itself always a mode of history. Social form is an order of relations which is not purely static, but which instead emerges within, and as, a process of change—just as any value form implies a certain mode of transformation out of which that “value” emerges. Tokugawa noh was hence a historical form, of course, but it also embodied a form of history.

In fact the noh was integral to the Tokugawa shoguns’ monumental and strategic attempts to appropriate and organize a new kind of socio-political space, premised on an order of time that precluded essential change. Chapter 1 examines the position of the first Tokugawa shoguns, and the place of the noh in their efforts to build the foundation for a new kind of state. By carefully organizing ordered flows and exchanges of noh actors and performances, the shoguns and the provincial lords, or daimyo, at a lower level of the political hierarchy attempted to create a “ritually”

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12. As Taussig puts it, “[in Marx’s] reasoning . . . value lies not in a source nor in exchange per se, but instead in the metamorphosis of the object or service exchanged . . . value lies in transformation.” Michael Taussig, The Magic of the State (New York: Routledge, 1997), 139.

13. The term “ritual” seems appropriate for several reasons. The shoguns themselves used the term ritual (shikigaku means either ritual or ceremony). Further, the shoguns were apparently trying to create an image of ritual structures of time and space that fit with qualities commonly ascribed to ritual structure, such as formalized behavior involving a resolution of the individual into the collective and a closure of time and space into repetitive cycles. This was a modern creation, however, and prior to the Tokugawa state the noh was considered a far more secular entertainment. For this reason and for others, Tokugawa noh was therefore a modern kind of ritual.
repetitive order. In Chapter 1, the question of value orientation and social form is thus taken up in the context of the official practices of the noh. Each of the subsequent three chapters similarly takes up different grounds of value production as background to the 1848 event.

Chapter 2 looks at monetary economy, including the use of rice as the general equivalent governing the shogun’s economic order, and its relation to the sometimes opposed and outlawed trajectories of capitalism. Brief examples for comparison are included, such as the status of the “dream portrait” of the founding Tokugawa shogun, which might otherwise be considered a problem of semiotics, or representation.

Chapter 3 turns to aesthetic form and the poetics of Edo-era noh. Given the emphasis on ritual, cyclical closure and permanence seen in the previous two chapters, there is a striking opposition of play types in official Tokugawa noh. Although one type is specifically ritualized and is founded on a neat unity of identities, the other type accentuates decomposition and failure of identity. This latter form would seem to be at odds with the kind of dependence on unified and bounded identities seen in the shogun’s rice economy, and in the circulations of noh actors and performances. The tension between a more totalizing, “beautiful” play form and one of disintegration indicates features that are in some ways modernist. It also calls into question and complicates the grounds for closure seen in the previous two chapters.

Chapter 4 extends the inquiry into aesthetic form, but with a focus on temporality. As one sees elsewhere in the cultural conditions approximating modernity, time is tied to visuality and increasingly is experienced as taking on precedence as the principal basis for social form. As a result, all other grounds of existence are subordinated to time, as if time has an independent existence in and for itself. The tensions and contradictions of aesthetic form here work out as contradictions in different temporal orders; ultimately, these tensions in temporality are at play in the 1848 performances.

Each of these chapters should be understood as returning implicitly or explicitly to social form, but social form in a way that involves more than social organization, and includes the form of evaluation—an axiology—inherent in any social organization.

14. Chapter 1 considers these actions as constructing a utopic structure. Utopic projects were seen elsewhere in the Tokugawa era, and certainly not always with the same political implications: the obvious example would be Harootunian’s analysis of nativist discourse. See Harry Harootunian, Things Seen and Unseen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
Value not only emerges in transformation, as noted above, but it furthermore is materialized only within the context of the concrete conditions of life. The desire one has for something, or the sense of goodness, worth, or beauty that is called “value” arises only when one comes into contact with the immediate world. Value, in other words, becomes realized in the material conditions of history. And in this engagement with history, the materiality of the world always exceeds any received order of value; value, and therefore ultimately social form, is never stable.

It is only in terms of the 1848 event that I claim to be showing this engagement with history—including the particular conditions then facing the early modern state, and the unique evaluation of those historical conditions that one can see happening in the 1848 noh performances. This is the subject of Chapter 5. This last chapter examines the status of the Kōka performances both as an “event” and as a ritual; the repetitive yet also singular character of the performances; and the ways this ritual event negotiated the determinate conditions of that moment in time.

Although I discuss practices from other times within the Edo period as background to the 1848 noh, these practices should be understood only in terms of the questions raised by 1848. Also, while I do not return to the event itself until the final chapter, this is not to suggest that stable structures of value persisted without change until the sudden eruption of 1848. This is not, in other words, an argument for an intermittent relation between stable cultural form and the disruptions of historical action (so that even if structure occasionally changes in action, there is still a fundamental distinction between structure and action). Nor was the Edo period a time in which nothing really happened, an era without history, until 1848. The mid-nineteenth century was a particularly eventful time, however, and therefore interesting. In many ways it did point back to earlier shogunal practices, as I try to show, but these practices were nonetheless framed by the circumstances of 1848. Throughout, my own argument similarly refers back to that one historical moment.

One of the ironies of Japan’s mid-nineteenth century is that although it was a time of great fragmentation and centripetal dissolution of power, one can yet also see elements of a new kind of coherence and unity—in some circumstances.

15. In the field of anthropology, see Marshall Sahlins’ *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976)—a groundbreaking attempt to resolve the oppositions of structure versus action, and idealism versus material—and in sociology, Pierre Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). Though now classic works, both ended up to some extent reproducing a model in which structure is interrupted (and transformed) by action, which then returns to a new structure.
ways, conditions that are often associated with the modern nation. The Tokugawa state geography, for example, developed as a heterogenous space. Internally, the various domains not only held a great deal of political independence from the shogun, they also were differentially ranked and empowered according, in part, to the level of genealogical relation of the daimyo’s family to the Tokugawa shoguns.

External borders were not all that clear, either. Especially in the north, the relationship of the Ainu people and their lands with the Japanese was continuously transforming: the Matsumae domain, the area now around the island of Hokkaido, was unlike any other, being partly under the rule of the Japanese and partly under the rule of a family that was not Ainu, but not entirely beholden to the Japanese either. The Ainu themselves traded at least as much with the Chinese and the Russians as with the Japanese, and at times wore Chinese or Russian clothing rather than Japanese; the Ainu people and their lands all made for a very uncertain border of northern Japan. But by the nineteenth century, the genealogical relation of domain lord to shogun—and especially the status of being a tozama or “outside” daimyo (外様), versus a fudai, or “related” lord (譜代)—no longer made as much difference. Borders, too, increasingly were defined. In the north, the shogunate sent armies to “pacify” the Ainu, and, separating them from the increasingly hostile Russians, it brought them into a more strictly “Japanese” state identity. In this way, trade with countries that had become more truly external also was brought under more centralized Japanese control.

Although Tokugawa-era Japan is often portrayed as having been an eminently closed country throughout, the term for this closure ( sakoku) did not appear until the nineteenth century, and in fact was a term derived from a Westerner. With incidents such as the British defeat of the Chinese in the opium war, and the Dutch and American demands for similar treaties with the Japanese, Japan was increasingly being brought into an international order of war and trade, and itself treated as a nation among others. So both internally and from the outside, forces were pushing toward an increasingly nationalized order of state.


17. The description of Japan as a “closed country” was introduced by the Dutchman Engelbert Kaempfer. The translation of this work was not widely read in Japan until the mid-nineteenth century; Shitsuki Tadao published his “Sakoku-ron,” based on Kaempfer’s work, in 1801. There were terms indicating a policy of restricting flows of people and trade earlier however—a common one was *kaikin* (’maritime restrictions”).
Shifts in the nature of power were visible as well. Earlier Tokugawa shoguns depended on an authoritarian sovereignty that (if also dispersed among the semiautonomous domains) emphasized rule by negative constraint. This was evidenced by the continuous issuance of decrees of prohibition. By the nineteenth century, however, there was less reliance on prohibition, or on geographic differentiation of power, and greater use of what Foucault has called biopower—power that works through a claim of beneficence rather than prohibition, and through a general and homogenized control of life. For example in the case of the Ainu, by the mid-nineteenth century the shogun was literally claiming to rule by beneficence—extending to the Ainu the goods and rights of all Japanese—and at the same time imposing new rules regarding hygiene and daily life.

The impetus toward something closer to a national form was in these ways part of the setting of the 1848 Kōka program. However, the motivation for at least some kind of centrality and even homogeneity can be seen in official Tokugawa noh more generally. This is taken up in Chapter 1.

But the question of modern forms of centrality and unity, especially as related to modern subjectivity, extends beyond the matter of the nation-state. A productive way to think about this, in relation to the concerns of this book, is in terms of the development of perspective and perspectival space. Perspectival space is mathematically homogenous, as seen for example in the case of single-point perspective painting. In order to unify and complete itself, this homogeneity at once requires and locates an external viewpoint (the punto dell’occhio)—the viewpoint of the observer that corresponds to the perspectival vanishing point. Although I am reducing what is in fact a very complicated set of variations, this is the position of the modern, renaissance subject, which is unified via this observational relation to rational, mathematical space.

Japan, however, did not have a moment, or epistemological break, equivalent to the Renaissance in Europe. Perspectival pictorial techniques were available in Edo-era Japan, but they were not used in the same way or with the same effect as in the West. If perspectival space and by extension the modern perspectival subject were not available as an organizing principle, the question then is what, if anything, did define the unity of Edo-period space and the subject of early modern Japan?18

The idea that there was no homogenously unified perspectival sense of space in the Edo period has been raised before, in varying ways. Late nineteenth century Western impressionists saw the “flatness” of Edo-era ukiyo-e woodblock prints as an indicator of an entirely nonmodern primitivism. More recently, in the late twentieth century, artists and critics connected to work such as “Superflat” art proposed a fundamental connection between Edo-period art and the compositional forms of digital media. Although not all that clearly stated, in this case the claim is that both art forms and both eras stand outside the modern. For these critics and artists one of the critical issues is perspective: “flatness” or the lack of perspectival depth seen in a good deal of the early modern woodblock prints is correlated with the nonperspectival, multiplanar techniques that arise with digital art. Both types of art deny the perspectival unity and therefore the positioning of a modern observational subject. Superflat art is based on a rejection of the modernist opposition of rational economic utility and autonomous aesthetic beauty, and sees a similar lack of differentiation in the Edo era.

Nearly all the comparisons by these commentators, however, were made fairly strictly with early modern capitalism, and the culture associated with the period—and kabuki in particular. Edo life was far more complicated than that. Looked at more closely, the concept of a nonunified, or multiplanar mode of composition may be more apt than the commentators realize. Although capitalism was present from the start of the Tokugawa period, over time its economic influence increased. Technically, capitalism was an illegal economy and the shoguns carefully and consciously attempted to establish an alternative economy based on rice. Clearly, these were two very different economies, with very different value orientations—and both had complicated relations with existing conditions that were in many ways feudal. The differing economic orientations also made up the environment of two very different cultural economies: the noh, for instance, was developed within the milieu of the shogun’s rice economy, while kabuki, ukiyo-e woodblock prints, and other popular arts were very closely affiliated with the world of capitalism.

Neither of these monetary or cultural economies could be used alone to describe the early modern era. Although in some ways they were directly opposed, they were not always dialectically opposed. To some extent the façade was maintained that social groups were divided by their participation in one or the other economy, with mercantile capitalists officially the lowest in a fixed-class hierarchy. Yet, in fact nearly everyone had to—and most wanted to—participate in both economies. Even the very first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, while working to construct his rice-based economic system, was also using the merchant Shaya Shirōjirō as one of his principal advisors.

Consequently, to understand at any level the differing orientations of value that underlay Edo-era life requires an analysis that addresses the relationship between these different economies. Accordingly, an examination of capitalism is integrated into the analysis of the shogunal rice economy in Chapter 1 and into the discussion of the poetics of kabuki in Chapters 3 and 4.

Because the ground and space of everyday life during the Edo era were comprised of truly different worlds, it is not entirely accurate to say that in the Edo period there was no distinction at all between rational monetary calculations and aesthetic judgments. This was in some ways true of the rice-based economy promoted by the shogun, but not really true of the culture of capitalism. Again, to varying degrees, people participated in both.

This cross-participation of people in differing value systems also complicates the conceptualization of the possibilities of difference, opposition, and resistance, especially as based on center versus marginal periphery models, or the idea of contest emerging from class consciousness. Kabuki is often portrayed as a site of marginalized opposition to the official center of Edo-period life. Although this view has some credibility, I will argue that resistance, and power, came to life more through a relation between the worlds of samurai-class noh and merchant-class kabuki than in an opposition of one to the other.

Given these differing worlds, each with distinctive horizons and orientations of value, it would be hard to think of anything like what Panofsky calls a

21. There were separate class affiliations for the two theaters, which were heavily enforced by the shogunate, but eventually these affiliations were as much a matter of ideology as they were of real practice. In fact, some of the most prominent and still revered authors of "commoner class" theater and literature, such as the great kabuki playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon, were by birth of the samurai class; and in general, people from the samurai and the merchant classes were attempting to participate in both forms of theater and economy.
“formative will,” coalescing a continuous, homogenous, systematic space like that indicated by perspectival pictorial composition. Hence the problem here is: if one is to think of the everyday plane of experience in the Edo period as in any way unified, what, if anything, governs this unity? Despite the Tokugawa shoguns’ occasional pretensions to divine kingship, the majority of people did not locate their relations to each other, and to the world, in terms of an overarching divine worldview—divinity was not the unifying force. But neither is there evidence for the modern observational subject serving as the organizing principle, integrating everything into a unified space. In fact, both these formations appear as possibilities within Tokugawa noh and especially in the more ritualized official presentations; the question of how they converged or were composed is critical to their overall form. This was certainly the case for the 1848 event.

In organizing the more important official noh programs, great care was taken in the placement of audiences to control who might see what, and how they might see it. Different subject positionings, of what appear to have been different visual regimes, were not only allowed for, but planned for, within the same performances. Disregarding the differences for the moment, one basic and important conclusion to be drawn from the attention given these visual regimes is that this is already visual space that is being ordered. By itself this might suggest something like a modern observational subject, but the substantive differences between the visual orders indicate other possibilities. The different orders of vision and their importance to the official public noh performances in general, as well as to the Kōka noh, are examined in Chapters 4 and 5.

In the 1848 Kōka noh, an organization of vision that was different from other official noh programs was evident. This reorganization of vision discloses the emergence of a new kind of integration, with a reconfiguration of the possibilities of unity and centrality and the subject positions that anchor this unity and centrality. Put in a different way, this book will argue that in the 1848 performance, the shogun (and everyone else) sat in a transformed position vis-à-vis history and the world.

Returning for a moment to Bakhtin’s chronotopes, one of the difficulties in reading his outline of these is deciphering how he saw the different chronotopes relating to each other in history. On one hand, he seems to privilege certain chronotopes and their value orientations as the teleological endpoint

of a progressive history; the value orientations of the “novel” in particular are newer, more open to difference, and tied somehow to the development of the nation as a sociopolitical form. In some ways, this could be read as an almost Hegelian history of the working out of an ideal, with the nation itself part of this ideal form. On the other hand, Bakhtin seems to say that a chronotope can appear at different times in history, and so would seem to be in a sense a tranhistorical, perhaps even essentialist form. The chronotope of the novel, for example, is described as popping up in different forms and in different times and places at least since second-century Greece.\(^{23}\)

There is perhaps some possibility in the way this book is structured that, similar to Bakhtin’s outline of the chronotope of the novel, the Kôka performance of 1848 might be construed as a synthetic moment, subjected to the constraints of a Hegelian teleology. I am, as stated above, reading earlier practices and conditions through the context of 1848. But I am laying claim to history only in terms of the 1848 performance, and the specific questions that I have raised regarding the value of that performance. It is very much a history, but specifically of that particular moment. The value forms that I describe are primarily of that time and place—not tranhistorical and certainly not in any way progressively ideal.

At least nominally, official Tokugawa noh was conceived of as a “ritual” form by the shogunate. The first shogun debated with his advisors about whether to use received forms of ritual such as bugaku or kagura for the rite of state, but he settled instead on the noh. Viewing the noh as a ritual, however, potentially puts it in an uncertain relation to modernity. Ritual often becomes a label for that which is traditional and is not or not yet modern. The construction of this kind of opposition was, in fact, part of Edo-era noh. But the Kôka event itself can be viewed as a form of ritual, even if in some ways it was less formal than other shogunal command performances. Ritual by this view lies neither wholly within nor outside of modern conditions. Instead, in what might be called the “ritual” negotiation and reevaluation of historical conditions that was visible in the 1848 Kôka event, the form and conditions of ritual itself are part of that negotiation. The new emphasis accorded the Kôka program, which, as a “once-in-a-generation” kanjin noh was organized quite differently from the performances otherwise held in the castle grounds, is thus in itself part of this reevaluation.

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\(^{23}\) See The Dialogic Imagination, especially "Epic and Novel," and "From the Prehistory of Novel- elistic Discourse."
This study is also not the story of an invented tradition. It is not the story of the birth and production of a nation-state on the back of something “false,” or empty in its claims. Doubtless much of the “classic” form of the noh was newly produced in the Edo era, and as with the concept of ritual, the distinction between the traditional and the contemporary was being developed in the noh—with the noh then located at the traditional pole of the opposition. However, these are real value orientations, with a real history, that in the mid-nineteenth century were integral to a changing state—and in being a site for the negotiation of these, the noh was also to some extent modern.

One final caveat regarding my discussion of the noh. Edo-era noh consisted of a wonderfully rich and varied set of practices. This book examines only official noh, and asks of it only a delimited set of questions that center on the value of the 1848 event. This is therefore not in any way a comprehensive picture or reconstruction of Edo-era noh. Furthermore, the questions that are being raised about the noh could be asked of other realms of social practice. Those realms of practice that are taken up here, including monetary economics and aesthetics, are examined for their relevance to the noh and are not comprehensive descriptions of Edo-era economic or aesthetic values. Yet, while these different realms of practice have their own material integrity as domains of value production, there is also no such thing as a specific domain of culture that exists as neatly bounded, whole and autonomous to other domains of practice. Rather than in such independent contents, culture in a sense exists only on the intersections of such practices. These intersections are not random, but bear a concrete responsibility and orientation to each other; it is in these concrete relations of intersection that value and meaning arise.

For this reason, extensive orientations of value come to be embodied in individual points of intersection that consequently take on something like the status of what Walter Benjamin called a fragment; and Bakhtin an atom or monad: an element that embodies and reflects a larger world of which it is or was a part. In a limited way, I am approaching the noh and the Köka performance as just such a fragment of the late Edo-era Japanese state. This book is therefore only about the noh, and a single perspective on the noh.

24. Value and culture are produced and reproduced differentially in the different arenas of social and cultural life.

25. The Benjaminian fragment is a remnant, or ruin, of a historical formation that, despite its fragmentary status, still contains within it the impress of a wider set of historical relations.
But in the juxtapositions that almost inevitably arise from examining the Kōka program, including between noh and kabuki, as well as between political practice, economic form, and aesthetic value, looking at the noh allows a reading of the landscape of late Edo-era social form.  

In this way, the Kōka event itself can be thought of as an “atom” within Japan’s mid-nineteenth century. It was a point of intersection that bore connection and responsibility not only to other elements within the various political spaces of Japan at that time, but also to values and conditions impinging from the outside. The new order of things that the shogun commemorated in 1848 was not simply a result of dynamics entirely internal to Japan. But it was also certainly not just a result of the forced intrusion of an outside, as in the commonly held view of Perry’s black ships opening Japan into modernity—implying that Japan up until that point had stood outside the conditions of modernity.  

The Kōka event was one small, atomized fragment in which all of those relations were being reevaluated and performed. It at once points back to a set of conditions that can heuristically be called early modern, and it is a point of emergence of something new, beckoning forward to the modern nation-state.

Following is a brief historical overview of some of the practices and contexts in which the noh was used. Greater detail, where relevant, will be found in the remaining chapters.

The noh initially developed around the thirteenth century out of a variety of ritual and entertainment forms, including comic styles as well as practices of nontheatrical performers such as jugglers and acrobats. Dengaku (山祭), an agricultural rite, was probably most closely associated with the noh; the noh was nonetheless distinguished from all of these rites, including in name.

Not entirely a ritual, but still entailing elements of religious practice, the noh frequently was performed within the space of shrine and temple

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26. On reconstruction (in this case, as a full picture of the early modern era) versus reading, see Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen*, 19–22.
27. This also means that to the limited degree that something like a “national” form of political space was arising at that time, at least in this case the development of the nation itself is not just a reaction to the forces of imperialism—although the imperialist activities of the British, Dutch, and Americans were already part of the context.
28. In the middle ages the noh was more commonly known as sarugaku (the art of imitation) than noh (the art of accomplishment). The term noh did not come into widespread usage until the Tokugawa period.
compounds, as was common practice for nonreligious and religious entertainments alike.

The noh was not originally aristocratic. The noh is characterized by a hegemonic incorporation of a great variety of styles, and many of them came from the countryside. Performers themselves were considered to be of the lowest classes. Nevertheless, patronage developed quickly during the fourteenth century. By this time the military leadership (the shogunate) had taken over the imperial nobility’s role as political rulers, and it was these newly legitimate military rulers who patronized the noh as an art form. The noh was thus associated with the military rulership from the start. However, despite it being a source of cultural legitimation for the new rulers, it still was not the rigidly formal theater that it later became in the Tokugawa era. Attempts were made to create it in the image of a “stately” form, but it was also allowed to continue having novel, even avant-garde characteristics which may have been appropriate for a military form of power. For example, the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, who was most renown for having patronized the first real concretization of the noh as a theater of state, himself was widely known for attending performances in the most up-to-date, even “bizarre” styles of urban clothing—for example, “a narrow-sleeved, wide-hemmed costume of a pale blue lozenge pattern tied with a red sash, green leggings and red knee-length breeches.”

Yoshimitsu also was a patron of the noh actors and playwrights Kannami and his son Zeami—the two who have been canonized both in the Tokugawa era and in contemporary Japan as the true founders of the noh and the definers of the best and true noh styles. Yoshimitsu, furthermore, was revered as one of the great military leaders of Japanese history, and the shogun who, in 1392, was finally able to create some kind of statewide reuni-
fication. The shogunate collapsed in the fifteenth century, but the noh continued to be performed. It was widely popular among the general public, and developed into a dramatic form unlike that seen today, and in many cases closer to what kabuki has become with large casts of characters onstage, realistic props, etc.

It thus seems likely that the Tokugawa shoguns were restaging the image of Yoshimitsu in their own early efforts to bring together a new state: an image of a military and political unifier, and patron of the originary figures

30. The plays of Kanze Nagatoshi (1488–1541) are a typical example of such styles.
of the noh. The Tokugawa shoguns also revived Yoshimitsu’s office of the shogun, which some time after Yoshimitsu had fallen into disuse. Under the Tokugawa shoguns, the noh was controlled by the state, although it gained popularity as a practice, even if not always legal, among the merchants and other commoners. As a ceremony of state it was given an aura of ritual practice that it previously did not have. However, some nongovernmental public performances were permitted and generally were known as *kanjin* (勧進) or “subscription” noh. Although *kanjin* noh had in earlier times been done for more truly religious ends such as raising money for temples and shrines, or to build structures such as bridges—all of which would be “good works” that earned a kind of positive karma for all involved—they were now done more specifically for monetary gain. Thus, under the Tokugawas, the noh became at once more ritualized and yet also more commercial.31

With the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the start of the modern Japanese nation in 1868, governmental patronage of the noh was ended and it was widely assumed that the noh would quickly die out. But with the state visits of several foreign leaders such as U.S. President Grant and the appearance of Japan’s own newly empowered emperor at a Japanese governmental officer’s house, the noh was chosen as the most appropriately “Japanese” entertainment for such events. The basis of comparison was now with foreign nations, and the identity of the noh as “Japanese” at this point became a national one.32 Although strongly subsidized by the government and considered largely a theater for older generations, the noh—and in recent years particularly the “bonfire” noh—remains relatively popular and an important site of Japanese identity.

31. A key concern of this book is this interrelation between the two apparently different kinds of economies of value, the different flows of desire, and the different modes of producing power.

32. Thus the noh was by the 1870s already given new patronage by the emperor, who himself had become ruler of the nation. The noh continued to develop not only these nationalist connections, but also relations to nationalist militarism. During World War II new noh plays were written, celebrating the might of the Japanese military and further developing the idea of a site of Japanese purity. This gradual movement of the noh’s modern ideological implications could be traced, too, in the actual movements of one of the first noh stages built after 1868: first given to the Meiji emperor’s (the first modern emperor) compound, it was then moved to Yasukuni shrine, the state shrine to Japan’s military dead, which also can be seen as glorifying Japanese militarism.