

STAR LINE

\$5.00

Spring 2015

38.2



Nearby Words of Aporia by Aunia Kahn

Uncanny Valley Trail

Difficulty: Unsettling

Distance: Unknown

Elevation Gain: Varies

Type: Out and Back?

Upon arriving at the parking area on the Cartesian Plains, you will notice the sign for the trailhead at the Origin.

The Uncanny Valley Trail is located near this intersection of the Abscissa Trail and the Ordinate Trail.

Begin your hike by following all paths simultaneously.

As you gradually ascend the first peak, be prepared to encounter unexpected phenomena. Because you are human, your need for belonging and social acceptance, correlated to the degree of your loneliness, will influence your perception.

On the lower slopes of the first peak, you will have the chance to observe the industrial robots. Note that your sympathy toward them increases as their machine limbs exhibit anthropomorphic movements. The steepness of this hike's incline will become more pronounced if you witness motion. This section of the trail is the positive *shinwakan* switchback. You may pass by inanimate forms, such as dolls or toy robots. The presence of puppeteers in black robes, manipulating creatures known as *Bunraku*, is not cause for alarm. As they wave to you from afar, their gestures will perhaps diminish your ability to discern potential humanness. In this instance, you may experience a sense of familiarity with the Other, signifying that you are gaining elevation even as the trail meanders.

Approaching the first summit, you will arrive at the coordinates, which are always undetermined. Ahead of you, the crest of the second peak will be visible. You may find an empty clearing, its location inconstant. There is no one here. You are not alone. There are other human beings at the top of the second peak. There are other beings here, at the ridgeline. This is the borderland of your empathy. You may see faces that are real, or faces which seem less real than normal human likenesses. What is real.

What is artificiality attempting to mimic that to which
you connect, that meeting of mind to mind.
In close proximity, you may sense a synchrony,
a presence of aliveness beyond functionality.

In the event of a handshake, you may feel a shift
in your comprehension, triggered by a sudden sense of
revulsion. Something is not quite right. Someone is
merely a pretense. A simulation of self, replicating
a smile that is too slow to be anything but wrong.
Your descent into the Uncanny Valley is no
leisurely venture but a plummet, a tumble,
a falling like death. Once, this area was known as
bukimi no tani: the valley of eeriness. Often,
there are casualties, and in this place, the stillness
of a real corpse is almost as unnerving as its sudden
locomotion. When the valley mists lift, so do the
masks of the almost-humans hiding near you. A hand
that is not your own will touch you. The hand may
be both true and false. The masks may be both
Noh and yes. Do not remain here long.

If you complete the final leg of your excursion,
you will return to the second peak, where you are.
As you climb, consider why you have this instinct—
or is it an ability—to discern that which, despite
all appearances, is not-human. Is your reaction a method
of self-preservation, an ancient protection from danger,
or is it an emergent skill, a new orientation,
showing you a way to map different borderlines,
changing your affinity for origins of all kinds.

—Carrie Naughton