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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan

Representing, Practicing, Performing

edited by
Andrea De Antoni and Massimo Raveri

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Head office

Dipartimento di Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa Mediterranea
Università Ca' Foscari Venezia
Palazzo Vendramin dei Carmini
Dorsoduro 3462
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Andrea De Antoni and Massimo Raveri (eds.)

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http://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/
ecf@unive.it

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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Introduction

Andrea De Antoni
(Ritsumeikan University, Japan)

Massimo Raveri
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

This volume was inspired by the Conference "Death and Desire in Modern and Contemporary Japan", held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in 2011. As organisers of the Conference, we decided to start thinking about publishing some of the papers as a follow-up project. Unfortunately, the process took more time than we had expected. Nevertheless, this delay gave us the opportunity to take some time to consider and discuss some issues related to the topic, in an attempt to refine and redefine the project's direction.

During this period, we witnessed an international increase in the interest in the topics of death, dying and 'thanatology', both among academics and within a more general audience. For instance, internet discussions groups – the widest of which is "H-Death", providing announcements about International Conferences related to the topic – have become much more active in the last few years. Moreover, also the rise of forums, websites and Facebook pages on death-related topics such as war and war-tourism, museums of torture, or the so-called "dark-tourism", has been highlighted by existing research (e.g. Sharpley 2009; Stone, Sharpley 2008; see also De Antoni in this volume), while the international market has witnessed an increase of horror films, both from the perspective of production and release (e.g. Popmatters 2017), and from the one of tickets sold at box offices (e.g. The Numbers 2017).

Similarly, in recent years, there has also been an increase in scholarly works on death-related topics. This trend has involved several disciplines that include social sciences – mainly anthropology (e.g. Kaufman, Morgan 2005; Franklin, Lock 2003; Lock 2002) and sociology (e.g. Exley 2004; Thompson et al. 2016) – but also film studies (e.g. Dixon 2010; Hantke 2004) and literature (e.g. Teodorescu 2015). There are even some ground-breaking attempts to deepen the understanding of death, dying and grief from an evolutionary perspective in primatology and biology, in the attempt to establish the new fields of "pan-thanatology" (Anderson, Gillies, Lock 2010): a study of death and grieving that comprises also non-human animals.

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Studies on Japan have not been an exception to this trend. On the opposite, scholars of Japan seem to have been even more interested in the topic of death than academics focusing on other areas. Indeed, in the last few decades, publications and research into practices related to death have flourished. In Japan, Nakamaki Hirochika and Shimazono Susumu (both included as authors in this volume) were central in the organisation and management of whole research clusters on death-related practices. Nakamaki was one of the precursors of this interest, focusing on funerary customs in Japan (1986) for quite a long time and gradually specialising and producing research into company funerals and memorial services (Nakamaki 1995; 1999; 2002). Shimazono was a central figure in promoting and establishing *shiseigaku* (literally 'death and life studies', but also the translation of the English word 'thanatology') as an academic field, through research projects that included large groups of scholars and produced a series of five edited volumes published by Tokyo University press in 2008 (e.g. Shimazono, Takeuchi 2008).

Also scholarship in English has flourished in the last few years, starting with the remarkable *The Price of Death* by Hikaru Suzuki (2000), a study on the commodification of funerary practices and the funeral industry, based on both archival and ethnographic research. This work shed light not only on change and commodification of funerals, but also on the by-products of these processes, which include a dramatic decrease of perceptions of pollution (*kegare*) and fear related to the danger of the malevolent spirits of the dead.

The focus on change in mortuary rites, as well as on their fluidity – as opposed to a strong tendency in stressing their fixity and role in the reproduction of social and power relationships – has become more relevant also in other anthropological research on Japan. Rowe (2003), for instance, goes as far as to push forward the idea that a "grave revolution" (85) started in the eighties, led by changing family structures and a critical lack of sufficient burial space. Ancestor worship and the relative grave system seem to have gone through deep transformations and a decline has started to be observed as early as the seventies (Smith 1974). As a matter of fact, along with the commodification of 'traditional' funerary practices and ceremonies, which gave way to differentiation, individualisation and personalization (Inoue 2013; Suzuki 2000, 2013a), studies shed light also on the emergence and relative success of new practices such as the scattering of ashes at sea or on the mountains (Kawano 2004, 2010), as well as the compacting of cremated bones into Buddha statues, or their burying under a tree in "tree burials" (Boret 2013, 2014). Besides being one of the results of the changing family structure and ideology of the *ie* system (Boret 2014), as well as a response to the excessive economic demands of 'traditional' funerals (Boret 2014; Kawano 2010), these innovative practices are deeply intertwined with discourses on 'nature' and the environ-

ment, which have emerged among certain Japanese, as well as clearly the result of the commodification and liberalization of death.

Similar processes have been pointed out also in conceptualizations and notions of the afterlife. On the one hand, especially in the case of individualised death rituals, also the spirits of the deceased seem to have become less bound to the world of the living by those family bonds that would keep them tied to their relatives (e.g. Rowe 2011). On the other, along with change in 'traditional' views of the afterlife such as becoming an ancestor and live with the family, or conceptualizations of heaven and hell, also alternative conceptualizations have been reported and analysed in their relationships with social values such as meritocracy or hedonistic views of life after death, as well as secularism and "scientific" views of nothingness after life (Mathews 2011).

Therefore, scholarship on death and related practices in contemporary Japan, in accordance with the broader socio-anthropological tradition, has tended to firmly link them to kinship and family ties – though the more general term "relatedness" (Carsten 2000) might be more helpful in some cases, for also friends and colleagues play a role in those practices (e.g. Suzuki 2000) – as well as to socio-economic change. These are all processes that also influenced views of the afterlife. Needless to say, also dealing with an alarmingly ageing society and its concerns contributed to sharpening the focus on the centrality of social practices related to death (e.g. Traphagan 2004).

In spite of the great work that scholars have done on these topics, however, there has been a very strong trend to focus on the practices through which death and dying are settled and institutionalised, whereas untamed, unsettled death has generally been left aside. Even when it was taken into consideration, such as in cases of disasters, the main scholarly concern was shedding light on the ways through which it is successfully coped with through ritual practice (Hood 2011, 2013; Gill, Slater, Steger 2013). Yet, what about the cases in which this does not happen? What about if, for some reason, institutions and discourses are not enough to tame death? And what are those reasons? What about the cases in which unsettled death suddenly intrudes the social? What are the forms in which it does, and the consequences in the social? These are some of the questions that the contributions in this volume attempt to answer.

We Walk the Line

This project is, in our views, a 'meshwork', an entanglement of different "lines" (Ingold 2007) of fragmented movements, which come not only from different contributors and disciplines, but that also originate from several points of view on death, dying and the transformations and becomings that they imply.

The classic work on death ritual by Hertz ([1907] 1960) contributed to shape anthropological scholarship on the topic. Death is a transformative process not only for the deceased, but also – maybe mainly – for the living. Indeed, death rituals not only provide ways to cope with the material remains of the deceased through, for instance, (re-)burial or cremation. They often function to symbolically transform the dead and reincorporate them into the community or the society, with new identities and proper roles.

These rituals, similar to other rites of passage (Van Gennep [1909] 1960) in a person's life, are often tripartite and include a stage of separation, a transitional or liminal period, and a final reincorporation, all marked by their respective practices. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1966) deepened the investigation of the liminal period, pointing out that it is often characterised by the inversion of social norms, as well as social and hierarchical relationships, through symbolic practices. The social order is, then, reinforced through rituals, and the participants can obtain a new status, exactly as a consequence of having gone through this period "betwixt and between" (Turner 1967).

This model proved to be overly simplistic and, for instance, Bloch (1989) showed that, even within the liminal period, power, hierarchy and social norms tend to be enacted and negotiated, and that, along with their transformative powers, rituals also legitimise the continuity of social order and power relationships. Nevertheless, the general model is still considered valid. It is widely accepted that mortuary rituals often involve metaphors of regeneration of life, and that they open the chance for participants to access a vitality with great transformative powers (Bloch, Parry 1982).

More recent work showed that social actors strategically mobilise mortuary rituals in rapidly changing societies (e.g. De Boeck 2009; Kawano 2015) and that those practices are occasions for social groups to negotiate and reshape their respective positions in societies characterised by diversity and stratification (e.g. Kawano 2010). Therefore, it is clear that, as over-simplistic as the above-mentioned model can be, mortuary rites and, potentially, death, do have a transformative power that can be disruptive for social relationships and power among the living. Consequently, people try to cope with it and tame it by ritualized means.

Following the spread of medical scientific practices and technologies, this "well-managed death" (Kellehear 2007) started being handled by medical institutions, as well as by professional funeral companies. As a consequence of the changes that followed these developments especially in postindustrial societies – where there has been, for instance, a dramatic increase of life expectancy – death has come to be seen, on the one hand, as pertaining to the elderly. On the other, it has become separated from communities and neighbours.

Indeed, Mellor (1993) explained the gradual commoditization of death in terms of medicalization of the dying process and privatization of practices connected to death, together with "the sequestration of death from public space into the realm of the personal, the *absence* of considerations of death from social life" (19). Furthermore, as Kellehear (2007) pointed out, death "became wild, not because doctors, lawyers or hospitals appeared on the scene but because the old place of death (the afterlife) became questionable, even evaporated before the eyes of an increasingly sceptical urban elite" (177). Japan has not been an exception to these processes:

> Community funerals reflected the participants' fear of death, which they believed caused the release of malevolent spirits. […] The ritual's purpose was to usher the deceased's spirit safely to the other world and to strengthen family ties as well as the relationship between the deceased's family and community members. […] Deprived of the common ground on which funeral rituals united communities, funeral ceremonies […] solidify the ties between the bereaved and the members of groups to which they belong, including the colleagues of the deceased. […] Various elements such as the migration of families into cities, the increase of nuclear families over household of extended kin, and the progress of work specialization have contributed to the transition. (Suzuki 2000, 4-5)

Following Suzuki (2013b), in addition to the dimension of social change and relatedness, it seems useful to add one more analytical perspective, in order to understand death and dying: the investigation of "how do the dying, who are expressing and acting on their own ideal for dying and death ways, influence afterlife values, the living, and the bereaved-to-be" (3).

As a matter of fact, thinking about death in postmodern societies only in terms of pacification and institutionalisation, implies the risk of overlooking the subjectivities and agencies of the dying and the bereaved. It also risks leaving aside those cases that exceed well-managed death, or in which the management of death through institutionalised practices is not enough. Moreover, particularly in complex and diversified societies such as the Japanese one, as a consequence of the above-mentioned changes in the modalities of relatedness that involve the management and taming of death, the problem of whose death that particular death is emerges. In other words, if a well-managed death implies the involvement of the family, friends and colleagues of the deceased, what happens when unrelated people come into play and, for instance, appropriate the narrative about one particular death, making it theirs? Or what happens when a badly managed death starts influencing people who are not related to it by 'proper' ritual practices?

This is the first line that we are trying to walk with this volume: the one between the efforts to 'properly' cope with the disruptive – at times

even monstrous – death, and the cases in which its transformative power produces new representations and practices. In traditional Japanese society – as well as in traditional scholarship on Japan – this was the realm of impurity or pollution (*kegare*), a liminal realm similar to the period between the double burial described by Hertz ([1907] 1960). Death was polluted and polluting. As such, special norms had to be observed by the bereaved in order to cope with it and its danger would not be tamed until the forty-ninth day. It was the realm that characterised liminal spirit entities, such as unrelated dead (*muenbotoke*) and spirits of people who died by sudden or violent deaths: *yūrei* or 'hungry ghosts' (e.g. Raveri [1984] 2006). It was the realm of social liminals such as outcastes, both *eta* and *hinin*, the ancestors of present-day *burakumin* (see Groemer 2001; Neary 1997, 2003). It was also one of the realms that the project of modernity tried to erase and pacify by making it a 'tradition' belonging to the past, through scientific rationalist thought and practices, as well as with the instauration of discourses of enlightenment, civilisation (Figal 1999; Foster 2009) and of, in some cases, 'superstition' as opposed to 'religion' (Josephson 2006, 2012).

Whilst, as stated above, studies on contemporary Japan have reported a decrease of the connection between death and pollution in funerary practices (e.g. Suzuki 2000), it has also been shown that it may be still operative in entanglements with national discourses of nostalgia, linked to a vanishing – though mainly imagined – past, framing and shaping practices perceived as related to 'Japanese culture' and 'Japaneseness' (e.g. Ivy 1995). Indeed, the politics of modernity were, for instance, not enough to debunk and erase ghosts or hungry spirits. Therefore, the possibilities for them to come back from the world of the dead and haunt places or people have been kept (De Antoni 2015), in spite of the strong and progressing secularization and the reportedly diminishing interest in religious and spiritual matters in contemporary Japanese society (e.g. Reader 2012).

This is the second line that this volume is trying to walk: the line between what is there and what is not, between what is alive and what is not; a line of diverse movements of multiple ways of differentiating, othering and distancing, as well as of coming-back. After all, "mortality and immortality (as well as their imagined opposition, itself constructed as a cultural reality through patterned thoughts and practices) become approved and practice life strategies" (Bauman 1992, 9). We walk the line between life and death as emerging ontologies (i.e. not given 'objective' categories, or epistemologies) of "being alive" (Ingold 2011), what it *is* and how it *becomes*, rather than what it *means*. The line of what happens in the social when distinctions are fractured and blurred by the exceeding transformative, or by the overwhelming suffering and mourning of the bereaved. In fact, suffering is a social practice (Kleinman, Das, Lock 1997) that goes well beyond the body. The body in pain can indeed disrupt selves

and subjectivities (Scarry 1987) but, nevertheless, suffering can also be a way to recreate a world (Das, Lock, Reynolds 2001).

In this sense, therefore, this project also walks the line of multiplicity. We look at discourses that identify the lines between life and death, at practices that (re)define them, at deadly desires that lie underneath them, and at institutionalised narratives and discourses disrupted by untamed death. Particularly in relation to this, we recognise the presence of a big absence in this volume: the 3/11 disaster in Tohoku (North Eastern Japan). There are several reasons for this. The first is that, to our knowledge, existing literature on 3/11 has mainly tended to focus on the efforts to tame all the deaths and horrors that occurred through more or less improvised institutionalised practices (e.g. Gill, Steger, Slater 2013) rather than pointing out the ways in which those horrors changed the social. This happened even in those cases in which the analytical focus was on adapting, for instance, religious practices to the immediate post-disaster (e.g. Peterson 2013). This trend is not unique to the case of studies of Tōhoku: it can also be found in the literature related to memorialization of other disasters in Japan (e.g. Hood 2011, 2013).

The second reason is linked to how it would be possible to highlight the ways in which death and horror changed the social in Tōhoku. One possibility, for instance, would be a scholarly investigation of the reports of experiences with ghosts in the area (e.g. Parry 2014; Ryall 2016). This was actually attempted by Kudō Yūka (2016), a student in Tōhoku Gakuin University, whose BA thesis was published as part of a seminal project by her Professor (Kanabishi 2016). Therefore, on the one hand, this topic has been already covered, at least partially. On the other hand, although a chapter on ghosts in Tōhoku would have been likely to have a certain appeal – Kudō san's work received a good amount of attention from the media (Andō 2016; *Mainichi Daily News* 2016) – we were not sure that it would have necessarily contributed to the volume from a methodological perspective.

The last – though definitely not the least – reason is that we wanted to leave those dead in peace, without the risk of appropriating them. Maybe it was not the right choice, maybe it is a matter of 'distance' (Latour 2005; see also De Antoni in this volume), but it was an important matter to us.

We put together contributions and approaches from different disciplines, trying to find a way to enmesh representations, practices and performing arts, seen as enactments of the above-mentioned transformations and becomings. Needless to say, we see each contribution as independent, as analysing one of the multiple, fragmented possibilities in which untamed death can tame the social.

The title comes from a different line than the *eros* and *thanatos* in the Greek philosophical tradition (otherwise it would have been *Desire and Death in Contemporary Japan*). Our intention was not to evoke Romeo and

Juliet, nor to invite to use those categories in the analysis of, for instance, the story of Izanami and Izanagi. Our intention was referring to the Buddhist concepts of suffering and impermanence, which link the ideas of death and desire, in an attempt to condense the above-mentioned lines in one single title, which also tries to point at two elements that transcend the specificities of Japanese society, each of them being common to all humankind. Yet, maybe, this was just another attempt to tame death and its becomings through ritualized (academic) practice.

The Lines in this Volume

The title of Matteo Cestari's paper – "Each Death is Unique" – is directly inspired by a sentence from a short essay written by Jacques Derrida, as an oratory for his departed friend Gilles Deleuze. How could there be philosophy, which speaks the universal tongue of reason – Cestari asks – about death, which allegedly is a matter of unique, unrepeatable singularity? Is thanatology still possible, or is it just an invalid application of some mental schemes and routines to an impossible object? How can we find an abstract truth about death, if the question is not the category of death, but every single death?

Cestari underlines how death "as such", in its facticity, is rarely taken from a purely phenomenological point of view. Many philosophers, scientists and religious men 'find' the meaning of death, its essence, its role within a rational scheme, bringing it back to the reassuring horizon of wisdom and thus re-determining the meaning of our being in the world. From the perspective adopted in his essay, the epistemic transfiguration of death is not limited to beliefs in afterlife, but includes the very assumption of possessing the hermeneutical keys to identify the essence of death. These hermeneutical keys are generally provided by a metaphysical approach that puts death's truth in a higher plane of existence, shifting the attention of the subject away from the awareness of death in its being 'here and now', closing the eyes to the fact that nothing can be either affirmed or negated about death. As Jankélévitch (1977) often says, death drives us to a condition of fundamental theoretical uncertainty, a constant oscillation that cannot be fixed on any determinate thesis.

Between the tragic subjectivity of death in the first person (my death) that is the tragedy of my entire being, exposed to nothingness, and the anonymity of death in the third person (their death), knowable only as an almost empty concept, Cestari points out that there is a somehow intermediate death, which can be experienced. This is your death. It could be possible to reckon that death in the second person is the most psychologically devastating dimension of death, which can affect my entire existence and shape my own death. Away from a subjectivist perspective, your death

reveals the social and relational character of the reality of dying and could count as a crucial element to allow a certain knowledge of death. It is neither the dominion of discourse, as with their death, nor the simple end of all possible words, as with my death. Far from being put into question in force of a rational counter-argument, it is jeopardised through some obscure, not entirely definable emotional and physical set of factors. Your death is the place of penumbra and ambiguity, where meaning vacillates and hesitates. Since your death cannot be reduced to a pure object of rational categorization, each death of people we knew well is to be considered apart on an existential and affective plane. Similarly, on the cognitive plane, such a knowledge is slippery and different each time.

It is Cestari's conviction that death may function as a kind of litmus test that enables us to verify the theoretical and ethical characteristics of our philosophical systems, and acquire awareness of their limits. He starts by discussing death in Plato's *Phaedo*, which he thinks is particularly useful in clarifying his metaphysical approach and the deep relationship with the idea of the transcendent character of truth. Plato's philosophy resolutely imposes death's meaning as the ideal condition to reach the transcendent and imperishable truth. His anthropology goes so far as to affirm that true life can be reached only rejecting the ambiguity of our transient body. Philosophy becomes an exercise of death, because human beings can achieve the realm of archetypal ideas solely once the soul is delivered from this mortal coil. Biological life is incompatible with truth. Platonic truth itself is deadly. It requires eternity and immobility. So, only imperishable, unchanging souls can enter the reign of the imperishable truth. The desire of truth becomes a desire of body's death, because the purity of the perfect truth requires that human being be purged of the entire bodily dimension. The impermanent body is a hindrance that must be swept away.

Conversely, in East Asian Buddhism, truth cannot be conceived without impermanence. As a matter of fact, in Buddhist tradition, there is a variety of positions regarding death. In ancient Buddhism, death is part of the process of the individual's decay, as the twelfth integrated cause of 'dependent origination'. Being subject to the 'wheel of becoming' is a source of suffering since the entirely impersonal causal flux, due to evil deeds and attitudes, gives rise to another existence, another individual combination, which produces other suffering. The question is also strictly interwoven with the problem of the self, since the self, considered as an aggregate of physical and mental elements, is disassembled with death, thus revealing the illusion of believing in an eternal individual soul. Moreover, according to many Buddhist texts, discussing about these themes conceals a selfish attachment to oneself. The correct path requires selfless practice and the attainment of wisdom, which has nothing to do with judgments and objective knowledge, but is much more a spiritual awareness of one's ontological dimension of emptiness. Salvation, therefore, is not

after death, because after death there are more and more lives. Salvation is not just another life, but another death, a 'different' kind of death, truly definitive – nirvana, the extinction– that finally wins the illusory forms of existence and ends the existential pain of living.

Cestari chooses to analyse the approach to death of the Buddhist Zen tradition, with particular attention to the writings of Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253), founder of the Zen Sōtō sect. His interpretation of death is radically defined by the question of Buddha-nature (*busshō*). Death is not contradictory to life, but is dialectically linked to it. As a matter of fact, Dōgen does not speak of simple death, devoid of life, nor of life detached from death, but always of 'life-death'. This relationship between birth and death is coincident with Nāgārjuna's affirmation of non-duality between nirvana and samsara, so much so that the very illusions of the world are just the same as Buddha-nature. Dōgen points out the error of interpreting the Buddha-nature as a sort of permanent substance, a kind of trans-temporal and trans-phenomenal essence that survives death. He straightforwardly defines Buddha-nature as impermanence. This statement indicates a totally different perspective: it assumes beings in their 'being-so', without any transfiguration. Death too 'is-so'. The true character of things has neither substance nor a hidden part manifesting itself in the transient world from outside. There is no distinction between transcendence and immanence. All beings, just as they are, are the perfection of truth and emptiness.

Dōgen's interest – Cestari comments – more than in knowing death or knowing life lies in 'practicing' death and life, as a way of forgetting the self. Only when the ego is not important anymore and is let go can life and death be fully lived, in every single moment, for what they are. As Kasulis (2009) and Ames (1993) pointed out, the difference between 'what' and 'how' to think of death lays respectively in the transcendent or immanent awareness of the epistemological relationship with the world. As Dōgen puts it, we can correctly face death only if we accept that life and death are truly enigmatic, and if we silently and lucidly accept both of them in their simply 'being so'.

'The view on death and life', *shiseikan*, is a neologism devised at the beginning of the 20th century, to indicate the emerging of new theoretical perspectives on the old problem. Shimazono Susumu, in his paper, poses the question of how new discourses on death had been progressively constructed in modern Japan.

The tendency to aestheticize death, based on the concept of impermanence, which inspired the ideal of the failing hero in classical Japanese literature (Morris 1975), was exploited by Katō Totsudō (1870-1949), a propagator of Buddhist teachings, who was considered a moral leader, and had an important role in edifying the 'new spirit' of Japan as a 'modern' nation. He advocated that the Japanese warrior spirit had to develop into the national morality. After the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific war, it became

the dominant rhetoric and was used as an ideological device to persuade young people to sacrifice their own lives for the emperor.

But it was the novelist Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) – as Shimazono maintains – who expressed a much more sophisticated view on death-and-life. Shiga, as many of his friends, felt it strange that a person would go to martyrdom out of a sense of chivalry for the sake of the honour of a specific institution, be it the clan or the nation. Writers such as Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai were shocked by general Nogi's suicide after the death of Emperor Meiji, and respectively wrote *Kokoro* (Heart) and *Abe Ichizoku* (The Abe Family) with a sense of deep emotion. They saw in Nogi's 'self-immolation' an act of profound moral value, coherent with a way of thinking about the meaning of life and death that was the reverberation of the luminous tradition of the past. But for intellectuals like Shiga, this gesture did not have any sense. That kind of past for them had been obliterated by modernity. In the new epoch, as Shimazono points out, the centrality of the ego and the "disenchantment of the world", which were at the heart of modernity, did legitimise a different ethical strategy for individuals who wanted to devote themselves to the pursuit of universal truth, through reason and not through faith. Yet, the loss of transcendental values did not cause forms of pessimism and nihilism, so much to think that there would be no other way to glory than committing suicide. Through the perception of death, Shiga's generation saw the brilliance of life.

As Itō Sei – a critic quoted by Shimazono – underlines, understanding life through the consciousness of death is a frequent theme in Japanese literature (Itō 1986). Poets of the past, such as Saigyō, Kamo no Chōmei or Matsuo Bashō, were always conscious about living under the shadow of death and tried to express emotions of resignation and abandonment to the final, definitive emptiness. But in modern Japanese literature, the traditional expressions of lamenting the evanescence of life had little appealing power. Confronting themselves with the idea of death, writers like Shiga found in the discourses of modernity a new strength for a spiritual independence, in an almost selfish perspective, and a joy of living every instant of their present life. They lost 'God' or 'Buddha', but they found an alternative, such as 'nature' or 'science', on which they could lean.

The advancements in the fields of science have always imposed the necessity of reassessing old habits of thought. In contemporary late capitalist societies too, the discoveries and innovative technologies in medicine are redefining the boundaries between life and death. Louella Matsunaga's article examines and compares the Japanese system of reporting and investigating medical related deaths with the coronial system as practised in England, in order to shed light on the cultural dimension of the problems implied by this procedure.

Legislation on the investigation of medical-related deaths in both countries are struggling to keep pace with the changes given by the grow-

ing complexity of medical care and the number of different individuals, systems and procedures involved in testing, elaborating a diagnosis, and giving a medical treatment, which have led to an increased potential for (possibly fatal) errors. In Japan, in 2010 and then in 2015, a new legislation came into effect, establishing independent centres (Medical Accident Investigation and Support Centres) whose role was to investigate 'unforeseen' deaths. In fact, from the point of view of the two countries' respective legal systems, the key question in deciding whether or not a death should be denounced and investigated, is whether the death was 'unusual' (Japan) or 'unnatural' (England). But who decides that a particular case should be considered 'natural' or 'unnatural'? On what basis is this decision made?

Exploring the contrasts and similarities of the Japanese and English systems of death-reporting and investigation, Matsunaga detects the many ambiguities and the points of tension, particularly on three main headings: the autopsy and attitudes to the body; the different roles of the patient and of his family in the processes of decision making; and the role of legal and institutional frameworks.

In Japan, the autopsy – which is, from the scientific points of view, the fundamental action to determine whether or not death was "unusual" on "unnatural" – poses a difficult problem because it touches some basic conceptions about the integrity of the body. As Namihira (1997) and Suzuki (2000) clarify in their studies, the idea of death as a process is quite diffused in Japan, and the newly dead body continues to be treated as a person during the succession of death rituals preceding cremation. Matsunaga agrees with Lock (2002, 2005) in pointing out the social importance of complying with Buddhist funerary practices, which continues to be marked, although expressed belief in ancestral spirits may be waning in contemporary Japan. It is this position that in turn reinforces reluctance to agree to medical intrusions into a newly dead body. But, as Matsunaga points out, an aversion to autopsy is by no means unique to Japan: fieldwork research clearly showed how many people in England pose strong objections to autopsies for religious convictions regarding the body and the person.

Another problematic issue, analysed by Matsunaga in both countries, regards the processes of deciding if a death could be considered officially reportable to the investigative authority. The reporting of 'unusual' deaths in Japan remains low, in comparison with England. In fact, in Japan, doctors are strongly influenced in their decisions on the reporting of deaths of patients by the question of whether or not they had obtained 'informed consent' for the procedure, tending to believe that having obtained informed consent would exempt them from reporting a death, even when this resulted from a medical error (Ikegaya et al. 2006). Matsunaga's article stresses that 'informed consent' is not necessarily understood in the same way in Japan as it is in the USA or the UK. Fetters and Danis

(2000), in their study, contrast the importance accorded to ascertaining the patient's family's views in Japan with the tendency among physicians in the United States to emphasise the patient as an independent agent and decision maker, on the basis of the idea of the primacy of the individual, and to correspondingly de-emphasise the role of the patient's family in medical-decision making. But this principle of autonomy, usually referred to as one of the most important bio-ethical principles in the Western social context, might not apply effectively within the Japanese cultural tradition. This is because Japanese culture, nurtured in Buddhist teaching, has developed the idea that the egoistic self should be completely suppressed. Being autonomous and independent as an individual has been regarded as an egocentric idea.

Increasingly, the fundamental ideas of bioethics, which give legitimation to the ways in which the body is dealt before and after death, are refracted and negotiated in different cultural and religious settings, and are the objects of global debates and exchanges, which interact with, modify, and are modified by local interpretations and practices.

Matsunaga's research on the medical and legal notions of the body, personhood, and the process of death casts light on a broader theoretical issue: what do 'natural' or 'unusual' mean, where death is concerned. Our understanding of the 'naturalness' of death may appear innocent and 'objective', taking for granted that death is an objective state, clearly distinguishable from another clearly objective state called life. Yet, in reality it varies, because also the concept of 'nature' is not static at all: it is the result of shifting classificatory processes that depend on both historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Matsunaga, following Lock (2002) and Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000), points out how the idea of a 'natural death' is far from self-evident, now that the boundaries between death and life become fluid in the light of technological transformations. The rapid advances in biomedicine and the successes in the domain of technology have, as a matter of fact, spread the belief that any limit is only provisional and can be moved further. The new reproductive techniques, the therapies practiced with an exasperated desire of winning death, the notion of brain death and organ transplantation have led to a situation where traditional categories of 'life' and 'death' become increasingly problematic and ambiguous. The implications have not only ethical, but also ontological overtones: can we hope to infinitely delay death? Transfiguring death through the dream of science tells how powerful the force of the myth of immortality is.

Yet, also a growing fascination with death in contemporary societies has been documented and analysed. As Stone and Sharpley (2008) pointed out, post-industrial societies increasingly consume, willingly or unwillingly, both real and commodified death through audio-visual representations and mediated expressions of popular culture.

In his article, Andrea De Antoni points out that, since the seventies, Japan has witnessed an increasing public interest in narratives about ghosts (*yūrei*) and monsters (*yōkai*): a real 'boom of the occult', *okaruto būmu*, as it is called. Media, television programs and the Internet often refer to specific sites, associated with death and the macabre, describing them as 'haunted places' (*shinrei supotto*), where people may have some supernatural experience. De Antoni presents his field-research on one of the most famous haunted place in Kyoto – the Kazan tunnel – which has become a destination of what is generally called 'dark tourism' or 'thanatourism' (Seaton 1996), providing a less generalised way to understand the alleged 'lust for death' in contemporary society. As a matter of fact, he points out how the definition of what constitutes 'dark tourism' is still theoretically fragile and problematic. It might have even become a 'fashionable and emotive' term, which perhaps oversimplifies a complex, multi-faceted cultural phenomenon.

De Antoni agrees with the most recent anthropological interpretations that the notion of darkness is socially constructed and, although haunted places are often liminal ones, legitimated by some historical link to death, there is no 'essence' of darkness that imbues those sites. As Stone (2006) argued, there might be multiple levels and shades of darkness in this kind of tourism. There are different design features and management strategies symbolically charging the place and, from the perspective of fruition, people have different motivations and ways to try to engage with ghosts, namely with spirits of people who (allegedly) died in those places. In this perspective, the author analyses the processes of construction, commodification and consumption of haunted places, to show how between death and place a relationship is constructed and negotiated among supply and demand, presentation and consumption, the visitors and the locals, focusing on the processes that create what Seaton (2009) defines the "Otherness" of death.

De Antoni argues that Otherness emerges according to associations or networks that include both humans (e.g. suppliers, tourists and residents) and non-humans (such as material features of the place). He shows that features of the landscape itself and things that are enrolled in the network during the tour and in haunted places have to be taken into account as actors, along with reified past events selectively presented by mediators to construct and preserve the auratic impact of the place, for they have an agency on tourists' perceptions. He sees how the experience of Otherness of death was constructed in various ways well before tourists were taken to the haunted places: famous mediums, who acknowledged the place as haunted, stories about ghosts or supernatural phenomena that were narrated as an entertainment during the travel. Tourists, in turn, contributed to improving the strategies of construction of Otherness. During the tour people tried to interact with ghosts and ghosts interacted with people:

sometimes one person or small group of participants claimed that they heard lamenting voices that no one else had heard.

As a useful analytical tool, De Antoni uses also the concept of "distance" (Latour 2005). As a matter of fact, within and among networks of interactions, distance – he writes – plays a fundamental role in constructing the reality of a place as haunted. On the one hand, the residents saw the tunnel as 'a simple tunnel', namely an environment in which they carried out certain practices related to their everyday life, thus creating a network that would not result in the haunting. On the other hand, associations between Kazan tunnel and ghosts were constructed by and negotiated among mediators – the media, the 'expert' of ghosts, the tour organisers – who, just because of the distance, had more chances to create networks of Otherness, not being connected to the tunnel through everyday practice. These two different Kazan tunnels were equally real and they could emerge because of two completely different (i.e. distant) modalities of interactions with the tunnel.

In contemporary Japan, De Antoni concludes, death and spirits of the dead are managed by the bereaved and the groups to which they belong. But the dead in haunted places do not belong exclusively to the private space of the bereaved, thus presenting some possibilities to be appropriated in the almost infinite play of identity with images and possibilities of difference that generates strong compulsions of negative and positive desire.

Also the ritual apparatus of the funeral organised and supported, both under the economic and social point of view, by a company to commemorate the founder on a grand scale, is an example of how death could be transferred from the private to the public sphere and renegotiated through an interactive semantic process that imply a tension between proximity and distance. This ceremony chronologically follows the 'private funeral' (*missō*) and the 'temporary burial' (*kasō*) organised by the family and is considered the 'formal funeral' (*honsō*). It is not an exaggeration to say that this is the most important social event in the history of the company. Nakamaki Hirochika, in his article, investigates the peculiar features and the symbolic implications of the procedure, analysing three significant examples, namely the funeral ceremonies for Matsushita Konosuke (founder of Matsushita Denki), Ibuka Masaru and Morita Akio (founders of Sony).

The company undertakes the arrangement of the ceremony in every formal aspect according to its own 'public' perspective, following a precise logic of roles and power that very clearly shows inequality and hierarchy. The company-sponsored funeral is not exclusively centred on the prayers for the deceased: a great importance is given to the choice of the guests who will be invited to attend the ceremony, i.e. Japanese and foreign businessmen, politicians, and other outstanding figures. Some decisions have to be taken very carefully, in particular about the person who will give the funeral oration to publicly honour the deceased, or the one who will

read the messages of condolence, or about the list of the guests allowed to burn the incense.

It is clear that the company's reputation is intimately connected to the 'official' funeral and any fault is felt as undermining its prestige in some way. The company pays attention to every single detail of the organisation in order to exclude unexpected events or at least to be able to cope with them. But the ceremony is also created by the guests, through little gestures that break the etiquette, spontaneous gestures which express intimacy and recall the 'private' perspective of the sorrow of detachment, referring to ties of affection and not of power. Nakamaki remembers, for example, when the U.S. Ambassador at a certain point of his memorial address, used Morita's first name. It was unexpected but was not considered impolite. Overcoming the formalities of diplomatic language was perceived as a demonstration of spontaneity that revealed the sincerity and friendliness of their relationship.

The funeral ceremony is constructed with the awareness that the event will be amplified and made spectacular by media coverage. That explains the peculiarity of the company's ornamental arrangement of the altar. In company-sponsored ceremonies, the altar adorned with flowers is usually displayed with a great picture of the defunct in formal suit at its centre; in some cases, posthumous ranks, decoration or medals may also appear on the altar. The image that depicts the founder in the perfection of his social role of authority becomes the fulcrum of the rite. The extreme formality with which it is addressed makes his figure even more abstract and pure.

The passing of the founder is invested with a particular significance for the company. Although it is a funerary ceremony, it represents an occasion for the company to express the will to maintain its internal and external relationships. In this occasion, the company displays its eternity: indeed, the ceremony often officially symbolises the continuity of the authority. Albeit a company is defined as an organisation with its own regulations, in many cases the ideas and personality of its founder constitutes the keystone around which the company develops. Nakamaki compares the internal organisation of the company to that of a family, where the founder constitutes the first ancestor. As long as the ancestor's DNA is transmitted to his heirs, the attitude of the founder, in some way, is handed down to his successor. The founder's figure (the 'great' ancestor) is renegotiated in an almost mythical discourse and becomes the personification of the company and of its characteristics.

Nakamaki, however, points out that the function of the company funeral is not just the memory and the magnification of the past. At the same time, this ceremony is considered an opportunity to show and legitimise some important changes. The subtleties of the ritual apparatus can, as a matter of fact, also represent the transferring of the real power inside the company, along with the development of the company's future attitude

and image. In a broader sense, the company's relations centred on the founder's action in the past are exalted in order to be repositioned on his successor in a new perspective for the future.

The 'good' death, thus, pertains to the male gender, in this case. The ancestor who, in life, was the head of the family and in death is, and will always be, its protector, is a male, not a woman. Through myths, legends and ritual norms, Japanese culture continued to sanction a marginalization of the woman with the idea of her fundamental impurity. She used to be considered the emblem of sexuality, felt as a wild and negative power. She was thought to incarnate the energy of nature, the confusion of the uncontrolled; her erotic attraction was considered to be a dangerous wealth, a fascinating and terrifying potentiality: when free, it was overwhelmingly destructive. The triggering of female sexuality was not intended as a regeneration of fertility, but rather as its antithesis: something that, stirring up the disorder of passions, threatened life itself. Buddhist tradition too shared this idea. The doctrine condemns the senses and feelings, as the primary vehicle of the thirst for existence and the illusion of the ego. It condemns woman's tempting erotic power, capable only of hindering and distracting man from his spiritual quest towards liberation. Already in the texts of ancient Buddhism, female sexuality is the samsara, i.e. the world of existential evanescence, the world of that same desire that imprisons human beings in the infinite cycle of deaths and rebirths.

In this context, the idea of a beautiful woman who turns up to be a cruel monster, is a subject dear to Japanese artistic and literary imagination. Her charm was felt as some sort of a threat: the more intelligent, fascinating and sensual is the woman, the more dangerous, smart and lethal is the monster that lies in her and that will lead her ingenuous lover to death.

Daniela Moro's in her article analyses a short story – *Ano ie* by Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986) – centred on a female protagonist, the actress Kayo, and her love story with Nishikawa, a great and famous Noh master. The heart of the narrative is a meditation on the many facets and nuances of female sexuality and desire.

The depth of the protagonists' feelings is expressed through a very sophisticated technique of intertextuality between classical theatre – in particular 'dream Noh' (*mugen nō*) – and prose. The references to two plays, *Dōjōji* and *Izutsu*, construct Enchi's singular interpretation of the power of female desire, which is destructive in *Dōjōji* and nostalgic in *Izutsu*. They are the two faces of the same coin and, indeed, the two female figures can be interpreted as the forms of Kayo's desire for Nishikawa. Moreover, both these forms of desire are related to death. On the one hand, the female protagonist of the Noh *Dōjōji*, corresponds to the image of the 'dangerous woman' archetype. Transformed into a monstrous snake by the terrible strength of her anger because she was refused by her beloved, the woman fights against the monk who wants to pacify her spirit. Yet, his prayers

fail to pacify her, because also in death she is consumed by her passionate attachment to life and love. After a furious battle, the poisonous snake burns herself with her own flames, but a suspicion is left that the angry ghost could return in the world over and over again.

On the other hand, there is the female protagonist of *Izutsu*, a "woman who waits for the distant past", a phantom that is still intensely longing for her dead husband, but does not show it emphatically. Her desire is so strong that she continues to linger in this world, but the only way to meet him again is to encounter him in the past, by making him live again in a cross-gendered transformation of the monk's dream, where she is herself and her dead husband at the same time.

Like in the majority of Noh plays, in Enchi's novel too there is a deep sense of the caducity of life, which reveals the other side of desire. The concept is a cliché of classical Japanese literature and drama. At the end of the story, Kayo, after the war, goes to the ruins of the teahouse. In front of what was once the place of her passion, of her "beautiful dream", which has become a place of death and destruction, she deeply feels the evanescence of life and experiences a sort of catharsis, finding purification from her obsessive memories.

In Moro's interpretation, the only way to overcome the vanity of life and death, the frailty of all the illusions of love and hate, is, paradoxically, to dream. As her analysis shows, the dream is at the centre of this story. At the end, when the framework narration returns in order to conclude the story and the protagonist meets the girl of the teahouse introduced at the beginning, Kayo becomes a spectator to her own past, together with the reader, but a few hints at the end of the narrative make the reader suspect that the entire story recalled by Kayo of her love for the master was not real, but the product of her phantasy. Yet, just this dream represents the final stage of Kayo's self-awareness of the depth of her illusion, and her liberation.

Death and desire are essential characteristics of Hijikata Tatsumi's *butō*. Katja Centonze, in her article, analyses several aspects displayed in *butō*'s death aesthetics and performing processes, showing how the artist, in tune with the sixties avant-garde in Japan, places the paradox of life and death, of stillness and movement, at the roots of dance itself.

The entangled intimacy between death and eroticism, which is nothing but the texture of life, is highlighted since the beginning of Hijikata's *butō*'s adventure. The artist often quotes Georges Bataille. Yet, for Centonze, it is important to consider that the French philosopher develops the concept of eroticism as an "inner experience" linked to mysticism, which transcends "flesh" (Bataille 1969). For him, human eroticism differs from animal sexuality and calls inner life into play. Conversely, for Hijikata, who drastically obliterates the dialectic between dancer/human being, animal and the object, everything runs through our body, including knowledge.

As a consequence, dance, if pushed to its extremes, is the art that is able to concretely reproduce the deep interplay of desire and death.

Centonze's article focuses on Hijikata's radical investigation of corporeality, which puts under critique not only the carnal body (*nikutai*), but even the corpse (*shitai*). The *nikutai* is the living and raw corporality that inexorably 'disappears', transforming itself into the *shitai*, the corpse. Mutability is absorbed by *butō*'s morphologic texture and becomes the fundamental condition of its semantic process: facing the forms of life necessarily implies facing death and mortality. Hijikata's *butō* – *ankoku butō* (dance of utter darkness) – emerges as an aesthetic and corporeal revolt, expressed on the theatrical scene through outrageous acts, in which also the physical states of biological death are icily and almost brutally enacted. Obliterating and suspending the dimension of transcendence, this form of art speaks of the omnipervasive presence of death. The audience is guided through the tunnel of the abyss of *ankoku*.

The stiffened and paralysed bodies in *butō* performances recall the state of *rigor mortis*. This practice becomes a distinctive component in Hijikata's experimental strategy. His renovation consists in conceiving dance by suffocating dance, which means, by preventing and sabotaging its commonly perceived dynamic essence, i. e. movement. Centonze shows how in technical and practical terms, the artist tries to destroy the common concept of choreography. Linear and geometric movements are further menaced and denied by *keiren*, convulsive seizures or nervous contractions. Not only *rigor mortis* is pursued, but also the other stages of death can be visibly and sensibly detected. *Pallor mortis* is reflected in *shironuri*, the practice of painting the dancers' body white. But the dancers are naked, in order to project, at the same time, an aura of sexual desire. Skeletonisation is manifested as well. The bones of the dancer are emphasized in performative dynamics. Hijikata brings on the scene dancers with a skull mask and a big scythe performing their skeleton dance as if they were dead laughing at the prosperous, sanitised, aggressively optimistic world of the living. In his challenge to the theatrical language, Hijikata exaggerates the movements of these hybrid bodies so desperately grotesque, and creates processes through which the dancer starts to animate the inanimate and renders inanimate the animated. For Hijikata, those who once died may die over and over again inside the dancer's bodies. The dead may become more present or alive on the scene than the dancers themselves. Enacting the contradictory unison of life and death, the deceased dictate the movements, while the body of the dancer, who has become stranger to himself, obeys almost automatically.

The fear of death and the desire to transcend mortality are themes that have often recurred also in film history. As a test case for her analysis, Cinzia Cimalando has chosen the film *Rokugatsu no hebi* (A Snake of June, 2002) directed by Tsukamoto Shin'ya. The film tells a sensual and violent story of salvation through the reawakening of desire and the repossession

of the body – an erotic body – in a modern city of steel, glass and concrete.

The structure of *Rokugatsu no hebi* is essential and rigorous: a limited number of actors, enclosed places, condensed duration. The use of the colour blue itself, ably combined with the sound effects of the unceasing pounding of the rain, are precise stylistic choices. Each element is an indispensable piece of a stylised mosaic, a thriller starring portraits of desire, inhabited by the fear and the fascination of death. For Cimalando, the film provides the occasion for an analysis of desire and its relationship with the crux of death through the interpretative key offered by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theories. Director Tsukamoto, throughout all his films, has shown his skills in giving shape to precise mental landscapes and staging the most hidden inner impulses of the unconscious. *Rokugatsu no hebi* too deals with the psychological uncertainty posed by the sense of frailty of life and the anguish for death, always looming on human beings. Cimalando's analysis shows how Tsukamoto's aim is to stir strong emotions in the spectator, but not as an end in itself: by systematically overturning the taboos of voyeurism, violence and disease, his declared intention is to penetrate and open a breach into the prison of the mind and the unconscious, like the rain that in the film seeps unfailingly into every crack in the cement; staging an act of deadly perversion that sweeps away any moral judgment, he offers an intense meditation on the mysterious and disquieting nature of desire.

This book begins with a reflection on the sense of the uniqueness of death, the impossibility of telling death in a subjective dimension – 'my death' – and ends with the article of Francesco Comotti, with a reflection on the difficulty, almost the impossibility, of telling another death: a death in the plural – a mass death – and the horror of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Together with works of historical reconstruction and analysis, there have been various atomic narratives, films, art and music coming from several European and American countries. Authors in Japan too write on the issues of the atomic bombs and the dangers of nuclear energy. In the media, the imaginary of radioactive monsters and post-apocalyptic worlds, where human society starts anew in a primitive struggle for survival, is widespread. The atomic bomb is treated as a dreadful Big Bang, a cosmic event that annihilates the 'old' world, the 'old' mankind, and opens the way to new knowledge and action. Hardly discernible from the explicit elements of these representations, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are silently still behind it.

Comotti focuses his article on some characteristic traits of Hiroshima and Nagasaki's witness literature and compares the different perspectives, the different approaches and motivations with the writings of authors who are not survivors of the bombing. Almost all their attempts at expressing the epoch-making appearance of the atomic bomb into the world share

a common ambiguous and controversial rhetoric: the ultimate weapon of mass destruction provokes a sense of fear for the terrifying option of future annihilation of humanity and a kind of intoxication for the power gained through scientific knowledge.

The concern with the truth of what really happened is a never-ending controversy in itself, from which any writing generally comes out defeated either on the grounds of its reliability or its literariness. In stories, novels, photographs, drawings, films and performances concerning the bomb, the line between testimonial accounts as historical documents and literature is blurred. In front of the unprecedented nature and terrifying magnitude of the two bombings, the paradigm of literary communication is radically questioned. Comotti clearly shows the problematic aspects in the creation and fruition of certain famous literary works about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But ultimately, the real question that emerges is if it is possible – and morally acceptable – to employ literature for writing something that, in its horror and inhumanity, resists being put into words. Or is the atomic bomb the ultimate literary theme, one that only by being mentioned is capable of branding any writing as literature? Answering such a question is not easy.

A considerable number of thinkers and writers have been taking interest in the nuclear issue since the two bombs were dropped in 1945. Figurative artists have usually recurred to representations dominated by the aerial silhouette of the gigantic mushroom cloud as was seen by the crew members of the B-29 planes who, in awe but undisturbed, had filmed and photographed it. But the living and the places that were forced to endure the destruction are missing from the narrative. The instantaneous and apocalyptic event reduces everything that one might imagine to exist underneath to one single nothingness.

As Comotti points out, authors who engage in the representation of the atomic bomb with indirect knowledge tend to put the focus on its totality: whether they evoke the scale of destruction in the event of a future nuclear conflict or recount the actual bombings through testimonies, they struggle for reliability and accuracy in pursuing the total scope of the bomb. The disparate singularities of the people who died or who survived are generally put together and multiplied in order to gain a full view of the scene. It is the bomb, then, that attracts one's desire of knowledge and experience: the bomb becomes the source of creative processes and imagination, obliterating the singular, local experiences of the survivors and the dead by including them metonymically.

Another tendency is to elaborate a superlative characterisation of the events, as the 'most' destructive, deadly, and terrifying. As Todorov suggests, ranking any violent event at the top of a chart is a frequent symptom of "sacralisation" (Todorov 2000). The 'end-of-the-world' symbology surrounding the bomb ends up distancing it, alienating the reader by hindering the only

thing that a stranger to the facts could possibly do: trying to empathise.

The Hiroshima and Nagasaki citizens who survived the blast and had the psychological strength to share their testimonies made it possible to look at the bomb from the ground up, as well as to have a better knowledge of the extent of the destruction and the suffering it caused. From that moment on, the atomic bomb could no more be justified avoiding the victims' reality of pain and loss. But these narratives place the reader or the spectator in an extremely vulnerable position: Comotti rightly stresses that, while there is little room to question what words and images are given about the facts, one is also repeatedly told that ultimately a comprehension will not be possible, that what is being shown and shared is not at all what it was to be there. There is a fracture that separates language from experience: in most narratives, the reader is being told through intelligible words about facts that the writer declares unspeakable. But the difficulty in communicating is not only due to the audience's lack of experience of that kind of suffering and dying, but also to the witness's inability to bring coherence to what he has experienced. In order to re-establish a tie between the victim and humanity, perhaps the writer and the reader have to meet in this very lack of understanding of what happened.

The paradigm to any attempt at comprehending the experience of the atomic bombings is, in Comotti's analysis, the survivor's body: while scientific data constitute abstract descriptions of the event, often outside the scale of what a human being could possibly register with perception alone, it is the survivor's body the only measure that the reader could refer to, as he/she tries to imagine what the bombings felt like. Yet, that same body sets apart those who experienced from those who did not: far from being a sign of truthfulness, the physical manifestations of the radiations isolate the victim as if deeply impure. Here lies a key component to the communicative status of survival: the body that suffered might be expected to incarnate a tale of survival by itself, as clear and self-explanatory as its resilience might suggest. But that is not the case: the traumatised body seems to become a magnified presence over which the survivor obsesses, while also rendering every word more opaque and insufficient in the face of the full extent of the experience. Since the atomic bombs were dropped not only on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but "on all Japanese's heads, on every human being around the world" – as Inoue Mitsuharu (1983, 292) wrote – it is only by fully accepting the victims' bodies and psyches in pain that humankind will be able to heal them as well as to overthrow the very possibility that an atomic bomb will be used again.

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We hope the reader will join us in walking the above mentioned lines, thus becoming an integral part of the entanglement of this book. Indeed, in line with the book topics, this might be our 'last wish', so that the end of this introduction will become the beginning of the readers' desire to continue investigating these issues, without letting the desire for further discussions die.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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"Each Death is Unique"
Beyond Epistemic Transfiguration in Thanatology

Matteo Cestari
(University of Turin, Italia)

Abstract Death is an insurmountable problem for truth systems. This paper aims at discussing the relationship between death and truth, swaying from Western (Plato's *Phaedo*, Jankélévitch, Morin) to Buddhist sources (mainly Chan-Zen Biyanlu and Dōgen). These contributions are interpreted according to the distinction introduced here between epistemic-metaphysical transfiguration and semelfactive phenomenalism.

Summary 1 Death, Individual and Lògos. – 2 Questioning Death. – 3 Epistemic Transfiguration vs Semelfactive Phenomenalism in Thanatology. – 4 Plato's Truth as Enemy of the Body. – 5 Death vs Impermanence, or the Question of Undecidability. – 6 Edgar Morin and the Returning Myths of Immortality. – 7 Vladimir Jankélévitch and Perspectival Phenomenalism in Thanatology. – 7.1 Beyond Some Presuppositions in Jankélévitch's Position. – 7.2 The Dialectical Character of Death. – 8 Death in Buddhism. The case of *Biyan lu*. – 9 Death in Dōgen's View. – 10 Which End?

Keywords Death. Philosophy of Death. Plato. Vladimir Jankélévitch. Edgar Morin. Biyanlu. Dogen.

1 Death, Individual and Lògos

The title of this essay is directly inspired by a sentence from a short essay written by Jacques Derrida, as an oratory for his departed friend Gilles Deleuze. In his speech, Derrida binds together philosophy and personal remembrance, in a hardly distinguishable manner. He recalls so many non-shareable personal memories, that we readers are inevitably left at a certain distance: our understanding is necessarily deprived of the depth and first-hand knowledge of this relationship between two friends of long standing. It is natural for Derrida to reckon that "each death is unique, of course, and therefore unusual" (Derrida 2003, 193). This position by Derrida seems to go against some fundamental views of philosophical thinking, as old as philosophy itself. From Heraclitus on, theoretical thinking has generally been conceived in terms of an activity deriving from the exercise of common *Lògos* and the philosopher has to 'follow the common' (*hèpesthai tò ksunò*) and not one's own 'personal wisdom' (*phrònesis*)

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(cf. DK B2).[1] How could there be philosophy – which speaks the universal tongue of reason – about death, which allegedly is a matter of unique, one-off singularity? Is thanatology still possible, or is it just an invalid application of some mental schemes and routines to an impossible object? How can we find a general, impersonal truth about death (but which death?), if the question is not death in general, or the category of death, but every single death? Stated differently, how much do we understand a person who has lost one of her/his relatives, if we look at such a situation from the point of view of general, impersonal death?

We could ask, however, to which objects those categories apply: can there be an explanation of death, if 'each death is unique'? Still, the distinction between death and life is fundamental for example in medical science and practice, which includes the debates around reversible and irreversible comatose states, palliative cures, pain therapy, and the like, with all their ethical, religious, deontological, political, legal problems they raise. How can we approach the problem, then, considering that our everyday life is the battlefield for such opposite approaches that sway from necessary but general universality to extremely dense but hard-to-communicate singularity?

Most of the philosophical inquiries about death toy with categorial distinctions that presuppose death as a universal category, like in the classical question 'what is death?', followed by 'what is life?' that invariably ends with: 'how do they relate to each other?'. However much these often-repeated formulations may appear as innocent and 'objective', they take for granted that death is a discrete, objective state, clearly distinguishable from another clearly objective state called life. Since they are 'concepts' – it is generally assumed – they must be clearly defined and have a certain universal content. There must be a general object called 'death', which of course must be always the same for everyone. Surely, most of the scholars who try to define death precisely are not simply playing with words: there is, as a matter of fact a direct and practical interest in these definitions. It is certainly useful and important to find objective criteria to distinguish death from life, especially in modern medical treatment. Then, why casting doubts on this approach? Because such definitions are far from being universally accepted among different cultures, social classes and even in cultural and scientific community (Steila 2009). And of course the evidence that the definitions of death have greatly changed in the course of history and in various areas of the world is concrete (Ariès 1975; Vovelle 1983; De Ceglia 2014). Moreover, nowadays technological advancements, such as life support system, are decisive in redefining the boundaries between life and death, as well as transplant

1 This reference follows the standard system Diels-Kranz (DK) numbering. See URL `http://www.iep.utm.edu/diels-kr/` (2017-05-18).

technology became fundamental in producing the need of defining the end of life state in a precise, clear manner (Cestari 2014). All these variations on the theme of death make it a tricky one, able to easily provoke too strong reactions, including the current ones of charging the opposing disputants of 'supporting euthanasia' on one side, and of 'being obscurantist' on the other. Despite (or probably exactly because of) its inner simplicity, death is still an embarrassing theme in our culture, probably one of the few only real taboos left in our apparently emancipated and uninhibited society. Approaching this strange silence should therefore be one main task of the philosophers, who nonetheless have recently been relatively silent on this issue.[2]

This paper does not count among its tasks that of discussing these definitions in details. Neither does it aim at finding immediately usable operative principles, although these principles may derive from the following discussion. On the contrary, it attempts to explore the chances of assuming a certain attitude toward death (and life), which derives from reassessing some implicit habits of thought. This approach has not only ethical, but also ontological overtones. For example, death is generally considered as a disvalue *in itself*, whereas life, being its opposite, *must* be positive. This value judgment is taken for granted, being based on common sense. However, should we really be satisfied with this approach? In particular, the act of drawing a clear distinction between life and death is important in many practical and fundamental situations. Still, the problem addressed here does not lay in an immediately practical distinction, which is important in everyday life, but in the ethical and theoretical (and only *then* practical) consequences out of this very act of establishing such a difference. Does our act of defining a divide between life and death transform our attitude towards them, so that they *become* objects with certain characteristics to which we grasp tightly (a value) or which we reject entirely (a disvalue)? Death should be considered a *relational* phenomenon, which greatly varies according to our social and individual involvement. Hence, social and cultural definitions interact with (and at times replace) our individual relationship with life and death. Still, Edgar Morin affirms that, unlike other animals that know death through instincts and social patterns, in our species it is the individual, not the species or society that knows death (Morin 2002, 65-73). If each death (and each life) are to be considered as unique and depending on individuals, their knowledge cannot become matter for incontrovertible definitions or clear and distinct concepts, but only of *phrònesis*, or 'practical knowledge', that largely depends on the case-to-case application of general principles and guidelines.

2 For example, in Italy important philosophers such as Remo Bodei, Giovanni Reale, Emanuele Severino, or theologians like Vito Mancuso have expressed their ideas on death in Monti 2010. However, with the exception of Severino, who extensively published on the argument, the overall result should be counted more as a philosophical editorial about recent news items, than a deep theoretical reflection on death.

2 Questioning Death

In Western philosophy, death has been generally defined according to two main ideas: as purely natural fact, a decease, which has no special significance for human beings; or as having relationship with human existence. Examples of the first tendency are Epicurus, Feuerbach, Sartre and Wittgenstein, who generally share the same vision of death as a contingent fact: "death is a pure fact, as is birth. It comes to us from the outside and transforms us into the outside. At bottom, it is in no way distinguished from birth and it is the identity of birth and death that we call facticity" (Sartre 1956, 697). Death is considered as insignificant, as it has nothing to do with existence.

In the second tendency, death is thought as having relationship with human existence, as the end of individual life (Hegel) or as its real beginning (in Plato or Christianity), or as existential opportunity, such as in Heidegger or Kierkegaard. Whereas the first conception of death generally places stress upon death as an event or a state resulting from this event, the second tendency considers death as a process in close relationship with life. The distinction between the two seems to mimic the difference between nature and culture, body and existence,which is so important in many Euro-American philosophical approaches, in some aspects of abrahamitic religions, as well as in modern cultures. Other dialectical conceptions of death are present in other religious-philosophical traditions including, but not being exclusive, East-Asian ones. Among these dialectical approaches, Daoism and Buddhism should be counted, but the level of dialectics appears to include, and not exclude, what previously has been defined as 'insignificant', i.e. the 'facticity' of death.

A clear-cut distinction between death and life could be interpreted as deriving from thinking at their relationship as external, their definitions being built separately, as if they were uninfluential on their respective inner definitions. On the contrary, a dialectical relationship between life and death may reflect the idea of an inner link between them and their consequent overlapping.[3] What is at issue here is not a question of arid and abstract definitions, but something that has very practical consequences and that sheds a totally different light on, for instance, ethical, medical, political and religious distinctions between life and death.

The debate on internal or external relationship in thanatology may involve the definition of human being: does death come 'from outside of us' and human species has 'originally' nothing to do with it? This is what certain passages of the Bible seems to suggest, affirming that death is

3 On the definition between external and internal relationship, see Kasulis 2002.

a consequence of human sin.[4] Or rather, is death essential to our constitution? For example, some biological theories suggest that death is essential to multicellular organisms. Whereas unicellular life forms are not planned to die by their own, death on the contrary seems to be 'planned in advance' in the physiology of multicellular beings, since these species are dependent on the process of replacing cells, defined in the process of their birth-and-death. Moreover, sexual reproduction and death count for strategies of variations, which have the advantage of making species more adaptive to the environment changes, thus ensuring genetic diversity and crossing over.

Adopting the idea of death 'from outside' or 'from inside' has dramatic consequences on our everyday expectations and, consequently, for example, on medical research plans: are we constitutionally mortals? Or constitutionally immortals and accidentally mortals? Is our death, as we (still?) experience today, an unavoidable destiny? Or in a near or far future, as imagined by a number of science fiction writers, can we hope to infinitely delay or even defeat death, becoming virtually or practically immortals? And granted that such a technology would be, or even simply *could* be, realised, would life and death remain the same as we experience today? Would we still be humans, altogether?[5] These questions often imply taking for granted the epistemological and metaphysical dominion of technology upon life and death, and implicitly turn possibility into necessity, as if technological advancements were unavoidable. Or could we imagine different courses in the development of technology? The historical contingency of technology is actually extremely important in the discussion of death's definition, and further increases the complexity of death's definition, binding it to historical uncertainty and contingency. If we define ourselves as "immortals by means of technology", how can we ethically think our consequent awareness of death? Perhaps as a selfish thought determined by our hopes and expectations of avoiding death and living forever? From such a perspective, technology itself appears as one of the remedies to our fear of death.[6]

In this essay, I will mainly consider the relationship between death and truth at the point of junction between ethics and ontology. From this perspective, it is my conviction that death may function as a kind of litmus test that enables us to verify the theoretical and ethical characteristics

4 See, for example, the following passage from the *Book of Wisdom* (1: 13-4): "For God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. For he created all things that they might be: and he made the nations of the earth for health: and there is no poison of destruction in them, nor kingdom of hell upon the earth".

5 See e.g. the interview to Schiavone in Monti 2010, 3-20.

6 The idea of technology as a remedy to our fear of annihilation is developed in the entire work of Emanuele Severino, See e.g. the interview to the philosopher in Monti 2010, 135-64.

of our philosophical systems and acquire awareness of their limits. These limits are consistent with the practical and ethical decisions that privilege different if not opposite needs, which at the same time display the type of truth for which we are searching. Such opposing needs are, for example, the search for truth about death on the one hand – which generally represents a deep psychological trauma – and the need of consoling the bereaved, on the other. In Buddhist words, we could read this in terms of the oxymoronic exchange between wisdom and compassion. How to say the truth and at the same time being compassionate? Is telling the truth (but which truth?) always the right thing to do? Consequently, does philosophical truth have anything to share with sociality in human existence, or is it necessarily detached from it? Ancient Greek philosophy was very much in tune with the task of teaching how to live and die in proper manner. Yet, such a philosophy has shown the tendency to transform death into something different from what is phenomenally lived and perceived, as in Plato. Is it then inevitable that our senses and life be destined to be denied by our reason? I would neither venture to discuss in details the ethical problems of dealing with the bereaved, nor define the right thing to do or say in similar situations. I would limit to reflect upon some consequences of the problem of truth, deriving from the theoretical and practical question of death.

The problem of death (the fact that death becomes a problem) is essentially the problem of our attitude toward death, which very often implies the more or less conscious attempt to soften or embellish – if not bluntly deny – its reality. When approached in philosophical or religious contexts, death is very often transfigured, or at least provided with meaning. Death 'as such', in its facticity, is rarely taken from a purely phenomenal point of view. It is very rare that human beings may find the strength of looking squarely at 'death's gaze'. Philosophy too is often dominated by the urgency of searching for a remedy to such a fear. This is understandable. We human beings are searching for assistance in order to face our inevitable fate without falling into desperation. Hence, philosophers have often assumed the task of delivering us from the fear of death: Epicurus, the Stoics and almost all ancient philosophers were actively engaged in accomplishing such an enterprise. This philosophical task is all but disappeared in modern thought: Spinoza and Leibniz, through their search for explaining death in logical terms, often used rational theorizations of death as a kind of solution. Transfigured death, and even explained death, is a remedy in itself. Many philosophers, scientists and religious men 'find' the meaning of death, its essence, its role within a rational scheme, bringing it back to the reassuring horizon of wisdom and, thus, re-determining the meaning of our being in the world. However, this philosophical agenda requires a metaphysical and epistemic (from the Greek *epì* 'over' and *hìstamai* 'stay') approach to death, that is the attitude of moving to a level above

the events, from which it is possible to discover the 'superior truth' or the foundation of death, of which a certain, incontrovertible knowledge is searched.[7] This approach is not priceless and is only apparently objective. It is rather under the undeclared influence of different motivations and desires, such as fear and the consequent need of finding solace, the search for extending control over life, etc. The search for the truth about death, if accomplished by such an epistemic and remedial perspective, betrays some non-rational presuppositions behind the rationality of the concepts used. It can also betray certain non-ethical attitudes, lurking behind the act of promoting those 'ethics of death' that are based on 'serenity' or 'hope for afterlife', which for example may even end with commercially bargaining over paradise promises with various 'good deeds', as Vladimir Jankélévitch has remarked, which makes explicit the thinker's selfishness behind.

In such a context, ethical responsibility and search for truth are closely intertwined: there is a double implication of theoretical and ethical characters. The search for truth, far from being an objective act, devoid of any practical consequences, should be more accurately considered as having ethical resonance, and the specific act of theoretical search is no exception. Truth has an ethical conjugation: we modify our ethical attitude toward the world, according to our theoretical choices, as it should be clear from various philosophical perspectives on death described in this essay.

At the beginning of this paper, I would clarify two fundamental and opposite definitional attitudes toward death: what could be called 'epistemic transfigurativism' and the opposite 'semelfactive phenomenalism'. These two orientations concerning almost every definitional practice are important to investigate the point of juncture between theoretical speculation and ethics as indicated before, providing some important critical elements to interpret the history of thanatology.

I will start by discussing death in Plato's *Phaedo*, which is particularly useful in clarifying the metaphysical, death-transfigurative philosophical approach and its deep relationship with the question of truth. I will explain how Plato's anthropology (and especially his conception of death) is determined by the transcendent character of truth aimed at by the philosopher. Then, I will illustrate Edgar Morin's conception of "death as loss of individuality", showing that, although from a completely different perspective, his approach still contains important traces of transfigurative orientation. Afterwards, I will deal with Vladimir Jankélévitch's thanatology, with its emphasis on the semelfactivity of existence and death. Then, after a brief

7 Of course, this use of the term *epistéme* has nothing to do with Foucault's idea of *epistéme* as the historical *a priori* upon which certain ideas have been developed. Rather, it is similar to the use of the term in ancient Greek philosophy and recently used by Popper and other thinkers to mean a kind of knowing endowed with incontrovertible truth value and opposite to the uncertain knowing of opinion (*dòxa*).

analysis of the concept of death in some ancient Buddhist texts, I will deepen the cases of one Chan *gong'an* (ja. *kōan*)[8] from the *Record of Blue Cliff* (ch. *Biyanlu*, ja. *Hekiganroku*) and the Japanese Zen master Dōgen (1200-1252), whose vision of life-death is in deep relationship with the notion of Buddha-nature (ja. *busshō*).

This list is not defined by chance. On the one hand, it should draw attention to the fact that, due to the deep levels involved, transfigurative or phenomenal approaches to death are not specific to any historical condition or culture. Despite the fact that some tendencies impose themselves in certain periods or cultural areas, epistemic transfigurativism and semelfactive phenomenalism can be found in different cultures and times: they emerge in many countries all over the world and heavily influence many definitional practices from theology, to philosophy and scientific theories. They look like orientations and habits that cannot be limited to a conceptual sphere, but inspire deep, practical attitudes. On the other hand, the cases of Jankélévitch and Chan-Zen Buddhist texts can help to inspire a-foundational interpretations of the world that may fruitfully reorient our manner of facing death.

3 Epistemic Transfiguration vs Semelfactive Phenomenalism in Thanatology

As explained before, death has been defined in many and various manners: as the event of cessation of vital functions in an organism, or as the process of dissolution, culminating in a radical and irreversible disappearance of a life form. These definitions of death in turn depend on the type of opposition to life, conceived for instance as contradictory or correlative. Still, a definitional approach to death that consists in clarifying it as a discrete object does not solve many problems, as indicated, and in particular does not consider its existential meaning. If the main focus of thanatology turns to be this meaning, limiting oneself to discuss death's definition is somehow out of target, however useful or relevant it may be in a limited number of borderline cases. The philosophical inquiry should rather be focused on our everyday relationship to death and our attitude towards it, which deals with human beings in their everyday life, avoiding focusing on exceptional conditions. Another change of focus should frame our starting question as: 'how to think of death?', instead of: 'what is death?'. As Kasulis (2009, 223-4) and Ames (1993) have indicated, the difference between 'what' and 'how' lays respectively in the transcendent or immanent awareness of the epistemological relationship with the

8 The abbrevations between brackets stand for Japanese (ja.), Chinese (ch.) and Pali (pali).

world. This change in our manner of questioning death requires that we choose whether we are directly engaged (immanent approach) or not engaged (transcendent approach) in the problem considered. This urges us to reflect on our reactions and limitations while facing death. Much more than about death itself – which may be defined as a true, unsolvable question mark – this reflexive attitude speaks about ourselves: more than defining what is true or false about death 'in itself', it has to do with our attitude to conceal it or our will to face it. This very will of ours influences what we define as true and false about death. This search is focused on the theoretical reverberation of such a practical standpoint, both ontically and ethically considered.

Many religious and philosophical definitional practices about death all over the world and in all epochs could be approached according to a distinction between what I would call 'epistemic transfiguration' and 'semelfactive phenomenalism'. Following transfigurativism, the interpreter feels justified or urged, for one reason or another, to transfigure death according to a superior perspective, or to explain its higher or inner meaning, adding (allegedly 'finding') characteristics that – although judged truer than the phenomenal order of events, or able to explain the truth of those events – are not directly and phenomenally evident in the specific event of death, but must be inferred, believed or hypothesized. From the perspective adopted in this essay, epistemic transfiguration of death is not limited to beliefs in afterlife, immortality of the soul and so on, but more radically includes *the very assumption of possessing the hermeneutical keys* to identify the essence of death. These hermeneutical keys are generally provided by a *universal* and *superior* perspective (the metaphysical and epistemic approach) thanks to which a comprehensive, rational or sentimental understanding of death is intended to explain its inner meaning. From this perspective, rationalistic or scientistic definitions of death do not radically differ from religious ones. They only diverge in means, their aim being the search for meaning. Let us consider the following hypothetical (but realistic) sentences:

a. "Death together with sexual reproduction is essential in multicellular organisms, in order to make the renewal and the adaptation of species possible".
b. "Death is a passage that brings the deceased to a better world".

The two sentences are very different in their presuppositions and scopes. Sentence a) is based on a rational reconstruction of the world from the perspective of a kind of immanent teleologism based upon scientific hypotheses. Sentence b), presupposing the existence of a reality beyond this world, is based upon some myths, or hopes, or tenets developed in a more or less religious (although generic) environment. In both cases, a

transcendent sense that overcomes and explains the level of phenomenal and existential death is found Accordingly, a truth outside of this world grounds the death's truth in a higher plane of existence, be it rational or fideistic. Still, from the perspective of individual death, they both end with shifting the attention of the subject away from the present awareness of death in its being here and now. If consolation is clearly sought after in sentence b), sentence a) too has a somehow similar effect, although in an immanent and rational sense, since it defines the sense of the otherwise mysterious and dramatic event of death. Avoiding this existential enigma, we believe we have the strength and the right to control events, or at least to understand them. If the consolatory path of any faith is not considered viable, as with rationalism, it is easy that a kind of scientific hypothesis about death may become an epistemological, merely intellectual surrogate of afterlife. Although without any faith, we can at least count on *meaning*. Since epistemic approach often sprouts from the need of controlling the course of events, it provides human beings with meaning, as necessary not to sink into despair. Whatever *idea on death* makes us conceptualise it. This grants us a meaning, through which we try to exert a kind of possession and control over the events, closing the eyes to the fact that about death nothing can be either affirmed or negated. We do not know anything about it. In front of this event, we experience a lack of any foundation, the impossibility to find such a foundation. This is utterly unacceptable to our rational spirit. Used to find meaning for everything, we think that there must be a meaning even for death. From such a perspective, acceptation or rejection of death are almost deriving from the same urge of *solving* this phenomenon once and for all. What is problematic is not such an urge *per se*, but the sclerotic and compulsive character of this urge, which does not let space enough for anything else than this truth.

On the opposite side, the other approach, named here 'semelfactive',[9] is antithetic to the epistemic one in many respects. In semelfactive phenomenalism, the interpreter considers it essential to avoid adding or changing attributes to the phenomenon of each single death encountered and faces each death on its very plane, carefully avoiding any way out, as well as easy solutions 'from outside'. From such a perspective, death should be faced for what it appears at the point of junction of physical and social-relational levels. Only from such a perspective, it would be possible to become more aware of this event and of our practical engagement with it, being con-

9 'Semelfactivity' derives from the Latin words *semel* (once) and *facio* (I do) and indicates what appears only once and does not constitute a class, a concept. It is a synonym of the Greek *hápax* (*legómenon*), or "(word) said only once" in a certain text. These words here are directly taken from Jankélévitch, who used both of them without limiting their value to linguistics, but through a definitely metaphysical orientation. They express the haecceity of the individual, its quality of 'being unique' in the entire history.

scious of the dangers deriving from the illusory appeal of both materialism and spiritualism. This approach implies to acknowledge that death cannot be defined according to foundationalist habits,[10] which urge us to find the transcendent or immanent meaning for everything, as a kind of mechanic application of a routine of thought, which often blinds our eyes and numbs our perceptions. Examples of this semelfactive orientation to death may be appreciated in many authors, such as for example the Buddhist Amida follower Shinran (1173-1263) and the nativist Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) in Japanese thought. In this essay, this approach will be represented by some of its most lucid interpreters: Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903-1985) and Dōgen (1200-1253).

Epistemic transfigurativism ends with both rejecting or accepting death, hating or desiring it. Its viewpoint is intended to solve the mystery of death, interpreting it as 'totally other' and thus constituting it as 'an object'. As Jankélévitch often says, in death, there are no elements to affirm or negate anything, either rational or irrational, spiritualistic or materialistic, immanent or transcendent. Death drives us to a condition of complete theoretical uncertainty, a constant oscillation that cannot fix on any determinate thesis. Death can become a really impossible object. Semelfactive phenomenalism tries to keep death in its being a true mystery, which derives from the fact that nobody has returned from the 'other shore' to explain how it is and any past experience of it is definitely excluded. Phenomenalism resists the temptation to solve this opaqueness. Following this perspective, we do justice to death's truth only if in our philosophical inquiry we recognise this fundamental inability of ours to find any evidence of sort and acknowledge the death's status of a-foundational dimension: neither sense (scientism, spiritualism), nor non-sense (nihilism, absurdism) can lighten such a darkness. Following the phenomenalist perspective, we can correctly face death only if we realise that death is truly enigmatic and impenetrable, or as Dōgen puts it, only if life and death are faced in their being simply 'so'.

The acknowledgement of death's enigma (or uniqueness) cannot lead in any case to reject smugly death's transfiguration as ingenuous, irrelevant, or merely superstitious. There are at least four arguments against such an attitude. The first is theoretical: thinking cannot claim to ultimately judge anything, without becoming dangerously ideological. This is particularly valid in the case of death: being a kind of power, ideology and knowledge are generally meant to – and from the political perspective, must – rapidly

10 Foundationalism is an approach that is rather common among many philosophical systems to rest upon a secure foundation of certainty as a preliminary basis for the development of a truth system. Although the term is mainly used in epistemology, here I would like to underline mainly the ethical and existential consequences of such an approach and its influence on our attitude toward the world, which results in a specific set of habits, both intellectual and practical.

occupy any vacant place in representational order. A-foundational phenomenalist should limit to resist such a luring temptation, within the scope of truth and ethical discourse. The second reason to avoid simple rejection of transfiguration derives from an anthropological reflection on the first argument: transfiguration of death is a powerful force of human self-affirmation beyond death, as Edgar Morin has pointed out. Hence, it has an extraordinary weight in social, political and religious dimensions and would be ingenuous to even think of simply abolishing it. The third argument is existential: searching for a world after death tells how dramatic death is and how feeble our defences are against it. The fourth and final argument is ethical: we have no right of knocking anyone off her/his own psychological balance, especially if this touches an open wound. We should respect any belief in our destiny after death, if only this belief is in turn respectful toward the others. As a matter of fact, discriminating between transfigurative and phenomenalist approaches should not be simply equated to the distinction between delusion and truth. Or better, applying the hermeneutic possibilities offered by the Buddhist conception of twofold truth (conventional and ultimate truths), the relationship between the two is deeper than one could think from an abstract point of view. A pure affirmation of phenomenalism that does not take into account the transfigurative inclination deriving from psychological trauma and/or social demands risks to be ideologically blind, childishly utopian and practically inhuman, especially when facing people who have recently suffered for a loss. The transfigurative approach too (which could roughly be included into Buddhist conventional truth) has a practical, anthropological, social and psychological meaning, motivated by the need of reassuring the shocked person and of healing one's wounds after the traumatic experience of losing one's beloved. Philosophy of death could not and *should not* overlook its practical applications and educational (or self-educational) potential.

At the same time, however, the instrumental character of the transfiguration of death can all too easily go against, if not cover, the awareness of death's enigma. As a consequence, the meaning and implications of death are too often changed according to unconfessed agendas (for example, the aim of simply chasing fear away, or of finding the meaning of life). Hence, although from the perspective of compassion transfigurative approach can be extremely important under certain circumstances, from the viewpoint of 'ultimate truth' it does not help us in any sense to come near to whatever may be the phenomenon of death. Transfiguration can be helpful as a path to overcome the sorrow and the fear of the last hours; it can work as a remedy or a compensation. Still, epistemic truth about death is not theoretically valid from the perspective of individual death. It can define generic death, 'everyone's death', but it is hardly effective in individualised death.

According to Lisciani Petrini, life and death should not be conceived following univocal definitions, like transcendental vs immanentist; meta-

physical vs biologist; personal vs impersonal, etc. Rather, a 'double sight' should be adopted that may allow facing their paradoxical and insolvable ambiguity (Lisciani Petrini 2009, xxviii). Such a remark is particularly significant since this 'double sight', or 'paradoxology' in Jankélévitch's terms, is the way through which the unrepeatability and haecceity of things (and human beings) is affirmed and taken care of, away from the potentially dangerous rhetoric of authenticity, so decisive in Heidegger.

Semelfactive phenomenalism affirms the singularity of things, whereas epistemic transfigurativism perceives singularity as a problem, in need of being emendated through religious, philosophical, scientific and political procedures. This emendation requires the absorption of the individual's uniqueness and the subsequent standardisation of one's own ideas on (and even perceptions of) life and death. It is no surprise that the modern state has exerted a strong pressure and conditioning over individuals through the so called 'biopolitics', as Foucault widely pointed out in his works. This process of emendation often implies an intervention over the individual's body, which is disquieting from the perspective of knowledge/power because of its ambiguous stance, difficult to be framed inside biopolitical schemes. Biopolitics creates a homogeneous political space in which individuality, emendated of its ambiguity and unique character, finds an unambiguous, clear definition. This happens in the case of death too, because it is always an individualised body that dies and only individuals realise death. Plato's case is very instructive in this respect, since he could be said to have built, ahead of its times, one of the first biopolitical ideologies in the history of Western civilisation that, rejecting the ambiguity of the transient body, imposes death's meaning as the ideal condition to reach the transcendent truth.

4 Plato's Truth as Enemy of the Body

Plato's approach resolutely submits human beings to metaphysical and epistemological needs and particularly to the idea of imperishable truth. His anthropology goes so far as to reverse the commonsensical interpretation of life and death: according to Plato, true life can be reached only after death and, while we are living, actually we are dead. Probably, this idea derives from orphism, but the core of the problem lays elsewhere, namely in his conception of truth. Plato's truth is imperishable and perfect. Being unmoving, it can only be reached in *hyperuranium*, the realm of archetypal ideas, which human beings can achieve solely once the soul is delivered from this mortal, ever-changing coil. Philosophy becomes an exercise of death (i.e. a preparation for true life after death) and biological life is declared to be incompatible with truth. The radical character of Plato's epistemology has important consequences on metaphysics, religion

and anthropology and influences the entire (especially higher) ancient European culture. Nowadays we probably do not perceive the revolutionary impact of his anthropological conception, but at that time, it had to be quite impressive, as it appears from the changes in the use of some key words introduced by Plato. The words indicating 'body' (*sôma*) and 'soul' (*psyché*) before Plato had the meaning of 'corpse' and 'last breath' respectively, as in Homeric culture (Galimberti 2006, 41-56). As a matter of fact, ancient Greeks had no words to indicate the entire, purely physical body, or the total emotional and thinking activity. Homer never reduced human being to abstract totality, focusing instead on its chances, of which the names of limbs were metonymic descriptions. On the other hand, dichotomy in Plato was essential for human beings to approach an imperishable truth. Since human world is subdued to transitoriness and change, Plato had to choose between two possibilities: declare this truth unreachable to us, or minimise the importance of transiency for humankind. He chose the second path, affirming that the only true dimension for human beings consists in the perfect world of pure, imperishable ideas, which at the same time is a world of death, as in the following quotation:

> While we are in the body, and while *the soul is mingled with this mass of evil*, our desire will not be satisfied, and our desire is of the truth. For the body […] is liable to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after truth. If there is time and an inclination toward philosophy, yet *the body introduces a turmoil and confusion and fear into the course of speculation, and hinders us from seeing the truth*. […] In this present life, I reckon that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have *the least possible concern or interest in the body*, and are not saturated with the bodily nature, but remain pure until the hour when [the] God himself is pleased to release us. And then *the foolishness of the body will be cleared away* and we shall be pure and hold converse with other pure souls, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere; and this is surely the light of truth. (Plato 2007, 43-4; emphasis added)

This passage is very rich of important indications about the relationship between truth and death. Platonic truth itself is deadly. It requires eternity and immobility, whilst life implies change, conflict and movement. It demands time and space, whereas Platonic truth is outside or beyond this world and due to its purity it must be kept apart from any changing factor. The body, in particular, is the epitome of such an allegedly despicable instability. It is considered the place of diseases and its irrationality and opaqueness obstruct our pursuit of truth. The body is the source of turmoil and confusion, so much so that it is considered as patently 'foolish'. It is interesting to note that Plato identifies in the body the cause of the present impossibility of reaching perfect truth. Even what today we could

call 'psychological negative states' in platonic explanation are ascribed to the body and would not exist if only the body would cease its influence on us.[11] It should be noted however that Plato's 'soul' is not the exact equivalent of our modern conception of 'mind'. We generally use this term to indicate a psychological state, which is unstable and changing, depending on emotions. This was not Plato's idea of soul, which on the contrary *had to be* unchangeable and eternal, akin to the very idea of eternal truth. As a matter of fact, only imperishable and unchanging souls can enter the reign of imperishable truth.[12]

Still, Plato's conception of truth is not only enemy of the body, but of individuality as well. If our soul is inherently mathematical, it is blind to *my* individuality to which my death belongs. In fact, it does not clarify what is me and only me. It can only see death in general, not what makes death mine and only mine, as it longs for the realm of imperishable, but necessarily impersonal truth.

5 Death vs Impermanence, or the Question of Undecidability

It is also interesting to note that in Plato the search for an imperishable truth and the contempt for the body have the same origin. His desire of truth becomes a desire of death, and this truth requires that the human being be purged of the entire bodily dimension, considered as unreliable because of its ever-changing status. The desire of truth requires the body's death, not the soul's: the impermanent body is a hindrance that must be swept away. This dualistic distinction explains why Plato is careful in distinguishing between death and impermanence. His desire is directed

11 Incidentally, I note that in ancient Buddhism the individual is considered transient both in its bodily and mental aspects, being formed by aggregates (pali *khandha*, sa. *skhanda*, ch. *wuyun*, ja. *goun*) that are not only 'physical', but also 'mental'. This setting of the problem prevents considering the body as the only cause of suffering. On the contrary, the process of 'co-dependent origination' (sa. *pratītyasamutpāda*) lists greed, ignorance and lust as *mental* causes of the unending process of suffering, together with other physical reasons of *saṃsāra* (Gethin 1998, 68 ff.). In other words, the negative conditions from which humans strive to be delivered in Buddhism are not only physical, but also mental. Moreover, due to the inter-relational nature of causes in Buddhism, the theoretical possibility of distinguishing between an 'always good soul' and an 'always evil body' is clearly excluded from the very first. In Buddhism, especially in Mahāyāna, the difference between *nirvāṇa* (positive state, to be pursued) and *saṃsāra* (negative state, to be avoided) is more a matter of mental and subjective attitude than of physical corruption of objects.

12 From such a perspective, Plato was laying the foundations for modern scientific laws. If Plato's truth is mathematical, so must be human souls. Mathematical and scientific truth, in general, derive from this thinking, although in Plato science does not stand apart from theology. Descartes and modern philosophical thinking would take a step forward the mathematical interpretation of the subject. See for example Galimberti 2006, 69 ff.

toward the former in order to put an end to the latter. Impermanence must be expunged due to its incompatibility with permanent truth.

Why does Plato desire death and not impermanence or becoming? Why is impermanence a big hindrance for the truth-seeker? In order to find an answer to this question, we should move away from philosophy and advance an anthropological hypothesis, based on what Mary Douglas in her famous book *Purity and Danger* stated about danger as a cultural classification. What is defined as "dirty and filthy" is actually what is perceived as disrespectful of the socially established cultural categories that ground social, epistemic and cultural order. Hence, dirt is perceived as dangerous, because it calls into question the order established by commonly accepted classifications (Douglas 2003). On the contrary, what is defined as 'pure' follows the established cultural distinctions and helps to strengthen social and cultural order. It is irresistibly tempting to interpret Plato's opposition between impermanent body and permanent soul as congruent with Douglas' distinction between 'dangerous' (impure) and 'safe' (pure). Due to its transient nature, the body does not follow the established cultural categories, but with its "turmoil and confusion and fear" disturbs the search for a clearly defined truth. Hence, impermanence is identified with the biggest hindrance to the discovery of truth. This requires the human body to be eliminated, in order to radically get rid of the main source of transitoriness and, thus, assure the soul a path toward an imperishable truth. Due to its stable and eternal character, death is a clearly defined state and can serve as an excellent dimension of truth, whilst the transient living body cannot, since it cannot be clearly defined once and for all.

Plato draws a distinction between death (acceptable and even desirable) and transitoriness (treacherous and to be recoiled). The former is a definite, perfect state; the latter is a breach in the categorical taxonomy. The former is the realm of pure soul, set free from the body; the latter is the ambiguous dominion of the body, which shackles the soul. Thus, Plato is transfiguring death out of his epistemic purposes. Death in Plato is a definite, perfect state of purity, whereas impermanence is undecidable and hence dangerous. This is why Plato thinks that eternal, unchangeable truth cannot be found in transiency. For this very reason, conversely, in East Asian Buddhism truth is *not* unchangeable and eternal and the question of drawing clear distinction between truth and error is defined in very different terms, as it appears in the Japanese Buddhist use of the image of Ōno no Komachi: Buddhist truth cannot be conceived without impermanence.[13]

13 Particularly significant is Kan'ami's (1333-1384) Noh playwright *Sotoba no Komachi* (Komachi of the *stūpa*), where the once famous beauty Komachi, presented as old and near death, is sitting on a *stūpa* (i.e. a Buddhist monument containing Buddha's relics) having a discussion with a monk. He rebukes her for dishonoring the symbol of Buddha's body: her female, corrupted body is in sharp contrast with the Buddha's perfect body. Still, after a

Plato's *Phaedo* could be considered as the epitome of transfigurative approach in philosophy. Death is not considered in itself, but only from the perspective of absolute truth, which in turn is gained only through death. Apparently, this approach to death brings hope to human beings, but at high cost: actually, human condition (and especially the body in its transitory complexion) is sacrificed to the realm of essence.

Still, the idea of death in *Phaedo* should not be considered as typifying 'Western' approach to life and death. From the perspective of transfiguration, this conception seems at least comparable, if not clearly convergent, for example with the tendencies to aestheticize death in many artistic and literary Japanese products, that inspired for example the ideal of the failing hero in classical Japanese literature (Morris 1975). Aetheticization of death in militaristic Japan during the Pacific war was also important as a rhetoric and ideological device to persuade young people to sacrifice their own lives to the emperor (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002).[14] Although the overall sense is obviously different and in need to be contextualized, there are some similarities in that all these approaches transfigure death, transforming it into something positive as an aesthetic motif (Japanese aestheticism) or as the ideally suited condition for accessing truth (Plato's *Phaedo*), or as a propaganda tool for the modern national warfare (Japanese and non-Japanese *kamikaze*).

6 Edgar Morin and the Returning Myths of Immortality

Among epistemic approaches, Plato's anti-somatic metaphysics is not the only possible. Edgar Morin's thanatology is particularly significant because transfiguration is allegedly involuntary in his case. After having provided an interesting interpretation of death in anthropological terms, he admittedly ends up with falling victim of the theories he has previously identified, using scientific hypothesis to find an alleged viable solution to the problem of death.

According to Morin, the appearance of tools and burial rites identifies the human development from the state of nature. The two practices could not be more different: the former is part of the adaptation process to the material world and its laws; the latter seems to revolt against the

long discussion, the monk admits that "What we call passions too" and Komachi continues "becomes awakening" (Chin 1998, 302-3). The idea of "passions-as immediately-awakening" (*bonnō soku bodai*) was very popular in the period and was associated to the idea that a female rotten body could liberate the monk from illusions (Chin 1998, 308).

14 By the way, similar ideological approaches to death can be found in many modern uses of the classical Horace's line, originally in *Odes* (3, 2, 13), stating, "It is sweet and proper to die for one's country" (Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori).

impositions of biology. Still, there is something in common: "death, as much as the tool, is an act of individual affirmation, which continues its presence in time, whereas the tool extends human presence in space" (Morin 2002, 34). Since the practices of burial can be found in every human group, even the most archaic ones, they are said to be quintessential to human cultures no less than tools. Death is interpreted as a continuation of this life. This however does not mean that archaic cultures are unaware of the difference between death and life. On the contrary, ritual consciousness draws a clear distinction between the living and the dead. Still, according to Morin, while affirming and recognising the event of death, archaic cultures negate death's annihilation (Morin 2002, 35-6).

Why must death be such a difficult matter for human beings? Could not we simply accept the idea of fading away? Morin's answer is no. He ascribes the complexity of death as a social phenomenon to the deeply shocking emotion – the 'death trauma' – that runs parallel to the consciousness of the void, which lays at the bottom of the individual. Morin calls the link between emotional trauma, consciousness of death and belief in immortality "the threefold anthropological datum". These three reactions to death (emotion, consciousness and belief) are always bound together and imply each other. For instance, what makes our emotions so intense in the presence of death is the perception of the distance between consciousness of death and affirmation of immortality. Such a distance hinders the belief in immortality. Consciousness of death starts from death trauma. Hence, it demands an affirmation able to overcome death (Morin 2002, 44).

Death generates strong reactions due to the loss of individuality implicit in it. We strongly react to the consciousness that an individual has become a carrion. Such a violent trauma needs to be balanced by an equally powerful affirmation of individuality after death. This belief in immortality is universally spread and originally coexistent with the other phenomena. There is an important relationship between death consciousness and individual affirmation. Death – or rather, the time immediately previous to death – is the moment in which the individual affirms itself in the most intense manner, not necessarily as an 'I' but also as a 'you', an 'ideal' or a 'value'. Such a final affirmation is considered to be stronger than the I, and strong enough to confront death. Thanks to this affirmation, an individual can find the courage to face death, or to risk its life (Morin 2002, 46-7).

In Morin's interpretation the loss of individuality is the red thread that links phenomena that are apparently unrelated, such as "the sorrow of funerals, the terror of the corpse's decomposition, the obsession of death" and lies at the center of the "threefold anthropological datum". Sorrow is particularly painful if we know the departed well, that is if her/his individuality "was present and recognised". The closer the dead was to us – that is, the more 'unique' was for us – the more intense is our grief for her/

his departure. In the same vein, terror for decomposition is explained by the fear of losing individuality. Likewise, human beings become obsessed with death especially because they are worried about saving their own individuality after death (Morin 2002, 42).

Morin's anthropological interpretation of death presupposes the purely physical idea of the cessation of vital functions, but it is not confined to purely biological dimension. It encompasses the basic human reactions to death as well, especially from the standpoint of the individual's loss. As a matter of fact, as stated in the first introduction to the work dated 1951, death should be read through a kind of 'Copernican revolution', to paraphrase Kant: instead of death, it would be essential to reflect upon human being itself, of which death is an image. Only after that would it be possible to look at death in its purely biological meaning (Morin 2002, 29-30). The specificity of human death lies in the fact that among human beings death is recognised as such not by species – which in the case of *homo sapiens* is extremely de-specialised and deprived of instinctual complement, especially if compared to animals – but by individuals. On the contrary, among animals it is the species and not the individuals that recognises death. Still, the reason for this is not strictly biological. In fact, 'individualised animals', such as pets, understand the individual's death (for example, their master's death) in a quite acute manner. Human societies work as a kind of species, at least under certain specific historical conditions like warfare, thus reducing the terror of death through social customs and practices, habits and ideologies, as well as interpersonal connections.

This approach of Morin is certainly a sort of anthropological and sociological 'explanation' of the phenomenon of death. However, does explanation necessarily mean transfiguration? The boundaries between the two are actually very thin and easy to overcome. Still, if explanation is defined according to its etymological sense of 'unfolding something' that is too dense (or crumpled) to be appreciated as such, 'unfolding death' does not necessarily mean to transfigure it. It could mean to realise the various aspects that occur in this event, consciously keeping one's viewpoint at the same level of the phenomenon considered. Thus, it does not necessarily mean 'understanding' in the sense of searching for its foundations or aims. Then we could ask whether Morin is searching for a transfiguring death. Does he aim at defining it from a superior standpoint, in order to impose a meaning to this phenomenon, or even to solve it? Following Morin's own interpretation, the desperate need of finding the meaning of death could be traced back to the concomitant action of the threefold anthropological data: our strong emotion in presence of death, our bitter consciousness of the decease and our invincible belief in immortality. Still, something paradoxical emerges from Morin's position: on the one hand, he traces many old and new cultural approaches to death back to their original myths of death-rebirth through transmigration and death-survival of the double

(Morin 2002, 119 ff.). On the other hand, he himself frankly admits to be caught by these same myths, "being induced to write – hidden by the mask of science – the last chapter of the myths of death" (Morin 2002, 341). This is the case, when at the end of the book he seems not to consider the problem of death from the individual, phenomenal perspective, but prefers to discuss its possible solutions through technology, realising only much later that a technical solution to death is nothing else than a modern variation of the myth of immortality. The author himself in his new conclusions dated 1970 and in the afterword of 1975 is finally quite self-critical about his own conclusions written in 1951, since he admittedly was "trying to find a way out of the tragedy of death", "ending with being prey to the very mythological forces I highlighted" (Morin 2002, 341).

However, despite this self-criticism and self-ironic stance towards what the author himself defines as the "Morinian myth of a-mortality", in the following edition of 1976 we can bear witness to another resurgence of those very myths: the quasi-Hegelian conclusion that death represents the 'intentional' strategy of living organisms that reorganise and renew themselves through disorder. Hence, through death, living beings can transform themselves and perpetuate species. Therefore, the process of disorganisation and degeneration are a part of the process of reorganisation and regeneration (Morin 2002, 17-8). Very sketchily stated, such an explanation produces the psychological effect of making death more comprehensible and even rationally acceptable. Moreover, although focusing on the relationship between death and the individual, Morin does seem to have radically shaped his own perspective according to this hermeneutical key. He has not changed his own point of view, limiting to the level of the sole 'content' of the discourse. He seems to have not completely modified his own critical perspective. Death and the individual become generic concepts and can be attributes of everyone (and no one at the same time). They remain objects of an epistemic knowledge.

Still, this is in no way a problem for the sole Morin. His frank admission, and his difficulties in coming to grips with individual death even *after* such an admission, should make us aware of the relative frailty of conscious thinking in presence of death. On the one hand, philosophical thinking is influenced 'from outside' by social and cultural constructions that tend to tame this event, in order to reduce its potentially devastating effects on society; on the other, thinking is exposed 'from inside' to emotions, especially the fear of losing individuality. Thus, death never ceases to be a 'dangerous matter' for philosophy.

7 Vladimir Jankélévitch and Perspectival Phenomenalism in Thanatology

A completely different approach to truth and death is that of the Russo-French-Jewish philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch (1903-1985), who takes an uncompromising stance against any transfiguration of death. In his premise to the book *La mort*, Jankélévitch's phenomenalist thanatology takes the shape of a strongly perspectival phenomenology of death. According to the Russo-French philosopher, our approach to death can vary depending on whether it is considered in the first, the second or the third person. Death in the third person (or *their death*) is death in general. It is the anonymous and general fact of the end of existence, noted down at the registry office as a pure datum in statistics. This death does not involve us in any particular form and we can keep it at a distance with relative ease. There is no tragedy from this perspective, only external phenomena (Jankélévitch 1977, 24-5). If the third person death determines indifference or serenity, if not relief (at the bottom of our heart, we could admit: "fortunately, it is not me!"), and can be engendered by ignorance or will to avoid it, death in the first person (*my death*) is the supreme source of anxiety. It is the tragedy of 'my entire being', which proves to be exposed to nothingness. From this death I cannot keep any distance, since it is my death that it is dealt with. I have no way out, no hope of escaping. At the most, I can choose to delude myself that this would never happen to me. Moreover, this death, in the same vein as birth, cannot be shared, but only faced alone. Finally, Jankélévitch considers *your death* as the death of people whom we personally know and love. "Between the anonymity of the third person and the tragic subjectivity of the first person […]; between the death of the other, which is far away and indifferent, and one's own death, that touches our own being, there is the nearness of the near" (29). This death is particularly touching: it is almost as painful as our own death. It is nearly like my death. Still, it is *not* my death.

My death and your death have to do with the 'haecceity' or the 'suchness' of the persons lost: they entail the 'semelfactivity' of the individuals, one of the *leitmotif* in Jankélévitch's philosophy and pivotal even in his discourse about death.

Jankélévitch consciously refers to death from the perspective of 'philosophy of partiality' (25). This approach admittedly underlines the insurmountable distinction and distance between individuals, who stay apart as radically singular: I cannot completely understand what the other is thinking and feeling and the same is true also for the other. This is also why Jankélévitch considers *our death* as a kind of paradox, a formula being defined not through "analogical induction, but lived sympathetically and intuitively in one's intimate experience" (27). Although death is a com-

mon destiny, this commonality keeps an exclusive, intimate and personal character, concerning only *that* person.

> This unrelated universality – Jankélévitch writes – is reducible to neither physical solidarity, nor to abstract community, nor to cosmological kinship; it expresses neither the individuals' inclusion in a common gender, nor their participation to a sole essence, nor their original affinity. In this case, in fact, persons would be monads, that is impersonal third persons. (27)

Both religions and rationalism fear death's solitude. Still, the supreme instant does not entail companions (28-9). From the point of view of the third person, death is a relative event. From the perspective of the first person, it is a unique and absolute occurrence. Hence, death is a kind of Georg Simmel's 'individual law'.

Jankélévitch's main analysis explores death from the temporal perspective of past, present and future: my death can only be conceived of as a future event (the death 'from this shore'), whereas yours and theirs can also be past (the death 'from the other shore') and present (the 'mortal instant') (37-8). The main characteristic of truth discourse about death in Jankélévitch lies in that it is an (almost) impossible object: contrary to Plato's idea of death as the highway to truth, Jankélévitch thinks that death is the greatest obstacle to truth, at least to its truth.

As far as we are alive, our discourse about death in the first person unavoidably speaks about life. We can try to imagine how it will be, but we are always destined to speak, think, imagine (and, therefore, *live*) without having experienced it. Hence, a discourse on death is impossible because it always speaks about something different, i.e. life, which is completely different from death. Here the dichotomous opposition of life and death ends with casting formidable doubts on the idea of truth and our chance to say something true. As a matter of fact, when we try to speak about the mortal instant, this infinitesimal moment is a 'nothing' (*rien*) or an 'almost-nothing' (*presque-rien*), ungraspable and useless in knowledge. It is just like trying to keep one's balance while standing on the point of a pin. It inevitably leads to discuss about the moment immediately before death (too early) or the moment immediately after (too late). Of course, a discourse after death is impossible, because it discusses an entirely unknowable object, which is completely beyond our possibilities (37-8).

Jankélévitch reckons that death and life are neither empirically, nor logically symmetric. Death is not what contradicts life: a dead being is not living *anymore*, not simply non-living. The very use of contradiction as a tool to illustrate the relationship between life and death does not reveal any characteristic of death, but only our manner of imagining what is beyond the mortal instant, the 'totally-other':

> It is not enough to reverse the positive aspects of life in order to obtain, as in a cliché, those of death! No! […] A mechanistic and simplistic reverse of this shore makes us depend on this shore. […] Contradiction, not more than contrary, does not make us glimpse at the totally-other; the back of the front is of same order than the front. (66)

Death is non-being, and yet it is not the nothingness full of potentiality, but the plain non-sense of sense, which constitutes the precariousness and inconsistency of every human thing (69). In Jankélévitch, dichotomous reasoning between death and life has no logical, symmetric nature, but indicates the consciousness that the existential relationship with the totally other is completely impossible.

7.1 Beyond Some Presuppositions in Jankélévitch's Position

However lucid may they be, these considerations by Jankélévitch originate from some undisputed, very basic assumptions. Relationship in general – for example between individuals, knower and known, life and death – is always considered as a 'third element' that stands between two different and, hitherto, unrelated objects. For instance, Jankélévitch thinks that the I is the I and cannot entirely communicate with the You and the relationship between us comes from outside of us, somehow after the I and the You have been defined as individuals. This implies isolation and impossible communication, which derives from what T. Kasulis defines as 'external relationship', or 'integrity' (Kasulis 2002). However, this is not the only possible conception of relationship. Some Japanese thinkers, such as Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945), have defined the I-Thou relationship according to an internal paradigm ("intimacy", in Kasulis' definition): I am not I without you, and vice versa. My relationship with you makes me what I am. I am myself thanks to you: my being is closely connected to you and cannot be set apart (Nishida 2003, 95). This would imply that *your death* has a direct effect upon me and shapes *my death*. In fact, there is a common field between you and me that goes beyond my very consciousness and that is neither yours nor mine.

Death in Jankélévitch is considered to be a punctual event, or a state resulting from an event. It is certainly much less considered as a process, as in many definitional practices, from Buddhism to some contemporary medical ethics (Steila 2009, 169 ff.; Cestari 2014). Moreover, death in Jankélévitch's approach is eminently, if not purely, a physical phenomenon. It is implicitly interpreted as the biological death of a human organism. This means that the extended (but very real) meaning of death, for instance the psychological or social one, is not considered in Jankélévitch's discourse. There are certainly some dangers in this reduction, since the

human being is identifiable neither with a biological organism nor with a physical object, as many contemporary philosophers have clearly pointed out.[15] Still, thanks to this focus limited on biological death and its effects on human beings, Jankélévitch avoids inappropriate usages of the idea of death, which all too easily softens its most unacceptable side. This aim would probably justify running the risk of reducing human death to a question of physicality. Yet, minimising the importance of the psychological and social death is strongly coherent with (and clearly strengthens) Jankélévitch's individualist approach, namely his inclination to stress the first person's approach to death.

As a matter of fact, his thought seems to be strongly dependent on the perspective of the speaking subject, the first person. In Jankélévitch's philosophy, all the perspectives on death seem to make sense only from this point of view. Coherently, its temporal dimension too is analysed from the standpoint of the 'I': future death is the non-sense of sense or the non-being of being; mortal instant is an 'outside-category' and past death is absolutely nothing. The 'I' can see and have only relative knowledge of another person's death and is supposed to know with a certain confidence only those events that happen to itself. At the same time, however, it is on the level of subjectivity that we experience the most crushing cognitive defeat. I cannot know my future death; my mortal instant is too rapid to be significant and finally my past death will be totally nothing for me, since I will be already dead (Jankélévitch 1977, 371-2). On the one hand, Jankélévitch grounds his argument of the unknowability of death from the particular perspective of the experiencing 'I'. On the other hand, this experience is severely limited: the subject experiences a true impossibility, so that a dark shadow is cast on the entire sense of human enterprise. This is certainly an interesting point of Jankélévitch, who shows his sensitiveness to the theme of cognitive finitude and finally ends with anti-subjectivist and anti-epistemic conclusions. Still, his approach starts from a perspective that is similar to the Cartesian subject, although his conclusions head to the diametrically opposite direction.

Jankélévitch's post-subjectivism reduces the possibilities of his own perspectivism, which betrays this limitation. The centrality of death in the first person is just the case. Residual subjectivism is clearly detectable in Jankélévitch's analysis, whenever the 'I' is said to lay at the foundations of every possible discourse on truth, including thanatology, although in a negative sense: I cannot know my death, which is radically incompatible with consciousness. At the basis of this idea, the presupposition of a clear

15 Two names among the others: Nishida Kitarō and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A discussion on death implies a discussion about what Nishida calls the 'historical body' (*rekishiteki shintai*), which is not merely physical or biological, but includes a social-historical dimension. See Nishida 1998; Merleau-Ponty 1945.

and distinct knowledge is working, which can only occur if the subject clearly knows, as in Descartes, the object of cognition. Accordingly, since my knowledge of another person's experience is always hypothetical, another person's death would be unknowable. As a matter of fact, death in itself cannot be known by anyone. In Jankélévitch, death in first person is repeatedly indicated as a quite paradoxical object of thought, whose meaning is completely impossible to find: I am and will be completely ignorant about it. Epicurus stated the similar thesis that consciousness and death are incompatible, but his purposes were consolatory: the fear of death has no meaning whatsoever, because if death comes, I am not present, and if I am present, death is still to come. Jankélévitch re-interprets the same argument to underline a disquieting consequence: our impossibility to know anything about death. Nothing can be said about my death, whereas this 'nothing' has no relation with the ineffable silence of the mystics or the poets. My death points to the unspeakable silence of the complete nothing, the total lack of any relations. Here, meaning is completely obstructed and affirming or negating anything is impossible (cf. Jankélévitch 1977, 67-91). Death in first person is an objective limit to my heuristic strength.

On the other hand, death in the third person is little more than an abstract concept, a kind of indeterminate category and it is meaningful only in a very generic sense. It explains death according to rational, scientific, religious, mythical, or social explanations. Scientific theories and (generically) religious-philosophical answers can derive from such an impersonal death.

If *their death* is knowable only as an almost empty concept, and *my death* cannot be known in any case, there is a somehow intermediate death, which can be experienced. This is *your death*. Despite what Jankélévitch affirms, it could be possible to reckon that death in the second person is the most psychologically devastating dimension of death, which can affect the entire existence of the I. Its effects on my world are deep and durable, and underline the essentially *social* and *relational* character of death. In a hypothetical dialogue with him, Jankélévitch, who stresses the importance of *my death*, would reply that I cannot properly know what is death for you. According to him, death in any case imposes drastic limitations to the perspectival truth discourse: *my death* and *your death* are unknowable, although for different reasons (the first one because my very end coincides with the missed object of knowledge; the second one because I cannot become you). Still, such an approach is grounded on the assumption that real knowledge can only be clear and distinct and originate from the subject.

Away from this post-subjectivist perspective, *your death* could count as a crucial element to allow a *certain* knowledge of death. This knowledge would be human and finite, far from being the absolute one. Still, this would be the only manner for human beings to perceive death. *Your death* is my first real experience of death. I realise that what happened to you may happen (or better *will* happen, although I do not know when

and how) also to me. *My death* is destined to remain an undetermined state for me. On the contrary, *your death* is the only, limited possibility I have to come to grips with *my death*. You lie at the foundations of my heuristic strength about death, however much this strength be limited. I depend on you in considering *my death*. Thoroughly realising that I will die is generally impossible, until I do not feel, realise and live *your death* in a manner or another.

How to consider this death from the point of view of death's knowledge? This approach does not refer to death in first person and consequently has some hypothetical aspects, but it is far from the generic impersonal death of the third person as well. On the contrary, it is very personal, as in Derrida's mourning speech. This type of death does not exactly fall within a category, since "every death is unique", according to the personal link we had with the departed. The dominating element is emotional and singular in this context. This is neither the dominion of essence (of discourse), as with *their death*, nor the simple end of any discourse, as with *my death*. On the contrary, it is where meaning vacillates and hesitates. Far from being put into question in force of a rational counter-argument, it is jeopardised through some obscure, not entirely definable historical, emotional and physical set of factors. *Your death* is the place of penumbra and ambiguity. It is undoubtedly a kind of awareness, although far from being of a purely rational type and its limits are those of the subject's experience and perspective. As a matter of fact, it sprouts from the personal link with the departed and affirms their and my singularity, the semelfactivity of human bodies and souls. Since *your death* cannot be reduced to pure object of rational categorization, each death of people we knew well is to be considered apart and occupies a special place in our world. On the existential, affective and physical plane, I would never get used to any *your death*. Similarly, on the cognitive plane, such a knowledge is slippery and, so to say, it is ambiguous and different each time. It cannot be added to any previous knowledge, but always transforms, often drastically, such a knowledge. It cannot grant either any predictability or reliability that other types of knowledge can offer. Far from being *epistéme*, it is *phrònesis*, a case-by-case familiarity.

Jankélévitch often seems somehow rigid in stressing more the differences among the various perspectives on death than their possible connections. On the contrary, perspectivism in thanatology may not a priori exclude a certain flexible relationship among viewpoints. Actually, the boundaries between, for example, *their death* and *your death* are unstable and permeable. *They* can easily become *you*. Just a bit of acquaintance (some words exchanged with a perfect stranger) and a certain degree of personal involvement are sometimes enough to transform death in third person into death in second person. Hence, the difference between *my*, *your* or *their death* is more a question of level of acquaintance and of the

quality of relationship than of substance. As stated before, death in the first person can be imagined only through the experience of death in the second person. This reflects the eminently social and relational character of death. Since it can be realised, conceived and defined only within social relationships, there are no ultimate reasons that may grant special status to *my death*. Moreover, my 'being myself' does not rely on an ultimate and isolated identity, but is intertwined with other identities, so that I cannot completely control and know myself. Far from being a completely self-transparent and unified identity, this 'myself' is more akin to an open field in which different forces work according to different speeds, vectors and needs that may even conflict with each other. Not to mention that 'my experience', especially on the issue of death, has so many limits, failures and more or less deliberate 'adjustments', that it is impossible to consider it as the epitome of the trustworthy knowledge.

In this perspectival approach, there is probably enough space to add another perspective to death, which is not originally expressed in Jankélévitch: this is *our death*. With this, I refer to the cases in which a powerful death experience brings to collapse and merge *my death* with *your death*. Unlike *my death*, *our death* can be experienced, although in a perspectival manner. Still, unlike *your death*, I am so deeply involved that my subjectivity is overcome and overturned once and for all. This perspective could be considered as a kind of living death, because through a deep, traumatic and often repeated, or large-scaled, experience of *your death*, I realise something very similar to *my death*, although psychologically and emotionally connoted, while still physically being alive. 'I' transfer *your death* to 'myself' and my way of looking at reality dramatically changes. 'I' do experience death and, since then, death cannot be clearly distinguished from life. This mechanism is visible among survivors who passed through particularly dramatic and shocking events, such as natural catastrophes, war or other dramatic facts (Auschwitz or Hiroshima, for example). *Our death* is different from the experience of *your death*, however much painful this one may be. It is certainly a difference of scale (*your death* is generally singular and unrepeatable; *our death* is generalised and at most can be pervasive), but this extensiveness exerts a permanent and crucial influence on the subject and its manner of living in the world, so much so that the subject is never the same again. Such an experience creates a rift between those who experienced certain dramatic facts and those who were not there, and hence "after all cannot understand" (Yagi 2007, *passim*, 46-ff.). The experience of our death extends our perception of death from the restricted sphere of what I know (me, my acquaintances, my world) to the enlarged area of others (even unknown people), without losing the intense relationship typical of *your death*.

7.2 The Dialectical Character of Death

In Jankélévitch, another trait typifies the relationship between death and life. This is their incommensurable character: he clearly states that they have nothing to do with each other (Jankélévitch 1977, 66 ff.). Still, their dialectical link cannot be easily dismissed as irrelevant, but vigorously emerges when, as in the case of *your death*, we stand in front of the corpse of someone we knew well.[16] Once again, the body, also when it is dead, is disquieting from the perspective of clear and distinct knowledge, as Plato immediately understood.

Interrupting the usual relationship between temporal moments, death's absence is not as if it were a purely logical, quantitative state, unrelated to past and future, but becomes a real presence, which refers to a still living, hurting past (memories) and to an impossible future (regrets). At the same time, the alien *presence* of the dead body boldly interrupts that temporal and affective links with the deceased. The corpse (and, in a fainter manner, the objects belonging to the deceased, her/his room, photographs, etc.) imposes its presence that tells the absence of the departed, in such a manner that it makes absence visible and present.[17] The corpse does not act on a purely logical and abstract level, but interacts with the expectations, habits and emotions of survivors. Hence, it is not simply an absence, but is 'presence– *and yet* –absence'.[18] The corpse makes such

16 The following considerations are directly inspired by the analysis of the episode "The Body" (ep. 16 of the fifth series) from the TV series *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, directed by Joss Whedon.

17 From such a perspective, Bergson's position on death, who bluntly denied death in the name of a kind of impossibility of nothingness, appears inadequate and even naif. Bergson's rhetoric of positivity according to which everything is necessarily positive and death does not exist – because when a living being dies, something else occupies its vacant place –, completely misses the point at issue, since he believes that what occupies the place of a deceased is radically and irrevocably different from the one we search for (Subacchi 2002). Actually, Bergson falls into a quite common mistake: considering death from the perspective of abstract logic, as the sheer antonym of life. This mistake, already exposed by Jankélévitch, derives from an undue application of binary logical schemes to the distinction between life and death, which cannot be approached through the strict application of logical patterns. Although we could say what is life, we do not have the same knowledge about death. How then can we apply the same logical scheme to both? Moreover, from the viewpoint of our relationship with the dead, it is exactly the replacement of our friend or relative with an inanimate thing (the corpse) that causes the deepest trauma.

18 Here the expression 'presence – and yet – absence' follows the Japanese *soku* (即), frequently used by the philosophers of the Kyōto School, especially Nishida and Tanabe, meaning a paradoxical relationship of logical oppositions, which coexist in a dialectical structure. This coexistence could be judged as contradictory from a logical point of view, although it actually indicates the limitations of logical categories themselves, when depicting some complex objects. The case in question is an example of such a situation, as death brings out a conundrum of opposite feelings, in which absence and presence are inextricably bound.

an absence much more grievous, since its presence enhances the 'not-anymore' of the beloved.

The temporal sense of lack resulting from the 'anymore' is the result of such a hybrid relationship between absence and presence. A corpse of a relative or a friend has such a tremendous effect on human psyche exactly because of this interrelationship. Far from being the simple negation of presence, at the same time it imposes a lack of presence, in which what has become a purely physical body plays the biggest role. The remains of a departed continue to exert influence upon those who remain. Death's experience through the dead body increases the gap between existential/social negation (necessarily a correlative opposition) and logical/mathematical negation (which can also be contradictory). If death were to be considered only in accordance with a logical opposition between affirmation and negation, absence and presence, the bodily relationship with the dead would be incomprehensible. On the contrary, the body refuses such a definitive logical status: it allows a continuous exchange between living and dead. It affirms the link with *past* life, while at the same time denying any *future* relationship. If past and future are clearly defined in front of the dead body, being represented by the corpse itself, the present situation is ambiguous. It involves both life *and* death in a complex interrelation that is more dialectical than oppositional. It exhibits death in a manner that strongly speaks of life. It is a kind of inextricable mixture of death and life. From such an ambiguity, what emerges is the anthropological need, attested in all cultures, to draw a distinction and re-affirming the separation among dead and living.[19] However, separation is not a contradiction. The stronger this separation is accomplished, the deeper the former relationship is affirmed in its being negated. This occurs also in the Japanese myth of Izanagi who, being chased after by his dead spouse Izanami, puts an enormous boulder at the entrance of *yomi no kuni* (the land of darkness) in order to stop Izanami, once he has discovered her horrific shape.[20] The concern for distinguishing the land of the dead from the land of the living indirectly tells us about the strength of the existing relationship, which must be interrupted and defined as 'impossible and unnatural'.

8 Death in Buddhism. The case of *Biyan lu*

How is death defined in the Buddhist world? In ancient, pre-Mahayāna Buddhism, death appears in an inextricable combination with aging/dying (pali *jarāmaraṇa*), as the 'twelfth integrated cause' (pali *nidāna*) of 'conditioned

19 About the Japanese separation rites, see Raveri 2006.

20 An interesting reading of this myth can be found in Ōmine 1992, 15-8.

production' (pali *paṭiccasamuppāda*). Aging and dying are considered as integral parts of the process of the individual's decay. Such an inevitable destiny occurs to whoever is born. As it is stated in *Paṭiccasamuppāda vibhaṅga sutta*:

> Now what is *aging and death?* Whatever aging, decrepitude, brokenness, graying, wrinkling, decline of life-force, weakening of the faculties of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called aging. Whatever deceasing, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, completion of time, break up of the aggregates, casting off of the body, interruption in the life faculty of the various beings in this or that group of beings, that is called death. (Thanissaro 2010b; italics in the original)

In this context, death is a source of suffering, as well as are birth and aging. Being part of the process of decay, which is inevitable for all living beings, it is subject to the 'wheel of becoming' (pali *bhava cakka*). This implies that death and life (or birth) are not considered as separated, but they form just one process, which inevitably causes suffering. Eliminating the causes of this suffering is the sense of the 'Buddhist path' (pali *magga*). There are some texts in Pali tradition that bluntly reject this process of decay, in a manner that appears to be very far from a fatalistic and sheer acceptation of destiny, which some orientalist interpretations often associates with 'Indian religions'. For example, in the small *Jara sutta* Buddha is reported to have said:

> I spit on you, old age – old age that makes for ugliness. The bodily image, so charming, is trampled by old age. Even those who live to a hundred are headed – all – to an end in death, which spares no one, which tramples all. (Thanissaro 2010a)

The question of this processual death in Buddhism is strictly interwoven with the problem of the self, since with death the self, considered as an 'aggregate' (pali *khandha*) of 'physical and mental elements' (pali *dhātu*), is disassembled, thus revealing the delusion of believing in eternal individual soul. However, death is the end of a certain mental and physical combination and does not put an end to the wheel of existence, since the entirely impersonal causal flux due to bad actions and attitudes gives rise to another existence, another individual combination, which produces other suffering.

What really counts in ancient Buddhism "is not so much the question of the existence or non-existence of the self, but that in seeking to answer the question of its existence the ordinary unawakened mind that is not free from grasping inevitably gets entangled in views and theories about the self" (Gethin 1998, 161). In *Nikāya*, Buddha did not answer to the questions posed by Vacchagotta the wayfarer about existence or non-existence

of the self, explaining to Ānanda that the reason for not answering was that, if he had replied, he would have further confused Vacchagotta. He would have induced him to embrace the extreme doctrines of eternalism or annihilationism. This ethical and theoretical approach could be applied to individual death as well. In fact, the questions about existence or non-existence of Tathāgata after death are parts of the so called 'ten undetermined questions' as explained in the *Cūḷamāluṅkyasutta* (The Little Discourse to Māluṅkyāputta), together with many others concerning the eternity or finitude of the world and the identity or difference of life and body (Gethin 1998, 66 ff.). All those questions are consciously left unanswered by Buddha because of the same ethical and theoretical reasons. Hence, these Buddhist texts drive the general sense of thanatology away from the concerns about persistence or non-persistence of individual soul after death. According to many Buddhist texts, discussing about these themes conceals a selfish attachment to oneself. The correct path requires selfless practice and the attainment of wisdom (pali *paññā*), which has nothing to do with judgments and objective knowledge, but is much more a spiritual and ethical awareness of one's present situation.

Such a wisdom needs that death and life (or birth) are not judged as oppositions. This would bring us to falsely consider life as positive and death as negative. On the contrary, they should be taken as two sides of the same coin, which is suffering. This dialectical link is so strong that the very Sanskrit word *saṃsāra* (the world of delusion) is translated into the Sino-Japanese writing system with the two characters for 'life' and 'death' (ch. *shengsi*, ja. *shōji*). Death and life are perceived together as one cause of suffering, whereas death is not only the event of dying, but is inextricably bound with the process of decay as with the Pali and Sanskrit word *jarāmaraṇa*.

However, from the perspective of the alternative between transfiguration and phenomenalism, in Buddhism too there are different attitudes towards death. Together with the phenomenalist orientation of some texts, it is not unusual among common Buddhist believers following clearly transfigurative discourses on death. A remarkable example of such a tendency, which was extremely influential in Japanese culture, was the famous *Ōjōyōshū* (Essentials for Rebirth in Pure Land, 985), written by the Japanese Tendai monk Genshin (942-1017). This book had an enormous impact on Japanese lay culture, especially due to its detailed descriptions of Buddhist hells and lands of bliss. Ōmine clarifies that Genshin's work was the very first in Japan to define the realm of death as an idealised 'other shore', while at the same time devaluating 'this world'. As a matter of fact, in pre-Buddhist ancient Japanese world-view the "country of darkness" (*yomi no kuni*) was juxtaposed to life as defiled and evil, whereas life was taken as good and pure. For example, many elegies in the *Man'yōshū* (A Collection of Ten Thousands Leaves, second half of the eight century) focus on the theme of

one's lover premature and tragic death. A *tanka* (short poetry) ascribed to the famous poet Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (662-710) is particularly touching: "In the autumn mountains | The yellow leaves are so thick. | Alas, how shall I seek my love | Who has wandered away? | I know not the mountain track" (*Man'yōshū*, 2, 208; see Ōmine 1992, 18).

On the contrary, the sense of death in the *Ōjōyōshū* may be well summarised by the phrase: "Renounce the defiled world and seek birth in the Pure Land" (Ōmine 1992, 21). Therefore, Genshin's attitude toward death is not very far from that of Plato's *Phaedo*. They both consider death as the pathway to another, perfect world – be it called Pure Land or *Hyperuránion* – that is to be preferred to our filthy this-worldly condition. This character suggests that the mechanisms of transfiguring death operate quite independently from other important assumptions (for example, the conceptions of life and death as contradictory vs correlative opposites), and seems to appear quite independently from cultural and religious-philosophical contexts.[21]

However, in East Asian Buddhist high culture, there are many cases in which death is not transfigured in any sense. In order to clarify this point, I will consider a *gong'an* (ja. *kōan* 公案) taken from the *Record of Blue Cliff* (ch. *Biyan lu*, ja. *Hekiganroku*), a famous Song dynasty Chan text (written in 1125, but variously arranged in the following years).

The case 55 of *Biyan lu* expresses the non-dual, radically non-transfigurative approach to death and life. In the story told in this *gong'an*, Daowu (ja. Dōgo) and his disciple Jianyuan (ja. Zengen) are paying a condolence visit to a family. Jianyuan, tapping on the coffin of the deceased, asks his master: "is it life? Is it death?". The master answers: "I don't say life, I don't say death". Then Jianyuan asks "why don't you say?" and Daowu answers "I don't say. I don't say". On the way back, the disciple, feeling the urge of the question, asks again and threatens his master: had he not answered, he would hit him. The master answers: "even if you beat me, I do not say". And Jianyuan hits his master. After a while, Daowu passes away and Jianyuan goes to speak with master Shishuang (ja. Sekisō) and asks him the same question about life and death, but he receives the same answer. Suddenly, Jianyuan awakens. One day, Jianyuan takes a hoe and walks in the Dharma-hall from east to west and from west to east. Shishuang asks him the reason of doing that and Jianyuan answers, "I am seeking the

21 Ōmine 1992 collects many classical Japanese examples of tendencies to transfiguration toward death (Genshin and partially Hōnen) or phenomenalism (the mythology of *Kojiki*, the tragic elegies of *Man'yōshū*, the thinking of Dōgen, Shinran and Motoori Norinaga). As an example of phenomenalist attitude, see this passage from Motoori Norinaga: "it is clear that both Confucianism and Buddhism are not the true path, for they try to argue in various ways how one should not be sorrowful about things which clearly make us sad and [...] fill us with sorrow" (Ōmine 1992, 28).

sacred bones of the late master". Shishuang continues: "giant waves vast and limitless; whitecaps overflow the heaven. What sacred bones of your late master do you search for?". Jianyuan answers: "exactly because of this, I really try hard". And Dayuan Fu comments: "the sacred bones of the late master are still there" (cf. T 48, 189 a01-a21).[22]

This *kōan* plays with two different manners of understanding Daowu's answer. It may appear that the master is unwilling of sharing his knowledge about the mysteries of death and life. Still, this is a very clear and effective reply to Jianyuan's question. Why is there such a misunderstanding? Because the disciple considers only the two possibilities of life or death and the answer *must* be comprised among this binary perspective. Hence, he does not consider what Daowu is really telling him. He is suspecting that his master is mocking him, or that he is jealously keeping a secret for himself. This is why his irritation reaches the point to hit his master on the way back. Actually, Jianyuan's question too is quite subtle and multilayered. On the one hand, he is worried for what must be done, what is the right thing to do, when facing the tragic fact of death. As Tanabe Hajime comments, if 'all that' is life, then there is no need to comfort the relatives and to practice mourning rites for people alive. If 'all that' is death, what is the sense of practicing mourning rites for the dead? (Tanabe 1959, 4) If all is life, then there is no death and therefore the funeral has no meaning. If all is death, then life has no meaning: we are bound to death and there is no sense in practicing. It is important to highlight that Jianyuan asks about a specific situation, while tapping on the coffin and asking: "is it life? Is it death?" This deictic and physical act is very important to understand the context in which the question is asked. He does not ask about generic concepts: "what is life? What is death?" or: "what kind of relationship is there among the two?" Tapping on the coffin, he simply asks: "life? Death?" In other words, he wants to solve the practical meaning of 'this' within a scheme of opposing values and definitions: life/death, good/evil, practice/attainment. Starting from these premises, it is natural that Daowu's answer does not satisfy Jianyuan. The words: "I do not say life. I do not say death" appears elusive to Jianyuan, who is frustrated and hits his master. Still, his master has answered. And not in an elusive manner, but in a very precise way. Or better, he answers obliquely, but without hiding anything. He just requires that Jianyuan goes one step further toward what he is saying, abandoning his binary logic. He does not refuse to answer, but only to give him an intellectual definition. Still, Jianyuan does not understand.

In order to clarify this point, we must return to Daowu's answer. With his oblique reply, he directs Jianyuan towards the true question and carefully

22 Hereinafter this kind of quotation system refers to Takakusu 1924-35.

avoids naming it 'life' or 'death'. This approach would define something and make us depend on an illusion. Daowu's negation is meant to help Jianyuan concentrating on the general inclination that urges the mind to search for definitions and concepts. Thus, the problem for Daowu is not 'life' or 'death', but 'saying' (ch. *dao* 道). In other words, the master is not concerned about physical or mental objects, but about the way of questioning (as it is known, *dao* in Chinese is also the 'way', the 'modality', the 'how' of something), which indicates our attitude toward the world. Daowu is actually warning his disciple not to think in terms of oppositions and discrete objects. In addition, he has indicated the orientation of this attitude: "I don't say. I don't say". What is he negating? Not language *per se*, but, rather, a certain use of language in which the search for abstract meaning (what in this essay has been defined as 'transfigurative' approach) is considered more important than 'this event' and its manifestation in front of us. Jianyuan, caught in the binary logic of essence, does not realise that 'this event' cannot be defined 'death' or 'life' without radically transforming its unique character and judging it as good or bad, desirable or hateful. This judgment radically transforms what we have in front of us into a case within a general theory. However, in doing so he does not watch at it, but only at his own hopes and fears. What really counts when facing death and life is that each death and life cannot be defined as simple 'life' or 'death'. Each life, each death does not fall into certain categories, but is 'wondrous' or, as we could say in modern philosophical words, each life and death are categories of their own. This could help to understand the sense of the dialogue between Shishuang and the awakened Jianyuan: Shishuang reminds Jianyuan of the vastness of the flowing universe, presumably admonishing him not to cling on any dead bones of any master and concentrating on present practice. Still, Jianyuan surprises the master with a different perspective: it is exactly because the universe is so vast and always flowing, that he is concentrating on his search of Daowu. A possible interpretation of such an answer could be that he is not interested in the general phenomena of the universe, no matter how vast and marvellous they may be. On the contrary, each single, tiny event really counts. This is the wondrous dimension of life-death *as* deliverance. Thus, he fully realises his master's words: no abstract, repeatable categories, valid for every death and life, but only unique events, each of which is a universe in itself.

9 Death in Dōgen's View

Another non-transfigurative Buddhist approach to death can be appreciated in the writings of Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253), founder of the Japanese branch of Chan Caodong (ja. Zen Sōtō) lineage. His attitude toward death is radically defined by the question of 'Buddha-nature' (sa. *buddhadhātu*,

ch. *foxing*, ja. *busshō*), conceived in terms of the possibility to awaken and become Buddha. From the perspective of ultimate truth, this possibility has often been defined as our eternal and true nature, which goes beyond our delusions and defilement. According to some ancient and recent interpreters, this idea of Buddha-nature is at risk of re-introducing a sort of substantiality in the otherwise anti-substantialist Buddhism.[23] Dōgen seems to side against the ambiguous approach of such alleged crypto-substantialists, but he does not identify the danger with a definite school or current or, even worse, with a cultural and geographic trait. On the contrary, he interprets it as the possibility of misunderstanding Buddha's teaching. This danger consists in thinking that Buddha-nature is a sort of permanent substance, a kind of trans-temporal and trans-phenomenal essence that survives death. In order to avoid such an erroneous interpretations, Dōgen straightforwardly defines Buddha-nature as 'impermanent' (ja. *mujō* 無常), as it appears in this passage from the "Shōji" chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*:[24]

> To seek Buddha apart from birth-death [*shōji* or *saṃsāra*] is like pointing the thrills of a cart northward when you want to go south to Yuezhou, or facing south to see the northern Dipper; it only furthers the conditions of birth-death and deprives you all the more of the way of deliverance [*gedatsu* or *vimokṣa*]. (Abe, Waddell 2002, 106)[25]

One important aspect of Dōgen's view of death is already defined in this short passage: death is not contradictory to life, but is dialectically, organically linked to it. In fact, he does not speak of simple death, devoid of life, nor of life detached from death, but always of 'life-death' or 'birth-death' (ja. *shōji* 生死), which is the translation of the Sanskrit *saṃsāra*. They cannot be considered apart from one another. This relationship between life/birth and death is coincident with Nāgārjuna's affirmation of non-duality

23 This tension between two potentially opposite theses in Buddhism concerning individual persistence after death is one of the historical and theoretical reasons for the development of the contemporary movement of the so called Critical Buddhism (*hihan bukkyō*). This movement, however, is too drastic in defining as 'non-Buddhist' those approaches that depend on the idea of the *tathāgatagarbha* or the 'Womb of Buddha' (the potential Buddha Nature present in all beings).

24 Actually, the chapter "Shōji" is not included in the list of 95 chapters of standard *Shōbōgenzō* and there are some doubts about its authenticity: for example, it lacks a colophon and the date of composition. However, it is part of the Sōtō school's official Honzan version of the work and its verses are extremely important in the school's ceremonies. See Abe, Waddell 2002, 105.

25 All the quotes from Abe and Waddell used the Author's translation of the Japanese term *shoji* as 'birth-death' instead of Abe and Waddell's original "birth-and-death". Furthermore, the *pinyin* romanization system has been used to write the toponym.

between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*, so much so that life-death is immediately Buddha-nature (ja. *shōji soku busshō* 生死即佛性). This implies that Buddha-nature is not a kind of substance that survives death, or a dimension that exceeds this world and grants a form of afterlife. Buddha-nature is not different from this world and should not be considered apart from it, as it is written in the "Hosshō" chapter from the *Shōbōgenzō*:

> To learn, in speaking of nature, that there is no flowing for water and no growth and perishing for trees is heresy. Śākyamuni Buddha said: "Such is form, such is nature". Accordingly, flowers' opening and leaves' falling are the nature of their "being so". Nevertheless, the fools think that in the world of True Dharma no flower opens, no leaf falls. (Dōgen 1969-70, 1: 417)

And again in the "Busshō" chapter:

> that the grasses, trees, thickets and groves are impermanent is the Buddha nature; that humans and things, body and mind are impermanent – this is because they are the Buddha nature. That the lands, mountains, and rivers are impermanent – this is the Buddha nature. *Annuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*, because it is the Buddha nature, is impermanent; the great *parinirvāṇa*, because it is impermanent, is the Buddha nature. All those with the small views of the two vehicles and the *tripiṭaka* master teachers of the *sūtras* and treatises should be "alarmed, dubious, and frightened" at these words of the Sixth Ancestor. If they are alarmed and dubious, they are grouped with Māra and the aliens. (Dōgen 2010, 12-3)

Here it is clearly stated that Buddha-nature is impermanent and Dōgen records the psychological reactions of those who believe in Buddha-nature's permanence. Their feelings of "alarm, doubt and fright" immediately define those who, being selfishly attached to their accommodating views about truth, afterlife, and death take up a defensive position and violently react to such a radical vision of impermanence. Such dualistic views are signs of delusional dispositions of mind. Hence, according to Dōgen, they vilify the Law of Buddha. According to Masao Abe, the very distinction between human beings and the other beings is one subtle, almost invisible form of dualism. Thus, a shift in Dōgen can be appreciated from the anthropocentric theme of life and death to the dimension of generation and extinction (typical of 'sentient beings', ja. *shujō* 衆生), to the cosmic level of appearing and disappearing, in which 'all beings' (ja. *shitsuu* 悉有) are considered in their "being-so". Only this perspective can properly face the problem of life and death, which is not different from that of appearance and disappearance of all things (Abe 1992, 42-4).

> We should realize that the 'being' that is here made [as] the 'entirety of being' by the Buddha-nature is not the being of being and non-being. The 'entirety of being' is the word of the Buddha, the tongue of the Buddha, the eyes of the Buddhas and ancestors, the nose of the patch-robed monk. Furthermore, the term 'entirety of being' is not initial being, not original being, not marvelous being; how much less is it conditioned being or deluded being. It has nothing to do with the likes of mind and object, nature and attribute. Therefore, the circumstantial and primary [recompense] of the 'entirety of being' of living beings is not by any means the generative power of karma, not deluded conditioned origination, not of its own accord, not the practice and verification of spiritual powers. (Dōgen 2010, 2)

Denouncing all forms of dualism in their being based upon delusional transfiguration of 'beings-as-they-are' into permanent substance, Dōgen overcomes every opposition between 'having Buddha-nature' (ja. *ubusshō* 有佛性) and 'not having Buddha-nature' (ja. *mubusshō* 無佛性), since they are both dichotomous visions that end in the 'eternalism' of the former or the 'annihilationism' of the latter. 'Buddha-nature as impermanence' (ja. *mujō busshō* 無常佛性) indicates a totally different perspective: it assumes beings in their 'being-so', without any transfiguration. Hence, death too, being dynamically related to life, 'is-so'. How can this idea be defined? I would focus my attention on the unspeakable and the unreachable character of beings. Both these negative characters are actually needed because of the (negative) relevance of the ego in the process of awakening. As a matter of fact, the ego tries to forcefully insert beings into a conceptual framework in order to exert control over them. Passions contaminate beings, perverting them from the perspectives of both ethics and theory. This contamination is the most subtle and difficult to sense, because we are used to it and the ego acts out of self-interest in making things appear as 'objective'. Still, the ego-contamination is the most crucial hindrance in the Way of Buddha, which consists in "forgetting the self and being awakened by all beings", as stated in the "Genjō kōan" chapter (Dōgen 1969-70, 1: 3).

A deep appreciation of Dōgen's understanding of death can be possible only reflecting on death and its relationship with the 'so' of things.[26] In Dōgen, this 'so' is expressed at least with two words: *nyorai* 如来 and *inmo* 恁麼. The first one is the Sino-Japanese translation of the Sanskrit substantive *Tathāgata*, or 'the one who emerges' (lit.'comes emerging') from the 'true reality of things' (sa. *tathātā*, ja. *shinnyo* 真如) (cf. Ishida 1997, 850). It is an epithet of Buddha and Dōgen, who follows a Chan-Zen custom and

26 This word is often translated as 'being-so', 'thusness' or 'suchness', but they seem too close to the substance or substrate of things, in an Aristotelian sense.

often refers to it as a question in which the adverb-verb nuance prevails. Moreover, *inmo* is adverbial. In other words, in Dōgen the nominal value of this 'so' is relatively weak and this works to the advantage of its adverbial value. This suggests that the question of 'singularity' of things does not depend on substantial subject as in Aristotle's *hypokeìmenon*. As a matter of fact, the 'so' of things is not an unchanging and stable substance, but is permeated by (if not equated to) the transitoriness of things. Dōgen's perspective is fully aware that the Buddhist question of the 'so' of things has a deep relationship with the knowing (but also and more fundamentally desiring) subject. This is the deceitful subject, which while seeing things, distorts them on the basis of its cravings and passions. Therefore, instead of questioning things, Dōgen is concerned about our attitude toward the world. Here, ethical questions acquire theoretical and cognitive nuances.

At the beginning of the "Busshō"[27] chapter Dōgen, inquiring the meaning of the phrase "all are living beings, all are the Buddha nature", answers by means of another question: "what is it that comes this way?". 'Coming this way' is another term for the word *nyorai* or *Tathāgata*. Answering to a question with another question may appear curious. Still, this strengthens the non-definitional approach to things, as it also appears in the "Inmo" chapter of *Shōbōgenzō*. It indicates – more than explaining – things in their 'coming-this-way'. In other words, it does not refer to their 'beings', but to their radically qualitative existence. Here, with 'radically qualitative' I mean their being so dense and special that no concepts may fit to them, given that concepts and words presuppose the commonality of rational concepts. The 'coming-this-way' of all beings is not subject to common definitions, because something that exists only once cannot be described with repeatable words and concepts.

The true character of things (*tathātā*) does indicate neither substance, nor hidden part manifesting itself in transient world from outside. All beings (*shitsuu* – not only *human* or *sentient* beings), just as they are, are *Tathāgata*. There is no distinction between transcendence and immanence, but Buddha-nature neither absorbs nor explains individuality: things 'are-this way' and everything is manifested in its being itself. There is no definitive answer to the question: "what comes this way?" On the contrary, all beings are a "what?", to which the only possible answer is the indexicality of "this!".

Such an indexicality is marked by a bodily act of indicating (which

27 Here, Dōgen comments the following passage of *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (ja. *Dainehangyō* 大般涅槃經): "all sentient beings without exception have Buddha nature. The *Tathāgata* residing in them forever has no change" (T 374, 12, 522c24). About this passage, according to Abe's reconstruction, "Dōgen dares to read this passage as follows: 'all is sentient being, whole-being (all beings) is the Buddha-nature; Tathāgata is permanent, non-being, being and change'" (Abe 1992, 35). This interpretation is not universally accepted, as it seems to force the text. On the various renditions of Dōgen's passage, see Tollini 2004, 53-5.

appears also in Jianyuan's *kōan*). This act makes immediately clear the individuality to which it is referred, but is completely lost in a context-free approach. This implies that, in order to grasp the meaning, the interlocutor must be included within the same concrete, physical horizon of the speaker and of the spoken. If we are comprised in such a horizon, our understanding is intuitive and very determined, being inextricably linked to that singularity. In other words, indexicality is marked by a bodily act (of the speaker) and implies the same physical horizon (the context) and physicality of the interlocutor, who must be located in that specific context in order to understand the message. Indexicality directs to the centrality of the physical dimension of things, which are appreciated in their 'so' because their 'physical individuality' lies where words break, like ocean waves on a rocky shore. As in a previously reported passage: "the 'entirety of being' is the word of the Buddha, the tongue of the Buddha, the eyes of the Buddhas and ancestors, the nose of the patch-robed monk" (Dōgen 2010, 2). The extremely physical character of these images are not only metaphoric. They express the strongly bodily dimension of the 'so' of things, their Buddha-nature, and contrasts with Platonic anti-bodily truth.

In the same passage, Dōgen admonishes that the being of all beings has nothing to do with the *distinction* between being and non-being (Dōgen 2010, 2). It is their 'so', their 'coming-this-way'. It is the ostensive being, whose qualitative character is too dense to be reduced to abstract categories (being or non-being) that move the question of things on a different, transcendent plane. In such a context, the mechanism of transfiguration (death's transfiguration included) collapses, because any 'elsewhere', which may function as a basis for this mechanism to work (for example, the 'general equivalent' in economic theories), has no access to things in their 'so' (ja. *inmo* 恁麼).

This 'so' is indifferent to both *saṃsāra* (ja. *shōji*) and *nirvāṇa* categorizations and should be neither preferred nor rejected. No preference at all should be given to either life, or death. Accordingly, when life and death are considered, we should go beyond any mercantilist idea of 'debit and credit'. Even more radically, beyond comparison itself:

> When there is life, there is nothing at all apart from life. When there is death, there is nothing at all apart from death. Therefore, when life comes, you should just give yourself to life; when death comes, you should give yourself to death. You should neither desire them, nor hate them. Your present birth-death itself is the life of Buddha. If you attempt to reject it with aversion, you thereby lose the life of Buddha. If you abide in it, attaching to birth-death, you also lose the life of Buddha and are left with only its outward appearance. You attain the mind of Buddha only when there is no hating of birth-death and no desiring of *nirvana*. (Abe, Waddell 2002, 106)

These words remind of the second-century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, a leading figure of the Mādhyamaka school of Mahāyāna, who after having demolished the theories that establish death and/or birth as prior, simultaneous or posterior, concludes: "wherever such methods of (discriminating) […] do not arise, why be obsessed by such birth and such decay-death" (Kalupahana 1986, 209).

Everything in this world is not cause or means of anything else. It is simply itself. It is an ultimate value in itself, or no value-system can be applied to it. Hence, life is its ultimate meaning and so does death. The correct attitude is this manner of being intensely alive or dying, without any *further* desire or hate, having let the ego fall:

> Just understand that birth-death itself is *nirvana*, and you will neither hate one as birth-death, nor cherish the other as being *nirvana*. Only then can you be free of birth-death. […] You only attain the mind of Buddha when there is no hating of birth-death and no desiring of *nirvana*. But do not try to measure it with your mind or explain it with words. When you let go of both your body and mind, forget them both and throw yourself into the house of Buddha, […] then with no need for any expenditure of either physical or mental effort, you are freed from birth-death and become Buddha. Then there can be no obstacle in anyone's mind. (Abe, Waddell 2002, 106-7)

Dōgen is clearly stressing the importance of practicing life-death, which is the best manner of being delivered from *saṃsāra*. The focal point of this practice is "letting go of both body and mind" (*waga mi wo mo kokoro wo mo hanachiwasurete* わが身をも心をもはなちわすれて), which is directly reminiscent of the concept of *shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落 or 'letting go body and mind' that appears in the "Genjō kōan" chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō* (Dōgen 1969-70, 1: 3). Only when the ego is not important anymore and is let go, can life and death be fully lived, in every single moment, for what they are.

10 Which End?

This essay was meant to discuss the distinction between two manners of interpreting the phenomenon of death: the transfigurative and the phenomenalist approaches. Although elaborated in different cultures and times, thanatology, if discussed accordingly, can reveal unsuspected similarities and differences. For example, Dōgen and Jankélévitch indicate two different manners of refusing death's transfiguration. They both affirm a-foundational haecceity or semelfactivity of life and death, although starting from respectively non-dual and dichotomous conceptions of life-and-death. The Japanese zen master considers them dialectically, whereas

the French philosopher reckons their total separation, which goes beyond even contradiction. The two are mostly distant in their stance toward the individual's relationship with death. In Jankélévitch, the individual and especially the first person is essential for knowledge. In Dōgen, that knowledge is delusional and the true world 'is so' when the self has been forgotten. Consequently, the relationship with death is radically different: Jankélévitch denies any possibility to know death, which remains the extreme limit of the ego (and therefore of knowledge). Dōgen's interest, more than in knowing death or life, lies in practicing death and life, as an indication of forgetting the self.

This comparison could pose an important question to philosophy: is renunciation the inevitable destiny of thanatology? Death appears as a mere limitation to the human will to know, like an existential thing-in-itself within Kantian limits. Differently stated, it seems impossible to conjugate both epistemic sense and existential involvement while dealing with death. Then, we are led to inevitably choose between two different and incompatible levels: generic but void knowledge of death in general, or dense but incommunicable awareness of one single individualised death. The epistemic perspective should remain confined to a general theory of death (and life), whose ethical consistence is all but proven. Although useful in generic contexts such as statistics and in some aspects of everyday life, any *speculation* about death should become a matter of individual choice, useful to the needs of those who are directly touched by this dramatic event. Still, in the penumbra of theoretical reason, ethical and practical commands should prevail over any other considerations, although considering the need for consolation. The existential dimension of death should not become an epistemic and metaphysical object, because its dense uniqueness would be stunned with generic, hollow indications.

However, this distinction between transfigurative and phenomenalist thanatology could prove to be not merely negative and may offer affirmative prospects in deepening each death's haecceity. Beyond Jankélévitch's thanatology, semelfactivity of death and life requires us to renounce to any superior meaning of death, but opens the path to an intense cognitive involvement, which is extremely physical and indexical, singular and affective. It demands to elect bodily life as a reference point of knowledge, overcoming any Platonic temptation. This phenomenalism apparently resembles Nietzsche's Zarathustra speech of "remaining faithful to the earth":

> Remain faithful to the earth, my brothers, with the power of your virtue! Let your bestowing love and your knowledge serve the meaning of the earth! Thus I beg and beseech you.
>
> Do not let it fly away from earthly things and beat against eternal walls with its wings. Oh, there has always been so much virtue that flew away!
>
> Like me, guide the virtue that has flown away back to the earth —yes,

> back to the body and life: so that it may give the earth its meaning, a human meaning. (Nietzsche 2006, 57)

Still, in comparison with Nietzsche, whose blunt exaltation of life should be approached with caution, if not with suspect (Lisciani Petrini 2009, xxiii), the centrality of meaning as it appears in Nietzschean philosophy should come to an end. In fact, as it is known, Zarathustra himself remembers that "the overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the earth!" (Nietzsche 2006, 6). This link between overman and meaning discloses the subjective roots of the theoretical problem of meaning, as well as of Nietzsche's own response to the question of nihilism (Ruggenini 1983). Contrary to this close relation between meaning and subjectivism, it could be possible to explore the possibility of facing death in its ambiguous uniqueness. This ambiguity implies death's resistance to the very question of meaning (and thus of subject). Dōgen's a-foundational idea of the 'so' of things does not simply mean to renounce to thinking, but to penetrate (and in turn to be penetrated by) the singularity of each life-death. This singularity is neither a transcendent truth – an ultra-meaning built upon a sign from beyond – nor an immanent truth – a resigned acceptation of the existent. Rather, it could be interpreted as *a middle truth* that can be appreciated only case-by-case and does not have any *a priori*, formal content, but only a radically qualitative, singularized character. Thus, the turn from epistemic thinking does not necessarily imply the end of any theoretical enterprise, as Dōgen exemplifies. Still, this practical involvement can find theoretical implications, only through a radical acknowledgement of the qualitative character of each life and each death.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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Discourses on Death-and-Life in Modern Japan and the Desire behind Them
Quest for the New Identity among Modern Japanese Elites

Susumu Shimazono
(University of Tokyo, Japan)

Abstract It was at the beginning of the 1900s that the term *shiseikan*, the 'view on death and life', was devised in Japan and many people became interested in the discourses on it. In the three decades from 1900 to the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in 1931, discourses on death-and-life showed some level of deepening. The author throws light on why discourses on death-and-life had spread around 1900, and then refined by the educated intellectuals in the following decades. The feature of the novelist Shiga Naoya's view on death-and-life is investigated. The process of Shiga Naoya himself overcoming serious crises of youth by squarely facing the guiding principle of his life and the problem of spiritual independence from his parents is described. Spiritual independence includes overcoming conflicts in human relations centring on one's family and accompanying moral questions, and searching to find one's proper position in relation to a lofty ideal and a transcendental dimension. In the process, the experience to attain a view on death-and-life and the creation of literary expressions to the view played a great role. It will be observed that views on death-and-life and their expressions have found suitable roles to play as elements for selfhood formation based on the inner selves of the modern intellectuals of Japan.

Summary 1 Emergence of Discourses on Death-and-Life around 1900. – 2 Identity Quest by Shiga Naoya. – 3 "Kinosaki nite" as a Novel Expressing View on Death-and-Life. – 4 View on Death-and-Life and the Awareness of Enlightenment. – 5 Lineage of Literature Describing Views on Death-and-Life. – 6 Inner Life-oriented View on Death-and-Life.

Keywords Shiseikan. Identity Quest. Shiga Naoya. Kinosaki nite. Selfhood. Leo Tolstoy.

1 Emergence of Discourses on Death-and-Life around 1900

It was at the beginning of the 1900s when the term *shiseikan*, 'the view on death and life', was devised and many people became interested in the discourses on it. The discourses on death-and-life in modern Japan came into being around that time, and were successively revitalised a second time during the Asia-Pacific War. Furthermore, there was a third rise since

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the seventies affected by the world-wide hospice movement that has continued to date (Shimazono 2003a, 2008).

In the three decades, from 1900 to the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War in 1931, discourses on death-and-life showed some level of deepening in the first period. I began preliminary consideration as to why discourses on death-and-life had spread around 1900, and what characteristics these discourses had by examining Katō Totsudō (1870-1949), who was the main actor to create and spread the term *shiseikan* (Shimazono 2003b).

Katō was born in a warrior family and learned Chinese classics as well as Buddhism. He gained a footing as a propagator of Buddhist teachings by writing books for the general readers, and later became a famous writer and a lecturer in moral instructions for ordinary people. In 1919, he gave as many as 230 lectures, and in 1924 he was elected a board member of the Federation of Edification Organizations, which was formed upon the "Imperial Edict on Lifting National Spirit" in 1923. It is understood that he was considered as an important leader to edify the nation by the government too. Being born into a warrior family, he had a feeling of familiarity with Japanese chivalry. He represented the group of people advocating that Japanese chivalry would develop into the national morality. This line was strengthened by the martyred death of Nogi Maresuke (1849-1912), former Army general, on the day of the funeral of the Emperor Meiji. After the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific war, this line of discourse gained a new vitality and became the dominant style.

However, it was not the only trend of discourses on death-and-life of that period. Another influential line of discourses was held by well-educated and literary people who were not forced to keep silent during the Asia-Pacific war. Even though they were not as influential as the aggressive and dominant trend, they had influence on the public to a certain extent. For example, the essay "Mujō to yu koto" (On the Idea of Impermanence) written by Kobayashi Hideo (Kobayashi 2002), strongly impressed many readers and continued to be widely read even after the war. In this essay, he quoted a passage from *Ichigon Hōdan* of the medieval Jōdo Sect that argued that "thinking about the impermanence of death and life (sa. *anitya* and *saṃsāra*), we should not worry about things in this world", and stated his thought that history is an act to remember (past happenings) in a clever way.

His discourse also contained the thought according to which only death could complete a human life. We should recall that *Ichigon Hōdan* is a typical medieval document on the view on death and life recommending the followers to contemplate death. It was an essay that showed a different way of describing a view on death and life when discourses encouraging young military servicemen to be prepared to die abounded. It cannot be ignored that this kind of discourses on death-and-life, which required a high level of education to understand the contents, exerted influence on

young people during the war. In the case of the critic Yoshimoto Takaaki, who frequently spoke on death after the eighties, it is natural to see the influence of Kobayashi's "Mujō to yu koto" behind his strong interest in *Ichigon Hōdan* (Yoshimoto, Ohashi 1996).

How then were these discourses on death and life developed in the world of *kyōyō* or 'education-oriented culture'? An early example can be found in the discourse on *hanmon* (agony), which aroused a public sensation in the early period of the development of education-oriented culture. In 1903 Fujimura Misao (1886-1903), a student at First High School, committed suicide by jumping into the Kegon Fall in Nikko. Fujimura was a son of a former budget examiner of the Ministry of Finance and a grandson of a Nanbu clansman. The suicide incident occurred soon after he entered First High School after graduating from Keihoku Junior High School, which was founded by Inoue Enryō (1858-1903). Reflecting Inoue's thought, who founded Tetsugakkan and Tetsugakudō (Philosophy House, later to be Tōyō University, and Philosophy Hall), Keihoku Junior High School emphasised philosophical education. Fujimura's uncle, Naka Michiyo, wrote an article to inform of his nephew's death in condolence saying,

> Fujimura Misao, son of my elder brother, was ambitious in his childhood, and wanted to pursue philosophy, the truth of the cosmos, in order to help people awaken from their illusions. He entered First High School last year and took a preparatory course in philosophy. He was not satisfied with the classroom study and devoted himself in studying philosophy, religion, literature and art. (Etō 1970, 253-5)

A prose, "At the Head of the Fall", carved on a tree above the Kegon Fall by Fujimura himself before he throw himself in the fall, surprised the public as it showed the philosophical motivation of his suicide:

> How wide is heaven and earth? How long is history? I tried to measure the greatness with my small body. Horatio's conventional philosophy finally was not proven to be worthy of authority. The truth of everything can be expressed in one word 'inexplicable'. I have been sick at heart with this quest and at last I determined to die. Standing at the fall, there is no anxiety in my heart. I realize for the first time in my life, great pessimism coincides with great optimism.

Horatio's philosophy here means practical and this-worldly thought of common people. Fujimura did not think it right to live a life occupied with miscellaneous matters in this world and tried to face the more important core of the transcendental truth. He finally realised that the ultimate 'pessimism' was the lack of meaning in life. On the other hand, he said that facing death was great 'optimism'.

This incident left the message that being determine to die and to face death would give one the answer to the ultimate question about one's existence, the meaning for living. There seemed to be a number of young people who sympathised with him and committed suicide in the Kegon Fall. Uozumi Setsuro (1883-1910), Fujimura's friend from junior high school days, left a written message sympathising with his death. In his words of condolence, he stated,

> I recall that I could not tell you about my thinking of dying when I fell into religious confusion in October last year, and in May this year, when you had a great question about death, you did not tell me about it. How could I imagine that today I would have to say my words of condolence? Upon hearing the news of your death, deep sorrow overwhelmed me, and I did nothing but think about dying. Death lured me and made me feel like dying again. If I had disclosed my anxiety last October, you might not have had to suffer from anxiety alone. Or, I may have jumped into the water together with you.

Later, Uozumi contributed an article entitled "On Suicide" in *Koyukai Zasshi*, a magazine of the Student Fraternity Association of First High School (May 1903), in which he said:

> I have three things that I can choose without being ashamed. They are insanity, suicide and faith. I approached the first two, but passed them by, and finally I arrived at the third to find relief. I once saw insanity and felt a shudder come over myself but I sent it away like sending a cloud away, then, I was tempted by death and suffered intense agony, however I managed to overcome it (I am grateful to my teachers and friends for their kind care and friendship). Finally, now I stand for faith after having cleared skepticism. (Uozumi 1974)

In short, he considered it right to face ultimate questions squarely, and even to be prepared to die or to commit suicide.

Uozumi was attracted to Uchimura Kanzō from earlier days and became a Christian, but suffered scepticism over the teachings. After graduating from First High School, he entered the University of Tokyo first majoring in German literature, then in Philosophy. He eagerly read Tolstoy's works. He advanced to the graduate school and resumed writing activities. He sympathised with Tsunashima Ryōsen, the author of *Yoga Kenshin no Jikken* (My Experience of Seeing God), and Nishida Tenkō, the founder of Ittōen training institute. He died in 1910 from illness. In those days, religious teachings and experience attracted many students. Religiously intelligent people who exerted strong influence on students were Uchimura Kanzō (1861-1930), Kiyosawa Manshi (1863-1903), Nishida Tenkō (1872-1968),

Tsunashima Ryōsen (1873-1907), Itō Shōshin (1876-1963) and Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910). While being conscious about death, Uozumi struggled to establish his identity as a pursuer of the truth and a student of philosophy by learning from these religious intellectuals. Despite this, suffering poor health, he passed away at a young age.

2 Identity Quest by Shiga Naoya

It was the novelist Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) who achieved sophisticated expressions of views on death-and-life and established himself in a prominent position in discourses on death-and-life in modern Japan. Together with Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Kinoshita Rigen and other friends from Gakushūin High School, he founded the literary magazine *Shirakaba* in 1910. He was among the leaders who launched a literary movement in the name of Shirakaba School including Arishima Takeo, Satomi Ton, and Yanagi Muneyoshi. Shiga was about the same age as Fujimura Misao and Uozumi Setsuro. He also seriously attempted to establish his own identity based on the education-oriented culture; but while he was living a scholarly life seeking after the truth, he fell into a severe inner conflict.

The president of Gakushūin School at that time was the former army general Nogi Maresuke, towards whom no one in the Shirakaba School felt a favourable feeling. Outside the group, Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai were shocked by Nogi's self-immolation following the death of Emperor Meiji, and respectively wrote *Kokoro* (Heart) and *Abe Ichizoku* (The Abe Family) with deep esteem and emotion towards Nogi. The young Shirakaba members did not seem to sympathise with the Japanese chivalry-oriented view on death-and-life represented by martyrdom. Honda Shūgo, who is known by his works on the Shirakaba School and Tolstoy, says in his *Shiga Naoya*:

> At the news of General Nogi's martyrdom, Mushanokōji Saneatsu commented that General Nogi's act was only praised by people with unhealthy reasoning affected by an ideology developed in an unhealthy time.[1] In Shiga's journal, he wrote that when he learned that Nogi committed suicide, he felt 'what a fool!' just as if one of his housemaids or other servants had done something wrong without thinking too much. (September 14, 1912) (Honda 1990, 66-7)

1 The article that Honda refers to is "Jinruiteki, Hu Nogi Taisho no Junshi" (On Universally Human, with Martyrdom of General Nogi), published in Shirakaba in November 1912.

Honda Shūgo commented on Mushanokōji's and Shiga's attitude as follows:

> They may have the unconscious sense of privilege of the graduates from Gakushūin. They discuss matters like the state, loyalty, and distinguished services quite lightly without adhering to old concepts. I do not agree with Mushanokōji and Shiga unconditionally. I just indicate the difference in thought between generations. Shiga Naoya was thinking that literature was the only work that was worthy of devoting his full energy, and thought that he would not care even if his life would be shortened in pursuit of this work. (Honda 1990, 67)

Mushanokōji and Shiga might have felt it strange that individuals would martyr themselves out of a sense of chivalry for the sake of the survival and honour of a specific organisation. They who wrote books making frequent use of 'I' wanted to establish their identity as individuals who devote themselves to the pursuit of the universal truth and hoped to come close to the universal truth through education, but not through religion and not as members of a specific group or organisation. They might have succeeded some spirit from warriors who had thought that there was something to respect beyond life in this world. Even if they were faced with the loss of transcendental values or 'nihilism', they never fell into pessimism to think that there would be no other way than committing suicide as Fujimura Misao did. They lost 'God' or 'Buddha' but found an alternative thing, such as 'nature' on which they were able to lean.

Even so, the notion of death sometimes played an important role. It was true with Shiga Naoya. He left behind novels that would represent discourses on death-and-life under the education-oriented culture in the Taishō period (1912-1926). Having experienced conflicts with his father and Uchimura Kanzō, Shiga's self-identity as an intellectual élite (literary person and artist), which was considered as the 'modern selfhood', grew through his experiences of facing death. It was in his novel "Kinosaki nite" (At Kinosaki, 1917)[2] that he depicted his 'experience of facing death', to clearly show the interrelation between the establishment of himself as an individual and a writer, and his view on death-and life.

Shiga experienced troubles with his father for a long time. He opposed his father, a businessman who wanted to exercise paternalistic power over his family members, and attempted to devote himself to the spiritual value that was central to the education-oriented culture. In his late teens, he was mentored by Uchimura Kanzō. Under the guidance of Uchimura, Shiga studied Christianity and tried to live away from the worldly life with

2 For the quotations from Shiga Naoya's "Kinosaki nite", I have used *Chikuma Nippon Bungaku 21 – Shiga Naoya* (Chikuma Japanese Literature 21 – Shiga Naoya). Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 2008.

the aim of seeking pure ethics. However, eight years later, he departed from Uchimura. He did not attend school and left Tokyo University. He could not become economically self-supporting. Further, as he could not stand the repression of sexual desire, he one-sidedly made up his mind to marry a household helper to have a sexual relation. This matter worsened his relation with his father and, consequently, he had to leave his home. He wrote an autobiographical novel, "Ōtsu Junkichi" (1912), depicting this process by featuring the hero's sexual torments and perplexity. This novel was published in the literary magazine *Chūō Kōron* around the time of Emperor Meiji's and General Nogi's deaths.

Later, Shiga married a different woman and had a child who died in infancy; on this occasion, he reconciled with his father. The process was written in the work "Wakai" (Reconciliation) in 1917. What changes occurred in his state of mind in these years? Reading through "Kinosaki nite", "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi" (A Man and his Elder Sister's Death, 1920), and *An'ya Kōro* (A Dark Night's Passing, 1919-37),[3] it appears that he experienced facing death, becoming acquainted with literary expressions about death. To overcome his youthful identity crisis and to set up his firm ethical identity (establishment of his selfhood), he owed much to his experiences with facing death, as well as to his ability to develop expressions of view on death-and-life.

3 "Kinosaki nite" as a Novel Expressing View on Death-and-Life

After his "Ōtsu Junkichi" was published in 1913, about one year after Emperor Meiji's and General Nogi's deaths, he was hit by a train and suffered a severe injury that made him think about death. This was described in the beginning of "Kinosaki nite":

> I was hit by a Yamate-line train and severely injured. To recover, I went to Kinosaki hot spa in Tajima all alone. If the injury on the back were to develop into vertebral tuberculosis, it would be fatal. But the doctor said that would not happen. If it would not develop so in two or three years, you should not worry about it, so said the doctor. Even so, he advised that I should take good care of myself. So, I came here. (Shiga 2008)

In "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", while he was on a tree branch, he was so surprised to see a snake trying to attack a bird nest on the tree that

3 For the quotations from Shiga Naoya's "Ōtsu Junkichi", "Wakai" and "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", I have used *Ōtsu Junkichi/Wakai/Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi*, Tōkyō: Iwanami Bunko, 1960. For the quotations referring to *An'ya Kōro*, see *An'ya Kōro*, Kadokawa Bunko, 1967.

he fell down from it. He was injured and blood seeped out from his head, thus he lost consciousness. He was carried to the hospital and stayed there for 20 days. While at hospital, he was worried about the injury on his back rather than that on his head. Even so, the psychological shock seemed to be great. In "Kinosaki nite", he said "my brain is not clear yet. I forget things more frequently. But I feel more tranquil than at any other time in recent years. I feel calm and comfortable" (Shiga 1960, 316). He depicted a state of mind in which 'sad', 'depressed' and 'calm' feelings were similar to one another.

A 'sad' concept is something like:

> With a little misfortune, I may have been lying down under the ground of Aoyama (urban grave garden in Tokyo), with a pale and cold face and with the injury on my head and on my back. The corpses of my grandfather and my mother are beside me, without communication among us. I imagine such a scene. It is sad, but the image does not scare me. It will become a reality someday. But when will it be? So far, I had thought that 'someday' would arrive far in the future. But now, I have come to think that 'someday' may come to me at any time. (Shiga 1960, 317)

He says that he is not frightened by this idea. However, he is thankful for his saved life or a sense of mission to make use of the saved life. Rather, this state of mind is combined with 'calmness'. "Strangely enough, my mind became calm. Somehow, an affinity toward death has developed in my mind" (Shiga 1960, 318).

In the following part of "Kinosaki nite", he explains the calmness of his mind with the consciousness of his own death and his "affinity toward death" while depicting the death and life of creatures that he observed at Kinosaki. The first one is a bee found dead on the roof of the entrance. "The legs were under the belly, the antennae were loosely down on the head". Then, "it rained heavily all through the night. It was all clear in the morning, tree leaves and the ground surface were washed away. There were no remains of the bee. […] Maybe it stays still somewhere covered with mud". And he repeats "it is so calm" (Shiga 2008, 319).

Next, he depicts a rat struggling to live. A rat was thrown into a river flowing into the sea:

> The rat is swimming very hard to find a way out of the water. A 20-centimeter long fish skewer is pierced through the neck. […] It managed to hold a rock with its front legs, but the skewer prevented it from climbing up. It fell into the water again. The rat is struggling to be saved. I could not see how its face looked, but from the movement of its body, I realized how hard it was trying to get away from the difficult situation. […] I did not want to see the last moment of the rat. But the way the rat

> was struggling at full power to find a way out from dying even though it is destined to die remained deeply printed in my mind. I felt sad and uncomfortable. I thought it was the reality. Before reaching the calmness that I seek, it is terrible that I have to go through agony like that. Even if I feel affinity to the tranquillity after death, I thought it scary to have to go through a struggle such as the rat before reaching death. Not knowing suicide, animals must continue their struggles to live until the last moment. (Shiga 2008, 321)

Then, Shiga asks himself how it was when he was hit by a train. He desperately looked for a hospital. "I thought it wonderful afterwards that my brain had worked to arrange the most important thing even though I was half-conscious at that time. It was a problem to know whether the injury was fatal or not. But it was strange that I was not attacked by the fear of death while wondering whether the injury was fatal or not". As a matter of fact, he was not told to have been fatally injured. But, any case, he was in a condition similar to that of the rat. He may or may not have become upset: "I might accept the situation as it is. I don't care whichever the case". And he says "It cannot be helped" (Shiga 2008, 322).

Finally, he refers to a newt in the stream along the road. In an attempt to surprise a newt on a stone and cause it to jump into the water, he threw a stone at it. The stone hits the newt and kills it. "I threw a stone but its death was accidental. For the newt, it was unexpected death. I stood still for a while. I felt I was alone with the newt, and I placed myself in its position and felt its emotion. I was sorry for it, and at the same time, I realized the sadness of a creature" (Shiga 2008, 325). He felt that the newt, which died by accident, and himself, who survived an accident, were interchangeable. Rather than being thankful for being alive or feeling sorry for the newt, he had the strong feeling that he was integrated with the dead one. He then concludes as follows:

> The light at the end of the town began to be seen. What happened to the dead bee? The rain at night may have put it under the ground. What happened to that rat? It may have flown into the sea, and the water-swelled body has been dashed against the shore together with other trash. Not having died, I am walking like this. I cannot help but be thankful for being alive. Even so, the emotion of joy has not surged from within myself. The facts of being alive and being dead are not two extremes, but I felt there was not much difference between them. (Shiga 2008, 326)

Shiga coolly tells his view on death-and life after having been faced with death in an accident while depicting the deaths of animals he observed in daily life in "Kinosaki nite". The work was evaluated as an essay or a novel describing his state of mind. He gained a certain type of view on death and

life through his life-risking experience, overcame the fear of death, and came to accept death as a phenomenon that happens around him. In short, the idea that the process that he has undergone is a certain kind of enlightenment, or that he has discovered the truth of death and life is suggested.

4 View on Death-and-Life and the Awareness of Enlightenment

At least for Shiga, the fact that he crystallised the experiences depicted in "Kinosaki nite" in a book was a great turning point in his life that allowed him to overcome his anxiety and conflict, and to live with a solid emotional mainstay. In the process of overcoming his perplexity, he seems to have been concerned about ethical problems and social ideological problems, and dealt with them as themes in other novels. Along with these concerns, overcoming the fear of his own death was more important. By writing "Kinosaki nite", it seems that he thought he had approached the quintessence of life enabling him to overcome the fear of death. This process becomes clearer by looking into "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi".

This novel illustrates the conflict between Shiga and his father after the occurrence of the incident contained in "Ōtsu Junkichi" as observed by the hero's younger brother. In "Wakai" the process of Shiga's reconciliation with his father is told. In the former work, the focus is placed on his sexuality and it is hard to understand why the conflict with his father has developed to such a serious point, as little reference is made to his father. In "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", the conflict between Shiga and his father is depicted more clearly. The conflict between the father and the hero (the elder brother Yoshiyuki) and the accident that made him face death are included among the various events that occurred in the hero's maturing process.

The elder brother left home, and he and the narrator (the younger brother Yoshizo) meet nine years later, on the occasion of their elder sister (Tokiko)'s death, who had left home in a small village in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture. The narrator is surprised to see that his elder brother with whom he is meeting after nine years has become a greatly mature person.

> Brother stared at my face with a nostalgic look. His eyes looked gentle and warm, even so, I felt a strange pressure being looked at in such a way. The look was far different from the timid way of walking with no confidence in himself that I saw when he left home. (Shiga 1960, 268)

The two brothers approach their sister's bed and then her dying process is described by the author. The author refers to the 'fear of death' and suggests that the elder brother has already overcome that fear.

> I felt it awful, more than fearful, that the whole life of a person would end like this. Anyone's death might be the same after one dies, but in this sooty wide room with a dark hanging lamp, there was no bright colour, and no colour or warmth was felt from her husband or mother-in-law. I felt the scene itself was a part of the land of the dead. (Shiga 1960, 271)

In the following passages, environmental differences between the rural house and the city hospital are described. Thereby, Shiga appears to suggest that they face the full reality of death because the environment is not artificial.

> But here, there was nothing artificial. I felt the fear of death as if I was going into infinite darkness, something that I feel when I go into sleep. Birds singing, insects flying, the sun shining, winds blowing, flowers blooming, dogs running, or children making noise: nothing came into mind which may happen again tomorrow. If death were eternal darkness, I felt that a human life would be dusk on a cold day on a height. At least, I felt that this was true with my sister. (Shiga 1960, 272)

However, the 'elder brother' is not possessed by the fear of death at all. For the narrator, who is the 'younger brother' stricken with the fear, the 'elder brother' began

> to be the only person he felt he could depend on. […] Particularly, his eyes looked as if he would not resist death nor would he be defeated. […] As a matter of fact, my brother looked at my sister, but he did not seem to be involved in the mood that held me captive. (Shiga 1960, 272)

Before the wake, the 'elder brother' leaves the place without any words. In the end of the novel, the whereabouts of the 'elder brother' are unknown. Learning that a person certainly considered to be the elder brother was in Mt. Daisen in Hoki (Tottori Prefecture), the narrator went there to find that it was not him. This episode reminds us of the end of *An'ya Kōro*. Its hero, Tokitō Kensaku, climbs Mt. Daisen and undergoes a mysterious experience. Being exhausted, Kensaku soon is laid up with serious illness. Just before that, he feels 'strange ecstasies':

> He felt that his mind and body were going to melt into this great nature. The nature is like an invisible vapour that embraces him as if he were as small as a poppy seed with its endless greatness. The feeling of being melted into nature, and the feeling of being reduced into nature gave him indescribable comfort. (Shiga 1967, 494)

It is implied that the ecstasies have an ideological meaning that would lead him to the state of mind able to overcome the fear of death:

> It was a quiet night, and no voice of night birds was heard. A thin mist covered down the mountain, and no light from villages was seen. What could be seen were stars and the line of the mountain that looked like the back of a huge animal. He was thinking that he had just stepped into a path leading to eternity. He did not feel any fear of death. He thought he would not have any regrets if he were to die in the next moment. But he did not think that stepping into eternity would mean death. (Shiga 1967, 494)

In *An'ya Kōro* the reason for Kensaku's visit to Mt. Daisen after being troubled with his wife's misconduct is like "leaving home to enter the priesthood" (Shiga 1967, 444). He is profiled to have a strong motivation to attain enlightenment. In "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", a narrow-minded 'father' is contrasted with a 'grandfather' as a person of integrity. This grandfather is depicted as becoming interested in Buddhism, especially in Zen Buddhism in his latter days (Shiga 1960, 204). The grandfather had "good eyes, calm and powerful eyes" and "he has never been seen with intensely shining eyes" (Shiga 1960, 205).

5 Lineage of Literature Describing Views on Death-and-Life

It was Itō Sei, a critic and writer, who presented an eminent interpretation of the views on death-and life contained in "Kinosaki nite". In his *Bungaku Nyūmon* (Introduction to Literature) (first print in 1954), he classifies novels into 'vertical' and 'horizontal' types, from the viewpoint of whether a novel intends to describe social relations or inner life. For the vertical type he further sees two sub-types, a descending type to shed light on life by depicting a downfall to death, and an ascending type to illustrate the light of life by placing oneself on the point near death or nothing. Itō discusses "Kinosaki nite" in detail as a work typical of the vertical-ascending type.

> Considering a person's life from the difference between dying and living as shown in this work, gives us an impression such as this: if we likened our life to the sea, a hero would go down to the bottom of the sea of 'death' and from there he would peep into the actual life of fish and seaweed under the sea and the shining water surface. Floating on the surface, we are concerned about the waves on the sea, and live trying to go faster than others and elbowing others out of the way in our horizontal relations, or condemning people who are behaving as they please in the name of morality. We forget what is at the bottom of ourselves floating

> on the sea or living in this world. By reading this kind of work, I feel that I can understand the fundamental state of life. (Itō 1986, 174-5)

Itō considers the novels of this vertical-ascending type as a method to "understand life and perceive our presence clearly when one is conscious about death or nothingness" (Itō 1986, 184). He says that this is frequently used by Japanese artists. He then lists "Aru Gakeue no Kanjō" (Emotion on the Top of a Cliff) (1928) by Kajii Motojirō, "Kaze tachinu" (The Wind has Risen) (1936-38) by Hori Tatsuo, "Mushi no iroiro" (Various Kinds of Bugs) (1948) by Ozaki Kazuo, and "Aka Gaeru" (Red Frogs) (1946) by Shimaki Kensaku. In these short stories, the scenes of death of people or animals are depicted, or the hero is assumed to be dying. The common point in these works is the reflections made by authors about their own life and the consciousness of being in an uneasy state, while they were going through an illness (Itō 1986, 185).

Itō argues that these works are based on relatively simple matters that many people may experience.

> Even a person who lives a profit seeking life, once he gets ill and is in bed with an idea of approaching death, he would think as follows. "I will leave this world before long. I will no longer be able to see the cloud, or leaves on the trees". Looking at a bug crawling, he would watch how it crawls and consider what the bug lives for. Or he may think that his life is as momentary as that of this bug, and that he may die on the next day, or the day after just as the bug.
>
> Then the way one bug moves is no longer a problem which does not leave him unconcerned. All his attention is focused on its movement. At this moment, he becomes aware of a bug, or a leaf with a sense of their presence. (Itō 1986, 165-6)

When we have to withdraw ourselves from our activities and human relations in this world because of fatal diseases or injuries, we attain the peace of mind based on resignation. Itō comments that "Kinosaki nite" and other series of works are works that illustrate this psychology with artistic sophistication and give expression to the peace of mind based on resignation as well as the perception of the brilliance of life.

Itō further comments that this psychology corresponds to the ideological tradition of withdrawal from ordinary life in the East. Europeans excel in literary expressions to illustrate horizontal human relations and to enhance the relations into an ideal state, which corresponds to Christian morality focusing on ego and love for others. On the other hand, thoughts in the East lack social morality and tend to idealise people who have withdrawn from and lived away from ordinary life. In the tradition of secluded people and wanderers as observed in Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism or Japanese

religions and poems, no standpoint has been taken to give insight into horizontal social relations to pursue an ideal. Because of this, "people in Japan have developed over a long time vertical type emotions, or a perception based on the consciousness of nothingness and death" (Itō 1986, 191).

Yet, Itō also says that "I do not mean that western writers are not capable of perceiving presence by means of nothingness" (Itō 1986, 191). As an example, in *War and Peace,* Tolstoy illustrates the peace of mind that Nicolai Rostov has attained by being faced with death on a battlefield. Tolstoy makes many people appear in his works and capably draws complicated horizontal human interactions, while at the same time, "he expresses the presence of life based on the fundamental consciousness of nothingness" (Itō 1986, 194). Because of this, Tolstoy is a great writer.

Itō's analysis grasps the distinctive feature of "Kinosaki nite" as a novel depicting the view on death-and-life. As Itō points out, poets in the past including Saigyō (1119-1190), Kamo-no-Chōmei (1155-1216) and Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694) were always conscious about humans as beings destined to die, and trying to express delicate emotions in the depths of people living under the shadow of death. It can be said that facing death along with a view of life as something transient and empty has long existed in the mainstream of Japanese literature. In modern literature, the traditional expressions of transiency on the premises of lamenting the shortness of life have little appealing power. As Itō indicates, there was the self-destructive personal novel style in which the author is nearly in the state of seclusion. However, this style differs from the lineage of emptiness' view of life. Conversely, describing situations closed to death due to illness or injury, it shows the brilliance of life in comparison with transiency and a perspective of a short life.

"Kinosaki nite" is positioned at the initial stage of this lineage of literature. As mentioned before, Shiga Naoya later attempted to associate the state of mind that he had attained in writing this novel with Buddhism, in particular Zen Buddhism. It may show that he intuitively realised that the state of enlightenment by withdrawing from this world would be linked to Oriental or Japanese religious tradition. It is also interesting to note that among the drafts before publishing "Kinosaki nite", there was one titled "Inochi" (Life). The term *inochi* is used when life is understood in relation to a transcendental dimension, hence this novel is a good early example whereby this use of the word was attempted.

6 Inner Life-Oriented View on Death-and-Life

The feature of Shiga Naoya's view on death-and-life that was established in "Kinosaki nite" has been developed through "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi" and *An'ya Kōro*. These two novels are the stories of the heroes' growth as well as the stories of heroes involved in the attempt of establishing their

self-identity. They embody the Shiga's endeavour to overcome serious crisis risen in his youth, finding the guiding principle of his life and coping with the problem of achieving spiritual independence from his parents, which ultimately results in attaining a firm social and mental position. Although it is not clearly expressed in these works, it is implied that by social independence Shiga means the stable married life and that social position he has become able to reach as a writer.

Spiritual independence includes overcoming the conflicts in human relations centring on one's family and accompanying moral questions, and searching to find one's proper position in relation to a lofty ideal and a transcendental dimension. In the process, the experience of attaining a view on death-and-life and the creation of literary expressions related to that view played a great role. In the three novels the heroes confront death experiences and allay the fear of it. Through this process, they acquire hints to come close to the ideal and something like transcendence. The result shows up through either the calmness of their minds or their confident attitudes. Therefore, the acquisition of a view on death-and-life is an important indicator of spiritual independence.

In "Kinosaki nite" only the experiences of facing Shiga's own death and its overcoming are described. For this reason it is said to be a novel about a view on death-and-life. However, in the other two novels, "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi" and *An'ya Kōro*, the experience of achieving the view on death-and-life and the expression of that view are contained in the framework of the story, which pivots on the establishment of one's selfhood. In other words, the view on death-and-life is treated as a component of growth stories or selfhood establishment stories. Supposedly, there is an inclination to establish one's own identity through 'philosophy', 'literature' and 'art' in modern education-oriented culture. Shiga Naoya attained a serious experience of death-and-life and gave shape to that experience against the cultural background.

In education-oriented culture, the self-identity of modern intellectuals (literary élites) is considered to be important and developed on the basis of one's inner self. The inner self is developed, most typically, through reading, religious experience and art experience. In "Kinosaki nite", "Aru Otoko, Sono Ane no Shi", and *An'ya Kōro*, the author's serious death-and-life experience and its expression are playing more important roles while the firm self-identity based on his inner self is taking shape. It is observed here that views on death-and-life, as well as their expressions, have found suitable roles to play as elements for selfhood formation based on intellectuals' inner selves.

As Itō notes, the death-and-life experience that Shiga shaped is not limited to an experience of intellectuals pursuing their inner selfhood, but rather it is an experience that can be widely sympathised with by many people of different social status. This is particularly true of "Kinosaki nite"

in which the framework of the growth story is least visible. Itō comments, "a seriously sick person lying in bed looks up at clouds, the sea, flowers, or tree leaves while thinking he would die before long, he may find these things to be extremely beautiful" (Itō 1986, 164). This comment comes home to everyone. However, it depends greatly on the social relations, or the horizontal element in Itō's words, of the author as to what he picks up from the experience of facing death and what elements he emphasises.

In the works of Shiga Naoya, tranquillity and a calm mood are keynotes, and also the overcoming fear of death is stressed. Hence, a optimistic idea, since the misery of death and the reality of death that are beyond the control of living persons are slighted. It is implied that there is a transcendent meaning in his works that is common to Zen Buddhism. Shiga's social position as a person who experienced suffering and finally developed his individuality after a great deal of struggle is inseparable from his literary work's contents.

Then, can Shiga's novels be said to be pursuing the realities of death and life and overcoming the restriction imposed by his social status as mentioned above? Does he describe a dimension where various kinds of death and life can be compared, while relativizing his own death-and-life experience in relation to others? Perhaps, he does not do this. Let us put it another way: does Shiga's death-and-life expression have an aspect that suggests expansion into various death-and-life experiences of people in those days, beyond individuals in a specific social position? It must be said that something is missing in Shiga's works to ask the broad meaning of his own death-and-life experience as an educated person or an intellectual, in comparison with death-and-life experiences of people in other social strata or any individuals in the wider society.

As Itō Sei says, he repeatedly illustrates individuals facing death and puts them in a tapestry of various people with different ways of thinking at diverse positions in society. As shown in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, many people living in modern society can hardly overcome tragic deaths, even with the support of Christian faith (Tolstoy 2008). Allegedly, Shiga Naoya's discourses on death-and-life have been formed under the influence of Tolstoy (Abe 2008). Both social elements and comparison with other people are incorporated into death-and-life discourses later on in modern Japan. The works by Miyazawa Kenji and Yoshida Mitsuru are examples, which will be examined on other occasions.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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Negotiating the Unusual, Classifying the Unnatural
The Reporting and Investigation of Medical-related Deaths in England and Japan

Louella Matsunaga
(Oxford Brookes University, UK)

Abstract This chapter compares the Japanese system of reporting and investigating medical related deaths with the coronial system as practiced in England and Wales, focusing on the categorisation of deaths as 'unnatural' or 'unusual' – terms which have become increasingly problematic, ambiguous, and difficult to apply in a context of rapidly changing medical technologies. The chapter examines the legislation and institutionalised frameworks for investigation of medical related deaths in Japan and in England and Wales, and uses this material to cast light on broader issues. Some key questions here are definitions of 'natural' and 'unnatural' and the ways in which the idea of 'culture' may be deployed in debates over the classification and appropriate investigation of medical related death. The chapter also considers variations in notions of personhood and agency, and understandings of the body, and the ways in which globalised systems of knowledge, in this case medical and legal understandings of the body, and of death, may be refracted and negotiated in particular local settings.

Summary 1 Background: Finding the Field. – 2 Japan. – 2.1 Negotiating 'Unusual' Death. – 2.2 Informed Consent: Agency, Autonomy, and the Importance of the Family. – 2.3 Attitudes of Relatives to Death Investigation and Autopsy. – 2.4 Summary: Issues Surrounding the Reporting of Hospital Death in Japan. – 3 England and Wales: 'Unnatural' Death and the Coroner. – 3.1 Legal Framework. – 3.2 Defining an "Unnatural Death". – 3.3 Reporting Deaths to the Coroner. – 3.4 Coroners and Medical Staff: Communication Issues. – 3.5 Coroners and Bereaved Relatives. – 3.6 Autopsy and Beliefs Concerning the Treatment of the Body. – 3.7 Holding an Inquest. – 4 Conclusion. – 4.1 Autopsy and Attitudes to the Body. – 4.2 Processes of Decision Making and the Role of the Family. – 4.3 Institutions, Individuals, and Discourses of Cultural Difference.

Keywords Death. Personhood. Body. Natural. Unnatural. Coroners. Autopsy. England. Japan.

In comparing the Japanese system of reporting and investigating medical-related deaths with the coronial system as practiced in England and Wales, the similarities in the dilemmas faced are striking.[1] In both

1 The present work refers to death investigation systems in place in England and Japan as of July 2016. As this is a rapidly changing field, further changes in the formal frameworks of these systems will undoubtedly have taken place between the time of writing and publi-

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cases, advances in medical technology have led to a situation where existing categories of 'unnatural' or 'unusual' become increasingly problematic, ambiguous, and difficult to apply. At the same time, the growing complexity of medical care, and the number of different individuals, systems and procedures involved in the processes of testing, diagnosis, and medical treatment, have probably led to an increased potential for (possibly fatal) errors. Legislation and institutionalised frameworks for investigation of medical-related deaths in both countries struggle to keep pace with these changes. And questions of bioethics, notions of personhood, the role of the bereaved family, and beliefs concerning the body and the process of death are also important concerns in both Japan and the UK.

In this article, I compare the two systems in order to address two main objectives. Firstly, I seek to examine and compare the differing ways in which these common problems are addressed in these two settings, exploring the contrasts and similarities between them in terms of institutional and legal frameworks, as well as in the broader socio-cultural context. Secondly, I seek to use this material to cast light on broader theoretical issues: some key questions here are definitions of 'natural' and 'unnatural' and the ways in which the idea of 'culture' may be deployed in debates over the classification and appropriate investigation of medical-related death, as well as variations in notions of personhood and agency, and understandings of the body. More broadly, I explore the ways in which globalised systems of knowledge, in this case medical and legal understandings of the body, and of death, may be refracted and negotiated in particular local settings.

The issues raised here echo broader concerns of medical anthropology, more specifically those foregrounded in some other recent anthropological work focusing on rapidly changing medical technologies which span both medical and legal domains. Some key works here are Strathern (1992), Edwards et al. (1999), Franklin (1997, 2003), and Franklin and Roberts (2006) on new reproductive technologies and kinship; Franklin and Lock (2003) on the "remaking of life and death" in the context of an anthropological examination of the biosciences; and Franklin, Lury, and Stacey (2000) on globalisation and understandings of nature and culture. Margaret Lock's work (1997, 2001, 2002, 2005) has been very influential not only in the anthropology of Japan, but also in medical anthropology more generally.

Lock's work on organ transplantation and the contested notion of brain death is of particular relevance to this paper. Lock highlights the diversity of opinion within Japan and North America on these issues, and also takes a critical look at the assertion within Japan by one particularly vocal strand of opinion that Japanese aversion to organ transplantation can be

cation. However, as argued below, the underlying issues identified here are long standing ones, and the debates explored are likely to remain of relevance to researchers on this topic.

explained in terms of 'tradition', or culturally specific beliefs concerning the body. This is contrasted by these same commentators with "the perceived cultural vacuum of America […] this dearth of 'culture', in their opinion, facilitates the implementation of medical technology without regard to ethical and moral implications" (Lock 2002, 5). In fact, Lock demonstrates convincingly that the situation is far more complex than this opposition suggests, and that the history and practice of organ transplantation in North America, as in Japan, has been influenced by a range of factors, therefore certainly does not proceed in a cultural vacuum.

Similarly, in my discussions with medico-legal specialists in Japan, I often encountered the assertion that the Japanese have a particular resistance to autopsy because of their beliefs concerning the body. This was coupled with the assumption that no such resistance would exist in England, which tended to be perceived in a rather similar way to Lock's remarks on (some) Japanese perceptions of America, as an implicitly 'culture-free' zone, where medical investigations could proceed unimpeded by such considerations. The material presented below echoes Lock's findings for attitudes to organ transplantation, in that it seems that attitudes in both England and Japan regarding autopsy are more complicated than this imagined opposition of the two would suggest. The appeal to cultural difference as a means of resistance to autopsy can be found in England as well as Japan, in part reflecting the cultural diversity of contemporary British society. And in Japan (as in England) opinions on autopsy are divided, and it is by no means clear that all opposition to autopsy in Japan is based on culturally specific beliefs concerning the body.

Another important aspect of Lock's work which relates to the material presented in this paper is the question of what is 'natural' where death is concerned. As Lock (1997, 2002) points out, the idea of a 'natural death' is far from self-evident; this point has become particularly problematic with the introduction in recent decades of the category of brain death in the context of organ donation. More broadly, although the dominant view of 'nature', particularly in the context of modern scientific and biomedical discourses, has become that of something objective and independent of culture, in fact our perception and understanding of what is natural is always filtered and influenced by a range of factors which can be viewed as cultural (we might include here language and education, for example, as well as broader socially accepted regimes of knowledge).

Our understanding of what is natural therefore varies, depending in part on both historical and socio-cultural context.[2] Franklin, Lury and Stacey (2000, 1), in a volume on globalisation and shifting notions of nature

2 There is an extensive literature on this topic. On the concept of nature in the English language see for example Williams 1976, 1980; on varying notions of 'nature' in the context of the environment see Ellen and Fukui 1996, Weller 2006; on historical shifts in European

and culture discuss "the power of nature, not as a static concept or even as a flexible sign, but rather as a shifting classificatory process", while Lock (2002, 51) argues for 'empirical investigation' of the ways in which boundaries between the natural and cultural are constituted "in specific historical and geographical locations", while also underlining the fluidity of these boundaries in the light of technological transformations.

It is useful to bear these comments in mind when examining the ways in which medical-related death is classified and investigated in England and Japan. The debate over the definition of 'natural' is not simply of theoretical interest here: from the point of view of the two countries' respective legal systems, the key question in determining whether or not a death should be investigated is whether the death was 'unusual' (Japan) or 'unnatural' (England and Wales). The ways in which the process of death investigation is negotiated in practice also relates to areas noted by Lock as important in the context of organ donation, in particular the interaction between bereaved relatives and medical and legal professionals, and also concepts of the body and its (in)alienability after death. This is thus a topic where a number of perspectives and domains of interest intersect – anthropological, medical and legal – and where the issues raised have important theoretical and practical implications. This article aims to contribute to these wider debates.

1 Background: Finding the Field

The impetus for the research presented here arose initially not from a theoretical perspective but from a practical one. In the early 2000s, in Japan there was a growing concern that the causes of deaths, in particular preventable deaths, in hospitals were not being adequately investigated, and that important lessons about patient safety and risk management were therefore not being learned. This concern was exacerbated by a number of high profile cases of medical error which were widely reported in the Japanese press from the late nineties onwards. The first of these cases to attract widespread media coverage involved the death of a patient from the accidental injection of disinfectant at Hiroo hospital in Tokyo in 1999. [3] The repercussions of this case in particular were significant, and led to a debate over the interpretation of the law relating to the reporting of death, and calls for changes in practice regarding the reporting of medical-related deaths.

conceptions of nature see Teich, Porter and Gustafsson 1997; on Japanese images of nature see Asquith and Kalland 1997, as well as the work on new medical technologies referred to above.

3 See Kishi et al. 2010 for an analysis of changes in the reporting of medical-related events in the Japanese press since the nineties. The authors note a sharp rise in the number of newspaper reports on medical error after the Hiroo incident (Kishi et al. 2010, 33).

In the course of this debate on the reform of the death reporting system in Japan, a particular focus has been the requirement in article 21 of Japan's Medical Practitioners Law, which requires physicians to report any 'unusual death' (*ijōshi*)[4] to the police. Until the late nineties, this provision had attracted little attention, and had not been generally interpreted as applying to medical-related deaths. However, in the Hiroo case, the director of the hospital was prosecuted, and eventually convicted, of violation of article 21, as well as falsification of the death certificate (Higuchi 2008, 258-60). Since this case, article 21 has become the centre of an intense debate on death reporting in Japan, with a number of commentators pointing out that the obligation to report an 'unusual death' to the police, combined with the absence of any independent mechanism for investigating medical-related deaths, acts as a disincentive to doctors to report such deaths, as it would make them potentially subject to a criminal investigation (Yoshida et al. 2002, Yoshida 2005, Ikegaya et al. 2006). This in turn has serious implications: it seems likely that some cases of medical error are not being reported, and lessons are therefore not being learned (Yoshida 2005); and there is also evidence that high-risk patients are being turned away from hospitals because of anxiety among medical providers that such cases may ultimately involve the hospital in a criminal investigation if the treatment provided is unsuccessful (Starkey, Maeda 2010, 4).

Some important recent initiatives have therefore centred around the suggestion that an independent system for investigating medical-related deaths should be established to replace the current criminal investigation system. In September 2005, a small scale independent investigation system, the Model Project for the Investigation of Medical Practice-Associated Deaths was launched on a trial basis. This was initially in four areas of Japan (Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Kobe) in which a medical examiner system existed, and later expanded to cover ten areas (Nakajima et al. 2009).[5] And in 2008, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare proposed a new 'third party' system of death reporting, whereby instead of reporting patient deaths to the police, as required under the provisions of article 21, doctors would report to a 'Medical Safety Investigation Committee' which would include pathologists, internists and lawyers as well as patients' representatives (Starkey, Maeda 2010, 4).

In 2010, this resulted in the establishment of the Japanese Medical Safety Research Organisation, later in October 2015, a new medical ac-

4 *Ijōshi* is often translated as 'unnatural death' in the literature and by professional bodies – for example, this is the translation used by the Japanese Society of Legal Medicine on their website. This is consistent with the terminology used in the English legal system, as discussed in greater detail below. However, here I have preferred to use the more literal translation of 'unusual death'.

5 See also Fukayama's 2008 review of the model project.

cident investigation system came into effect, establishing independent centres (Medical Accident Investigation and Support Centres) whose role is to investigate 'unforeseen' deaths caused by medical treatment referred to them for investigation by medical institutions. However, there are significant ambiguities in this new system: it is not clear what constitutes an 'unforeseen' death; at the time of writing article 21 remains in force with considerable uncertainty as to which deaths are meant to fall under the remit of the new system, as well as to which should be classified as unusual deaths falling under the scope of article 21. The suggestion is that article 21 should be interpreted as having a much narrower scope than previously, but this remains to be clarified.

Trying to establish an independent investigation system, concerned Japanese professionals, working together with the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, have been interested to examine independent systems of death investigation used in other countries, notably the coronial system which is used in a number of countries, including the UK, and considering what aspects of such systems might be suitable for introduction in Japan. As a part of this background research, Professor Yoshida, a forensic pathologist working at the University of Tokyo closely involved in the model project for the investigation of Medical Practice-Associated Deaths in Japan, asked me to look at the coroners' system of England and Wales, and consider what aspects of this system might be transferable to Japan.

Between 2005 and 2007, I undertook a preliminary study for this project, focusing on coroners' offices in England and Wales.[6] As part of this research, I conducted in-depth interviews with six coroners, two of whom had both medical and legal qualifications, with the remaining four having only legal qualifications,[7] and one coroners' officer in various regions of England, I also attended several coroners' inquests, plus one autopsy. In addition I interviewed several hospital doctors and one bereavement officer.[8] I did not approach any bereaved families for this study, but I have consulted documents produced by organisations representing bereaved

6 I gratefully acknowledge the support of Professor Yoshida, and of the Daiwa foundation and the Sasakawa foundation for this project.

7 Until June 2013, coroners could have either medical or legal qualifications, though in practice a large majority had only legal qualifications. From June 2013 all newly appointed coroners must have legal qualifications, although existing coroners with only medical qualifications are able to retain their current posts. The minimum qualifications for coroners in England and Wales are discussed further below.

8 Although I have not identified them by name in order to preserve their anonymity, I am very grateful to all the coroners, coroners' officers, and medical professionals who gave so generously of their time, and provided invaluable insights into the death reporting and investigation system in England and Wales.

families as well as other published reports in order to gain an insight into their perspectives. Professor Yoshida also generously made available to me the results of his team's research in Japan, which I have drawn on in the section on Japan below.

This research was conducted at a time when the English system of death investigation was also under public scrutiny following a succession of high profile scandals in the later nineties, which raised questions about the reporting and investigation of medical-related deaths. Some key events in UK were the public inquiry launched in 1998, regarding the high death rate in children undergone cardiac surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary between 1984 and 1995 – the Royal Liverpool Children's Inquiry, set up in 1999 following the organ retention scandal, centering on the Institute of Child Health at Alder Hey in Liverpool – and the Shipman Inquiry carried out from 2001 to 2005, into the case of Harold Shipman, a general practitioner (GP) who was convicted in 2000 of the murder of 15 of his patients. [9]

Taken together, these inquiries raised serious questions about aspects of death reporting and certification, and also the treatment of bodies, in particular with regard to post mortem examinations and the retention of human tissue. All these are issues that concern the coroner under the system currently deployed in England and Wales, therefore in light of these scandals the coronial and death registration system came under review in England, as did the treatment of human tissue. In 2003 the Luce Report, "Death Certification and Investigation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland: The Report of a Fundamental Review" was published, followed the year after by the Human Tissue Act, regulating the removal, storage, and use of human organs and other tissue, ultimately replacing the Human Tissue Act of 1961 and the Human Organ Transplants Act of 1989. The Human Tissue Authority was established as licensing and regulating authority in order to oversee the implementation of this Act.

Also in 2004, the British government published a position paper on the reform of the Death Registration and Coronial System, followed by a draft Coroners' Bill in 2006. The draft bill came under criticism from both the Coroners' Society of England and Wales and the British Medical Association, resulting in some changes to the proposals and a further period of consultation and discussion. The resulting Coroners and Justice Act was eventually passed in 2009, but subsequently underwent further modification,[10] with a further period of consultation on the Bill in 2012. A set of revised

9 For further details see reports listed in the "Websites, reports, legislation and statistics" section of the bibliography.

10 For example, the newly established post of Chief Coroner was first scrapped, as part of a programme of government cutbacks in 2010, and then reinstated, with the first Chief Coroner appointed in May 2012 (Palmer 2012).

coroner rules and regulations, and a new statutory framework for coroner investigations and inquests, were implemented in July 2013.[11]

The early 2000s, then, was a period when the process of death reporting and investigation, particularly in regard to medical-related deaths, came under intense public scrutiny both in Japan and in England. Both systems have been heavily criticised and have been undergoing major change, a process that is continuing.

The initial research for this paper was largely conducted prior to the recent legislative reforms outlined above. But despite recent legislative changes, the material presented here remains relevant, partly in so far as it relates to informal processes of decision making and negotiation within the two systems, but also because in part the reforms have left many key features of the two systems intact, as I argue further below.

The key issue addressed here is that of how decisions are reached regarding which medical-related deaths should be reported and investigated within the two systems. On what basis is this decision made? How does the decision making process differ in Japan and in England, and how does this relate to the different institutional and legal frameworks in the two countries? What ambiguities and points of tension arise in the reporting and investigating systems? The next section of this paper discusses the system of death reporting and investigation of medical deaths in Japan, followed by a discussion of the situation in England. In the concluding section I compare the two, and reconsider the broader theoretical issues identified at the beginning of this paper in the light of this material.

2 Japan

2.1 Negotiating 'Unusual' Death

As noted above, article 21 of the Medical Practitioners' Law in Japan states that all 'unusual deaths' (*ijōshi*) must be reported to the police within 24 hours. However, there is some debate over what constitutes an unusual death, particularly in the context of medical-related deaths, since the category of *ijōshi* is not defined by law. Article 21 has been part of Japanese law since 1874, but understandings of 'unusual death' in court decisions, academic opinions, and government statements, have shifted over time. Pre-war, the Supreme Court defined unusual death as "a death in any situation that caused doubt as to simple death by disease" (cited in Higuchi

11 At the time of writing a post implementation review was underway to assess the impact of these changes.

2008, 259).[12] In 1981, the Ministry of Health and Welfare explained that article 21 existed to facilitate the detection of crime, as doctors would be in a position to observe signs of crime in bodies that they examined: "Since dead bodies or stillborn babies sometimes show signs of crimes including murder, assault resulting in death, damage to a corpse, and criminal abortion, for the convenience of the police, obligation to report such unusual cases has been prescribed" (cited in Higuchi 2008, 259).[13]

As Higuchi (2008) notes, there is no mention here of possible medical error or negligence. However, in 1994 the Japanese Society of Legal Medicine (JSLM) suggested that the category of 'unusual death' should comprise "all deaths except those for which there is firm evidence that the death resulted from an internal disease process" (Japanese Society of Legal Medicine 1994).[14] The JSLM divides such deaths into a number of possible categories, including unexpected or suspect deaths associated with medical practice. Criteria listed by the JSLM on their website for considering a medical-related death as 'unusual' are:

- When the death occurred either during, or relatively soon after a medical procedure such as: injection, anaesthetic, operation, medical examination/test, childbirth
- When the medical procedure itself may have contributed to the death
- When the death occurred suddenly during, or immediately after a medical procedure and the cause of death is unclear
- When there is a possibility that there may have been a medical error or medical negligence

In 1995 the Ministry of Health and Welfare endorsed these guidelines (Higuchi 2008, 259), however, they have been criticised by the Japan Surgical Society (Nippon Geka Gakkai) on the grounds that if all deaths during medical procedures were reported this would have a detrimental effect on medical care, and would destroy the relationship of trust between the doctor and the bereaved. Furthermore, the society argued that if these guidelines were accepted as an interpretation of the law, this would violate doctors' rights not to incriminate themselves (Japanese Society of Legal Medicine 1994).

The last of these objections is particularly revealing: the problem here, as Yoshida (2005) and others have forcefully argued, is that the obligation to report an unusual death to the police along with the absence of an independent authority that can investigate medical-related deaths with-

12 Cited in the Report of Court Decisions, vol. 24, issued 28 September 1918, page 1226.

13 Yamauchi, T. [Head, General Affairs Division, Health Service Bureau, Ministry of Health and Welfare]. Interpretation of the Medical Care Law and Medical Practitioners Law/Dental Practitioners Law. Revised 14th edition. Tōkyō: Igaku-tushinsya 1981, 360-1.

14 All translations are the Author's, unless otherwise specified.

out addressing questions of civil or criminal liability, acts as a powerful deterrent to reporting by medical staff. Reporting of a death to the police triggers an investigation in which the medical staff involved potentially become suspects. As Leflar and Iwata (2005, 217) note: "the possibility of criminal sanctions and adverse reputational consequences could create, in the minds of medical personnel, the incentive to cover up medical mishaps".[15] As mentioned above, the introduction of the new independent third party medical accident investigation system in October 2015 aims to address these concerns, nonetheless at the time of writing article 21 still remains in force. While the intent appears to be to apply a new, more restrictive definition of unusual death – which would exclude many medical-related deaths – exactly which deaths will continue to fall under the scope of article 21 and which will be referred to the new investigation system, remains unclear, although this due to be clarified by June 2016. In sum, the category of 'unusual death' remains a disputed one in medical and legal circles, and the extent of the duty to report medical-related deaths is also unclear.

Following the Hiroo case, concern over the reporting of deaths in hospital was heightened among medical professionals, as the hospital director was prosecuted, and convicted, under the provisions of article 21, for failing to report an unusual death. In the wake of this case, media reporting of medical accidents increased markedly (Kishi et al. 2010, 33), and several professional bodies, including the Japan Surgical Society, without retracting their previous objections to the JSLM guidelines, called for voluntary reporting of medical-related deaths to the police as a means of accountability, and in order to restore public trust in the medical profession (Leflar, Iwata 2005, 218). In terms of actual numbers of reports made of medical-related death, a steep increase is observable in the reports of such deaths after the Hiroo case. Medical accidents (including injuries as well as deaths) reported to the police jumped from 31 in 1998 immediately before the incident, to 124 in 2000, and 248 in 2003 (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* April 30 2004, cited in Leflar, Iwata 2005, 219).[16] As shown by Starkey and Maeda (2010) the vast majority of the increase in reporting of medical-related deaths following the Hiroo incident was accounted for

15 The reporting of an unusual death to the police does not always trigger a criminal investigation – after reporting, the death may be placed by the police into one of three categories: criminal case, suspicious case, or non-criminal case, depending on the circumstances of the death and the police investigators' judgement (Fujimiya 2009, 57). However, the possibility that the death could be categorised as a criminal case, and thus subject to criminal investigation, remains a real issue for medical staff faced with decisions on whether or not to report a death.

16 There was a fall in reports in 2004 and 2005, followed by an increase again in 2006 and 2007 to similar levels to the 2003 figures, see Starkey, Maeda 2010.

by reports made by physicians – reporting of patient deaths by next of kin did not increase significantly over this period. Prosecutions of healthcare providers have also increased markedly since the Hiroo incident, although only a little under a quarter of these resulted in a criminal trial (Starkey, Maeda 2010).[17] As Leflar and Iwata point out (2005, 219), this tends to indicate that the threat of criminal proceedings does not inevitably lead to medical providers concealing medical accidents. In a privatised system such as that which exists in Japan, where hospitals compete for patients and adverse publicity is itself a powerful sanction, there may be an incentive for hospitals to take the initiative in revealing medical-related deaths and thus appearing to be accountable and transparent, rather than risking a scandal of the sort that happened at Hiroo.

However, overall, the reporting of unusual deaths in Japan remained low both in comparison with England and Wales, and with other nations with a system based on the English coronial system. According to Yoshida (2005), between 2000 and 2001, the total rate of deaths reported as unusual (including not only medical-related deaths, but also homicides, suicides, and accidents) was only 12% for Japan as a whole, with an autopsy rate of 1.3%. This contrasts sharply with the figures for England and Wales for 2001: 37.8% of deaths in that year were reported to the coroner, with an overall autopsy rate of 22.8%.[18] The figures for England and Wales are admittedly relatively high (cf. Luce et al. 2003, 19). However, figures taken from a range of jurisdictions in countries using some variant of the coroners' system, including Ireland, parts of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, show an overall autopsy rate over the same period ranging between 7% and 11% – much lower than the figures for England and Wales, but far higher than in Japan (Yoshida 2005; Luce et al. 2003, 19).

While the fear of exposure to a possible criminal investigation is probably a factor in the low rates of reporting of medical-related death, other factors may also play a part. One recent study found that of 274 respondents to a postal survey of members of the Japan Society of Internal Medicine regarding the reporting of medical-related death, over 60% did not know the JSLM definition of unusual death. The authors of this study also concluded that doctors were strongly influenced in their decisions on the reporting of deaths of patients under their care by the question of whether

17 See also Sawa 2008 on the criminalizing of medical malpractice in Japan, and debates surrounding the interpretation of article 21.

18 Since 2001, the rate of reporting deaths to the coroner in England and Wales has increased to 45% according to official figures, while the rate of autopsy has decreased somewhat to 40% of deaths reported to the coroner, giving an overall autopsy rate of 18%. (Ministry of Justice May 2015). These figures, and some problems with the reliability of statistics on deaths reported to the coroner, are discussed further in the section on the coroner's system in England and Wales below.

or not they had obtained 'informed consent' for the procedure, with doctors tending to believe that having obtained informed consent exempted them from the requirement to report a death, even when this resulted from medical error (Ikegaya et al. 2006, 114-6).

2.2 Informed Consent: Agency, Autonomy, and the Importance of the Family

In considering these findings, it is important to bear in mind that 'informed consent' is not necessarily understood in the same way in Japan as it is in the USA or the UK (Leflar 1996; Long 2005, 82-6). Leflar (1996, 11) cites in this regard the 1990 report by the Japan Medical Association's Bioethics round table that stated: "we must consider our history, cultural background, national character, and national feelings in creating a concept of 'informed consent' appropriate for Japan". Again according to Leflar (1996), the category of 'informed consent' in Japan seems to encompass a wide range of practices, from a detailed explanation to the patient of a procedure altogether with its potential risks, benefits, and possible alternatives, to a generalised conversation between the patient and the doctor, or even an explanation to the patient's relatives about the risks involved in a procedure, without involving the patient at all. Low, Nakayama and Yoshioka (1999, 180) note that, in the debate on how informed consent should be interpreted in Japan, those arguing for adaptation to the Japanese cultural context emphasised the involvement of the family in the decision making process on the basis that: "the Japanese are family and group-oriented and, because of this, Western rules such as informed consent which are based on the concepts of the primacy of the individual are not appropriate for Japan". Kimura, one of the founders of bioethics in Japan, has commented on this issue:

> The principle of autonomy, usually referred to as one of the important bioethical principles in the Western social context, might not apply effectively within the Japanese cultural tradition. This is because Japanese culture, nurtured in Buddhist teaching, has developed the idea that the egoistic self should be completely suppressed. To be autonomous and independent as an individual has been regarded as an egocentric idea, one which does not address the need for people to be dependent on each other in the family, social, economic, and political community. (Kimura 1992, 151, cited in Long 2005, 85)

The importance attached by doctors and other medical staff in Japan to the views of the family of the patient has also been documented by Fetters and Danis (2000), in a comparative study on Japanese and US physicians' car-

egiving practices and approaches to withholding life-sustaining treatments. Fetters and Danis contrast the importance accorded to ascertaining the patient's family's views in Japan with the tendency among physicians in the United States to emphasise the patient as independent agent and decision maker, and to correspondingly de-emphasise the role of the patient's family in medical decision making. For a minority of the US physicians surveyed, this even extended to viewing the family's involvement as obstructive.

Long (2005, 87-92), writing on end-of-life care and disclosure (or non-disclosure) of a terminal illness diagnosis, concurs that the involvement of the family is thought as important for many in Japan, but points out that there is a debate on the subject of informed consent in Japan, arguing that various 'scripts', or possible narratives,[19] for understanding informed consent co-exist. The first of these is labelled by Long as "the medical school script", in which emphasis is placed on the authority of the doctor, who is assumed to be acting in the best interests of the patient. The "developed nations script", is described by Long as "based on American bioethics and international human rights standards", and assumes that "the patient is an autonomous agent whose decisions must be respected by medical staff and family as long as he or she is competent" (Long 2005, 88).[20] Both the remaining scripts suggested by Long, the 'caregiver' script and the 'family autonomy' script, emphasise the importance of the family. Importantly, these scripts locate ideas of personhood and hence the appropriate locus of decision making in the relationship between individual and family, although with some subtle differences, for example the incorporation of the notion of surrogacy in the decision making process for the family autonomy script. Practically, Long argues that different individuals may draw on different scripts, hence the continuing debate in both medical and legal circles on what informed consent should mean in Japan, and how it should be applied.

Returning to the question of medical-related deaths, it seems that where a death has occurred following medical treatment, the notion of 'informed consent', with its attendant ambiguity concerning the involvement of family members in the process, may blur into the broader area of obtaining the "understanding of the bereaved relatives" (*izoku no nattoku*). This was identified by both the Ikegaya study cited above, and also by another study by Kawai[21] as a key factor in influencing the decision of doctors on whether

19 Long draws here on the concept of 'scripts' as used in sociological studies of death – see e.g. Seale 1998. She defines scripts as "symbolic narratives of behaviour, thought, and interaction, by which culturally appropriate decisions can be made", and also notes that they are "porous and flexible, open to culling and merging in creative new ways" (Long 2005, 205-7).

20 Long also recognises that actual practice in the United States and western Europe does not always correspond to this ideal.

21 Mr. Kawai's study is unpublished.

a death should be reported to the police (Ikegaya et al. 2006; Kawai et al. s.d.). In initial discussions that I had with Mr. Kawai and others in professor Yoshida's research team about doing a parallel questionnaire study to Kawai's study in England, the idea of asking a question about the importance of obtaining informed consent "either before or after death" was raised. This is a logically impossible question in the English system, which locates the capacity to give informed consent with the individual patient, but makes sense in (one possible) Japanese view in which informed consent may also closely involve the family.[22] It is also interesting to note here that generally the term 'informed consent' is used in English by Japanese medical professionals, perhaps contributing to the lack of clarity and debates about its meaning. The Japanese language alternative sometimes used is *setsumei to dōi* – literally, "explanation and agreement" (Long 2005, 83). However, this does not indicate who is doing the explanation or the agreement, or at what stage in the process.

Ikegaya et al. note in this regard, "even giving an explanation to interested parties after a death is apparently seen by Japanese physicians as a safeguard that relieves them of the duty of reporting [medical-related deaths]" (Ikegaya et al. 2006, 116). This is not the only factor influencing the decision whether or not to report a death: the most important consideration found by Kawai's study was whether or not medical error had occurred. In cases of clear medical error a majority of doctors said that they would report the death, regardless of the attitude of the bereaved relatives. But in cases where it was not clear whether or not a medical error had occurred, or where there was no medical error, the attitude of the bereaved relatives had a very significant influence on the doctor's decision on whether or not to report the death.

2.3 Attitudes of Relatives to Death Investigation and Autopsy

It also emerged from Kawai's study that bereaved relatives sometimes oppose the reporting of medical-related deaths to the police even when medical error appears to be involved. This raises some further questions. Why do bereaved relatives appear in some cases to be reluctant for further investigations into the death, even when there is good reason to suppose

22 For another account showing a similar blurring of agency between family and patient with reference to decisions concerning autopsy see Long 2005. In Long's account the decision of a widow not to allow an autopsy on her husband, despite his expressed wish for one before his death, is referred to by a family friend as illustrating the fact that "people do change their minds". As Long notes, this shift does not seem to be thought of by the friend in terms of a change in the subject making the decision – again illustrating the common tendency in Japan for the notion of personhood and agency to extend to include close family members (Long 2005, 173).

there has been a failure in medical treatment which may have contributed to the death? And, given that the Japanese law allows in addition to medical staff also next of kin or others (such as newspaper reporters) to report unusual deaths to the police, why has the rate of reporting of medical-related deaths by next of kin in particular remained low, despite the high profile media coverage of a succession of medical scandals?[23]

More in-depth research is needed on these questions, even though at least three possible explanations could be suggested. The first, and simplest, explanation is that bereaved relatives are primarily concerned to have an adequate explanation of why the patient has died. If they are offered one that they find acceptable and understandable, they may see no particular need, or benefit, in taking further action. Starkey and Maeda point out in this regard that there are "significant barriers to pursuing civil litigation in Japan, such as high start-up costs, lengthy trials, and low chance of success" (Starkey, Maeda 2010, 4). Criminal litigation may be a more realistic option, but long delays are still likely. There is a debate as to whether the relatively low rate of litigation in Japan is due to a culturally based aversion to resorting to the courts as a means of conflict resolution, or whether it is due to structural problems such as delays in cases coming to trial, and shortages of lawyers and judges.[24] However, the fact remains that resorting to police and courts as a means of resolving disputes is relatively uncommon in Japan, it is probably not the obvious first course of action that would occur to most bereaved families.

A second possible explanation is that the patient-doctor relationship in Japan is very hierarchical, hence it is difficult for the patient to question the authority of the doctor.[25] In this context, bereaved relatives may also find it difficult to challenge the doctor's explanation of the death or to pursue it further. Still, the importance attached by medical professionals´ answers in Kawai et al.'s survey about getting the bereaved relatives´ understanding and acceptance of doctor's explanations of the death suggests that this acceptance, rather than being automatic, requires that doctors make an effort to obtain it.

A third possible explanation is that the bereaved relatives may be averse to a police investigation because this is likely to involve an autopsy. Ohnuki-Tierney (1994, 235-6) notes the importance in Japan of the body being intact, a notion extended to the body in life as well as after death, as does Namihira (1988, 1997), who has also argued that beliefs about ancestral spirits, personhood, and body affect the ways in which the body is treated

23 See Starkey, Maeda 2010 for an analysis of rates of reporting of medical-related death in Japan post Hiroo.

24 For more on the debate on this issue see Haley 1978, 1982; Ramseyer 1988; Dean 2002.

25 See e.g. Low, Nakayama, Yoshioka 1999, 174-6.

after death in Japan, tending to inhibit both autopsy and organ removal for transplants. The idea of cutting into a dead body may be perceived as lacking in respect, or even inflicting suffering on the deceased – in one questionnaire study conducted in the eighties regarding the donation of bodies for medical research, the word *kawaisō*' or 'poor thing' was used by some respondents in this regard (Namihira 1988, cited in Lock 2002, 223-4). Namihira (1997) notes that personhood for the Japanese continues after death, and that the body continues to be an important aspect of personhood even after death, and therefore must be treated with respect, and in accordance with the correct ritual procedures. The idea of death as a process in Japan, according to which the newly dead body continues to be treated as a person during a succession of death rituals preceding cremation, is well documented (Suzuki 2000), and Lock (2002, 224) notes that although expressed belief in ancestral spirits may be waning in contemporary Japan, the social importance of complying with Buddhist associated funeral ritual in Japan continues to be marked, and this in turn probably reinforces reluctance to agree to "medical intrusions into a newly dead body". However, Lock also notes that aversion to autopsy is not unique to the Japanese: separate studies cited by Lock (2002, 225) show that a high percentage of respondents in Oregon and in Sweden were uncomfortable with the idea of autopsy, a finding replicated in my preliminary study of attitudes in England, as discussed further below. This suggests that it may be simplistic to attribute Japanese attitudes solely to specific 'cultural' or religious factors.

The importance of attitudes concerning the integrity of the body in Japan is also suggested by a questionnaire study of 126 bereaved families where the deceased had undergone a forensic autopsy between 2002 and 2006 (Ito et al. 2010). The deceased in this survey had died from a range of causes, including homicide and traffic accidents as well as medical-related death; although the study was very small scale – so we need to be cautious about drawing too sweeping conclusions – it is interesting to note that little over a third of respondents reported negative feelings about the autopsy, with the main reason for this being "I fear that the body would be mutilated" (Ito et al. 2010, 104). However, the study also found that over half of those surveyed initially took a positive view of the decision to conduct an autopsy. The main reason given for this was wishing to know the cause of death (around a third of all respondents).

The study also suggested that the families' wish for accurate information about the cause of death was often disappointed, leading to "frustration and anger" (Ito et al. 2010, 103). Problems in communication with bereaved families were reported both before and after the autopsy. In Japan, if a police investigation is launched, the consent of the bereaved family is not required in order to conduct an autopsy (this parallels practice in other death investigation systems, for example in England and Wales, as explored further below, and has some obvious benefits in preventing rela-

tives from blocking an investigation in which in some instances they could be implicated).[26] It is common practice for a police officer to give some explanation to the family regarding the autopsy prior to the procedure. However, so far these officers have received no special training for this role, and this study showed that a large majority (70.7%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with the explanation given by the police (Ito et al. 2010, 103). The authors note that: "More detailed information was requested by 36.4% on purpose, institution and processes related to a forensic autopsy" (Ito et al. 2010, 103). In response to the concerns raised by this study, a leaflet has now been produced for bereaved families explaining the purpose and processes of the autopsy, also police liaison officers have begun to be instructed for autopsy cases (Ito et al. 2010, 105); however, it is too early to assess the impact of these changes.

A further problem with forensic autopsies has been that disclosure of the autopsy results is restricted, since these are part of a criminal investigation. In about two thirds of the cases in Ito et al.'s study the autopsy results were conveyed to bereaved relatives by police officers, but not all the families concerned felt that the information given was sufficient. A large majority (82%) "wished to hear from the person who conducted the autopsy" (Ito et al. 2010, 104). In the case of medical-related deaths, this lack of explanation for autopsy results may contribute to the decision of bereaved relatives to initiate litigation against physicians (Ito et al. 2008). Nor are autopsy findings fed back to the hospital involved – they can only be used for prosecution or litigation (Yoshida 2005, 127). The criminal autopsy procedure for medical-related death is thus perceived as highly problematic even by professionals operating within the system.[27] Yet it does little to address queries that bereaved relatives may have about the death, except in so far as the answers to these queries may eventually come to light in subsequent litigation. The new system for reporting and investigating medical-related deaths which came into effect in 2015 is supposed to address these issues, as it includes a provision for reporting the results of investigations to the bereaved families; however, at the time of writing it is too soon to assess how this will work in practice.

26 Hospital autopsies require the consent of a relative, but this is not required for forensic autopsies, which are carried out in cases involving deaths reported to the police as 'unusual' (Ito et al. 2010, 103).

27 See Yoshida 2005 for a more detailed critique of this system.

2.4 Summary: Issues Surrounding the Reporting of Hospital Death in Japan

The situation in Japan regarding the reporting of hospital death is one in which the legal requirements have for some time been unclear, and subject to debate. One key element in this has been the question of how the category of 'unusual death' is interpreted. As we have seen, interpretations of the category of 'unusual death' have shifted considerably since its formulation in the late nineteenth century, and the application of this category to medical-related deaths has been particularly contentious. Recent legislative changes have raised the possibility of limiting the scope of this category, but the details of exactly how this will be worked out are still being discussed.

In navigating the classification of hospital deaths and deciding whether or not to report these for further investigation, the interaction between the attending doctor and the bereaved family has been crucial; in particular, the issue of whether or not the doctor succeeds in obtaining family's acknowledgement of the doctor's account of the reasons for the death. This seems unlikely to change: the provisions of the new medical investigation system place explanations from the hospital to the bereaved at the centre of the process, allowing medical professionals to retain a great deal of discretion in determining whether or not to report a death for further investigation.

In making this decision, often doctors may have been motivated, at least in the past, partly by a wish to avoid a possible criminal investigation by the police. On the other hand, in deciding whether or not to push for further investigation the bereaved family may be influenced by a range of factors that include the doctor-patient relationship, their assessment of the likely outcome of embarking on a police investigation (at least under the pre-2015 system), and a possible wish to avoid autopsy – a wish which is probably influenced by a combination of beliefs concerning the integrity of the body and dissatisfaction with the way in which the autopsy system operates. Although the recent reforms address some of these issues, many remain likely to continue to influence the process of death reporting and investigation in Japan.

3 England and Wales: 'Unnatural' Death and the Coroner

3.1 Legal Framework

In the UK there are two different systems of death investigation in the case of certain categories of death (including some medical-related deaths): the coroners' system which covers England Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Scottish system of the procurator fiscal. In this paper I am concerned with the coroners' system in England and Wales.

The office of coroner in England dates back at least to the late twelfth century, possibly earlier. Initially it had a varied role, encompassing not only the investigation of cases of sudden death, but also raising revenue for the crown – an important aspect of the medieval justice system (Dorries 2004, 2-3). In the ensuing centuries, the role of coroner has changed dramatically however, alongside broader changes in English society and in the justice system,[28] so that now the main role of the coroner is determining the cause of deaths within or near the coroner's area[29] in certain defined circumstances. In brief, these deaths fall under one of the following three headings:

a. the deceased died a violent or unnatural death
b. the cause of death is unknown, or
c. the deceased died while in custody or otherwise in state detention. (Parliament of the United Kingdom 2009, 1-2)[30]

Until June 2013, coroners were required to have held a qualification as a solicitor, barrister, or medical practitioner for at least five years, although in practice most had been qualified for far longer. The vast majority of coroners have a legal qualification – in 2003 only about 18 of 123 coroners in England and Wales held a medical qualification, and most of these also had a legal qualification (Dorries 2004, 14). From June 2013, all coroners have been required to hold a legal qualification, although existing coroners with only a medical qualification may continue in their current posts. Many coroners are part time, but also they work part time as solicitors in private practice.

An important feature of the coroner's office is its independence: coroners are independent judicial officers, although they are appointed and funded by local authorities they can only be removed by the Lord Chancellor or by the High Court. As Dorries (himself a coroner) points out, this independence is crucial given that coroners are frequently called on to investigate deaths involving a range of official bodies, including NHS trusts, the police, and the government.[31] However, a drawback of the sys-

28 For an overview of the coroner office's history in England and Wales see Dorries 2004, 2-8.

29 The coroner's jurisdiction has in the past also included military personnel killed while serving abroad.

30 These provisions are substantially the same as those in the 1988 Act, which this Act replaces. At the time of writing, parts (though not yet all) of the 2009 Act were on the point of coming into effect.

31 One example of this is the conduct of military operations in the recent war in Iraq, which occasioned criticism of the Ministry of Defence amongst others in a succession of high profile inquests into the deaths of UK military personnel. The former assistant coroner for Oxfordshire, Andrew Walker, was particularly noteworthy in this respect, and received widespread attention in the media both in the UK and in the US. Some indicative examples

tem is that the autonomy enjoyed by individual coroners has contributed to considerable variation and inconsistency in local practice among coronial jurisdictions – one coroner that I interviewed referred to these jurisdictions as effectively "little fiefdoms".

This variation in local practice has led to some confusion in death reporting, as explored further below, and was strongly criticised in the Luce report on Death Certification in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland in 2003:

> The phrase we have heard more than any other during the Review is "the coroner is a law unto himself". Virtually every interest has complained of inconsistency and unpredictability between coroners in the handling of inquests and other procedures. Many of those who have experienced the system, whether families, lawyers and doctors who work alongside it, the police or voluntary bodies […] have all made the same point. (Luce et al. 2003, 71)[32]

From the perspective of the wider legal framework, the coroners' investigation is linked to the death certification system. In order for a death to be registered, there must be a recorded cause of death. In a large proportion of cases, a medical practitioner is able to sign a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD), this then enables a death certificate to be issued by the registrar of births, deaths, and marriages. At the time of writing, there was no statutory obligation for a doctor to report deaths to a coroner,[33] this was legally the duty of the registrar, however, the registrar cannot accept a MCCD for certain types of cases, as discussed

of newspaper articles on Andrew Walker and his criticism of the war conduct in Iraq are: Adam, Karla; Sullivan, Kevin (2006). "Coroner Says US Forces Unlawfully Shot Reporter". *The Washington Post*, 14 October. URL `https://goo.gl/0DBebu` (2017-04-12); Lyall, Sarah (2007). "Coroner Rules Death of British Soldier in Iraq Unlawful". *The New York Times*, 16 March. URL `https://goo.gl/471QFP` (2017-04-12); Norton-Taylor, Richard (2006). "Soldiers Shot After Ambush in Iraq Killed Unlawfully, Coroner Rules". *The Guardian*, 3 October. URL `https://goo.gl/ru0cNb` (2017-04-12); Seamark, Michael (2007). "Coroner Who Stands Up for Grieving Families". *MailOnline*, 6 February. URL `https://goo.gl/lGZNcN` (2017-04-12); Simpson, Aislinn (2008). "Andrew Walker: The Coroner Who is a Thorn in the Side of the Ministry of Defence". *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 October. URL `https://goo.gl/Xtx1W5` (2017-04-12).

32 In an attempt to remedy this problem, the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 created the office of Chief Coroner. One of the main responsibilities of this role is to "provide support, leadership and guidance for coroners in England and Wales", as well as to set national standards for coroners, oversee training of coroners, and to provide an annual report on the coronial service to the Lord Chancellor (Judiciary of England and Wales Website, Office of the Chief Coroner). The first holder of the post was appointed in May 2012.

33 The Coroners and Justice Act 2009 (clause 18.1) gives the Lord Chancellor the power to "make regulations requiring a registered medical practitioner, in prescribed cases or circumstances, to notify a senior coroner of a death of which the practitioner is aware", however, no suggested regulations had been published at the time of writing.

further below, so it is important that doctors understand when a MCCD can and cannot be issued, and how it should be filled out. Advice on when the death should be referred to the coroner is given in the booklet of medical certificates of cause of death issued to doctors (Dorries 2004, 57), and there are also guidelines that may vary locally on the basis of the coronial jurisdiction.[34]

In practice, a majority of deaths reported to the coroner each year are referred voluntarily by a doctor, with most of the remainder referred by the police in cases of sudden death, plus a small number (around 2%) referred by the registrar, often in cases where s/he is unable to accept the doctor's certificate (Dorries 2004, 52). Generally, this arises from a failure on the part of medical staff to recognise what constitutes a reportable death. Some categories of reportable death are fairly clear-cut – for example, the regulations for the registration of births and deaths by the registrar state that deaths must be reported to the coroner "if the deceased was not seen by the certifying medical practitioner either after death or within 14 days before the death" and in any case "which appears to the registrar to have occurred during an operation or before recovery from the effects of an anaesthetic" (Registration of Births and Deaths Regulations 1987, cited in Dorries 2004, 58). However, others are less clear, in particular the requirement for the Registrar to report to the coroner any death which "the Registrar has reason to believe to have been unnatural or caused by violence or neglect". The categories of 'unnatural' and 'caused by […] neglect' are especially problematic as discussed further below. Several recent studies have demonstrated confusion on the part of medical staff as to which deaths are reportable,[35] as well as variation in local coroners' practice, and have drawn the conclusion that there may be significant underreporting of medical-related death to the coroner (cf. Start et al. 1993, Booth et al. 2003).

3.2 Defining an 'Unnatural Death'

One important issue here is when a death should be considered as 'natural' or 'unnatural'. As for the category of 'unusual death' in Japan, there is no statutory definition in the UK of what constitutes an 'unnatural' death. The Coroners' Benchbook suggests that death from natural causes may be defined as "the result of a naturally occurring disease running its [full] course" (cited in Dorries 2004, 40). For deaths which take place in hospital,

34 For further discussion of this variation see Start et al. 1993, 1039.

35 Both the studies cited here attribute this confusion in part to inadequate training on death certification given to new doctors, aggravated by the variation in local coroners' practice.

however, reaching a judgement as to whether or not this is the case may involve assessing the importance of a number of other factors – for example, drugs treatments, complex medical technologies used, post-operative complications, and possible mishaps (such as a fall) in the hospital. A further issue is whether lack of care (or neglect) was a contributory factor in the death – even if the underlying cause of death could be said to be a naturally occurring disease.

As Dorries (2014, 41-6) notes, the difficulties in determining whether or not a death should be defined as 'unnatural' have resulted in some high profile court cases since the nineties, the definition is thus the subject of evolving case law. Two particularly important cases in this regard that are widely referred to are the Thomas case and the Touche case. These cases effectively illustrate the problems involved in the determination of how medical treatment related deaths should be classified.

In the 1992 Thomas case, a young woman died of an asthma attack following the failure of the ambulance service to respond promptly. Although the coroner initially refused to hold an inquest on the grounds that asthma is a natural cause of death, the bereaved family applied for a judicial review, on the grounds that the death was 'unnatural' because in this case 'natural causes' had been "aggravated by a lack of care". The High Court agreed with the family's submission and allowed the judicial review, but this judgement was subsequently overturned by the Court of Appeal. However, the dissenting judge in the Court of Appeal judgement presided over another hearing in 2001 relating to the death of Mrs Laura Touche from a cerebral haemorrhage, which may have been related to eclampsia, following her delivery of twins by caesarean section. The coroner initially considered an inquest to be unnecessary, but a subsequent judicial review heard medical evidence that if Mrs Touche had been monitored the cerebral haemorrhage would probably have been avoided, therefore an inquest was ordered. The coroner appealed against this finding, but lost on the grounds that Mrs Touche's death was "at least contributed to by 'neglect' and thus […] unnatural" (Dorries 2014, 44).

Another issue to be considered is whether a particular condition can be considered a naturally occurring disease process. One recent subject of controversy in this regard is MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus). One senior coroner that I interviewed told me that even though coroners tend to take the view that it is natural, they might take a different view if there was a specific incident leading to it. However, this is at the coroner's discretion, indeed a cardiac surgeon working in a different coronial jurisdiction informed me that in the jurisdiction where he worked all cases involving MRSA are reported to the coroner and will then go to inquest. Hence it seems that there is some inconsistency in the ways in which the problem of MRSA is dealt with, reflecting the considerable autonomy that coroners have in taking a view of what deaths should and

should not be investigated – although their decision-making in this regard is always potentially subject to legal challenge, as the Thomas and Touche cases demonstrate.

3.3 Reporting Deaths to the Coroner

Given these ambiguities, who decides how the particular cases should be dealt with, and how are these decisions reached with regard to medical-related deaths? In most cases, a medical certificate of cause of death is issued directly by the attending doctor,[36] and the death can then be registered with the registrar of births, marriages, and deaths, and a death certificate issued. However, where the doctor has doubts as to whether or not they can issue a medical certificate of cause of death, they may first contact the coroner's office – and indeed are encouraged to do so by the official guidelines on death reporting.[37] The coroner's office can advise on whether or not a formal referral is necessary, and whether a medical certificate of cause of death (MCCD) can be issued. In some cases the coroner may decide, after discussion with the doctor, that there is enough information to indicate that death is from natural causes and no further investigation is necessary. At this point, practice varies – sometimes these cases will be recorded by issuing a special form to the registrar (form A) which confirms that the death has been reported, and no further action is needed. This is essential for cases which the registrar would otherwise be obliged to report to the coroner, but some coroners argue that form A should be used more generally (Dorries 2004, 79-80). Another possibility is to record the case as "no further action" without issuing a form A – and it is also theoretically possible not to record the enquiry at all. Which of these options is used varies not only depending on the case concerned, but also depending on the coronial jurisdiction. One consequence of this which was pointed out to me in my interviews with coroners is that statistics on the number of deaths reported to the coroner, and also on the percentage of cases where no further action is taken, are unreliable, given that one coroner's jurisdiction may consider all telephone enquiries from doctors to count as reporting the death to the coroner, while others may only count those which are subsequently investigated further.

36 The published guidance for doctors completing Medical Certificates of Cause of Death in England and Wales states that "there is no clear legal definition of 'attended', but it is generally accepted to mean a doctor who has cared for the patient during the illness that led to death and so is familiar with the patient's medical history, investigations and treatment" (Office for National Statistics' Death Certification Advisory Group 2010, 3).

37 Office for National Statistics' Death Certification Advisory Group 2010, 3.

Overall, it seems likely in any case that more deaths are discussed informally with the coroner's office than are formally recorded as having been reported to the coroner. With this caveat in mind, it appears that the proportion of deaths reported to coroners has seen a marked rise over the past fifty years, levelling off over the past decade to a fairly stable rate of between 45% and 47%, with the figure for 2014 at 45% of registered deaths. Of these, 40% underwent post-mortem examinations (Ministry of Justice 2015, 9). Although these figures refer to all registered deaths, and do not indicate what proportion of these was medical-related or occurred in hospital, the high rate of reporting, in conjunction with the likelihood that not all deaths discussed with coroners' offices by doctors are recorded in the statistics of deaths formally reported, is indicative of the relative willingness of medical professionals to refer deaths to the coroner in England. This reflects in part the view taken both by bereavement officers in hospitals and by doctors that, if there is any possible question mark over the death, it is better to consult the coroner. One consultant to whom I spoke said "most of us see the coroner as a good backstop", while for hospital trusts the practice of referring cases to the coroner helps with transparency for the trust. For example, in cases where the bereaved family complain that care was generally negligent or that there was a misdiagnosis, the act of reporting the death to the coroner may be interpreted as showing that the trust has been transparent.

An important point to bear in mind here is that the coroner's duty in England and Wales is to determine the cause of death, not to address questions of civil or criminal liability. The contrast here with the Japanese system, where the reporting of a hospital death automatically triggers a criminal investigation, appears striking. It seems likely that this difference in the investigation systems between the two countries is a major factor in accounting for the very noticeable difference in the rates of reporting of deaths. Basically, the argument here is that medical professionals are more likely to be willing to report deaths in England and Wales because they do not get involved as subject of a criminal investigation. In other words, they do not feel threatened by the process.[38]

However, the actual process of death reporting within the English system is not always smooth. One coroner that I interviewed described it in the following terms:

> The patient dies, the relatives are told, and an appointment is made with the bereavement office in the hospital, where the relatives can collect a medical certificate as to the cause of death (MCCD). This is taken by

38 This argument has been forcibly made by Professor Yoshida, who has been closely involved with efforts to reform the Japanese death investigation system.

the relatives to the registrar who gives them a certified entry of the copy of the register of births and deaths. Half an hour before the relatives are due the bereavement officer will be chasing the junior doctor – the junior doctor hasn't done it yet and says, "Oh, we must refer it to the coroner", or the bereavement officer says, "You must refer this to the coroner", then they call the coroner's office and they say if they can issue the certificate or not. So the coroner's office must make decision very quickly on whether or not a certificate can be issued. We have to know what questions to ask – it's a gut feeling.

3.4 Coroners and Medical Staff: Communication Issues

The issue arises here of how coroners and coroners' officers, most of whom lack medical training, can evaluate what they are told by doctors. Even putting to one side any possible intention to mislead, it was noted by the hospital bereavement officer that I interviewed that there can be problems of communication between medical staff and coroners or coroners' officers owing for example to doctors' tendency to use technical medical terminology. She commented that doctors need to be reminded to explain what has happened in lay terms to the coroner, or coroner's officers, while one of the coroners that I interviewed who had both medical and legal training suggested that "a medically qualified coroner may spot cases where the care was inadequate, we are less likely to have the wool pulled over our eyes by medical professionals […] a medically qualified coroner […] may be more likely to spot medical issues when doctors are being economical with the truth".

In contrast, the non-medically qualified coroners that I interviewed felt that their legal training combined with their experience "on the job" and the possibility of bringing in medical experts from outside the coronial service when necessary equipped them to deal with medical cases. They also pointed out coroners' society of England and Wales also runs training courses to help with these issues, and this has in the past included a course specifically on hospital deaths. But these coroners also acknowledged that they remained dependent on the accounts given by doctors to a great extent. One commented "Janet Smith (the chair of the Shipman Inquiry)[39] criticised coroners for trusting doctors too much, but I think it is necessary to trust doctors". Another explained:

39 This was the inquiry into the murder by the GP Harold Shipman of at least 15 of his patients over a period of many years – one key question addressed by the inquiry was how Shipman had been able to continue killing his patients for so long without being detected, and what shortcomings in the existing system for certifying and investigating deaths (including the coroners' system) might have contributed to this.

> I rely on the honesty of the reporting doctor. If he says a load of nonsense, probably a load of nonsense is all we know. But most doctors reporting are pretty junior – coroners' officers pick up a lot – they know what follows and what doesn't. People die in hospital of a narrow range of events. We ask for example had she or he had a procedure? Was it an expected death? If you want to cover up though, you just don't report it to the coroner. There should be a penalty for this – currently it's not a criminal offence.

More bleakly, another commented:

> How effective is the system re:[regarding] medical-related deaths? It relies on trust […] the system isn't going to stop another Shipman.

The question of the lack of specific expertise of most coroners in medical-related matters was noted by the Luce report (2003), which recommended the establishment of a system of statutory medical assessors to support coroners where necessary. This recommendation was adopted in modified form in the Briefing on the Coroners and Justice Bill 2009, which provides for a new medical examiner service to work alongside the coroners' service. However, the implementation of this provision was delayed pending an impact assessment on the funding implications, and has since been repeatedly deferred. Although there have been six successful pilot trials of the scheme, at the time of writing it has yet to be implemented.

3.5 Coroners and Bereaved Relatives

A further contentious issue is the possible influence of bereaved relatives in the process of death registration and decisions regarding death investigation and autopsy. The doctors that I interviewed were adamant that in England, unlike Japan, the views of the bereaved relatives have no relevance in this process, and that decisions as to whether or not to report deaths are made solely on the merits of the case. Dorries' widely referenced guide to law and practice in coroners' courts is equally definitive, stating that "A decision not to refer a case because of potential distress to relatives or embarrassment to colleagues is wrong and cannot be justified in law" (Dorries 2014, 66).

However, some coroners offered a different perspective. One suggested that a reluctance on the part of doctors to ask the relatives for an autopsy could inhibit the referral of some deaths to the coroner:

> No-one is prepared to sit down with relatives to talk through the process. They send down the most junior doctor. They don't want to ask the

> relatives for an autopsy. If they say – "oh well, bronchial pneumonia" then that will lead to fewer and fewer autopsies. Bereaved relatives' attitudes have a negative effect, they inhibit the decision to report the death to the coroner.

Other coroners that I interviewed also indicated that in conversations with doctors calling in to ask whether or not they could issue a death certificate, one consideration was the attitude of the bereaved family in this regard:

> A ninety-four year old man dies, suffering from aspirational pneumonia. If he has had a fall, this should be reported to the coroner. The doctor would need to tell the coroner about the medical history, and explain why the fall played no part in the death. The coroner's officer would then speak to the family – if they were happy that the fall had played no part in the death, a death certificate would be issued. In this case, we are relying on the doctor's assessment. The only way to check this would be to do a post-mortem, but we are reluctant to do this in the case of a very elderly person. There is perhaps an issue of ageism here. If the family are not happy, then we might hold a post-mortem. But we are not medical ombudsmen, it doesn't automatically follow that the coroner will order a post-mortem. Often the family is complaining about the care received – the important thing is to establish whether this is relevant to the cause of death.

Taken together, these comments suggest that although perceptions of the attitudes of bereaved relatives may in some cases inhibit reporting of death, in other cases the relatives may actively push for an investigation. Sometimes, this may influence decisions on whether or not a particular death is investigated. One coroner expressed this quite bluntly:

> We respond to people who shout the loudest. I am less influenced than most coroners because I don't think it's right.

The perception of bereaved families, in contrast, has often been that they are insufficiently involved in the process. INQUEST, a group of lawyers providing information and representation at coroners' inquests, comment in the Briefing on the Coroners and Justice Bill 2009 regarding the situation prior to the enactment of this bill:

> The legal rights of bereaved families in the proceedings are artificially and unnecessarily restricted, and their current place within it is anomalous and inadequate […] the administrative framework is not directed at their full inclusion in the process. There is inadequate provision of information and support to bereaved families facing inquests at all stag-

> es which affects their capacity to participate effectively in the inquest process. There is no government-funded information service for families. Thus they often come to us having not been advised they can be legally represented during the process, nor have they been given […] sufficient information about the inquest proceedings. (INQUEST 2009, 4)

The involvement of bereaved relatives has been an important concern in the reform of the coroners' service. The Luce Report recommended putting bereaved families "at the centre of the death investigation process" (Luce et al. 2003, 142); based on the recommendations of this report, a draft charter for bereaved people was produced in 2009. This was subsequently issued as a "Guide to Coroner Services" setting out the "general standards that you can expect during a coroner's investigation" (Ministry of Justice, s.d., 1). This gives detailed information about the process of a coroner's investigation, including the family's right to legal representation. From the point of view of this paper, a particularly significant provision in the guide is the statement that "where possible, coroners will take account of your religious and cultural needs whilst acting in accordance with the law when ordering a post-mortem examination and the type of examination to be performed". The guide also includes the information that in some parts of the country, for the payment of an additional fee, non-invasive techniques such as CT (Computerised Tomography) or MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scans may be available as an alternative to the standard post-mortem, and "may be preferred by people who have a strong objection to an invasive examination of the body". The guide does also stress that these techniques may not be suitable for all cases, and the decision as to whether or not they are appropriate will be made by the coroner, however, the inclusion of this information is indicative of a recognition of the strong objections voiced by many in England and Wales to autopsies, evidence that an aversion to autopsy is by no means unique to Japan.

3.6 Autopsy and Beliefs Concerning the Treatment of the Body

As will be apparent from the above discussion, the decision to conduct a post mortem is sometimes a source of conflict with bereaved families, especially in cases where an invasive post-mortem runs counter to religious or cultural prescriptions regarding the treatment of the body after death. This has been a particular difficulty in cases involving orthodox Jewish or Muslim families, as noted in the Luce Report (Luce et al. 2003, 156-7). In both cases, there is a belief that body should be buried within 24 hours, and that it should remain intact. This was explained by one Muslim surgeon, addressing a conference on *Life and Death in Judaism and Islam,* held at Cambridge University in 2010, in terms of a duty of care to the deceased,

who should be treated with gentleness, dignity and respect, as the soul is present nearby feeling what is happening to the body. In addition, maiming the body is *haram*, or forbidden.[40] Similarly, for orthodox Jews there is a requirement to respect the body after death, this is also linked to the idea of the resurrection of the body, which means that the body be intact.

Religious specialists from both communities seem to agree that these considerations are over-ridden by legal requirements, in particular in cases where it is necessary to perform a post-mortem in order to establish the cause of death. The necessity of performing a post-mortem is often stressed by coroners in their conversations with families in these situations, and they may also call on religious specialists, or religiously based arguments, to help mediate with the families. For example, one coroner reported on his conversations with Muslim families:

> They tend to say, the Koran says you can't have an autopsy. But I know the Koran doesn't say that – it says you mustn't have an autopsy unless it's necessary.

Another response to the religious requirements of particular communities that I encountered was that of (unofficially) expediting autopsies for Muslims (in one area with a significant Muslim community) in order to allow the body to be buried as soon as possible, although this seemed highly variable depending on the jurisdiction, and some coroners were vehemently opposed to any such practice as they saw it as favouring one section of the local community over others.

A further measure, as indicated in the guide quoted above, is to look at possible alternatives to post-mortems as a means of ascertaining cause of death, for example CT or MRI scans. MRI scans were introduced as an alternative to autopsy in Manchester in 1997, at the instigation of the local Jewish community, and in cooperation with the local coroner (Bisset et al. 2002, 1423). The use of this method has since been extended to the local Muslim community, in part at the instigation of local coroner, who has been active in seeking to inform local Muslims through the mosques that this may be a possibility in some cases. There have also been some cases of Christian families using this service. MRI scans are used as an alternative to the invasive autopsy in Manchester for certain specific types of case – generally non-suspicious deaths where there is a fairly good symptomology and previous hospital history – but are not appropriate for all cases. MRI scans are also considerably more expensive than the standard autopsy, an issue that has been dealt with in the Manchester case by the

40 Paper presented by A. Alzetani, 26 May 2010, conference on *Life and Death in Judaism and Islam*, St Edmund's College, Cambridge.

coroner's office providing the equivalent of the cost of a standard autopsy. The remainder is borne either by the family, or by a special fund organised for this purpose – funds have been created by the North Manchester Synagogue group and by the Central Mosque in Manchester.

Both interest in and provision of alternative non-invasive autopsies has continued to grow in recent years, despite some studies casting doubt on their reliability compared to the conventional post-mortem.[41] Between 2006 and 2008 pilot studies on non-invasive autopsies were run in Manchester and Oxford. In 2012, the Department of Health published a report noting that "if our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society is increasingly unwilling to accept conventional autopsy, consideration must be given to the provision of a non-invasive autopsy service that meets both the expectations of the public and provides the most reliable information possible", and recommending "an integrated, phased implementation programme for a national cross-sectional autopsy imaging service based on a regionalised service provided by 30 mortuary-based imaging centres in England" (National Health Service Implementation Sub-Group of the Department of Health Post Mortem, Forensic and Disaster Imaging Group [PMFDI] 2012, 13-4). In 2013 a digital autopsy facility was opened in Sheffield by the Chief Coroner for England and Wales, and two more digital autopsy facilities have opened in England since then.

In a further recent development, in July 2015 a High Court judgment in a case brought by a Jewish family objecting to an invasive post mortem ruled that "a non-invasive procedure should be considered when the family requested it on religious grounds if there were 'a reasonable possibility' that it could establish the cause of death; if there were 'no good reason' to order an invasive autopsy; and if it would not impair the findings of an invasive autopsy should that subsequently prove necessary" (*Jewish Chronicle*, 28 July 2015). This judgment could be interpreted as placing the onus on the coroner to demonstrate a good reason for an invasive autopsy, although it is also careful to allow both for cases where it is unlikely that a non-invasive autopsy would establish the cause of death, and for the possibility of a subsequent invasive autopsy if the findings of the non-invasive autopsy were deemed inconclusive by the coroner. This seems to open the door to a possible two-stage approach to autopsy in at least some cases. Although it is potentially expensive, this is indeed the process recommended by the new digital autopsy facilities, who stress that the digital autopsy results will always need to be reviewed by the coroner, and may need to be followed up by a conventional post mortem, depending on the findings.

41 See Roberts et al. 2012; Underwood 2012. It should also be pointed out however in this context that the standard coroner's autopsy has also been the subject of criticism in an extensive recent study (NCEPOD 2006).

It is also important to note that opposition to invasive post mortems is not confined to those from the Muslim and orthodox Jewish communities – coroners that I interviewed reported widespread aversion on the part of families to the idea of their loved one being 'cut up', and one coroner commented: "very often they say: hasn't he gone through enough? Why do you want to do this to him?". The extent of opposition to the idea of an invasive post mortem can be gauged from an opinion survey commissioned for the Luce Report (2003), which found that 38% of respondents would be upset by "the thought of a post-mortem examination on someone they knew" with the most common reason given for this "the feeling that the procedure was upsetting and distasteful" (Luce et al. 2003, 155). At the extreme end of this, instances of repeated telephone calls, abuse, and even threats (including death threats) from families and friends of the deceased in response to the prospect of a post-mortem were reported by coroners and coroners' officers that I interviewed.

Resistance to autopsy is not universal though: a slight majority (56%) of those surveyed for the Luce Report reported that they would not be upset by a post mortem on someone they knew, with the main reason given for this "the need to be sure about the cause of death". And the report also notes that "Four fifths of those who were upset at the thought of a post-mortem said that they would feel better about it if they thought that the results would improve 'medical knowledge of a particular disease or illness'" (Luce et al. 2003, 155). In this respect, it is relevant to note that bereaved families in England and Wales have considerably greater rights to information relating to the findings of the post-mortem than is the case in Japan. The family have a right to be represented by a doctor at the post mortem if they request this, they may also ask for copies of the post-mortem report and of any other relevant documentation, although there is also a proviso that coroners may withhold documents in certain circumstances for legal reasons.

The coroners to whom I spoke emphasised the importance of involving families in the death investigation process and of explaining to them the purpose of autopsy, indeed such an explanation is recommended by the Coroners' Model Charter of 1999 (Dorries 2004, 125). Sometimes, the coroner might postpone the post-mortem examination for a day or so to allow the family to reflect, and to take legal advice – in fact, families have no power to block an autopsy, although it is possible for them to ask for a judicial review if they do not wish an autopsy to take place. This possibility of a judicial review does seem to influence some coroners' decisions on whether to conduct a post-mortem – one coroner told me:

> It does influence my decision on post-mortems – if [the family] are violently opposed to it I think I will have to deal with it in the High Court – the judge will ask, why do you need to do this for the sake of

scientific certainty when the family is upset? So sometimes I do give in, but other times I dig my heels in.

3.7 Holding an Inquest

If the cause of death remains unclear after the autopsy, or "if there is cause for the coroner to suspect that the deceased died a violent or unnatural death, or died in prison", an inquest must be held (Ministry of Justice 2012, 11). In deciding whether or not to hold an inquest, the question of whether the death can be considered 'natural' therefore again comes to the fore. In many cases the autopsy will establish clearly whether or not the death is due to a cause that can be considered 'natural' (for example a naturally occurring disease process). In cases where a natural cause of death can be established by the autopsy no inquest will generally be held; although, as noted above, there are ambiguous cases, particularly in medical-related deaths, including possible cases of neglect, failure in medical treatment, or a disease that may be considered as arising 'unnaturally' (such as MRSA), where the decision as to whether or not the death should be considered natural and therefore whether or not to hold an inquest is not clear cut. These ambiguities have led to cases (for example the Touche case discussed above) where the coroner's decision not to hold an inquest has been challenged.

The inquest itself is inquisitorial, not adversarial, and is concerned with establishing certain defined facts surrounding the death: the identity of the deceased, the time and place of death, and how the death came about. Witnesses are questioned in order to establish the facts surrounding the death, in the case of medical-related death it can be an important means for bereaved families to obtain an explanation that they may have had difficulty getting directly from medical professionals, since the coroner can compel medical staff involved in the treatment of the deceased to give evidence to the court. Close family members[42] or their legal representatives also have the opportunity to ask questions of witnesses in the inquest. [43]

The coroner's inquest is not concerned with settling questions of civil or criminal liability, and the coroners rules (cited in Dorries 2004) specifically prohibit the verdict from being "framed in such a way as to appear

42 Legally, "properly interested persons" are entitled to examine witnesses at the inquest. This includes, but is not limited to, close family members, specifically "a parent, child spouse, and any personal representative of the deceased" (Coroners rules, rule 20, cited in Dorries 2004, 412).

43 One failing of the system, however, is that there is little provision for legal aid for bereaved families to obtain representation at inquests – they are generally reliant on their own resources for this.

to determine any question of (a) criminal liability on the part of a named person, or (b) civil liability" (rule 42, cited in Dorries 2004, 416). However, in parallel to this, there is specific provision in the coroners rules that "a coroner who believes that action should be taken to prevent the recurrence of fatalities similar to that in respect of which the inquest is being held may announce at the inquest that he is reporting the matter in writing to the person or authority who may have power to take such action and he may report the matter accordingly" (rule 43). In 2008, this rule was amended so that anyone receiving such a report is now obliged to send a written response to the coroner. In addition, these reports and the responses to them are copied to the Lord Chancellor and to all "properly interested persons" (a category which includes immediate family), and a summary of these reports is published twice a year (Ministry of Justice 2012, 17). These provisions help to address the concerns of bereaved families, for whom it is very important not only to establish a clear narrative explaining the circumstances that led to their relative's death, but also to establish that, where appropriate, lessons have been learned. A legal group working to help families in their dealings with the coronial system notes:

> the majority of bereaved families we work with are motivated by the hope that there will be accountable learning. A recurring theme common to virtually every family with whom we journeyed through the coronial system is simple: an unswerving desire that other families should not have to suffer the often preventable ordeal which they have had to endure. (INQUEST 2009, 3)

Another feature of the inquest which links to this concern to prevent similar deaths from occurring in the future is the growing use of the narrative verdict,[44] which permits a greater exploration of the circumstances surrounding the death than is afforded by the narrower format of short form verdicts, such as 'natural causes', 'accidental death' or 'misadventure'.[45]

44 Statistics show that 'unclassified verdicts', which include narrative verdicts, have risen steeply since 2001, when they comprised less than 1% of all verdicts, until the most recent figures at the time of writing, which showed that unclassified verdicts accounted for nearly 15% of all verdicts in 2011. The majority of this increase seems to be due to the increase in use of narrative verdicts, a trend which has been encouraged by recent case law, in particular the House of Lords Middleton judgement in 2004 (Ministry of Justice 2012, 7-8)

45 There is a list of suggested verdicts in notes relating to the relevant section of the Coroners Rules 1984, but this is not binding, and there is some variation in usage among coroners.

4 Conclusion

The comparison of the Japanese and English systems of death reporting and the investigation of medical-related deaths presented above can be summarised under three main headings. Firstly, autopsy and attitudes to the body; secondly, processes of decision making and the role of bereaved families in this process; and thirdly, the role of legal and institutional frameworks. These in turn have implications for notions of personhood, and are also intertwined in some interesting ways with discourses of cultural difference.

4.1 Autopsy and Attitudes to the Body

Although small scale, the Ito et al. (2010) study cited above indicated that in Japan not all bereaved relatives oppose autopsy – a significant proportion of those surveyed were in favour of autopsy in order to find out the cause of death. Similarly, as we have already seen, the wish to be sure about the cause of death was also the main reason given by those surveyed in England for the Luce Report, who did *not* oppose autopsy for stating that they would not be upset by a post mortem being conducted on someone they knew. However, as explored in detail in the material presented above, there is a division of opinion on this in England as in Japan. Many in England *are* resistant to autopsy, a resistance that seems linked to beliefs about the body and, implicitly, personhood. These beliefs may have a religious base, as for orthodox Jews and Muslims, but they may also be much less clearly articulated, and lack an easily identifiable ideological framework. Remarks by bereaved relatives cited by coroners, such as "hasn't he gone through enough?" or "why do you want to do this to him?", suggest a view of the newly dead body as still retaining attributes of personhood, thus requiring care. It is hard to see much difference here with the description of dead bodies donated for medical research in Japan by questionnaire respondents as *kawaisō*, or 'poor thing', suggested by Namihira as evidence for a Japanese culturally based aversion to autopsy and organ transplants (Namihira 1988, cited in Lock 2002, 223-4).

While I would not dispute that there is extensive evidence in studies of death and dying, and death rituals in Japan, supporting the idea that from a Japanese perspective personhood does not end with the death of the physical body, my argument here is that attitudes towards dead bodies in England suggest similarly complex ideas of personhood and death as a process of transition, even if these have a very different cultural and religious base. The differences between the two countries in this regard may be less clear cut than it at first appears. It is also important to note

here that neither England nor Japan are monolithic in terms of religion and beliefs around death, although the variation is perhaps more obvious in the English case. Also, in neither country are beliefs concerning the body the only factor influencing attitudes to autopsy. The wish of bereaved relatives to have a full explanation concerning the death is also an important common theme – the performance of an autopsy does not necessarily provide it in the Japanese case; a problem which, in turn, contributes to the relatively negative evaluation of autopsies by many bereaved families in Japan.

4.2 Processes of Decision Making and the Role of the Family

Another point of interest is the importance of informal processes of decision making regarding the reporting and investigation of medical-related death in both countries,[46] in particular concerning whether or not a death is considered officially reportable to the relevant investigative authority – in Japan until very recently, and still in some cases, the police, more recently the newly established Medical Accident Investigation and Support Centre, or the coroner in England and Wales. Some confusion is evident among medical professionals in both Japan and in England and Wales as to which deaths are reportable, partly because of the difficulties and ambiguities inherent in the categories of 'unusual' or 'unnatural' death. In the Japanese case this is exacerbated by conflicting interpretations and guidelines issued by different concerned organisations – we might note the debate between the Japanese Society of Legal Medicine and the Japan Surgical Society in this regard. And in England and Wales there is some local variation depending on the coronial jurisdiction.

A further factor to consider here is the influence of bereaved relatives on the process. Here, there is an interesting difference in the way in which this is articulated in the two countries. In Japan the attitude of the bereaved relatives is clearly recognised as important in the decisions of medical staff as to whether or not to report the death. The 'understanding' of the bereaved relatives in respect of the explanation offered by the medical staff regarding the death is seen as key, and may be more or less explicitly linked with the idea of 'informed consent', where the locus of consent is not necessarily solely the patient, but also the patient's immediate family. This could again be linked to notions of personhood, and the

46 The importance of informal relations and processes of decision making within a range of organizations in industrialised societies has been one key focus of the emerging anthropology of organizations (Wright 1994; Gellner, Hirsch 2001) and has been explored in a number of ethnographic studies. For an overview of recent work in this area see Van Maanen 2001.

often advanced idea that in Japan personhood is relational, and involves the immediate family and nexus of social relationships.[47]

In England, in contrast, the expressed ideal is that the bereaved family *should* have no influence on the decision as to whether or not a death is reported to the coroner. Nevertheless, as noted above in interviews of several coroners included in this study, the views of bereaved relatives did, in some circumstances, play a role in the decision-making process. This may link to dominant discourses concerning the idea of the 'professional' and the importance of 'professional objectivity' and 'neutrality', as well as to a different idea of personhood, where the deceased is viewed as clearly separate from his or her relatives. The idea that professionals in positions of responsibility should have discretion to make a range of decisions in which they should not be subject to influence from interested parties is deeply rooted in England, but scarcely universal or immune from challenge.[48] And indeed, in the UK alternative discourses emphasising (equally socially constructed) ideals of 'accountability', 'transparency' and the importance of the 'customer', 'client' or 'service user' have become prominent in recent decades, not only in the field of medicine (as evidenced by the growing use of 'charters', such as the National Health Service patients' charter, setting out what patients can expect from various areas of the health service) but also in other professionalised fields such as education.[49] So perhaps in England, as in Japan, we can see multiple 'scripts' of the kind suggested by Long (2005). In the context of the reporting and investigation of medical-related death, high profile scandals such as the Shipman and Bristol Royal Infirmary cases referred to above have also contributed to a shift where government policy is now pushing for a re-evaluation of the role of bereaved relatives in the death investigation process. However, at present, still much remains at the discretion of the coroner; this seems likely to continue to be the case even after the implementation of the 2009 act.

In this context, an important contrast between the English and Japanese systems is in the locus of informal interactions surrounding decisions over whether or not to report a death, whether or not an autopsy and further investigation should take place. In Japan, the critical interactions are between medical staff, in particular the attending doctor, and the bereaved

47 The idea of the relational self in Japan has been written about extensively – see e.g. Rosenberger 1992. For a discussion of the idea of personhood as embedded in the family in the context of medical decision making see Long 2005, 89-92.

48 Parallels can be drawn here with anthropological studies of bureaucracy, its operations within specific localised frames, which have provided a useful critique of the Weberian model of 'rational' impersonal bureaucracy. See e.g. Gupta 1995, 384.

49 This includes higher education, where the discourse of student as customer or consumer of educational services has become widespread.

relatives. In England and Wales, the coroner's office provides an interface in this process, interacting with, and sometimes mediating between, the medical staff and bereavement service in hospitals on the one hand, and bereaved relatives on the other. The concerns of relatives can at present be expressed mainly through two channels: either to the hospital, particularly via the bereavement services of the hospital, or to the coroner, or the coroner's officers. The opinion that some medical professionals expressed to me that the views of the bereaved relatives are 'irrelevant' in the English context is not quite accurate: it would be more accurate to say that the channels by which these may be expressed are different from in Japan – their views may not be relevant to doctors directly in their decisions as to whether or not to report a death to the coroner, but they may influence the advice given by the bereavement service to doctors as to whether or not to report deaths where the circumstances of the death are ambiguous. They may in practice, as discussed above, also influence the decision of the coroner as to whether to proceed with a further investigation into the death.

Another important contrast is in the power relations involved. As we have seen, in Japan the lack of an interface between medical staff, bereaved relatives, and the police, has meant that in the pre-2015 system at least the critical decision on whether or not to report a death for further investigation took place as a result of discussion between bereaved relatives and the attending doctor. There is a clear power imbalance here – the prestige of the doctor role, and the respect that patients and their families are meant to accord doctors in Japan, combined with most families' lack of medical knowledge, thus the doctor's version of events is very hard for families to challenge. While the studies cited above have demonstrated the importance that doctors attach to gaining the families' 'understanding' of events, in the absence of detailed qualitative information on the interactions between doctors and families in these discussions, it is impossible to know how this understanding is obtained, or measured. It may be that families feel in most cases that they have little choice but to accept the doctors' explanation, and while they have the option to pursue the matter directly with the police, or other relevant investigative authorities, they may feel reluctant to do so for the reasons explored above. This is an area that would benefit from further qualitative research.

On the other hand, in the Japanese case there is a strong incentive for doctors to provide an explanation of events to bereaved relatives, in sufficient detail to satisfy any doubts or questions that the relatives may have (or at least feel able to express). In contrast, in the English case I came across repeated complaints from coroners and coroners' officers that medical staff in many cases did not make the time to sit down and "talk through" with relatives what had happened. One important role of the coroner's inquest is to allow relatives, or their legal representatives, to

put questions to medical staff involved with the deceased's care. I attended several inquests where the eventual finding was that the death could not have been avoided, in some cases because of rare complications which led to the unforeseeable and unpreventable death of the patient during medical procedures. Although in these cases no fault was found with the medical care provided, it seemed from the questioning from relatives during the inquest that this had been the first opportunity they had had to gain a full explanation from medical staff of what had gone wrong and why. Such an explanation is clearly very important to the bereaved, however, it seems that it may not always be forthcoming without the intervention of the coroner, who has the power to compel doctors and other medical staff to give evidence.

Although it would seem desirable in many ways for such explanations to be provided at a much earlier stage, directly from medical staff to the bereaved, the intervention of the coroner, and possibly a subsequent inquest, does have some advantages. In addition to the thorough investigation of cause of death that an autopsy or other alternative post mortem examination may provide, in terms of power relations the coroner is in a much stronger position than are the bereaved relatives, if compared to doctors and other medical staff. Legally, as already noted, he can compel them to provide information and to give evidence if the case goes to inquest. The doctor-patient relationship in England too is hierarchical, and the doctor role has considerable prestige. It is often difficult for patients or their families to get the information and explanations that they want from hospital doctors,[50] and in England too, bereaved relatives may lack the knowledge to effectively question medical staff. The intervention of the coroner can redress this problem to some extent, although the debate over to what extent non-medically qualified coroners in particular can effectively evaluate the information given to them by doctors has been noted above.

Still, the interaction between coroner and doctor is an interaction between two professionals, where the coroner has powers available to him that are not available to bereaved relatives. It is also qualitatively different to the interaction between police and medical staff, the other part of the triad of possible interactions that has until very recently characterised the

50 For example, the Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry noted that: "While the evidence is polarised, there is a strong sense that on many occasions communication between parents and some staff was poor. There does not appear to have been any deep thinking about how to communicate information to parents in advance of surgery, nor any systematised approach to doing so. While some parents felt that they had been significantly helped to understand what the surgery and subsequent intensive care involved, we were also told of doctors and nurses drawing diagrams on scraps of paper, or even a paper towel. The sense is gained that informing parents and gaining their consent to treatment was regarded as something of a chore by the surgeons" (The Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry 2001, "Final Report: Parents' experiences: communication").

investigation of hospital deaths in Japan, as the coroner is not leading a criminal investigation, and is specifically barred from determining questions of civil or criminal liability. Investigation of a death by a coroner is therefore not necessarily, or even usually, perceived as a threat by medical staff, in marked contrast to the situation in Japan when a police investigation is launched. Although Japan is now introducing an independent system of investigation of medical accidents in order to address this problem, as noted above, the obligation to report an unnatural death to the police under article 21 still stands at the time of writing, and it remains to be seen how this will be reconciled with the new system of medical accident investigation, and how effective the new system will be.

4.3 Institutions, Individuals, And Discourses Of Cultural Difference

A final difference to note between the two systems is somewhat counter-intuitive, at least from the perspective of those familiar with the extensive anthropological literature on Japan. This concerns the implications of the differing legal frameworks for the investigation of medical-related deaths in Japan compared to England and Wales. In supposedly 'groupist' Japan, the investigation, when one takes place, has been on particular individuals and on identifying who is to blame for the death. In contrast, in England and Wales, often popularly supposed to lie at the individualistic end of the spectrum in comparison to Japan, the coronial system is non-adversarial, and places the emphasis on identifying the cause of death. And as noted above, coroners are specifically barred from allocating blame to individuals. Additionally, in identifying the cause of death in complex medical cases, it is very likely that a number of factors will be involved, potentially leading to a focus on problems with systems rather than a focus on individuals. The growing use of narrative verdicts in coroners' courts has given further scope for identifying system problems. This emphasis on system failure, rather than individual failure, is also consistent with broader approaches to risk management in medicine in the UK and elsewhere in Europe and the United States.[51] Japanese health care professionals have been exploring these approaches with interest in recent years, but they have yet to become well established in Japan.

Overall, then, this comparison between the systems of investigation into medical-related death in Japan and England and Wales adds to the growing body of literature, suggesting a much more complex view of differences in the views of personhood, the body, and in the relative weighting of in-

51 See e.g. Reason, Carthey, de Leval 2001 on "vulnerable system syndrome" and risk management. The authors of this article are highly critical of the tendency to blame individuals rather than exploring broader problems with systems.

dividual and group than can be captured in the rather crude opposition between groupist Japan and individualistic West familiar from populist *nihonjinron* (theories of the Japanese) models.[52] In dealing with the common problems posed by rapidly changing medical technologies and ambiguities surrounding the classification of death as natural or unnatural, or unusual, a range of institutions, medical and legal, and of 'scripts' for understanding and dealing with death, and the treatment of the dead body come into play. Although there are important differences between the Japanese system and that of England and Wales, there are also overlaps, thus the differences do not always play out in the way one might expect. The notion of 'culture' too is deployed in some interesting ways, appealed to as a mode of resistance to some forms of intervention (notably autopsy), not only in Japan but also amongst the Muslim and orthodox Jewish communities in England and Wales, with reference to beliefs about the body and its correct treatment after death. However, this resistance is not universal in Japan, and extends beyond the Muslim and orthodox Jewish communities in England and Wales, suggesting that we need to take a critical view of the ways in which the notion of 'culture' is appealed to. Long's notion of multiple scripts co-existing again seems fruitful in this context.

Another theme here is the globalisation of ideas[53] – debates over the notion of 'informed consent' in Japan, for instance, show the ways in which bioethics has both global and local dimensions – apparently globally applicable concepts such as informed consent turn out to be subject to local interpretation and debate. Similar processes could be traced for notions of risk management in medical settings, and indeed the impetus for this study, as explained at the beginning of this paper, arose from an interest in Japan to find out more about death investigation systems in other countries. Nor is this interest in comparison with other countries' approaches confined to Japan: in the UK the Luce Report also compared the English and Welsh systems with other systems of death investigation and certification in the search for recommendations for improvements (Luce et al. 2003, 18-9). Increasingly, ideas relating to bioethics, biomedicine more generally, and the ways in which the body is dealt with in medico-legal frameworks before and after death are the objects of global debates and exchanges, which interact with, modify, and are modified by, local interpretations and practices.

Finally, all this needs to be placed in the frame of an examination of the evolving legal systems and power relations between the various partici-

52 For an excellent recent critique of *nihonjinron* (a genre which has been very popular in Japan) see Befu 2001.

53 Appadurai's (1990) 'ideoscapes' are relevant here – although the unevenness evident in the ways in which ideas relating to bioethics are disseminated is more reminiscent of Tsing's image of globalisation as an "uneven and contested terrain" (Tsing 2000, 330).

pants in the process in both countries, which act as important constraints.[54] The impact on all this of recent legislative reforms both in Japan and in the UK remains to be seen.

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54 Financial constraints are also an important dimension. In the course of this study, coroners that I interviewed frequently remarked on the problems created by the under-resourcing of the coronial service in England and Wales, a problem that seems likely only to get worse in the economic crisis prevailing at the time of writing. The problem of resourcing has already led to delays in the implementation of legislative reform of the coronial service, as well as modification of a number of recommended reforms. For a recent discussion of this issue by the coroner for South London, who is also medical secretary of the coroners society of England and Wales, see Palmer 2012.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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Lust for Death
Dark Tourism, Creation and Consumption of Haunted Places in Contemporary Kyoto

Andrea De Antoni
(Ritsumeikan University, Japan)

Abstract Since the seventies, Japan has witnessed an increasing boom in narratives about ghosts and the supernatural, spread on a national level by specialised books and magazines. This 'mediascape' often refers to specific sites, describing them as 'haunted places' (*shinrei supotto*), thus informing people about where they may have some supernatural experience. In the case of Kyoto, starting from the summer of 2009, haunted places have also become the destination of a guided tour created by a small local travel agency, that could be framed as one example of the so-called 'dark tourism'. Drawing upon ethnographic data I collected through fieldwork, in this paper I will focus on this tour, in order to enlighten the processes of construction, commoditization and negotiation of haunted places in contemporary Kyoto. I will build on the concept of 'Otherness' of places related to death. Focusing on one of the haunted places visited during the tour – Kazan tunnel – in order to show the processes of construction of Otherness and their negotiations among supply, demand, and the locals, I will argue that Otherness emerges according to associations or networks of human and non-human actors, including material things related to the tunnel, as well as reified events in the past. I will show that 'distance' among actors and networks plays a major role in the emergence of possibilities of commodification and consumption of places connected to death. In doing so, I will argue that the idea of distance can also be useful to a re-conceptualization of 'dark tourism'.

Summary 1 Introduction: Whose Dark? – 2 Research Methods. – 3 Touring Ghosts in Japan. – 4 Construction's Strategies of Otherness. – 5 Kazan Tunnel. – 6 Ghosts in Kazan Tunnel. – 7 Local Kazan Tunnel. – 8 Distancing Actors. – 9 Conclusions.

Keywords Dark Tourism. Haunting. Ghosts. Actor Network. Distance. Memory.

1 Introduction: Whose Dark?[1]

In the last decades, studies about the phenomenon of the so-called 'dark tourism' have witnessed an impressive increase. According to Stone

1 This article is one of the results of my postdoctoral project on haunted places and tourism in contemporary Kyoto, which I carried out from 2010 to 2012 at Kyoto University. I am deeply grateful to the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, which provided the funding for this research. My deepest gratitude goes also to Prof Tanaka Masakazu at the

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(2011, 320), the results of a simple Google Scholar search using the generic term 'dark tourism', generated approximately 2,000 entries in 2001, whereas in 2011 they were as many as 63,900. I carried out the same search at the time of rewriting the present article in 2016 and I obtained approximately 120,000 entries.

'Dark tourism' is generally defined – largely from a supply perspective – as "the phenomenon which encompasses the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites" (Foley, Lennon 1996, 198), or as the "act of travel to tourist sites associated with death, suffering or the seemingly macabre" (Stone 2006, 146) and has presently become the most widely used term in scholarly articles that analyse these kinds of phenomenon. Yet, it is only the most recent of a whole series of tentative terms: 'black spots tourism' (Rojek 1993), 'thanatourism' (Seaton 1996), or 'morbid tourism' (Blom 2000) are only some of the examples of academic attempts to provide classifications and analyses of similar, though not completely identical, phenomena.

Because of the broad scope of the definition, scholars interested in dark tourism took the variety of these different phenomena into account, providing tentative classifications. For instance, Stone (2006) considers multiple levels or shades of dark into which a dark tourism product can be categorised from a supply perspective. In his view, dark sites can be categorised as ranging from darkest to lightest, in relation to its design features and management strategies. Therefore, dark sites can range from "dark fun factories", "those visitor sites, attractions and tours which predominately have an entertainment focus and commercial ethic, and which present real or fictional death and macabre events" (Stone 2006, 152), such as the London Dungeon, to "dark camps of genocide", namely "those sites and places which have genocide, atrocity and catastrophe as the main thanatological theme" (Stone 2006, 157), such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Similarly, Sharpley (2009b) classifies dark tourism into four shades: pale tourism, grey tourism demand, grey tourism supply and black tourism. This classification takes into consideration not only supply but also demand, thus suggesting that there might be darker and paler ends of dark tourism consumption, implying that people have different reasons to visit sites that are created as dark from a supply perspective, as well as that they experience things in different ways.

Institute for Research in Humanities in Kyoto University, who acted as a host researcher, as well as to Prof Sugawara Kazuyoshi and all the graduate students in anthropology at Kyoto University, who provided very insightful comments when I firstly presented my research. Equally, I am grateful also to all the scholars who gave me comments when I presented my research at International Conferences. Needless to say, I am profoundly indebted to all the people involved in the travel agency, the guide, and all the participants who collaborated to my research. Last but not least, I would also like to thank Dr. Giorgio Colombo and Dr. Watanabe Fumi, who gave me their precious advice and time throughout all my research, both as academics and friends.

Although research on dark tourism has tended to focus on the expansion, elaboration and systematisation of these categories (see Raine 2013), the very definition of what constitutes 'dark tourism' is still problematic. As several studies argued, the term 'dark tourism' "continues to remain poorly conceptualized" (Jamal, Lelo 2011, 31) and "theoretically fragile" (Sharpley, Stone 2009, 575), while it might have even become a "fashionable and emotive" term that perhaps "oversimplifies a complex, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon" (Sharpley 2005, 220). Moreover, the fundamental features of what constitutes 'darkness' in 'dark tourism' have been questioned (Bowman, Pezzullo 2009), indeed some studies (see Biran et al. 2011) even challenge the very existence of dark tourism as distinct to heritage tourism.

Discussing the definition of the term 'dark tourism' goes beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, although there clearly are issues related to it, the massive amount of studies about this topic testifies to the increase of an academic interest in this field, as well as of the touristisation and commodification of places somehow related to death and disaster.

Indeed, the growing fascination with death and suffering in post-capitalistic societies, which has been documented and analysed by existing literature (Cohen 2011; Sharpley, Stone 2009), is not only confined to the experiences that people can have in touristic sites. As Stone and Sharpley (2008, 580) pointed out, more generally "contemporary society increasingly consumes, willingly or unwillingly, both real and commodified death and suffering through audio-visual representations, popular culture and the media". According to Appadurai (1986, 15), "commoditization lies at the intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors" and Mellor explains the gradual commodification of death in terms of medicalisation of the dying process and privatization of practices connected to death, together with "the sequestration of death from public space into the realm of the personal" (1993, 19).

The Japanese case is not an exception: studies about death rituals highlighted the relationships among funerary, memorialization practices and social change. Consequently, they shed light on a whole set of different and dynamic ways of negotiating the meaning of death that include commodification (Boret 2014; Kawano 2010; Rowe 2003, 2011; Suzuki 2000, 2013) and, to a certain extent, touristification (Hood 2011). Moreover, in recent years, also the term 'dark tourism' was introduced in Japan, both in the context of strictly academic scholarship (see De Antoni 2013) and in terms of tourism management and promotion, particularly related to the disasters that struck North-East Japan (Ide 2012a, 2012b).

In the context of dark tourism research, Seaton (2009) builds on the concepts of privatization and individualisation of death, introducing the idea of 'Otherness' of death. According to him, this is the main feature of dark touristic sites and, as a consequence, "the Other of Death is the defining feature of thanatourism and […] evoking and conserving its auratic im-

pacts are the central tasks of management" (75). Moreover, he maintains that "Othering is [...] the almost infinite play of identity with images and possibilities of *difference* that generates strong compulsions of negative and positive desire, approach as well as avoidance" (Seaton 2009, 82-3; italic in the original). Seaton's approach is quite phenomenological, based on the assumption that death "is the only Other that is universal, existing in all cultures as an absolute, not a construct of relative difference" (83). He links the 'Otherness' of death to dark touristic sites, claiming that "they may be perceived as sacred spaces" (85).

These ideas might provide a useful starting point for the understanding of dark tourism destinations' management and their fascination. Nonetheless, on the one hand, recent research agrees on the fact that "the notion of *darkness* is a socially constructed one, rather than an objective fact – there is no 'essence' of darkness that imbues the site" (Jamal, Lelo 2011, 40; italic in the original). On the other, as Yamanaka (2012) shows in his considerations about the definition of tourism – particularly in relation to religion and pilgrimage – 'Otherness' (*tasei*) is often a defining characteristic of tourist destinations in general. Moreover, it is not a feature of the place or death themselves, but a symbolically represented one. He identifies three main points as main features of tourism:

> 1) Travelling to an unusual place (*ikyō*): Tourism means more than anything else travelling to an unordinary place, separated from everyday life. […] In case of travelling to places such as religious sacred destinations, characterized by world views and grammars different from modern science, this aspect of experiencing the unusual becomes particularly important. 2) Consumption behaviour: […] If tourism is essentially inseparable from its feature of "moving to an extra-ordinary place", then it can be said that its consumption is deeply related to symbols that represent 'otherness' (*tasei*) and 'difference' (*isei*). 3) Social activities (*itonami*) around a specific place: Tourism is not only simply travelling (to an extra-ordinary place), it is travelling to a 'place' that tourists consider worthy to be visited. In other words, that place – both in a religious and a touristic context – as a place made worthy to be visited by various actors related to it, becomes a locality to which certain 'meanings' are attached. In particular, in cases related to religion, there are many special places – such as sacred sites – that are endowed with a peculiar history, culture, atmosphere, or meaning, and that cannot be considered as mere touristic destinations. Furthermore, it should also be considered that there are also cases in which those places are deeply intertwined to the residents' identity. (Yamanaka 2012, 6-7)[2]

2 All translations from Japanese are the Author's, unless otherwise specified.

Yamanaka's reflections are based on his analysis of religious tourism and sacred spaces. Drawing on previous studies about religion, pilgrimages and tourism, he also shows that practices connected to touristic sites represented as 'Other' – although not necessarily as 'sacred' – differ from those carried out in established religions, based on belief and rituality. Yet, they can be contextualized in the context of 'spirituality' (Sharpley 2007, 2009a; Timothy, Olsen 2006), which "allows an analysis of practices, beliefs, and places in a broader sense, as connected to individualization and consumption" (Yamanaka 2010, 4). In this sense, Yamanaka's definition not only blurs the boundaries between 'tourism' and 'pilgrimage', providing a theoretical framework for analysis of practices and processes of construction of places, based on represented and experienced 'Otherness', but it also clarifies, on the one hand, that 'Otherness' is a feature of touristic sites, not only of 'dark' ones. On the other, it makes clear that it is a matter of representation and not a feature of destinations themselves.

Also this approach, though, tends to be focused more on the supply perspective, not taking into account how Otherness is not only consumed, but perceived and negotiated by tourists. Moreover, although it takes local actors such as residents into play, it clarify neither their roles in the emergence and shaping of Otherness or of the site itself, nor their relationships with tourists, in case there are any.

Therefore, in this article I will present a part of my research about haunted places (*shinrei supotto*)[3] in contemporary Kyoto, focusing on the relationship between death and place, and on their consumption. I will propose some reflections about dark tourism, focusing on the Otherness of haunted places, which led to their commodification and consumption. I will argue that Otherness is not only constructed and represented by suppliers, but it is negotiated among a variety of actors, that include both humans (i.e. suppliers, tourists and residents) and non-humans (such as material features of the place). I will try to shed light on the processes

3 The Japanese '*shinrei supotto*' is a recent expression that literally means 'spiritual spot', or 'psychic spot'. It indicates places haunted by a ghost (*yūrei*), a monster (*yōkai*), or places where paranormal phenomena occur. In Japanese folklore, the difference between monsters and ghosts is sometimes blurred, since both of them are classified as 'changing things' (*bakemono* or *obake*), not to mention the obvious local and historical variations (Nihon Minzokugaku Kyōkai 2004). Yet, generally speaking, ghosts are the spirits of people who died by sudden and/or violent death, who do not access the afterlife and cling to this world because of their continuing desire to live, or because they did not realise they died. For this reason, they tend to stick to human beings, sucking away their life and, thus, causing weakness, illness and, eventually, death. For references about Japanese ghosts and a broad classification of the spirits of the dead see, among others, Iwasaka, Toelken 1994; Raveri [1984] 2006; Smith 1974. Since *shinrei supotto* renowned for apparitions of ghosts outnumber other kind of places – also because in contemporary Japan beliefs in ghosts are much more widespread than the ones in monsters (De Antoni 2015) – in this article, I will focus on beliefs in ghosts and experiences in places haunted by ghosts.

through which these negotiations take place, starting from an "integrated demand-supply perspective" or "experiential approach", which "captures the experience as an interactive process involving the tourist and the resources, and highlights the symbolic meaning of the site" (Biran et al. 2011, 2), since processes of construction of touristic sites and experiences are contested and negotiated by actors through networks of relationships (Jamal, Kim 2005).

In order to do so, I will firstly introduce the "Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu*" ("Kyoto bus of ghost stories") – a tour of haunted places in Kyoto that took place from 2009 to 2011 – as an example of dark tourism, showing the strategies of construction of Otherness during the tour itself. In second instance, I will focus on one of the visited sites: Kazan tunnel[4] in order to show the processes of construction of its Otherness in the media, particularly on the Internet. I will argue that haunted places are constructed as associations or networks (Latour 2005) of actors through a series of interactions based on practice. I will show that features of the landscape itself and things that are enrolled in the network during the tour and in haunted places, along with reified past events selectively presented and enrolled by mediators who construct certain places as haunted, have to be taken into account as actors, since they have an agency on tourists' perceptions. Furthermore, I will also take the locals' perceptions of the place into account, thus showing that the process of the emergence of Otherness (or 'darkness') changes according to practices and interactions, through which actors are associated and through which networks are constructed. Consequently, I will argue that distance (Latour 2005) within and among networks of interactions plays a fundamental role in the construction of the reality of a place as haunted. Finally, I will try to show that distance can also be a very useful analytical tool to rethink the above-mentioned methodological issues in the field of dark tourism research.

In other words, by opening the 'black box' (Latour 2005) of the ghost tour and one particular haunted site, I will try to shed light on the processes of construction and consumption in dark tourism, by showing how and by whom (i.e. whose) 'darkness' is created, while also providing a less generalised way to understand the alleged 'lust for death' that is assumed as a characterising feature of dark tourism in modern societies.

4 This tunnel, whih connects Higashiyama and Yamashina Wards, is also renowned as Kazan-dō, or Higashiyama Tunnel.

2 Research Methods

This study is based on ethnographic data I gathered through fieldwork in contemporary Kyoto in 2010 and 2011, during the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* tour, a bus tour created in 2009 by a small travel agency based in Kyoto. Differently from other smaller tours of haunted places, the number of people taking part in it was constantly increasing: the travel agency offered a single route in summer 2009 and two different routes in summer 2010; four different routes and a train tour were scheduled in summer 2011, and the agency planned to offer ten different routes along with the train tour in summer 2012. Yet, due to the massive influence that the great earthquake and tsunami that struck North-Eastern Japan on March 11th 2011 and the subsequent incident in Fukushima nuclear power plant had on tourism in Kyoto, about half of the tours in 2011 were cancelled. This was not only a matter of lack of demand. It was also related to resistance by customers of other tours that the agency organised, who would cancel their reservations as soon as the agency started advertising the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* tour on its website, as well as by companies – such as the bus company from which the agency would rent the bus – that suddenly rose prices (De Antoni 2013).

Since most of my research partners stated that, along with specialised books and magazines, their main source of information about haunted places was the Internet, in first instance, I carried out an Internet survey of specialised websites, blogs, forums, chat rooms, and interviewed the webmasters of the most relevant websites. Some of them agreed to meet me and others agreed to answer some questions I sent them by email.

In second instance, I carried out participant observation in the tour, investigating the experiences that people had while visiting and interviewing them. In 2010, the ghost tour started on July 17th and was repeated six times up until September 25th. The normal tour was divided into two routes taking place on different days. There were also two special events, on the 20th and the 2st of August, offering a 'ghost stories battle live' (*kaidan batoru raibu*), in which two professional ghost storytellers (*kaidanshi*) entertained the customers with ghost stories. The 'battle' was then followed by a special tour that visited haunted places not included in the usual routes. In 2011 the tours took place every Saturday from June 25th to September 24th, and two more routes were added to the previous two. Both in 2010 and 2011 the tours started from and arrived at the tour bus terminal in Kyoto Station and lasted approximately three hours, from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. People could take part in them by paying a 6,000 Yen fee, in which a special lunch box (*bentō*) was included.

I took part in the tours five times in 2010 and seven times in 2011. I took part as a normal tourist twice in 2010, whereas, after I interviewed the agency's director, I was allowed to take part in the tours for free and, during the initial speech, the organisers would introduce me to the cus-

tomers as an Italian researcher in cultural anthropology affiliated to Kyoto University. Since the schedule of the tour was really tight and the guide or the organisers were constantly speaking, talking to the participants was not easy. Therefore, every time I would focus on two or three people, particularly those who stated that they felt some ghostly presence, trying to obtain some more detailed information about their experiences. I repeatedly met and interviewed the staff of the travel agency that organised the bus tour, in particular the director of the agency and the guide. Additionally, I carried out surveys in the areas surrounding the haunted places, and, when possible, I interviewed the residents. In this article I will focus exclusively on Kazan Tunnel.

3 Touring Ghosts in Japan

Ghost stories or tales of the strange and mysterious (*kaidan*) have been present in Japan since the Heian period, when they could be found in collections of Buddhist stories (*setsuwa*), such as the *Nihon Ryōiki*. Yet, as such, they were known mainly to Buddhist monks and were not a part of the knowledge background among common people. Besides this, they do not appear in historical records until the Edo period (1603-1869), when they reached their peak, as they entered vernacular literature as collections of oral-derived narratives. Along with the spread of tales of the supernatural, also the practice of organising gatherings in which people would tell ghost stories (*kaidankai*) became popular (Reider 2000, 2001, 2002). Ghost stories reached their peak during the middle of the eighteenth century, because of the adoption of print that made popular literature possible. According to Reider,

> in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Japan, each Japanese would have reasons and expectations that would vary with their different socioeconomic background and experience. Overall, however, the general appeal of *kaidan* appears to be fourfold: 1. fascination with the grotesque, 2. plausible explanations for unexplained common occurrences, 3. attraction to the exotic, and 4. social commentary. (2000, 269)

Yet, along with the progressive modernisation, westernisation, and secularisation of the country, a strong ideological campaign carried out by intellectuals such as Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) depicted beliefs on the supernatural as unscientific, against the progressive 'enlightenment' of the country, and categorised them as untrue 'superstition' (Figal 1999; Foster 2009; Josephson 2006, 2012). Moreover, the introduction of Western medical practice and psychotherapy, contributed to the medicalisation of the majority of those phenomena that previously belonged to the religious

sphere or were categorised as supernatural, such as spirit possession or religious healing (Harding et al. 2015). For instance, Sanyūtei Enchō (1839-1900), an oral storyteller, complained about the fact that "the teachers of the Age of Enlightenment (the Meiji period) thought that the supernatural was the product of the mind, and *kaidan* an extension of that neuropathy" (quoted in Reider 2000, 278).

Nevertheless, ghost stories survived and, along with phenomena such as spirit possession, witnessed a renewed boom in the seventies, as a part of the so-called "boom of the occult" (*okaruto būmu*) (Taniguchi 2006), in which the popularity of Hollywood horror films, such as *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1974) played a major role (De Antoni 2015, Taniguchi 2006). Since then, ghost stories have been spread on a national level by the media – particularly by television programs and the Internet – in constant feedback with a more and more flourishing market of specialised books and magazines (Miki 2007, Namiki 2010, Yamaguchi 2013).

This 'mediascape' (Appadurai 1996) often refers to specific places, informing people about where they can have some ghastly experiences. Haunted places (*shinrei supotto*) are often liminal ones, legitimated by some historical link to death. Among the various areas in Japan in which they can be found, Kyoto provides a peculiarly interesting field of investigation, since, on the one hand, narratives on the supernatural are also embedded in a number of both scholarly and non-scholarly studies about local history and folklore (Irie 2007; Kikuchi, Kasha 1999; Komatsu, Naitō 1985; Komatsu 2002). On the other, the ongoing national discourse that depicts Kyoto as the mythological cultural capital of Japan and the representative of 'true' Japanese culture, through the use of historical narratives (Macdonald 1995), also plays a major role in the construction of the authenticity of hauntings. Haunted places in general attract people who visit them in order to perform different practices, that range from 'courage testing' (*kimodameshi*) to, like in the case I will take into consideration, tourism.

In this context, a small travel agency in Kyoto decided to start the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* in 2009. The agency was made of three people, but only two of them used to take part in the tour. Usually I.-san, the Director of the agency – a forty-one-year-old man in 2010, born and raised in Kyoto and former mountain guide – was there. He was accompanied by K.-san, a male in his late twenties, who specialised in Kyoto history of monsters and the supernatural in Kyoto University of Art and Design (Kyōto Zōkei Geijutsu Daigaku). When I.-san could not take part in the tour, K.-san played his role, introducing all the staff and the tour to the participants in the bus. T.-san was the third person and the only female in the agency, but she worked as a receptionist and she used to carry out mainly administrative work, so she never took part in the tour and I never met her as K.-san. Sometimes, however, she would wear a monster (*yōkai*) outfit and silently accompany the tour, thus contributing to create an eerie atmosphere. Yet, the main

character on the bus was the guide, U.-san, a male in his early sixties, from Kyoto Prefecture, always dressed in black. He used to work as artistic director in an advertising company and, after he retired, he decided to become a ghost storyteller. Since then, he has often been invited to radio and television programs about ghosts and ghost stories, and he manages a free web-magazine with around 30,000 readers, a website (*Ōmagatoki*)[5] through which he promotes and sells his books and CDs with ghost stories. U.-san not only entertained the people on the bus during the travel from one place to another with a number of stories about ghosts or supernatural phenomena, but he also provided information about the history of and the ghosts in the places that the tour would visit, thus playing a major role in constructing places as haunted.

In 2010, an average of twenty people attended the tour every time. The bus had twenty-four available seats and three times the bus was completely full. There were also people who took part in the tour two or three times. I met relatively few people from Kyoto, although most of the participants were from Osaka and Shiga Prefectures, or from other cities in the Kansai or Kanto areas. As I mentioned above, in 2011, because of the influence of the great disasters that struck North-East Japan, about half of the tours were cancelled due to lack of demand and resistance from surrounding actors and stakeholders and, when they took place, there was an average of ten participants.

Most of them were people in their late thirties to early fifties, both males and females (with females slightly outnumbering males), but there were also small groups of university students, young teenagers or children with their mothers. Most of the tourists joined the tour in small groups, from two to four people. Yet, every time there were two or three people (mostly males in their forties), who joined the tour on their own.

Most of the tourists, regardless of their age or gender, told me that they decided to take part in the tour because they found it 'unusual' (*mezurashii*). Many people, generally in their forties, stated they chose the tour because they wanted to 'shiver' (*zotto suru*) or because they wanted to see 'weird things' (*henna mono*) or 'ghosts' (*yūrei*). Yet, there were also people who were interested in Kyoto history, as well as people who told me that they often visit haunted places and that had a personal interest in the supernatural. In other words, since most of the participants joined the tour because they wanted to try to engage with ghosts, namely with spirits of people who (allegedly) died in those places, it is clear that the Kyoto *kaidan ya-basu* can be analysed as an example of dark tourism.

Indeed, during the tour people tried to interact with ghosts. Some of them told me their own experiences with the supernatural besides the

5 URL `http://www.e-oma.com/index.htm` (2017-04-04).

tour, but taking them into account goes beyond the scope of this article. During the tour, in some cases ghosts did interact with people, as I will show below. Needless to say, all these events would contribute to the eerie atmosphere and would be perceived, to various extents, as an evidence of the authenticity of the experience. An experience whose Otherness started being constructed well before tourists were taken to the haunted places, as I will show in the next section.

4 Construction of Strategies of Otherness

Below the uncanny aspects of the tour, there was a series of strategies through which several actors were brought into play. These strategies began well before the start of the actual tour, continuing until the end. For instance, when participants placed their reservations by telephone or email, they were advised to absolutely take a flashlight with them, because the places would be dark and scary. When we entered the bus, all the curtains were shut, in order not to let the afternoon light in, and we were welcomed by screeching noises and eerie music from the speakers, along with a woman's voice telling frightening ghost stories. We found a plastic bag on our seat, containing some pamphlets of the agency, a survey to compile at the end of the tour and a small plastic envelope with some salt. In the initial speech, one of the organisers would explain that

> The salt is to be purified and to keep ghosts away, because we are going to visit some fairly scary places. So, absolutely take it with you every time you get off the bus. Sometimes someone happens to start feeling strange, or to have a sudden headache, or to see strange things during the tour. If this happens to you, then throw some of the salt on your body and around you, and everything will be solved. (I.-san, initial speech, 2010-07-31)

We were constantly reminded to take the salt and the torch with us every time the bus stopped nearby a haunted place.

One more actor that contributed to the emergence of Otherness during the tour was the *bentō* (fig. 1) that the travel agency had prepared from a shop in Kyoto, using natural food-colouring to give it a scary aspect. The composition of the *bentō* was created in compliance with the route theme. The organisers explained that "although it may look weird, it is definitely good, so don't worry. We are going to haunted places, but we don't want you to die, so be sure that it is safe" (I.-san, initial speech, 2010-07-31).

Moreover, all the routes started from a Shinto shrine, somehow connected to stories of murderers and demons in the past: Kubizuka Daimyōjin, on the borderline between Kyoto and Kameoka, and Shimogoryō *jinja*, close to Kyoto city centre in 2010. The two new routes added in 2011

Figure 1. An example of *Kaidan bentō* that was part of the tour

started respectively from Fushimi Inari Taisha and a small shrine next to Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei. These starting points were explicitly brought into play as ways to be purified and protected during the tour. We were informed by the guide about the history of the shrine and guided to the main altar, where everyone would pay their offerings, clap their hands and bow.

The participants' general reactions were sometimes amused: most of the people giggled in front of the *bentō*, commenting "How scary!" (*kowai*), or "How eerie!" (*kimochi warui*). Yet, most of them were completely silent during the visits to both the shrines and the haunted places. Their attention was absorbed by the stories that U.-san told both on the bus and on the spots. During the tour, people tried to interact with ghosts. Many of them took photos of the places, evidently looking for something weird and, sometimes, someone claimed they could actually take some sort of ghastly picture. In some cases, ghosts interacted with people: sometimes one person, or a small group of participants, claimed that they heard lamenting voices that nobody else had heard. Depending on the place, sometimes people would suddenly start feeling cold, or start crying, or screaming because something touched their shoulder. In some cases, someone's camera would suddenly stop working properly, just to get back to its normal conditions as we left the haunted place. Needless to say, all these events would contribute to the eerie atmosphere and would be perceived, to various extents, as an evidence of the authenticity of the experience.

Tourists were given the possibility to contribute to the improvement of the strategies of construction of Otherness during the tour, through the survey that they found on their seat. U.-san's ghost stories became more and more gruesome over time, and his attitude in telling them more and more serious, with the repeating of the tour. As I asked him why, he replied that this was a consequence of tourists' comments and suggestions in the surveys. The satisfaction rate became higher and higher: at the beginning, U.-san was criticised for making too many jokes and for telling stories that

were not scary. On the contrary, his stories were praised by most of the tourists who took part in the last two tours.[6]

5 Kazan Tunnel

Kazan Tunnel is a narrow tunnel that connects Higashiyama and Yamashina Wards, on the top of Gojō-zaka, on the Eastern side of Kyoto. It was built in 1903, in order to facilitate the route from Eastern Kyoto to Yamashina, on the Shibutani *kaidō*, the previous path. Yet, when in 1967 the broader Gojō bypass was open, Kazan Tunnel was destined to exclusive pedestrian and cycling use (Kyoto-shi 1987).

This tunnel was not only one of the most famous *shinrei supotto* in Kyoto in 2010, but it was also included by most of the websites that listed *shinrei supotto* in the whole Japanese territory. However, it was not included in specialised magazines and books about haunted places in Kyoto, thus showing that its fame spread mainly through the Internet, or by word-of-mouth. In order to understand the relevance of narratives of the tunnel as a haunted place, suffice it to say that a simple Google search showed that the results with the names of the tunnel were 4.9% of the haunted places in the whole Japan, whereas they were 11.4% of the haunted places in Kyoto. Furthermore, information about Kazan Tunnel as a haunted place was entered in the Wikipedia page even before its history, and the tunnel was also the first haunted place in Kyoto to be listed in the Wikipedia page about *shinrei supotto*, on the 13th of October 2005 (Wikipedia 2016a).

6 Ghosts in Kazan Tunnel

As I pointed out above, associations that constituted Kazan tunnel as a haunted place were very widespread on the Internet. Most of them constructed the place as haunted because of some historical links to death or to violent events in the past, as well as because of its proximity to cemeteries in the neighbouring temples and to Kyoto central crematory:

> Around Kazan Tunnel, in Awataguchi, there is the place that was used for executions during the Edo period. There are also Kyoto central crematory, and several cemeteries of Honyoshi dera, Jōmyōin, and Hokkeji. Since the place where Akechi Mitsuhide's retreat after the battle of Yamazaki was put to an end, is close to Kazan Tunnel, it is said that one

6 The agency's director let me access only part of the surveys (the final comments on the tour), because of privacy issues.

> can see the figure of a *bushi*.[7] Furthermore, because in July 1994 a man who was riding a mini-bike really died on an accident in the neighbouring Higashiyama Tunnel on the 1st National Street, it is said that one can see the shape of a beheaded rider, or of a dead male.
>
> The two stories mentioned above about Kazan Tunnel are famous, but it is uncertain whether they are actually true or not. (Wikipedia 2016b)[8]

Furthermore, some peculiar actors also played a major role in the construction of the haunting: famous mediums (*reinōryokusha*), who acknowledged the place as haunted. Some of the people who managed websites dedicated to haunted places in Kyoto, or in Japan, claimed to have supernatural powers and to be mediums themselves. Their experiences on the spot were fundamental in the enrolment of new, different actors in the network, and the Internet became the way through which those associations were strengthened also by means of pictures (fig. 2) and spread:[9]

> Kazan dō: This is a pedestrian street and, apparently, close to the crematory. The place for executions used to be there. It is said that the spirits of the people dead during a war wander about here. This place was visited by several mediums, such as Gibo Aiko.[10] (Okaruto Jōhōkan 2016)

> Kyoto Prefecture, haunted places – Kazan- dō: Former Higashiyama Tunnel, also called Kazan tunnel. […] It is a famous haunted places visited even by famous mediums such as Gibo Aiko. […] Since, while passing through Kazan Tunnel, […] there is the possibility to be possessed, it is bet-

7 Akechi Mitsuhide (1528-1582) was a general under Oda Nobunaga. He betrayed his lord, attacking him as he was resting in Honnōji, in Kyoto, on the 21st of July 1582. Knowing there was no way out for him, Nobunaga committed *seppuku* and Mitsuhide took over his power and influence on the Kyoto area. Thirteen days later, he was defeated during the battle of Yamazaki by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. For references about Akechi Mitsuhide and the battle of Yamazaki, see Kyoto-shi 1987 and Nagai 1999.

8 The part of the Kazan Tunnel Wikipedia page titled "Kazan Tunnel as a Haunted Place" was deleted with an edit on the 7th of February 2011 and, therefore, it is no longer present on the main page.

9 I identified the most influent websites on haunted places in Kyoto by using a specialised software (Google Touchgraph). I contacted the webmasters and asked them for an interview. I met some of them (Ryūsuidō was one of these cases), whereas I interviewed the others via email. People who claimed not to have any psychic power maintained that they were managing the website as a hobby, and that they would update information about haunted places they received by people who lived in the areas. Yet, most of them claimed that, when they could, they would go and try to experience the places, in order to understand whether they were really haunted.

10 In particular Gibo Aiko (1932-2003) was often quoted as an actor. She was a very famous medium, author of several books, and was often invited to television programmes, especially during the eighties.

Figure 2. Picture of the ghost of a child in front of the Yamashina side of Kazan Tunnel (Ryūsuidō 2016)

Figure 3. Tourists visiting Kazan tunnel during the tour

> ter not to get close to it carelessly. If you absolutely have to walk through it, it is better that you take some *o-mamori* with you. (Ryūsuidō 2016)

U.-san told me that his main sources of information about ghost stories and haunted places were specialised books, as well as the Internet. Consequently, also the association he constructed in front of Higashiyama Tunnel, while relating various actors to the place as haunted during the tour, always included the crematory, the accident, and the story of Akechi Mitsuhide. Moreover, he also added that the place was haunted because of the neighbouring Shogun-zuka, where Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, the second Shogun of Japan whose spirit is said to be still guarding Kyoto, was buried. I report here a historical narrative about this place, from a book on haunted places that the guide indicated as one of his sources:

> Shogun-zuka is where the grave of Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, who wanted the place to be named after the name of his military rank, is said to be. Apparently, the place is one of the seals by which Emperor Kanmu protected the capital from demons, as he moved it to Heian. Sakanoue no Tamuramaro is firstly renown for having become a Shogun, but there are also several tales of his heroic deeds as a military man. He continues to be famous even today as the man who subjugated the Emishi and expanded the territory [of the Empire]. (Yoshida 2002, 74)

The tunnel was accessible only by walking a couple of minutes through a dark and narrow path, flanking some old Japanese style houses. Moreover, being the last place visited in that tour route, we always arrived there in pitch darkness, and the only light was provided by the illumination inside the tunnel. After U.-san introduced Kazan tunnel to us, we were invited to cross it and to come back. The staff and the guide would not cross it, stating that they did not want to go too much into such places. It was also the only place in which four different times some people refused to enter, stating that it was 'creepy' (*kimiwarui*), 'weird' (*okashii*), and that they were feeling a "too heavy atmosphere" (*kūki ga omosugiru*) or some 'ghastly presence' (*rei wo kanjiru*).

The tunnel was actually dark, even when I visited it during daytime. Moreover, because of the mountain air that flows through it, it was always colder than the surrounding and very humid: I often had the impression that my face was touched by or that I passed through some sort of veil, particularly in the very moment I entered. Furthermore, water percolated through its walls, creating dark shapes that, sometimes, resembled the shape of a human face, or a human body. Visitors were generally attracted by these shapes, which became associated to the network and ghosts straight away, thus contributing to the emergence of the Otherness of the place and of the experience of visiting it. While walking in the tunnel, most of participants uttered comments such as "It's creepy!" (*kowa*!), or "How eerie!" (*kimi waru*!). Three times, while walking through the tunnel, some people claimed they heard some voices. As I asked for more detailed information, they explained what they heard as whispers, or small squealing voices coming from afar. Furthermore, in two different times, two people suddenly moved towards the wall with a small scream, claiming that they were touched by something on their side, or as if something had swiftly brushed past them, at the centre of the tunnel.

7 Local Kazan Tunnel

As a remote place as the tunnel is, on its Western side, there are a funeral company, a couple of little offices, a small Buddhist temple called Seikanji, and a bunch of houses. All of them composed the small Seikanji Yamanouchi-chō, populated only by 49 people in 2010 (Kyoto-shi 2016).

Although the area was served by public transport, it was very liminal, at the top of an extremely steep slope and far away from the city centre. Most of the people had moved to other areas and, therefore, the neighbourhood was inhabited mainly by over-sixties, who lived in their family houses.[11] No one among the people I interviewed in the neighbourhood acknowledge the tunnel as a haunted place, often defining it "a simple tunnel" (*tada no tonneru*):

> Yes, I heard the rumours about ghosts. They have been circulating for about thirty years. Apparently, the story firstly came out on a magazine, but I don't know which. […] I've always lived here and I've never seen a ghost, though. You know, the tunnel has always been there and, although some time ago it was even dirtier, darker, eerier, full of rubbish and graffiti… Sometimes motorcycle gangs (*bōsozoku*) gather here… […] I have never thought it could be haunted. I think it is a simple tunnel. However, actually, there are quite a few people visiting the tunnel at night: I see them. They come especially during the Summer. They are mainly University students, but there are also older people. […] Sometimes, someone comes here and asks me "do ghosts appear here?" And I can only answer: "I don't know, I've never seen any... [Laughs]. (Woman, aged sixties, Kazan tunnel, 2010-07-10)

> I know the stories, but I don't believe them. I used to live here before those rumours came out, and I have never thought that the tunnel could be haunted. (Man, aged sixties, Seikanji, 2010-10-06)

In other words, people living in the area did not consider Higashiyama tunnel as a *shinrei supotto* because, for them, it was an element of their everyday life. This means that the practices of everyday life that they carried out in the tunnel, namely certain kind of interactions such as utilizing it as a passage from one point to the other, created a Kazan tunnel that was a different association to the one created by actors during the tour. In fact, the actors that the woman mentioned above, were completely different to the ones that constituted the haunting: instead of cemeter-

11 No age census is available for Seikanji Yamanouchi-chō. However, people who lived in the area, approximately estimated that more than 80% of the locals were over-sixties.

ies, crematories and ghosts, the tunnel was associated with dirt, rubbish, graffiti and motorcycle gangs.

Interestingly enough, though, some residents enrolled also some actors from historical narratives and social memory that did overlap with the network of Kazan tunnel as a haunted place:

> This used to be a nice area, during the Edo period, you know. People used to come here to have fun. My husband's grandfather owned a tea-house here. Then… Do you know Shōgun-zuka? It's right nearby. There's the grave of an important person, called Sakanoue no Tamuramaro, so the history of this area is very important. Yet, everyone went away because there are no jobs. Then no one comes to live here because it is unpractical, so only people whose families have always lived here remain. And, since we are all old, we have a lot of troubles. (Woman, aged sixties, Kazan Tunnel 2010-10-09)

Actors such as Shōgun-zuka and Sakanoue no Tamuramaro are enrolled in this association as well. Yet, when associated to other actors related to daily practice, their agency completely changed, for they became carriers of some sort of positive value, in a very similar way to the one that several classic studies about Japanese 'communities' and 'neighbourhoods' pointed out (Ben-Ari 1995; Bestor 1989, 1992; Martinez 1990, 2004; Robertson 1991).

Thus, on the one hand, people who were directly linked to the place, associated it with a series of actors closer to their everyday life, thus creating a network that would not result in the haunting. This happened because for them it was a 'simple tunnel', namely an environment in which they carried out certain practices related to their everyday life. On the other hand, associations between Kazan Tunnel and ghosts were constituted by and negotiated among mediators (the media, U.-san and the tour organisers), who were not connected to the tunnel through everyday practice and, therefore, had more possibilities to create networks of Otherness. Also visitors played a role in this process, not only with their comments in the survey. As a matter of fact, as I showed above, during their visit, they had already been made part of the association to it, through a series of strategies and progressive associations with specific actors both before and during the tour (the flashlight, the salt, the *bentō*, the shrine), and while reaching Kazan tunnel (the narrow and dark path, old-style Japanese houses). Thus, when tourists actually directly experience the place in practice, they enrolled (or would be enrolled in the network by) further actors that were present in the tunnel (darkness, humidity, stains…), thus strengthening the association of the tunnel as haunted.

After I talked to the residents and became aware of what actors they would identify, I decided to try a small 'experiment' during the visit to Kazan tunnel. I repeated it twice, with two different people, a male in his early forties and

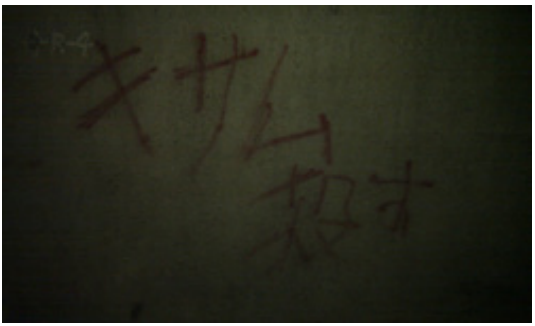

Figure 4. An example of graffiti left by motorcycle gangs, that can be found in Kazan tunnel. This means “Kisamu, I will kill you”

a female in her early fifties. While walking in the tunnel next to the person, I suddenly brought into the association one of the actors pointed out by the residents, by saying “Look at that! That is real horror!” and pointing at one of the graffiti (fig. 4). In both cases, the tourists got slightly upset and accused me to have spoiled the atmosphere, adding that they could not enjoy the place anymore because now it was ‘too real’; and similarly once two people came from the other side of the tunnel, while riding their bicycles and chatting cheerfully. One of the tourists, a woman in her forties, commented with a disappointed tone: “No… Now I know that this is a normal tunnel”, implying that she could not enjoy the experience anymore. People around her agreed.

8 Distancing Actors

In this article, I tried to show processes of construction of Otherness, on which basis fascination with and commodification of places connected to death in contemporary Kyoto emerge. On the one hand, I showed that, like Jamal and Lelo (2011) pointed out, the ‘Otherness’ (or ‘darkness’) of haunted places is not a feature of places or death themselves: it is the result of associations made by several actors through practice. On the other, though, I showed that it is not only simply produced by suppliers and mediators: it is negotiated through relationships and interactions among human and non-human actors, whose mutual agencies create a network. The Otherness of haunted places and the fascination with them, thus, emerged according to the kind of networks that actors could create. It was the result of the reciprocal position of the actors in a network of interactions and relationships. Consequently, as a function of positionality, also distance among actors comes into play:

> even the most routine, traditional, and silent implements stop being taken for granted when they are approached by users rendered ignorant

> and clumsy by *distance* – distance in time as in archaeology, distance in space as in ethnology, distance in skills as in learning. Although these associations might not trace an innovation per se, the same situation of novelty is produced […] by the irruption into the normal course of action of strange, exotic, archaic, or mysterious implements. (Latour 2005, 80)

In other words, on the one hand, the residents saw the tunnel and all the actors associated to it as literally matters of everyday life. On the other hand, for the people involved in the tour, the Otherness of Kazan tunnel could emerge because of the distance between them and the tunnel, which was mainly bridged by associations constructed by mediators. These two different Kazan tunnels were equally real, and they could emerge because of two completely different – that is, distant – modalities of interactions with the tunnel. Moreover, the two different associations could coexist because of the distance between them, as well as between residents on one side and visitors and mediators on the other.

In this sense, because of distance in space and practice, the Otherness of Kazan tunnel, along with the fascination with the site and its consequent commodification and consumption, could emerge and be negotiated. As the webmasters who managed websites about *shinrei supotto* pointed out, conflicts would arise when the locals could take part in the processes of negotiation of associations with ghosts in their own area.[12] They told me that they received emails from the locals, who threatened to sue them because they had not cancelled the haunted place from their websites. Webmasters also stated that they have similar issues with half of the places they upload in their websites; according to the residents' perceptions, associations of specific places with hauntings may have an influence on the image of the area and, as a consequence, on the price of the land.[13]

From a different perspective, I believe that the concept of 'distance' may be helpful also in order to understand the role of death in the construction and negotiation of dark touristic sites. For instance, in the association that constituted Higashiyama Tunnel as a *shinrei supotto*, a battle that occurred in 1582 was directly linked to the present, and therefore closer to it than any other event that happened up to 2010, with the only exception of the death of the poor rider in 1994. Consequently, those two events became actors in a broader network that constituted the haunted tunnel. In this sense, a shorter distance was constructed and perceived between those two particular deaths and any other event that might have happened

12 This was made particularly clear by the webmaster of one of the most influential websites on *shinrei supotto* (Okaruto Jōhōkan), in an email I received on 14 December 2010.

13 Real estate agencies employers in Kyoto confirmed this as a general trend, though with differences according to the areas. I am still working (with greatest difficulties) to produce hard data about this aspect.

in that place even, for instance, ten minutes before the arrival of tourists. Whatever happened ten minutes before, consequently, was not associated to the haunting or the place through the practice of tourism and, therefore, it resulted much more distant than the battle in 1582.

One more kind of distance that can be seen, is the one between tourists and the ghosts of the people who (allegedly) died in or around the tunnel: there was no personal relationship among them. As Suzuki (2000) points out:

> Community funerals reflected the participants' fear of death, which they believed caused the release of malevolent spirits. [...] The ritual's purpose was to usher the deceased's spirit safely to the other world and to strengthen family ties as well as the relationship between the deceased's family and community members. [...] Deprived of the common ground on which funeral rituals united communities, funeral ceremonies [...] solidify the ties between the bereaved and the members of groups to which they belong, including the colleagues of the deceased. [...] Various elements such as the migration of families into cities, the increase of nuclear families over household of extended kin, and the progress of work specialization have contributed to the transition. (4-5)

In this sense, it is clear that, in contemporary Japan, death and spirits of the dead are managed by the bereaved and the groups to which they belong. Consequently, 'distance' in personal relationships can emerge with the dead who are not related to those groups. Nevertheless, the deaths associated to the place were public: two important historical characters and one young man whose death was brought to the public sphere by the media. Therefore, these deaths did not totally belong exclusively to the private space of the bereaved (Mellor 1993), thus presenting some possibilities to be managed and associated by mediators. Because of this distance, thus, there emerged a space in which the spirits of the dead could be related to other actors, thus allowing Otherness to emerge, along with the possibilities of commodification and consumption of places related to death.

9 Conclusions

In this article, I showed that an approach based on the analysis of interrelationships and interactions among human and non-human actors, including material actors related to the place and reified events that constitute social memory, as well as on 'distance' in and among networks, can be useful to the understanding of processes of emergence and negotiation of the Otherness of dark touristic sites. This approach, moreover, could help the comprehension of tourists' fascination with places connected to death, and the consequent possibilities for commodification and consumption. I

also believe that a similar approach can also be challenging and useful for a deeper understanding and a better conceptualisation of the wide range of 'dark tourism' phenomena, as well as of the broad assumption of commodification of and fascination with death in modern societies.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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The Funeral in Contemporary Japanese Society
The Company-sponsored Funeral of the Founder. Arrangement and Creation of the Most Important Funeral Service in the Company's History

Hirochika Nakamaki
(National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan)

Abstract The company-sponsored funeral represents a fundamental event in company's life. In particular, the funeral of its founder presents some peculiar features in comparison with other types of company-sponsored funeral. In this paper, I will investigate the arrangement and the creation of the founder's funeral through the analysis of three significant examples, namely the ceremonies for Matsushita Konosuke (Panasonic), Ibuka Masaru and Morita Akio (Sony).

Summary 1 The Company-Sponsored Funeral and the Company's Founder. – 2 The Company-Sponsored Funeral. Some Practical Examples. – 2.1 The Funeral Ceremony of Panasonic's Founder. – 2.2 Company-Sponsored Funeral of Sony's Founders. – 3 The Arrangement and the Creation. – 3.1 The Arrangement of the Company-Sponsored Ceremony. – 3.2 The Creation of a Company-Sponsored Funeral. – 4 Conclusions.

Keywords Anthropology. Company's Founder. Company-Sponsored Funeral. Panasonic. Sony.

1 The Company-Sponsored Funeral and the Company's Founder

The company-sponsored funeral[1] is a ceremony organised and supported, both under the economical and human point of view, by a company to commemorate the top-level administrators who particularly contributed to its success. This ceremony chronologically follows the 'private funeral' (*missō* 密葬) and the 'temporary burial' (*kasō* 仮葬) organised by the family and it is considered the 'formal funeral' (*honsō* 本葬). In Japan, the number of these formal funerals have considerably grown, whereas in the adjacent countries, such as Korea, the number is lower.

1 A previously translated version of this paper was published in March 2003 as "Company Funeral of the Corporate Founder. Panasonic and sony", *Tenri Journal of Religion*, 31, 151-66. For the original paper see Nakamaki 2002.

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The main characteristics of company-sponsored ceremonies can be summarised as follow.[2] First, it is not exclusively centred on the prayers for the deceased, yet a great importance is given to the funeral oration where the deceased is publicly honoured. In other words, the company undertakes the arrangement of the ceremony in every aspect. Second, it is clear that the company's reputation is intimately connected to the company-sponsored funeral. Since the company invests a considerable amount of money and time in these ceremonies, any fault could undermine both the company's prestige and the departed's name. Therefore, the company pays attention to every single detail within the organisation and, in order to provide against unexpected events, a certain flexibility is fundamental. Third, the company-sponsored ceremony is a usage that continues to exist within the reciprocal relations of the company's members. Socially, this is a ceremonial event for the company, open also to people who do not belong to it. Although it is a funerary ceremony, it represents an occasion for the company to express the will to maintain its internal and external relationships. Four, in this occasion the company displays its eternity and rebirth. Indeed, the ceremony often symbolises the succession of authority. Lastly, one of the most evident features is the displaying of inequality, since these ceremonies are noticeably arranged exclusively for founders or administrators. Even though all the new employees participate in the welcoming ceremony, they will never receive the honour of a company-sponsored funeral unless they reach the company's top positions.

In particular, this paper deals with the ceremony held on a grand scale for the company's founder. It is not an exaggeration to say that this is the most important event in the history of the company, presenting different aspects in comparison with the company-sponsored ceremony of other members. This is because the passing of the founder is invested with a particular significance within the company. During the ceremony, on the one hand, the succession of authority and the changing of the guard take place along with the development of the company's future attitude and image. On the other hand, people's opinion about the company and the reality it lives constantly change. Albeit a company is defined as an organisation with its own regulations, in many cases the ideas and personality of its founder constitutes the keystone around which the company develops. It is, thus, clear why this ceremony is highly considered to be important.

The founder's ceremony emerges for its importance among the other ceremonies performed for the company's top members. If we compare the company's internal organisation to a family's, the founder constitutes the first ancestor. As well as ancestor's DNA is transmitted to his heirs, the attitude of the founder, in some way, transfers to his successor. Moreover, the

2 For further details, see Nakamaki 1999b.

characteristics of a company are handed down as intangible regulations. Thus, the passing of the founder, who personifies the image of the company, represents an opportunity to make some changes because it hides the reorganisation of DNA and the possibility to transform the company's essence. Depending on the arrangement of the ceremony, the course of the company's future may considerably change.

The company or the undertaker are not the sole directors of the company-sponsored ceremonies. Indeed, the people attending the ceremony may also arrange the event. In this case, some important decisions need to be made properly, e.g. the choice of a proper funeral chairman; the people in charge of reading the message of condolence; how to accommodate every participant's individual need. In a broader sense, the company's future relationships depend on the success of the ceremony. In many cases, albeit the funeral formally takes place according to plan, there might be unexpected events as well. It proves to be an occasion for the company to show its ability to cope with unforeseen situations. The participants to the company-sponsored ceremony, thus, create this event in every single part.

When analysing the company-sponsored ceremony we must consider two aspects: the arrangement and the creation of the ceremony. For instance, in the case of a film, there is a clear intention regarding the direction along with a screenplay. Yet, the actual film may reveal some differences with the planned one, due to the ability of the actors, the adjunction of scenes or other elements; in other words, it depends on things that were not initially taken into account. Analogously, in the funeral ceremony, it is fundamental to provide a 'film' that can be easily modified according to the circumstances, even though an original plan exists.

In this paper, I will present the cases of company's founder funeral from Panasonic and Sony. Panasonic and Sony are the leadership companies in the electronic field; their founders' business philosophy is unique and the respective companies present some peculiar features that differentiate them from other competitors. In any case, this paper is not focused on the different features of these two companies, yet the material collected from reliable testimonies clarifies the features of the funeral ceremonies of their founders.[3] Panasonic was founded by Matsushita Konosuke, whereas Sony's founders are Ibuka Masaru and Morita Akio.

After a brief illustration of Matsushita Denki's and Sony's funeral ceremonies, I will analyse these cases using the key-concepts of 'arrangement' (*enshutsu* 演出) and 'creation' (*sōshutsu* 創出).

3 Recently the following publications have appeared: Tateishi, Yasunori (2001). *Sony to Matsushita: Nijūisseiki seiki wo ikinokoru no wa dochirada!*. Tōkyō: Kōdansha; Ōtomi, Hiroyasu (2001). *Matsushita ga Sony wo koeru hi*. Ōsaka: Sunmark shuppan.

2 The Company-Sponsored Funeral. Some Practical Examples

2.1 The Funeral Ceremony of Panasonic's Founder

Panasonic was founded in 1918; it became a leader in the home electronics industry to the extent that its founder, Matsushita Kōnosuke, was defined as "the god of business". Matsushita passed away on April 27th 1989, at the age of ninety-four. A first viewing was held between April 27th and 28th, in the western pavilion of the family's estate, whereas the formal viewing took place at the so-called Northern Hall (Tsumura branch temple in Nishi-Honganji complex) in Osaka on April 29th. On April 30th, the President Tanii Akio allowed the funeral chairman to perform the private funeral in the Northern Hall. The officiating priest was the head of the Nishi-Honganji's head office (Jōdōshinshū branch), and a tea ceremony was offered by the grand tea master Sen Sōshitsu of the Urasenke school. The people who attended the formal viewing were 3,500, while the participants at the private ceremony were 12,000. After a month of preparation, in May 25th 1989, a collective ceremony attended by the Matsushita Company and its affiliates was arranged at the gymnasium of the company in Hirakata (Deguchi et al. 1999). The ceremony was transmitted through satellite in the 24-hour shops of seventeen cities throughout the country. The condolatory telegrams amounted to 11,500, and the condolence callers exceeded the 20,000 people, therefore it was defined as "the greatest company-sponsored ceremony in the history" (1999, 151).

2.2 Company-Sponsored Funeral of Sony's Founders

Ibuka Masaru and Morita Akio are known as Sony's founders.[4] In 1946, Ibuka and Morita founded a tape-recorder company at Hirakuya in Nihonbashi. This was the origin of the well-known Sony Company; in fact, they both cooperated in the built of a tape-recorder and substantially contributed to Sony's birth. Ibuka died in 1997 and two years later, in 1999, the co-founder Morita passed away.

Ibuka, the company's founder who kept the role of supreme advisor after his retirement, gave his last breath in his house, in December 19th 1997, at the age of 89. Since Ibuka was Protestant, the private ceremony was held at the Christian Church in Shinagawa. The ceremony and commemoration sponsored by the Sony Group were organised at the International Hall "Pamir" of the Prince Hotel New Takanawa, in the afternoon

4 Formally, the first president was Maeda Tamon, who was Ibuka's father-in-law and had previously worked for the Education Minister. However, Sony's founders are equally identified with both Ibuka and Morita.

of January 21th 1998. The tenor of the music was high and the mourners were approximately 5,700.

Sony's co-founder and honorary chairman, Morita, died at the age of 78, on October 5th 1999. The company-sponsored ceremony (organised with the participation of Morita Co., Ltd), took place in the afternoon of November 8th 1999 at the International Hall "Pamir" of the Prince Hotel New Takanawa, as in the case of Ibuka. Obviously, internationally well-known businessmen as well as important personalities from all over the world were present. Besides, the ceremony was transmitted simultaneously by Sky Perfect TV throughout the country. The people who attended the event were about 10,000. I also was admitted at the ceremony in the Hokushin Hall.

Morita's funeral service was characterised by the presence of music; even though the ceremony did not follow the general pattern, the invitation card reported the following program:

Memorial Service Program
1. Procession
2. Ave Maria F. Schubert
3. Moment of Silence
4. "Chatō no gi" Tea Ceremony, Sen Sōshitsu, Grand Tea Master of the Urasenke
5. Video Tribute to Akio Morita
6. Memorial Service Eulogies
7. Norio Ōga, Chairman of the Board, Sony Corporation
8. Yōtarō Kobayashi. Chairman, Japan Association of Corporate Executives
9. Minoru Oda, President, Tokyo University of Information Sciences
10. Thomas S. Foley, US Ambassador to Japan
11. "Dies irae" "Lacrimosa" from Requiem, W.A. Mozart
12. Telegram of Condolence
13. Ave Maria, J.S. Bach / C. Gounod
14. Remarks from Hideo Morita
15. Conclusion and Floral Offerings
16. Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra
17. Soprano: Satsuki Adachi
18. Conductor: Norio Ōga / Yōichirō Ōmachi
19. Sony Philharmonic Choir

3 The Arrangement and the Creation

3.1 The Arrangement of the Company-Sponsored Ceremony

The company-sponsored ceremony is usually held to commemorate the company's founder or chairman. Many extant companies were built by their founders immediately after the war. Specifically, in some cases the vice-president, the executive president and the managing president receive a company-sponsored funeral, whereas in other companies there is a distinction between 'formal funeral' (*honsō* 本葬) for the executive president and 'cooperative funeral' (*kyōryokusō* 協力葬) for the managing president. In any case, the company usually arranges the funeral and the funeral oration for the top-level administrators and the salaryman élite, even though they are not the founder himself or part of his family.

The founder's funeral, if compared to other company-sponsored funeral, is distinguished by numerous differences. First, the company assigns the organisation of the funeral to its most valuable members. In the case of Matsushita Kōnosuke, the selection of the personnel part of the organisation team preferred 'considerate', 'reliable' and 'diligent' people, selecting six hundred employees among the best members of the company (Deguchi et al. 1999, 151). Another peculiarity was the supply of a desk in the head office for the death care company (*kōekisha* 公益社) during the funeral.

In the case of the ceremony of Sony's founders, the top management elaborated a rather complicate plan on their own. They did not rely on the funeral company, yet the chairman in charge composed and personally performed the funeral music, awakening attendants' admiration. During the entrance of Ibuka's ashes, the wife of the president and chairman Ōga Norio, Matsubara Midori, played Chopin's Piano Sonata no. 2, op. 35 "Funeral March". Moreover, Ōga's composition "To the memory of Ibuka" was played by trumpet during the silent prayers. During Morita's ceremony, Ōga also conducted the Tōkyō Philharmonic Orchestra. Interestingly, there was the singular case in which the President, Idei Nobuyuki, presided the funeral. This is an extremely rare case, as it is usually performed by the head of the general affairs department.

Another important point that need to be further investigated is the presence of VIP guests who are not part of the company. They can be founders of important companies based in Japan, which are also internationally well-known. In the case of Matsushita and Sony's founders, the VIP guests from abroad were particularly noticeable. A memorial address was read on behalf of George Bush, the 41st President of the United States; during the ceremony, also the business partner and Philips's president, Wisse Dekker, expressed his sorrow. During the funeral service, every local administration offered a floral tribute, formed by white chrysanthemums.

The funeral ceremony of Ibuki was not attended by guests from abroad.

On the other hand, in the case of Morita, many international businessmen were present, e.g. the US Ambassador to Japan, Thomas Foley, who made a funeral address. Furthermore, there were innumerable condolatory telegrams from abroad sent, among others, by the President of France, Jacques Chirac; the former US Ambassador to Japan, Michael Mansfield; the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger; David Rockefeller.

Obviously, there were many important Japanese personalities and the big names from the political world were at the ceremony. During Matsushita's funeral, the eulogies were given on behalf of the Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru and on behalf of Mitsuzuka Hiroshi, Transport Minister; a memorial address was also made by the Honorary President of the Kansai Electric Power, Ashihara Yoshishige. For the incense burning were selected Edo Hideo, President of the Mitsui Fudōsan Co.; the Governor of Ōsaka Prefecture, Kishi Sakae; the Unaffiliated Director, Nakayama Sohei, in charge as special consultant for the Industrial Bank of Japan; the President of Japan Business Federation, Saitō Eishirō. At Ibuka's and Morita's funerals, the memorial service eulogies were given by Sakura Bank's Honorary President and Consultant, Koyama Gorō; Reona Esaki, past Rector of Tsukuba University, for the former. Ambassador Foley; Kobayashi Yōtarō, chairman of Japan Association of Corporate Executives and chairman and executive director of the Fuji Xerox Co.; the President of the Tōkyō University of Information Sciences, Oda Minoru, for the latter. Among the participants to Matsushita's funeral ceremony, the presence of leading figures from the financial world of the Kansai area emerges, whereas in the case of Sony's founders the participation of the Prime Ministers, both from the past and in charge, is particularly relevant.

If we compare Panasonic's and Sony's memorial addresses, some peculiar features emerge. At Matsushita's funeral, the memorial addresses of the most important public figures, namely the Prime Minister, the Transport Minister and the President of the US, were given on their behalf. The Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru and the Honorary President of the Kansai Electric Power used 'Matsushita-san'to refer to the deceased, whereas President Tanii and the representative of the labour union preferred the title of 'Counselor'. President Bush and Decca's Chairman chose 'Mr. Matsushita'.

During Sony's founders' funerals, no memorial address was given by the former or actual Prime Minister. Indeed, some of their closest friends were selected for the memorial eulogies. Sakura Bank's Honorary President and Consultant, Koyama Gorō, and Ibuka were about the same age and knew each other from Tōkyō Tsūshin Kōgyō's times; furthermore, Koyama worked at the company for several years as Outside Director. Reona Esaki was employed at Sony for four years as researcher and became famous for receiving the Nobel Price for the Esaki Tunnel Diode. They both used 'Ibuka-san' during the memorial address. Morita's friends also preferred

'Morita-san' (Kobayashi Yōtarō and Ambassador Foley) or 'Morita-kun' (Oda Minoru, a classmate during the period at the Faculty of Physics at Ōsaka University). The head for the funeral organisation and company's chairman, Ōga, referred to Sony's founders as 'Ibuka-san' and 'Morita-san'. The usage of the name ending 'san' derives from a practice within the company, as it was used indiscriminately for both the founders and the directors.

The memorial address at Ibuka's ceremony is distinguished by a particular element. At the time, Morita was having medical treatments in Hawaii, so he could not take part in the funeral. The memorial address preceded Ōga's one and was given by his wife, Morita Yoshiko, who read it after recalling some memories about Ibuka. Hence, this is how Sony arranged the ceremony, celebrating the relationship between Ibuka and Morita.

Another main difference between the memorial addresses during Panasonic's ceremony and that of Sony's is the presence of a labour union delegate. Matsushita Konosuke was famous for adopting a family-oriented policy in his company. Therefore, the labour unions were never seen as a mere antagonist, because at the centre of Matsushita's business philosophy there were mutual respect and sustain for his employees. The particular attention given to the employees was the reason why the labour union delegate, Maekawa Tomohisa, was included with a memorial address in Matsushita's funeral. In order to commemorate the soul of the deceased employees, Panasonic Company erected a memorial tower at Kōya-san where the president and minor managers can, along with the labour union delegates, burn incense (Nakamaki 1992, 74).[5] Thus, it appears clear that the participation of Maekawa at the funeral service is not an exceptional event, yet it aimed at the maintenance of the natural balance within the company. However, the presence of the labour union at company-sponsored funeral is not very common in the Kansai area; also at the Sony-sponsored ceremonies there was no memorial address given on behalf of a labour union. Therefore, the memorial address from a labour union's chairman further emphasised the great importance given by Panasonic and his founder to labour-management relationship.

Lastly, another peculiarity of the company's arrangement is the ornament of the altar. In a company-sponsored ceremony, the altar adorned with flowers is usually displayed with a picture depicting the defunct at its centre; in some cases, posthumous ranks, decoration or medals may also appear on the altar. At the company-sponsored ceremony of both Panasonic's and Sony's founders, the donation provided by the Emperor and the Imperial Prince was added to the usual ornaments, making it very

5 A labour union delegate also participates and burns incense at the memorial services organised by the Nankai Dentetsu (1992, 62-3).

different and unique if compared to the common altar used in this type of ceremony.

Noticeably, at Ibuka's funeral there was only one portrait displayed, whereas in the case of Morita there were three of them. At the centre, one with a smiling face; on the left and on the right, a portrait at work and one with crossed arms respectively. In these images, Morita clearly resembled an international businessman in his formal suit. The portraits from three different perspectives, rather than one single image, were useful to awake people's imagination about Morita. Moreover, the portraits were not photographs, as the company preferred pictures. According to the organisation, placing a backlight for a constant illumination was extremely difficult, but it was possible thanks to Sony's special technologies.

The audacious idea to place three different pictures was elaborated within the internal board of the company and did not depend on the undertaker. Indeed, the ornament of the altar at Ibuka's ceremony was left to the undertaker, whereas in the case of Morita it was not.

The relationship with the undertaker varies if we compare the case of Panasonic with Sony, emphasising once again the differences between the two companies. Panasonic closely cooperated with the undertaker, to the extent that they provided the death care company with a desk. On the contrary, in the case of Sony, the company dealt with Sudō's flower shop for Ibuka's ceremony and collaborated only with the hotel for Morita's funeral.

3.2 The Creation of a Company-Sponsored Funeral

The company-sponsored ceremony is a funeral ceremony with a plot. In order to display the ceremony it takes about twenty-five days of accurate organization, albeit it does not always take place as it was programmed.[6] For instance, there might be important condolence caller not included in the guest list, or ad lib memorial addresses. The weather condition also greatly influences the result of the event. Moreover, when the number of cars is limited due to the parking space, the concern of the people in charge is considerably higher. Then, even though the importance of the guests is always kept in mind, some faults always happen.

The funeral usually goes according to plans and, unless something unexpected happens, the condolence callers follow the given indications. If we analyse the ceremony from the point of view of the construction of its

6 The data refer to the analysis published in the *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, from January 1996 to March 1997, regarding the obituaries about the organisation-sponsored funerals, e.g. the company-sponsored funerals in the Toky area and neighbouring prefectures. See Murakami 1999.

etiquette by the organisation and the participants, some interesting features emerge from the cases of both Panasonic and Sony.

At the very beginning of Matsushita's funeral, there was a light rain, but during the ceremony it became heavier and heavier. A great number of umbrellas were arranged for the long line of guests waiting in front of the gymnasium. Furthermore, the organising committee promptly ordered some hundreds of towels from the nearby training center, entrusting the female employees to bring the towels back and wipe the guests' back. According to Mitsui Izumi, it was intimately connected to the 'protection of trust' (*hoshin* 保信) that Matsushita himself transmitted during his life, thus the company-sponsored ceremony was the stage where this 'protection of trust' was greatly displayed as a value (Deguchi et al. 1999, 154).

For Panasonic the protection of trust is particularly important. Therefore, the company considers the business partners as 'sustainers' (*onkosha* 恩顧者) and constantly expresses them its gratitude, working for the maintenance and the enhancement of the trust within the company. In order to control the company's trustworthiness, in the main quarters, a "Trustworthiness Division" was established and placed under the direct control of the president. It was first established in 1938 as "Trustworthiness Department", representing the beginning of a long tradition. At first, it aimed at the improvement of the welfare, beginning with heating the bath for its employees. Nowadays, it has established a state-of-the-art system to satisfy the needs of the 'sustainers'. Among the duties of the "Trustworthiness division", there are: firstly, visit of congratulations or call of condolence in case of mourning; secondly, preparing telegrams of congratulations or condolatory telegrams; thirdly, arranging letters of sympathy and greetings cards; fourthly, arranging the gifts during festive periods such as *chūgen* and *seibo*; fifthly, the duties regarding the yearly events. For example, they organise mourning memorial services for deceased employees and administrate the cemetery at Mount Kōya; they are also responsible for the administration matters regarding the company-sponsored funeral. The demonstration of the ability to promptly satisfy guests' needs, being polite and express the company's gratitude toward supporters are an expression of 'protection of trust'. Hence, it is clear why Mitsui saw a manifestation of the so-called 'protection of trust' in the wiping of the guests' shoulders.

In the case of Sony's founders, at Morita's ceremony the funeral music abounded with references to Sony brand, yet under the point of view of the creation of the ceremony, the memorial address of US Ambassador to Japan, Thomas Foley, need to be further analysed.[7] Foley referred to Morita

7 I am particularly grateful to Morimoto Masayoshi and Katsuta Tadao, respectively Senior Managing Director and Head of Secretarial Section, for their support during my research at Sony.

as ‘Morita-san’, the most famous person in Japan, after the Emperor; in describing Morita he said that “he was able to overcome the boundaries of different cultures” and “as a Japanese spokesman he played a remarkable part in this process”; as a businessman he showed “his loyalty toward the responsibilities in the company”. At end of his address, Foley used ‘Akio’ instead of ‘Morita-san’.

The participation of an ambassador at a private citizen’s funeral and the related memorial address following the Japanese etiquette seem to belong to a different age. Moreover, the use of Morita’s first name during the memorial address given by the US Ambassador was extremely unexpected, since an informal name was used during the company-sponsored funeral, which is one of the most formal events. However, the usage of the first name is common in American culture, and in the case of Morita, it is not to be considered as impolite, rather it overcomes the formalities of diplomatic language stressing the spontaneity of the memorial address.

Under the point of view of the creation of the ceremony, this element is particularly important as Foley modified his memorial address before the funeral. Sony had arranged the Telop transmission device for the translation, which revealed to be unnecessary. On the contrary, this unexpected change proved the sincere friendship between Foley and Morita.[8]

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, the given examples show the adaptation of a solemn ceremony such as the company-sponsored funeral to different circumstances, mainly created by the guests’ originality. This type of funeral reveals its creativity within an extremely complicated one-time-only planning, avoiding being an event with a strict schedule. In this sense, the individuality of both the deceased and the company emerge, revealing the unique business philosophy of the founder along with many other important details.

8 In the special memorial issue for Morita Akio “Family” (Commemorative number for the founder and honorary president Morita Akio, December 2000, Sony Corporation Public Relations Department), Thomas Foley’s memorial address was entirely translated (100-101) using exclusively ‘Morita-san’. However, it should be noted that, in the last part of his address, Foley referred to Morita as ‘Akio’.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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A Dream to Challenge the 'World of Dreams'
Evanescence and Desire in *Ano ie* (1953) by Enchi Fumiko

Daniela Moro
(Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

Abstract This is an analysis of the short story *Ano ie* by Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986), based on the affinity with Noh, both in structure and content. In particular, the main plays quoted are *Dōjōji* and *Izutsu*, which both revolve around the notion of female desire at the centre of their narration. After surveying the readings of the texts by a few scholars, such as Wakita Haruko, Kanaseki Takeshi and Susan Blakeley Klein, the article will look at how the intertextual references to the two plays in *Ano ie* construct Enchi's singular interpretation of female desire, which is seen in its many stages through the life of the protagonist, Kayo. In conclusion, the dream-like structure of the narration becomes the only way to escape from obsessions and the evanescence of life, allowing the protagonist to be the spectator of her own past and sublimate her negative passions.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Narrative Features. – 3 Plot. – 4 Affinity to the 'Dream Noh' Structure. – 5 *Dōjōji* and the Power of the Female Desire. – 6 *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, the Repented Womanizer. – 7 Cross-gendered Performance. – 8 *Izutsu* and the "Woman Waiting for the Past". – 9 Death, Desire and Enchi's Use of the Cliché of *Mujō*. – 10 Conclusions.

Keywords Dōjōji. Izutsu. Mugen Noh. Female Desire. Mujō. Cross-Gendered Performance. Dream.

1 Introduction

Ano ie, published in 1953 in the magazine *Bessatsu shōsetsu Shinchō* 別冊小説新潮 (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 2), focuses on the love story between Kayo 香代, a traditional Japanese *nihon buyō* 日本舞踊 dancer, and a Noh actor, Nishikawa 西川, who, at the time of the narration, has already passed away. I will analyse some crucial points of this work, focusing on the intertextuality between classical theatre and prose that lies at the heart of this text.

2 Narrative Features

Kayo's mind is rendered explicit through the narrative voice and whenever a comment occurs, it is always rendered to us as her train of thought. For

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example, two adjectives refer to the male protagonist Nishikawa: *kimagure* 気まぐれ (moody) and *wagamama* わがまま (egoist), but they are seen from Kayo's point of view, since the same sentence contains the expression *ataete kureru* 与えてくれる (he makes the favour of giving me), obviously used by the narrator in order to express closeness to Kayo's mind (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 2: 69).[1] Even when the narration is close to the male protagonist Nishikawa, one cannot regard it as a shift in perspective, since there are expressions such as *rashiku* らしく that suggest a supposition (69). Thus, it does not directly report Nishikawa's thought. On the contrary, it is more probable that this too is part of Kayo's thought.

Two narrative levels give the work an inverted narrative structure. The first one is the framework, at the beginning and at the very end of the piece, which introduces the second narrative level, or the body of the story. The narrative voice shows the present situation and describes Kayo relaxing at a thermal resort after a performance. This framework is the spur for the flux of Kayo's memory, recalling the love story with Nishikawa, who passed away many years before. Indeed, the framework contains some brief flash-forwards that pre-empt the events recalled in the central story, narrated on the second level. Those flash-forwards are mainly triggered by the dreamlike encounter of Kayo with a woman at the resort hotel, who is supposed to be the niece of the owner of 'that house' (*ano ie* あの家), the teahouse with rooms for romantic encounters between lovers, which lends itself as title to the work. Then the body of the story is introduced and the recollection of the events starts. In the following, I will give a brief account of these events.

3 Plot

Kayo and Nishikawa were known to each other as disciple and teacher, since she asks him to teach her the Noh drama *Izutsu* 井筒, in order to apply it to her dance in the *nihon buyō* style of the same play. After the unsuccessful performance of *Izutsu* by Kayo, she accompanies him to a Noh costume exhibition and then he brings her to the teahouse, where their relationship starts. At first, Kayo is almost upset by the tactlessness of Nishikawa's approach, to the point that she wants to cry. Afterwards, however, she starts feeling at ease in his embrace. Not before long, Kayo's feelings and desires grow increasingly deep and she keeps the relationship hidden so as to avoid opposing voices, which could hinder their marriage. On the other hand, the feelings of the Noh actor Nishikawa start to wane. He starts going out with other women and Kayo becomes caught up in

1 Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Japanese are the Author's.

jealousy. When Nishikawa abandons Kayo, she is desperate and puts all her efforts into her art, which she had neglected during their relationship, to the point that the father was about to adopt a different disciple to follow in his art, according to the custom for families without children in the world of traditional performing arts. But after having overcome the pain of an unrequited love, her art takes on a more mature touch and gains strength. Kayo's father is happy about this, but ignores that the motivation at the basis of her strength is that she is not seeing Nishikawa anymore. After a while, she starts hearing many stories about love relationships in which Nishikawa would have toyed with women and eventually abandoned them. Then, Kayo sees Nishikawa for the last time after seven years, during the war. He is playing the *shite* シテ (main actor) of the play *Dōjōji* 道成寺 and Kayo is moved because the female desire conveyed by Nishikawa, playing on the stage the snake-woman role, reflects the same intense passion she once had felt for him. When the end of the war is approaching, Kayo, who had been evacuated to the mountains, reads in the newspaper that her former lover has passed away from pneumonia. After the main body of the story has finished, we return to the framework, set again at the thermal resort, in the morning after the supposed encounter with the woman of the teahouse.

It is important to notice that the encounter Kayo has with that woman remains in a dreamlike state, both at the beginning and at the end. From the way the encounter is described, it is difficult to understand whether we are faced with reality or just a fantasy of Kayo. Moreover, the non-parallelism between the sequence of the events and narration of those events, creates an ambiguity and incoherence,which is typical of the dream.

4 Affinity to the 'Dream Noh' Structure

In my opinion, it is precisely the pattern of the 'dream Noh' (*mugen nō* 夢幻能) that this work makes reference to. Describing the structure of this type of Noh, Beonio-Brocchieri (1967, 87) explains that the *shite* in the *nochiba* 後場 (second part of the performance) is "the character in its material individuality, which relives his/her own human events thanks to the technique of *flash back*, an enactment with the artifice of the dream by the waki".

In *Ano ie*, it is not the supporting character's role (*waki* 脇) to recall the past in Kayo's dreams, rather it is directly the main character's role (*shite*), which is Kayo herself. And the persona that disappears as a phantom is not Kayo, but the woman encountered at the resort, who is not named once during the entire narration. Indeed, she is a perfect minor character, who is useful as a spur for Kayo to recall her past. In this sense, she is comparable to the role of *waki*, although she ambiguously manifests herself like

a *shite* in a *mugen nō*. Also, Kayo has a principal role, even if at the same time she recalls the past thanks to a dream, like a *waki*.

In the first part of the performance (*maeba* 前場), the *waki* walks in the scene, followed by the *shite*, a phantom disguised as a human, telling the *waki* the story of the place (Cagnoni [1978] 2006, 108). Similarly, in *Ano ie*, through the dialogue with the woman-phantom, there is a flash-forward that becomes a sort of summary of the main story and pre-empts the main events.

During the second part of the *mugen nō*, there is a detailed narration of the events. The *nochijite*, the *shite* in the second part, dances in his/her original phantom appearance and the scene normally ends with the liberation of the *shite* from obsession and an image of *mujō* 無常 (caducity). Similarly, Kayo, at the end of the story after the war has finished, goes to the teahouse's ruins and intensely feels the caducity of everything, as we will see below. Through a vivid contrast between the memories of a vital and passionate past and the reality of death and destruction, the *shite*-Kayo experiences a sort of catharsis, thus finding purification from obsessive memories. She ultimately regains a new strength and joy of living.

Finally, at the end of a *mugen nō* there are a scene of awakening from an illusion and the revelation that it was a dream. In *Ano ie* the framework narration returns in order to conclude the story and the ending casts a shadow of doubt on the real existence of the woman. Thus, it makes the reader suspect that the whole story was recollect by Kayo in a dream.

Cagnoni speaks of 'critical mimesis' referring to the fact that *shite* and *waki*, along with their co-supporter (*tsure* ツレ) or with the chorus (*ji* 地), speak of themselves as third persons and therefore live their situation as spectators (Cagnoni [1978] 2006, 108-9). The narration of *Ano ie* can be interpreted in the same way, because the narrator is very likely to be an alter ego of Kayo, being perpetually inside her mind, but speaking in the third person.

5 *Dōjōji* and the Power of the Female Desire

The role of Noh in this work is not only linked to the structure, but it is even more essential when it comes to intertextuality. We know that the first step towards the end of Kayo's overwhelming passion for Nishikawa is when she goes to watch his performance of *Dōjōji*, seven years after the end of their relationship. On that occasion, Kayo experiences a sort of purification of her feelings. The narration (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 2: 71) refers explicitly to a "distance from carnal desire" (*nikuyoku wo hanarete* 肉欲を離れて), because Kayo realises that at the end of the performance her feelings have changed and she desires to see him, not out of passion, but out of will to shake hands with him, probably in order to express her admiration for a fellow performer.

Dōjōji is a fourth type of drama, classified as a *genzai nō* 現在能, even if it is not characterized by a parallelism of sequence and narration of the events, as it is typical of this kind of Noh (Blakeley Klein 1991, 314).

The play is set in the Dōjō-ji Temple in the Province of Kii 紀伊. The background is the story of a lord's daughter, who has been told by her father that she will marry a certain mountain priest who visits her house every year. When she realises that this is not the priest's intention, she assumes that she has been betrayed by him. She transforms herself into a poisonous snake, chases the priest to the ground, and finally destroys him as he hides under the bell at Dōjō-ji Temple, by blowing flames of resentment onto the bell.

The play starts with a Buddhist rite for the hanging of a renewed bell. The head priest of the temple orders the other monks not to allow any women in for the rite. However, one *shirabyōshi* 白拍子 (a female dancer who wears a male costume) appears to ask the servant of the temple to allow her to perform a dance for the rite and manages to enter the place where the rite will be held. The woman approaches the hanging bell while dancing. She finally lowers the bell and hides in it. After hearing the news, the head priest of the Dōjō-ji Temple begins recounting the horrible story about the temple. The monks understand that the woman still has her heart set on the man and they pray with all their sacred power and successfully pull the hanging bell up. Then, the woman, transformed into a monstrous snake, appears from inside. After a furious battle, the poisonous snake burns herself with her own flames, which are supposed to burn the bell, and disappears into the bottom of the Hidaka River.

In the scene depicted in the work, there is the snake-woman fighting against the monk who wants to pacify her soul, in "obsessive attacks after escapes with no letting up". What is underlined in this scene is the weight of the female karma. The famous Noh critic Masuda Shōzō 増田正造 appreciates the description of the scene from *Dōjōji* to such an extent that he claims that Enchi was "a writer with no peers in the description of Noh scenes" (Masuda 1990, 387).

First of all, the choice of this precise Noh drama has to be pointed out, since, as underlined by Blakeley Klein (1991, 292), it is a story that came from *setsuwa* 説話 and underwent many dramatic changes before taking on the actual form. In the last *Dōjōji* version, the story took a particularly orthodox stance towards the idea of the female karma. Following the reconstruction of the variations of this story throughout the centuries, Blakeley traces back this increased criticism of the female figure to the change with time in performing needs. When the patrons of the Noh performances changed from monks to samurai, the tastes went towards more dynamic performances, which would possibly represent fights between *shite* and *waki* (322).

The principal motivation for the modification of the *Kanemaki* 鐘巻 play into the *Dōjōji* play is said to have been the desire to raise the dramatic

efficacy. For example, the scenic effect obtained by the *shite* as a snake-like figure diving into Hidaka's riverbed at the end of the play is obviously stronger than the scene in *Kanemaki*, where the woman is ultimately unburdened of worldly passions and exits the stage quietly. No matter what the motivations for this change were, I want to think here of how the reception of the drama has been influenced by this change.

Kanemaki derived from the story narrated in a *setsuwa* called Kegonenjienki 華厳演縁起, which "demonstrates that the power of feminine desire even in the monstrous form of a dragon can be transformed by the teaching of Buddhism into a power for good" (Blakeley Klein 1991, 302). It is evident that here the Buddhist principle of *gyakuen* 逆縁 is exalted. For this principle, "sin itself may paradoxically form the ladder, or 'link', to salvation" (307). This concept in *Kanemaki* is not as explicit as in the *setsuwa*, but the final scene of the enlightenment of the snake-woman shows that she understood her mistakes and, precisely because of that, she has the chance to overcome her passions in a catharsis-like process. For example, in *Kanemaki* the woman dressed as a *shirabyōshi* dancer is torn between the will to be purified from the obsession of an unrequited love and the will to find the monk to punish him for having disappointed her. On the other hand, in *Dōjōji*, the possible change of the woman's consciousness, the ambivalence is almost completely eliminated (Masuda 1971, 125-6). It is true that the interpretation of the serpent-woman's mind depends on the Noh school that performs it (Blakeley Klein 1991, 294-5), but generally in *Dōjōji* she corresponds to the image of the 'dangerous woman' archetype, without any repentance or will to reach enlightenment. Here, I borrowed the expression 'dangerous woman' from Nina Cornyetz (1999), referring to the modern and contemporary transformation of the *femme fatale*-like archetype belonging to Japanese tradition, born out of men's fear of women's independence and power of self-expression. In her book she dedicates a chapter to Enchi Fumiko's works, especially focusing on the concept of female karma, which is original of medieval Buddhism and skilfully adapted by Enchi.

In other words, the emphasis on female sexuality and desire in *Dōjōji* is evident. In *Kanemaki* it is the wisdom of the woman that allows her to enter the confines of the temple, forbidden on that day to women, but in *Dōjōji* it is thanks to her *shirabyōshi* dance, which represents the tool of female fascination and temptation. Moreover, the version of the story in *Dōjōji*, where the prayers of the monks fail to pacify the snake-woman, ends with the possibility that the snake could return from the river over and over again, since it is not enlightened or purified at all.

There are many Noh plays that trace female suffering for unrequited love or yearning, but *Dōjōji*, especially compared to its original, the *Kanemaki* version, could be considered as an emblematic play for describing a strong female desire and a marked female sensuality. The fact that in *Ano ie* the only scene quoted is precisely the climax of *Dōjōji* obviously

comes from the will to stress to the maximum degree the strength of female desire expressed by Nishikawa's performance of *Dōjōji* to which Kayo is a spectator:

> In that symbolic world Kayo started seeing her own figure in pain despairing and crying, when she had been abandoned seven years before, and for a moment she held her breath. She had lost. From the bottom of her heart she felt that she had lost. From the start she had perpetually been defeated by Nishikawa, but after watching the performance today, she felt that she was living inside Nishikawa's art. She touched her cheek and realized that a pure tear was flowing down. (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 71)

Kayo sees herself under a new light and, for the first time after seven years, she deeply realises how much she had been suffering. Only one tear flows down her face, which is probably a sign of purification.

It is not uncommon for Enchi to use the intertextual references to Noh drama to render the depth of the protagonists' feelings. In this case, the technique is even more powerful because the actor who brings the role of the desiring female to the stage is the man for whom the woman protagonist of the work suffers. Conversely, the roles danced by Kayo are the womanizer male roles, such as the protagonists of *Izutsu* 井筒 and *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男.

6 *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, the Repented Womanizer

First I will focus on the intertextual reference to *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, the famous Edo period book on the adventures of Yonosuke 世之介, by Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴. The chapter of Saikaku's work that inspired Kayo's performance is narrated in detail at the beginning of the work, where Kayo is reconsidering her performance while resting at the thermal resort. This metadiegesis is useful here because the reader can understand the tone of the performance, which is not in harmony with the general lively tone of the original *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*. The chapter is indeed extremely sombre and full of references to the evanescence of life. The theme of passion is opposed to that of *mujō* and therefore it is in line with the rest of the narration. In this chapter Yonosuke, the stereotype of Don Juan, gets out of prison where he had been retained for having an illicit relationship with a married woman. He meets another married woman in the prison, and they try to escape together, but the woman is caught by her husband and killed. The chapter ends with the unusual image of a desperate Yonosuke, who attempts to commit suicide because he is feeling guilty for the death of the woman. The contrast between this scene and the usual hedonistic

tones of Saikaku's work powerfully suggests the ineffability of death and the evanescence of worldly passions. Even the man who has dedicated his entire life to the pleasures of the fleeting world has to face his karma at a certain point in time and is obliged to endure a sense of disillusionment and the victory of death over everything.

The narrative text of *Ano ie* indicates that the performance based on this chapter is greatly appreciated by the audience, especially concerning Kayo's disciple's interpretation of the woman's passion, choosing to escape with her lover Yonosuke. But Kayo is not satisfied with her performance of Yonosuke. She admits

> she would have liked to dig a dark cave with a big entrance into the heart of such men, through the figure of a Don Juan like Yonosuke, who is changing continuously without peace, consuming his passions from a woman to the other in one instant. (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 63-4)

7 Cross-gendered Performance

The cross-gendered scheme emphasises Nishikawa's talent versus the mediocrity of Kayo's performance, especially when it comes to performing roles of the opposite sex.

Moreover, many years before this performance of Yonosuke, Kayo is scolded by Nishikawa for her performance of *Izutsu*. He argues that the scene where the female main character "becomes a man" (*otoko ni natta tokoro* 男になったところ) is not well performed (67). This underlines the disparity between their artistic skills, which metaphorically mirrors what will become of their emotional status after their relationship starts. The cross-gendered performance – which is actually a metatextual performance in *Izutsu* – has the opposite effect of the cross-gendered performance in *Dōjōji*. Kayo, focused on her passion in love, has no energies left to dedicate to her art as she was used to. She *is* herself the longing woman, the waiting woman, thus she cannot avoid identification with this role once on stage.

On the other hand, Nishikawa, whose feelings are more distant and indifferent because he is not concentrating on her, being free from attachment, can seamlessly enter the soul of women and "bleed them dry", as some disciple of Kayo says (71). Not only, but also thanks to his coldness, he can calmly observe from the outside the destructive passion she feels for him, finding inspiration in it for his women roles, which become even more efficacious after the relationship with Kayo. This is based on the idea that the woman's destiny is retribution since her attachment to worldly passions and carnal desire are deep, precisely like the female figure in *Dōjōji*. Generally speaking, in Buddhist terms, every attachment

is negative, but Enchi in her first works does not deny female karma. The narrator of *Ano ie*, entering Kayo's mind, argues: "the more Nishikawa's cold heart was exposed, the more Kayo's passionate desire would become single-mindedly strong" (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 69). In this phase of Enchi's works, the woman is the victim of man's coldness. Therefore, the Buddhist idea of female karma is not denied, but rather emphasised in order to denounce the genders' inequality. The narration underlines: "in art there should be neither male nor female, but Kayo thought that probably female are less suitable for it" (64). An admission that woman's loss is both moral and artistic, hence social as well.

Cagnoni, explaining Zeami's theories, argues that the actor and the character are separate, sometimes even contrasting personas. She insists on the need for the actor to be critical in his mimesis, to 'narrate' the character, ideally reaching the alienation effect given by the distance from the character represented (Cagnoni [1978] 2006, 111).

Kayo's dance is not a Noh dance, even though we know that it borrows many elements from Noh. Nevertheless, it is clear from the text that, if Kayo had been able to distance herself from her passion, she could have given her performance a different degree of energy and effectiveness. When Kayo is focused on her relationship with Nishikawa, her dance loses energy. The other way round, once she is abandoned by him, she finds comfort putting all her energy and time into dancing and, as stated previously, her performance improves dramatically.

There is a very significant sentence in the narration that evidently expresses Kayo's thought on the art of Noh. It reads: "what can it be this refined and intense beauty which does not seem to be of this world and is emanated from the action of a man on the stage allowing to perceive the void?" (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 67).

This definition seems very close to that of *yūgen* 幽玄, pointing out the obscure and mysterious grace that emanates from a Noh scene, as underlined by Cagnoni's reference to the commentary by the famous critic Nose Asaji 能勢朝次 (1894-1955) in the collection of treatises Zeami Jūrokubushū 世阿弥十六部集 (Collection of Sixteen Treatises by Zeami) (Cagnoni [1967] 2006, 72-3). The perception of the void and self-awareness of the spectator is the ideal aim of theatrical expressions such as Noh, where there is no perfect identification of the actor with the character. When there is identification of the actor with his/her role, there is indeed no space for interpretation by spectators. But the abstract art of Noh allows a personal reading, therefore a consequent projection of the spectator's emotions onto the stage. This leads to their objectification and ultimate awareness of his or her passions. The fact that the actor takes distance from passions before interpreting a role is therefore essential to achieving a successful result performance (Cagnoni [1978] 2006, 109-11).

8 *Izutsu* and the "Woman Waiting for the Past"

Here I would like to concentrate on the *Izutsu* play, because some concepts linked to this play are crucial to the interpretation of *Ano ie*, even more than *Dōjōji*, which is referred to more often in the narration.

I already mentioned that because of *Izutsu*, Kayo and Nishikawa meet each other at first. She asks him to teach her to perform this play in order to use it in her *nihon buyō* dance style. The play, taken from *Ise monogatari* (伊勢物語), narrates the story of Ki no Aritsune's (紀有常) daughter, married to Ariwara no Narihira (在原業平), another Don Juan of Japanese classical literature. It is a *mugen nō* and a 'wig play' (*katsuramono* 鬘物), a play where a woman features as the protagonist.

As a typical *mugen nō*, *Izutsu* starts with an itinerant Buddhist monk in the role of *waki* who stops at a temple, the Ariwara-dera (在原寺) in Yamato on his way to the Hase Temple (長谷寺). According to the legend, the Ariwara Temple was built by Ariwara no Narihira. A village woman in the role of *shite* arrives to tend a grave in the garden. She draws offertory water from a wooden-framed well and, as the priest watches her, he becomes intrigued. In response to the monk's inquiries, she begins to tell the story "Tsutsu-Izutsu" from the *Ise Monogatari*, a love story between Ariwara no Narihira and a daughter of Ki no Aritsune. Young Narihira and Aritsune's daughter, who compared their heights at the well head, grew to adulthood and got married after exchanging love poems. The woman reveals to the monk that she is Ki no Aritsune's daughter, then she disappears behind the old burial mound.

The priest asks a village man about the place and hears the story more plainly. The villager suggests that, as a priest, he could offer a prayer to her soul, and so he decides to settle down for the night on a bed of moss in the garden. Late at night, the ghost of Lady Izutsu appears in his dream while the monk is asleep. This is the typical formula of the second part in a *mugen nō*. The woman in his dream wears Narihira's headdress and a male's imperial court kimono and starts the dance of *jonomai* 序の舞 showing her love and yearning for him. The phantom of the woman in that moment takes Narihira's place, with the intention of becoming one with her object of desire. She looks into the well that they had stood beside as children, seeing his reflection instead of her own. She then cries and disappears. At that point the monk is awakened from the dream.

Like in the majority of Noh plays and in this drama too, the sense of caducity is strong, and both *waki* and *shite* insist on underlining the transience of life on numerous opportunities. In the first part, the woman says (Yasuda 1980, 411):

定めな き世の夢心
sadamenaki yo no yumegokoro

何の音にか覺めてまし
Nan no oto ni ka sadametemashi
何の音にか覺めてまし
Nan no oto ni ka sadametemashi

In the translation by Kenneth K. Yasuda it reads as:

> In this fleeting world of men that our hearts dream of,
> what will be the sound that calls to awaken us,
> what will be the sound that calls to awaken us?

Yasuda interprets these lines as a call for Buddha's benevolence that would lead men to reach the Western Paradise or nirvana from the actual world, the 'world of dreams' from which men need to be awakened. Yasuda goes even further: he sees the end of the play when the monk awakens from the dream, as the breaking of the dream of actual reality.

In other readings, the invocation of Buddha is lost or merely used as a way to emphasise, conversely, the loss of hope for salvation from this world of dreams. The form is therefore religious, but the content is not necessarily interpreted in religious terms: this word is transient and therefore it is like a dream. Wakita Haruko (脇田晴子) points out that this is the only passage where one can detect Buddhist tones in the whole play (2005, 57). She argues that

> traditionally, in the readings of earlier scholars, this term '*sadametemashi*' used to be interpreted as reaching illumination. Actually the fact of aiming at the Western Mountain and if we consider the passage "voice of the Law, please guide me" (*michibiki tamae nori no koe* 導き給へ法の声) in the *sageuta* 下歌, it becomes obvious. Nevertheless, considering the same phrase, I cannot help thinking of the scenario where the phantom, asleep on the ground is awakened by a sound and suddenly emerges. I at least think that Zeami had both ways in mind. (57)

Also Kanaseki Takeshi (金関猛), studying the psychological aspects of Noh plays, underlines that this is the only phrase with Buddhist tones in the play; then, he questions whether the woman's call is made out of a real desire to reach illumination. He interprets it as a self-questioning attitude, most probably linked to a sentiment of resignation, which dissolves within herself (1999, 46). In Kanaseki's opinion the answer to this question could be at the very end of the play, exactly where Yasuda sees, as quoted above, some hope for human beings to attain nirvana. On the contrary, for Kanaseki the awaking of the monk by the sound of the temple bell is an awaking in this world of dream, a fleeting world, so it is not positive and confirms the woman's doubt about the chance to reach illumination. He

argues that this ending makes the spectator imagine that "other dreams will be weaved" (*yume wa sara ni tsumugare* 夢はさらに紡がれ) and that the woman's morning visit will continue every day (Kanaseki 1999, 46).

The dream is at the centre of this play, both in the structure of *mugen nō* where the monk dreams the story, and in the fact that the caducity of the actual life is emphasised by means of the metaphor of dream. Moreover, following Kanaseki's logic, the use of the monk's dream in the *nochiba* is a way to break with the actual world's evanescence, because this is the only way to make the past alive again. We can say that, ultimately, in *Izutsu* passion is so strong that it overcomes death: so, the woman's desire to meet her husband again in the afterlife is satisfied thanks to the dream, which overcomes the vanity of life (Kanaseki 1999, 43). Paradoxically, a dream represents the challenge to the world of dreams.

Notwithstanding this, Kanaseki underlines that it is not the phantom of the woman who wants to appear in the monk's dream, but it is the monk calling the past figure of Narihira before taking to rest (1999, 48). Further evidence is given that it is not the woman calling for divine help; therefore the sentence quoted above, calling for Buddha's mercy, is more to stress the perception of *mujō* than to ask for prayers.

On the other hand, he affirms that the memory of the past is always true along with memory of facts, whether real or invented, since both are 'psychological realities'. Therefore, they can affect the life of the person who is remembering at the same level (Kanaseki 1999, 50). Moreover, since in *Izutsu* past events are not recalled in chronological order – since first life as husband and wife is narrated and then the child memories come up – every principle of reality loses strength (Kanaseki 1999, 48-9) and the narration goes in the direction of the past. This is why the female protagonist of *Izutsu* is paradoxically defined as (64) a "woman who waits for the distant past" (*harukana inishie wo machitsudukeru 'hitomatsu onna'* 遥かないにしえを待ち続ける「人待つ女). Her phantom's longing and desire for her dead husband is so strong that she continues to linger in this world, but the only way to meet him again is to encounter him in the past, by making him live again in her body in the cross-gendered transformation of the monk's dream, where she is herself and the dead husband at the same time. It is like a dance between man and woman, or a metaphorical sexual encounter (Kanaseki 1999, 63-4), which is aimed at the satisfaction of the woman's desire, projected from the past into the future.

There is another aspect related to the concept of desire prevailing after death. As narrated by the woman at the beginning of the play, she had been betrayed by her husband with a woman living far away. While she was waiting for his return, the wife, anxious for him to come home safely, showed her love and cherishing feelings towards him instead of being jealous. The story tells that the man, feeling this affection, stopped seeing the other woman because he understood the depth of his wife's love.

Strong longing and desire are ultimately the reasons why the woman is neither jealous nor she demonstrates any feelings of anger. This is the exact contrary to the protagonist of *Dōjōji*. Kanaseki argues that the sense of loss given by the death of her husband cancels all negative feelings, which must have been inevitably strong at the time of his fling. He quotes the seminal work on demons by Baba Akiko (1988, 56) and argues that, under the calm appearance of the *ko-omote* 小面 mask worn by the woman in *Izutsu*, there must hide a *hannya* 般若, an angry demon, the mask used in the *nochiba* of *Dōjōji*.

The study of *Izutsu* by Wakita (2005, 58-60) arrives at conclusions similar to those argued by Kanaseki. However, these are based on theatrical and not psychological analysis. At the centre of Zeami's *mugen nō* plays there often is a purposeful memorial service (*kuyō* 供養), which is employed when an angry spirit needs to be pacified in order to be able to take distance from obsessions and leave this world. She points out that, although this play is structured exactly in the same way, the ultimate aim of *Izutsu* is not the memorial service, but rather the spirit appears simply to "reenact the glory and the memory of the past" (*kako no eikō ya tsuioku wo saigen suru* 過去の栄光や追憶を再現する) (2005, 60). Wakita explains that the spirit protagonist of the play does not request a memorial service, since the only religious reference is the one we already quoted. Nevertheless, in her opinion, it can be interpreted in different ways, as we saw above. Wakita compares *Izutsu* to *Matsukaze* (松風), a play that expresses longing and desire after death but reenacts the past glories as well. She argues that in *Matsukaze* the spirits appear in order to receive prayers from the monk and reenact the past at the same time. Therefore, in this aspect of not necessarily requesting a *kuyō* for the lingering spirit, *Izutsu* is a singular play.

In some cases, as noted by Blakeley Klein (1991, 295), in *Dōjōji* the initial scene of the *shirabyōshi* is interpreted as a will to get rid of passions. Nevertheless, in her analysis of the play (2013, 37), Kimura Keiko (木村恵子) points out that the snake-woman, even if supposed to, does not show explicit will to reach salvation because of her fierce anger. Notwithstanding this, at the end there is an unsuccessful prayer because the serpent-woman escapes into Hidaka River. The female desire, embodied by the serpent-woman, is so strong that ultimately the Buddhist faith is ineffective.

The two main plays quoted in *Ano ie* have this point in common, and, in my opinion, this is very meaningful, since their final aim is not a religious one, but it is the pure emphasis on desire. A desire which is destructive in *Dōjōji* and nostalgic in *Izutsu*, but still strong and powerful. On the basis of this, the opposition of the two female figures at the centre of the two plays is intriguing: on the one hand a woman, transformed into a demon out of rage because she was refused by her beloved one; on the other hand, a woman who is intensely longing for her dead husband but does not show it emphatically. It is like two faces of the same coin, indeed the

two female figures can be interpreted as the two phases of Kayo's desire for Nishikawa, one while they are together but she is suffering because of his negligence, the other after his death. It is meaningful, too, that Kayo is unable to skilfully perform the woman in *Izutsu*, while Nishikawa has mastered *Dōjōji*'s female role, as noted above.

Distance from passions is what Kayo cannot reach, and this is underlined, not only in occasion of *Izutsu*'s performance when Kayo is young and still inexperienced regarding relationships with men, but also towards the end of the story, which is narrated at the beginning of the work, when she performs the dance inspired by *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*. The fact itself that Kayo performs the role of a man so as to understand men, as argued before, is a symptom of the fact that her art is still affected by her private life. Thus, her efforts are doomed to fail.

9 Death, Desire and Enchi's Use of the Cliché of *Mujō*

The concept of the evanescence of life, which belies the whole story, is a cliché of classical Japanese literature and drama. We find it especially in the intertextuality of *Izutsu* and *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, but also for example in the very famous quotation at the beginning of the work from the *Hōjōki* 方丈記 by Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明, which gives a strong sense of vanity to the whole narration and therefore seems to suggest a key for interpretation from the very beginning. The quotation reads:

> The master and the dwelling are competing in their transience. Both will perish from this world like the morning glory that blooms in the morning dew. In some cases, the dew may evaporate first, while the flower remains – but only to be withered by the morning sun.[2]

The choice of this precise passage to set the general tone of the work is very indicative. The sense of evanescence is indeed found in the metaphor of the dwelling, the house, which recalls the title of Enchi's work, *Ano ie*. In my reading, the centrality of the house reaches its climax in the scene where Kayo, after the war and Nishikawa's death, comes back to Kagurazaka, where the teahouse was located. Without really intending to do so, she ends up stopping by and visiting the ruins. The narration says:

> I believe that every burnt-out area looks the same. Except for Kayo, who bore in her heart the unspeakable burden of Nishikawa's death, and the

2 The English translation of *Hōjōki* is taken from didactic materials from the website of Washburn University, URL `http://www.washburn.edu/reference/bridge24/Hojoki.html`.

> fact that Kagurazaka, where she and Nishikawa had met and separated, had been turned into a degenerated ruin, was such a horrific scene that she wanted to cover her eyes. (Enchi [1953] 1977-78, 72)

Exactly such as in the sentence by Kamo no Chōmei, human beings and their dwellings are evanescent, and in this case they are both gone forever. What remains is only the memory in Kayo's heart. She asks herself in a trance-like state:

> What on earth did I come here in search of, in the middle of these runs? The phantom of Nishikawa or the phantom of myself who loved Nishikawa? Mutual exchanges of hugs and contrasts, two bodies molded into one; now that wonderful music, the memory of those moments, survives only in herself. Both Nishikawa, with whom she had shared happiness and sadness, and the room where they had consumed their lives, would never return to this world again. (73)

The memories linked to that house, a place of life and passion, which had been defined before in the narration (69) as a 'beautiful dream' (*utsukushii yume* 美しいゆめ), are alternated in this climactic scene with the actual reality of the house, a place of death and destruction. Images of the desolated gardens or the holes on the pavement contrast with the lively past, like the smell of the fruits on show in a shop, or the voices of the children in the school nearby.

Corresponding to what we said about *Izutsu*, this passage in the end emphasises the desire thanks to the contrast with images of evanescence. Death and desire become even more inextricably linked in the sentence: "Kayo standing in the middle of those ruins in a swirl of dense yellow dust, felt that she was loving her own remaining life to the point of willing to caress it" (73). To continue with Kamo no Chōmei's metaphor, the remaining hours of the flower after the dew has vanished become very important: the desire for life is enhanced by death. But for the older Kayo, after all the negative experiences she has had, her desire for life is not linked to the desire for love like in *Izutsu*, where the passion towards the lost husband is emphasised by his death (Kanaseki 1999, 68). In *Ano ie* the one aroused by the consciousness of evanescence is a desire for a peaceful life, after having taken distance from worldly passions. Kayo's awareness of the need to distance herself from negative passions begins here, by the ruins of the house where she used to meet with Nishikawa. This sensation of "loving her own remained life" can be read as a will not to waist the remaining life with negative feelings and to live her life intensely without obstacles. In this laic adaptation of Buddhist principles by Enchi, the ultimate goal is not to get rid of every attachment to worldly passions, but to only keep the ones that allow us to enjoy life fully, without obsessions.

10 Conclusions

In her love story with Nishikawa, Kayo, such as the protagonist of *Dōjōji,* had to overcome both destructive desire and – after the death of Nishikawa, similar to the protagonist of *Izutsu* – a nostalgic and ardent desire based on the memory of the good days with him. But these experiences probably still were not enough to get rid of the obsession, since we know from the narration that the drive for the performance of *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* is in her strong will of understanding men like Nishikawa. And this intent becomes the last obstacle to the achievement of a good performance.

In my reading the only way to get rid of all those attachments is the dream. In the final dream where she meets the girl of the teahouse introduced at the beginning of the narrative framework, Kayo becomes a spectator to her own past, together with the reader. This dream, which embodies the whole narration of the story with Nishikawa, represents the final stage of Kayo's awareness. With this dream she experiences once again all the stages of her love from the outside and, thus, she can sublimate her own feelings. In particular, it is important that she re-experiences the stages of her own self-awareness: in a first step, as a spectator of *Dōjōji*, and in a second phase, by the ruins of the house. After recalling all those moments, she can finally purify and sublimate her desire. Ultimately, in *Ano ie* – like in *Izutsu,* albeit for different reasons – the only way to overcome the vanity of life is, paradoxically, dream.

At the very end of the story, Kayo asks the front desk of the hotel about the woman she met the evening before and it is in that moment that she realises that it was most likely a dream. After this *mugen n*ō-like scene, we can assume that Kayo gains awareness and comes back to her art with less attachments, being finally able to perform in an successful way, without having any obsessions at the base of her performance.

The narration of *Ano ie*, with its complex time structure, becomes a sort of Chinese box of the dream, where the end is merely suggested and remains open.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
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Hijikata Tatsumi's Sabotage of Movement and the Desire to Kill the Ideology of Death

Katja Centonze
(Universität Trier, Deutschland; Waseda University, Japan)

Abstract Death and desire appear as essential characteristics in Hijikata Tatsumi's *butō*, which brings the paradox of life and death, of stillness and movement into play. Hijikata places these contradictions at the roots of dance itself. This analysis points out several aspects displayed in *butō*'s death aesthetics and performing processes, which catch the tension between being dead and/or alive, between presence and absence. It is shown how the physical states of biological death are enacted, and demonstrated that in Hijikata's nonhuman theatre of eroticism death stands out as an object aligned with the other objects on stage including the performer's carnal body (*nikutai*). The discussion focuses on Hijikata's radical investigation of corporeality, which puts under critique not only the *nikutai*, but even the corpse (*shitai*), revealing the cultural narratives they are subjected to.

Summary 1 Deadly Erotic Labyrinth. – 2 Death Aesthetics for a Criminal and Erotic Dance. – 3 *Rigor Mortis* and Immobility. – 4 Shibusawa Tatsuhiko. Performance as Sacrifice and Experience. – 5 *Pallor Mortis* and *shironuri*. – 6 *Shitai* and *suijakutai*. The Dead are Dancing. – 7 The Reiteration of Death and the *miira*. – 8 The *shitai* under Critique. Death and the *nikutai* as Object. – 9 Against the Ideology of Death.

Keywords Hijikata Tatsumi. Butō. Death. Eroticism. Corporeality. Acéphale. Anti-Dance. Body and Object. Corpse. Shibusawa Tatsuhiko.

I started to dance when I decided to die.
(Murobushi as quoted in Centonze 2016a)

1 Deadly Erotic Labyrinth

Death and desire are the presupposition and founding principles of *butō* dance. As its further definition *ankoku butō* (dance of utter darkness)[1] im-

1 For the distinct forms and definitions of *butō* throughout history see Centonze 2014, 91-6. For the concept of *ankoku* see Centonze 2002. A general discourse on postwar *butō* would be misleading. Even the dance of its founders, Hijikata Tatsumi and Ōno Kazuo, differs from each other. Here I will focus on the former's art, which in its turn changes throughout its history. A great part of the issues displayed in this essay have been pushed to their limits

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plies, discussing death and eroticism in relation to it leads to a tautological discourse. *Butō* offers an immense and diversified landscape in reference to both, to their interrelation and implicitness. By venturing into this labyrinth, we see how it explores in profundity both realms accessing immaculate territories, although death and eros have always underpinned dance history.

This vanguard dance condenses and articulates chthonic and catachthonic principles at a corporeal level, and brings the paradox of life and death, of stillness and movement into play. Hijikata Tatsumi places this dilemma at the roots of dance itself. His pursuit of radically rethinking dance is reflected in this poly-oxymoron: "Dance can be defined as a corpse [*shitai*] standing straight at the risk of its life" (Hijikata 1987b, 87).[2]

Generally speaking, the sixties avant-garde in Japan worked and developed under the banner of death and desire, which were incorporated in its countercultural strategy of dissidence against the situation established by postwar domestic policy and the Japan-U.S. alliance politics evolving under the Security Treaty first signed in 1951.

Hijikata's *butō* emerges as an aesthetic and corporeal revolt, forging through outrageous acts the special corporeality which sustains this innovating and turbulent decade: the *nikutai*, the carnal body (cf. Centonze 2010).[3] The intervention by means of the body itself, as a site of protest, characterises his subversive engagement.

The *nikutai*, transient and anarchic, is the living and raw corporeality most exposed to deterioration and most attached to life and eroticism. Its highest expression and potential are shown in processes like metamorphosis, modification and mutation. It continuously fluctuates between states of life and death, presence and absence. In this study, the *nikutai* may be interpreted as the nucleus of death, that which 'disappears' mutating into the *shitai*, the corpse. Facing the *nikutai* necessarily implies facing death and mortality.

Hijikata disembowels and eviscerates body and dance showing the risk they imply and how close they stand to death. In his challenge to theatre and dance, he pushes the nonhuman dimension in performance to the extremes and investigates, intellectually and choreutically, processes for which the dancer or experiencer starts to animate the inanimate and make inanimate the animated. In his dance the corpse stands out as protagonist. Beyond dramatisation and religious purpose the body is lived in its fatal collapse.

Obliterating and suspending the dimension of transcendence, this form of art does not direct the attention towards the concept or image of death,

in Murobushi Kō's artistic work and life. Unfortunately, after Murobushi's death in 2015, I was not able to centre this essay on his death aesthetics.

2 All translations from the Japanese are the Author's.

3 As discussed in previous studies (see, for example, Centonze 2002; 2009; 2010, 116), I intentionally do not translate *nikutai* as 'flesh', but as 'carnal body'.

but enacts its omni-pervasive presence. The audience is guided through the tunnel of the abyss of *ankoku* and dives deep into its bottomless profundity.

2 Death Aesthetics for a Criminal and Erotic Dance

Focusing on the practices of walking and standing,[4] Hijikata parallels his dance to the gait of the criminal on death row. As argued in "Keimusho e" (To Prison, 1961), he studies the dance of criminals, who do not have to learn how to stand in a prison, a place he designates as the stage of tragedy and drama, where "naked bodies and the death penalty are indivisibly united" (47). Quoting Georges Bataille,[5] he refers to the connection among human solidarity, nakedness, solitude, continuity of being, death and obscenity.

His dance tries to catch the state of tension between being dead and/or alive realised in the moment when a death row convict is forced by the juridical system to walk towards the guillotine. In this paradoxical situation vitality rises to its apex.

The guillotine directs our attention towards the acephalic condition, the beheaded body.[6] The decapitated corporeality explored in *butō* performances[7] challenges further characteristics in respect to the image of the *acéphale*[8] chosen by Bataille, who writes: "man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison" (Bataille 1985, 181). To put it simply, in the case of Hijikata's *butō* the entire body

4 For the principles in *butō* practice of *aruku* (walking) and *tatsu* (standing), stripped off their common social connotation, see Centonze 2002.

5 Hijikata quotes words from the introduction of *L'Érotisme* (1957) but, unfortunately, the Japanese source he refers to is not specified. The first Japanese translation of Bataille's *L'Érotisme* (1957) was published in 1959 by Muro Junsuke. If we confront Hijikata's quotation with Muro's translation, it emerges that the two versions, although similar, are different. It seems as if the dancer would have picked up parts from the sentences of Muro's translation and recreated the text with omissions and slight changes. Moreover, in Hijikata's 'adapted quotation' appears for example the term *shikei* (death penalty) (Hijikata 1961, 47), probably standing for 'mise à mort' (Bataille 1957, 25), translated by Muro as '*shinaseru koto*' (the act of making die) (Bataille 1959, 17).

6 For the guillotine in Bataille's thought see, for instance, Bataille 1985, 220-1.

7 See, for example, the use of brass panels as guillotine in Murobushi's gender-questioning performances *Bibō no aozora* (Handsome Blue Sky, 2003) and *Heels* (2004) discussed in Centonze 2009.

8 *Acéphale* was the revue (1936-1939) founded by Bataille, and its associated secret society. Its cover image, a drawing by André Masson inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, depicts a headless standing man symbolising the death of God and the classical concept of man, and the refuse of a leading figure, thus hierarchy (cf. Bataille 1985, xix-xxiii, 178-81). His groin is covered by a skull. Instead of reason this image denotes gnostic culture.

is concretely challenged and put into question. In early *butō* the performer is prevailingly decapitated of facial expression by concealing face and head and privileging the back.[9] As Hijikata declared in "Kinjiki" (Forbidden Colours, 1959),[10] in his dance the expression of the body writhing in agony is reoriented from the face to the rear, which, together with the chest, emanates all the evil and is prioritized (cf. Centonze 2016b, 451-2).

Heads wrapped in newspapers are exposed, for example, in *Anma. Aiyoku o sasaeru gekijō no hanashi* (The Masseur. Story of a Theatre That Sustains Sexual Desire, 1963). The use of the back and the acephalic body emerges also in Hosoe Eikō's *Heso to genbaku* (Navel and A-Bomb, 1960).[11] In this short film Hijikata and Ōno Yoshito appear naked or in underpants with their heads veiled by white cloths (fig. 1),[12] or with a thick rope bound round their necks, designating the condition of being hanged or captured. In a close up of Hijikata's limbless torso, his back creates twitching and syncopated moves. His head is hidden behind his back and therefore absent from the scene as he perfectly bows it. Male figures in underpants stand in a line on the shore with their back to the camera in a position of peeing men (fig. 2). A white decapitated hen flatters and struggles, tossing nervously, in agony on the sea's edge.

The underworld has been profiled since Hijikata's duo with Ōno Yoshito, *Kinjiki* (May 1959), officially considered *butō*'s debut. A young man (Ōno) seemingly strangulates a white hen between his thighs. An older man (Hijikata) lies down on him in a sodomitic attitude.[13] In reference to the relation among the young man, the hen and the older man, critic Gōda Nario envisions a circuit of violence and abuse, a sexual coercion lived by the younger as a nightmare, while being initiated into the gangland (cf. Centonze 2013, 659-61). With *Kinjiki*, Hijikata consecrates dance and the body to darkness, death and desire, and brings scenic heresy, zooerasty/zoo-

9 Murobushi made of this condition his trademark. For the headless body in *butō* see also Centonze 2014, 79-80; 2009, 175-6. For a comparison between the neutral mask in Etienne Decroux and *butō* see Centonze 2014, 79.

10 Notes written for the performance *Kinjiki nibusaku* (Forbidden Colours 2, September 1959).

11 I refer to the frames of the experimental short 16mm film *Heso to genbaku*, directed by Hosoe Eikō in Japan. This unique portrait of death and destruction centred on life and sex may be considered to be one of the most important filmic documents of the initial *butō* experimentations (Centonze 2012, 228-30). For the collaboration among Hijikata, Hosoe and Mishima Yukio see Centonze 2012.

12 In Hosoe's photos taken in those years we may see that the performers used to wrap their heads in black cloths. I discussed the parallelism between these black cloths and the long, black head covers, called *hikosa zukin*, used during the *Nishimonai bon odori* in Ugo, Akita (cf. Centonze 2014, 80). *Bon odori* are folk dances performed during the death ritual of *obon*, which are festivals celebrated to honour the departed spirits.

13 For a detailed analysis of *Kinjiki*, its versions and the presence of the animal on stage see Centonze 2013.

Figure 1. The veiled heads of Hijikata Tatsumi and Ōno Yoshito in *Heso to genbaku* (1960) by Hosoe Eikō (Courtesy Hosoe Eikō)

Figure 2. Men standing in a peeing position seen from behind: scene from Heso to genbaku (1960) by Hosoe Eikō (Courtesy Hosoe Eikō)

philia, homoeroticism, murder, sacrifice, viciousness into play. Androgyny and cross-dressing are further deepened in his following projects, such as during the sessions of Hijikata Tatsumi DANCE EXPERIENCE no kai (1960-1961). This early stage of Hijikata's aberrant dance, according to Ichikawa Miyabi's periodization,[14] integrates and elaborates the scabrous literature of Jean Genet, Comte Lautréamont and Marquis de Sade.

The entangled intimacy between death and desire/sex, which is nothing but the texture of life, is highlighted since the beginning of *butō*'s adventure in Hijikata's statement for his new dance:

> It is an extremely natural course that I am urged to the world of male love which the prioritised drama, mingled with the semen and sweat of the rehearsal room, pricks applying the technique of erection. Also in the male [*osu no*] dancers' gestures of tender nature this is an obvious opening. In this moment six penises are grasped in my hand. On the skin of the young men who receive the attack of hard muscles run the

14 For Ichikawa's historical gaze see Centonze 2014, 86-8. For the periodization proposed by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, which differs from Ichikawa's, see Shibusawa 1992.

> letters of welts after being touched by the overhead wire. This signifies death. (Hijikata 1959)

Osu is the term that defines the male referred to animals and plants. Hijikata's erotology goes beyond the *Menschanschauung*. He breaks with the assumption that eroticism concerns exclusively the human sphere, as suggested by Bataille. It is important to consider here that the French philosopher, although blurring categories, develops the concept of eroticism as an 'inner experience' linked to mysticism, which transcends 'flesh' (Bataille [1962] 1969, 23-33, 88). For Bataille human eroticism differs from animal sexuality and calls inner life into play (23). Conversely, for Hijikata, who drastically obliterates the dialectic between dancer/human being, animal and the object, everything runs through our body, including knowledge. As a consequence, dance, if pushed to its extremes, is the art that is able to produce and concretize the very moment of death and desire. As will be discussed later, experience is the raw material of performance; it is posited as the "inner material and material" (Hijikata 1960) and, therefore, experience is not limited to inner life, but deposited in our (material) bodies. Hijikata's "dance of terrorism", as he defines his dance (cf. Hijikata 1960), unfolds not only on a socio-political plane, but invests the conception itself of artistic creation considered as a human domain. In his nonhuman and amorphous dance he puts the metamorphic body into practice. Mutability is absorbed by *butō*'s morphologic texture and becomes the fundamental condition of its corporeality.

3 *Rigor Mortis* and Immobility

I would suggest that *butō* embraces the different stages of biological death[15] subverting choreographic laws and instituting anti-aesthetic and grotesque states of the body. It breaks with the common physical law that associates movement to life and immobility to death. Death, without a beginning and an end, is taken in its process including pre-mortem and post-mortem states. These are experienced by the dancer (and by the audience), who enacts conditions of the body and becomes a practitioner of death and eros.

Hijikata dissociates death (and dance) from time. Due to the abrogation of the chronologic monopolism prevailing in the concept of rhythm and of choreographic phrase, time is radically corroded. It is my contention that Hijikata, rather than 'rethinking' time, 'kills' time in dance practice.

15 The recognisable signs of biological death considered here are: *pallor mortis*, *algor mortis*, *rigor mortis*, *livor mortis*, decomposition/putrefaction and skeletonisation.

The stiffened and paralysed bodies in *butō* performances recall the state of *rigor mortis* (fig. 3).

As highlighted by Mishima Yukio, one of the specific aspects in this avant-garde dance is the discontinuity, the unexpected interruption of movement, which disobeys the spectator's telic consciousness (cf. Centonze 2012, 220; 2016b, 442-6).[16] This practice becomes a distinctive component in Hijikata's experimental strategy. His renovation consists in conceiving dance by suffocating dance, which means by preventing and sabotaging its commonly perceived dynamic essence, i.e. movement. Hijikata's dance launched an attack to the roots of terpsichorean art by denying its harmonic and fluent dynamics, and promoting the non-dancing, non-moving body. Ōno Yoshito often recalls (Centonze 2013, 657) that he was not told to execute a series of paths, but only to stiffen his body. The petrifying body introduced since *Kinjiki* is controversial, self-contradictory and separates the performer from ordinary dance hindering the act of evolving form in space. The stone-like physicality was a clear manifestation and declaration for the death of dance. This inversion of perspective leads to the fact that immobility *is* dance. The paradox of life and death is realised on stage so long as the immobile dancer's blood continues to circulate and his/her heart to beat.

A new platform, which is not a horizontal stage, but a collapsing and sinking space, is disposed.[17] *Butō* eludes the three-dimensional perspective and opens dance to a multidimensional playground. These factors lead to new possibilities of movement, or to the potential bodies, which enable the performer to explore different aspects of motility, even in stillness, approaching also the sphere of the dead body.

The 'motionless' body may be associated with what Hijikata advocates as the *mumokutekina nikutai*, the aimless, atelic *nikutai* (cf. Hijikata 1961, 46; Centonze 2010, 118-9; 2016b, 442-6). In his critique and resistance to consumer society, Hijikata redeems corporeality from the oriented purpose imposed by the capitalistic system, which invests our bodies with false needs. The system of productivity is beheaded by this atelic *nikutai*, rather than by a choreographic content or an ideological concept. At the same time, the atelic *nikutai* is exempted from its function of 'means', or 'instrument of expression' subordinated to choreographic laws and methodologies. Hijikata divests the dancing body of its directed vectoriality and acts outside the Cartesian coordinate system consecrating it to the entropic sphere.[18]

16 For an analysis of Mishima's literature on Hijikata's dance see Centonze 2016b.

17 For the concept of "*kūkan o tsukuru*" (construct/make space) in Japanese performing arts see Centonze 2011.

18 I have argued elsewhere that Hijikata achieves the shift to dance viewed as entropic movement or thermodynamics (Centonze 2013, 672-6).

Figure 3. The corporeality of the corpse performed in Murobushi Kō's dance: Murobushi Kō. *Quick Silver* (2006). Azabu Die Pratze, Tokyo. Photo by Awane Osamu (Courtesy Awane Osamu)

In technical and practical terms, this dance, nourished by unbalance and crisis, destroys the common concept of choreography. Linear and geometric movements are further menaced and denied by *keiren*, convulsive seizures or nervous contractions. These spasms or shivers resemble a dystonic attack that affects one or different parts of the body, or its entire build. *Keiren* may embody the intersection between the orgasmic apex and *tremor mortis*. Movement disorders, usually uncontrolled and involuntary, appear as crafted dynamics in this choreutic art. Staged are micro-movements and sometimes infinitesimal shock-like jerks, imperceptible to the eye but deeply sensed by the audience. The *teboke* (hand senility or tremor occurring in the hands), discussed also by Mishima in terms of *Begriff* and *begreifen* (Centonze 2012, 224-5),[19] disarrays the relation between object and body, thus the vectoriality of language and naming.

Also refined falling techniques are carried out. Sudden falls are performed on the ground from a vertical position, sometimes without inter-

19 Mishima discusses the relation between object, body and words in Hijikata's *butō* (cf. Centonze 2016b, 455-8).

mediate movements and change of intensity. The body falls heavily and rigidly like a compact block under the influence of gravity.

The intermittent movements executed in *butō* may be compared to the agonal phase of the decapitated hen in *Heso to genbaku* struggling vividly and violently until it stops moving.

Ground-breaking theories and new visions of dance only recently refer to the conception of dance as a non-flowing, anti-dynamic phenomenon, as offered in André Lepecki's ontological investigation (2006).

In her seminal study, Peggy Phelan (1997) illustrates the case of a New York City Ballet member,[20] who after an injury experiences the impediment of movement. The immobilised ballerina explores the conflicting interrelation between utterance in psychoanalysis and the necessity of their performative and corporeal enactment. Phelan's analysis helps the reader to discover that "spasms might be closer to 'pure' movement than dance is" (67). Though the ballerina's condition may appear similar, in Hijikata's strategy the sabotage of movement is a conscious act, which reaches beyond psychoanalytical terms or conflicting aspects between corporeality and verbal utterance.[21] At the same time the negation of dance becomes in Hijikata the way of emancipating this art in a world dominated by verbal (theatre and literature), visual (visual arts and film) and acoustic (music) practices.

4 Shibusawa Tatsuhiko. Performance as Sacrifice and Experience

An extensive literature on eroticism, fetishism and obscenity has been produced by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, whose works are an important channel that conveyed to Japan culture and art concerning also Western medieval demonology and esotericism. The influential figure of the counterculture and close friend of Hijikata refuses the sentimental and optimistic vision diffused during the eighties of the rebellious decade, and asseverates that it is impossible to describe his experience of the sixties without talking about the dancer (Shibusawa 1992, 223).

Shibusawa (1992, 231) expresses his personal conviction that the ultimate idea of Hijikata's dance lies in Bataille's concept of "non-continuity of life".[22] When Shibusawa writes about the dancer, a strong emphasis is laid

20 Here we should keep in mind the fundamental difference between the corporeality in Balanchine's choreography and in *butō*.

21 As I discussed in Centonze 2016c, Hijikata treats bodies as words and words as bodies.

22 Shibusawa, scholar of French literature, translated works of Jean Cocteau and de Sade, and published in 1973 the translation of Bataille's *L'Érotisme* (1957). For the companionship among Shibusawa, Mishima and Hijikata see Centonze 2016b.

on the aspect of sacrifice, which Hijikata himself regarded as "the source of all work" (Hijikata 1960). Shibusawa's interpretation gives prominence to the "eroticism of ritual sacrifice" (Shibusawa 1992, 227),[23] individuated as the main characteristic of Hijikata's dance taken in its first phase. In relation to this facet, the critic portrayed him as "*hansai no buyōka*" (dancer of burnt offerings):

> The Dancer of Burnt Offerings
>
> Roman emperor Caracalla at the halfway of his pilgrim journey to the Temple of the Moon, died after being stabbed by the assassin, while he was in the midst of urinating outdoors [*tachishōben*]. The Japanese dancer, Hijikata Tatsumi, discovers the position of human crisis in the figure of a standing man, who pees outdoors, seen from behind.[24] At the dawning of the second half of the 20th century.
>
> The Byzantine theologians disputed endlessly during a night full of stars shining serenely to define the sex of angels. The Japanese dancer, Hijikata Tatsumi, choreographs without end during the night of darkness, for assigning the sex to all things in the universe. Asceticism.
>
> The Italian despot of the Middle Ages under the resplendent sunlight of high noon amputated the organs of young boys in order to preserve the castrato. The Japanese dancer, Hijikata Tatsumi, in order to cause the miracle of rejuvenation in dance amputates the poisonous organ of the choreographer, who is not able to dance any longer. On top of that, [all this] in the tragic, broad daylight produced by the footlights.
>
> The poet and scholar of metaphysics, Joséphin Péladan, in the crepuscule of Latin decadence, dreamt of the androgyne who realises the magic purity of the sexes. The Japanese dancer, Hijikata Tatsumi, after having chipped off everyday life, creates the androgyne as his new concept of the *nikutai* in order to capture the possibility of dance in the criminal fiction.
>
> This is the dialectic of Hijikata Tatsumi's choreographing art. All dances are his experience, and are burnt offerings to the earth. It should be thought there is no stage. (Shibusawa 1961)

Hansai indicates the burnt sacrifice, i.e. one of the highest forms of sacrifice in which the victim is completely burnt on the altar. The concept appearing in the *Book of Leviticus* is known in English also as 'holocaust'.

23 Mishima defines Hijikata's performance as a heretic rite (cf. Centonze 2012, 223).

24 As Hijikata declared in a conversation with Mishima in reference to his "dance of crisis", one of the emblematic postures that reflect this condition is the rear of a standing man who urinates outdoors (*tachishōben*) (cf. Centonze 2012, 224; 2016b, 450-1).

In 1970 the term *hansai* is revived, when Hijikata began to sign his productions with the name "Hangidaitōkan". As referred by Motofuji Akiko, this acronym has been selected by poet Takahashi Mutsuo. *Han* stands for the first syllable of *hansai* and *gi* stands for the first syllable of *giseishiki* (rituals of sacrifice).[25] Takahashi, a close friend of Mishima, depicts Hijikata as "one character, who climbs onto the altar, which is the stage, and stamps on the great earth symbolised by the wooden boards" (Centonze 2016b, 441). For the poet, Hijikata is the dancer, who raises the sacrificial flame towards the sky aspiring to a model of *butō* as big as the great universe and chooses the hardest way: to live honestly.

Only a few months before his own ritual sacrifice and act of denouncement, Mishima, whose self-inflicted death marked a watershed between the sixties and the seventies, wrote with a brush the epithet "Hangidaitōkan" on a two metre-long bleached cloth. It was destined to hang down from the terrace of the Seibu Department Store in Ikebukuro, where the performative exhibition *Hijikata Tatsumi Hangidaitōkan (fu) korekushontenji sokubai* (Hijikata Tatsumi Hangidaitōkan with sale of exhibited collection items, 28 August – 1 September 1970) was hosted (Centonze 2016b, 442).[26]

Shibusawa continues to articulate the discourse on sacrifice and connects it to the discussion of the term *pafōmā* (performer). He calls attention to the early use of this definition by Hijikata demonstrating that the concept of performer, or *taikensha* (lit. experiencer),[27] was highly considered by the dancer. As elucidated by the critic: "the performer, in this case, is the executor who offers on the altar in sacrifice his flesh [*niku*]"[28] (Shibusawa 1992, 227). The self-sacrifice, a self-immolation that stands as a consequence of a risky and challenging dance, where the performer's own body is involved, is implied here.[29] According to Shibusawa (1992, 227) the killing of a hen on stage should be considered as a consequence in those years.

25 *Dai* (macro) derives from *daiuchū* (macrocosm), and '*kan*' derives from *kikan* (model, example) (for a detailed explanation of "Hangidaitōkan" see Centonze 2016b, 441-2). *Tō* refers to *fumu* (stamp). The stamping of the feet is a universal element in dance and rituals, in which death and sex converge. Re-evoked also in *bu-tō*, its importance in Japanese theatrical tradition and folk dance is transversal. *Fumu* recurs in death rituals such as *chinkon*, executed for the appeasement of the souls, or in rites of fertility and abundant harvest, like the *ta-ue odori* (cf. Centonze 2008, 129-30).

26 Its artistic curator was Nakanishi Natsuyuki.

27 Hijikata defines since his programme notes for *Kinjiki nibusaku* the performers as *taikensha*.

28 In this case corporeality is defined as '*niku*'; therefore I translate it in a strict sense as 'flesh'.

29 For a discussion of *kagura* (ritual dance) as sacrifice in Japanese performing arts see Centonze 2008, 130-3. For an analysis of sacrifice and the animal on stage as conceived in *butō* and contemporary performance see Centonze 2013, 661-6.

The intrinsic quality of art understood not as representation but as experience *hic et nunc*, which involves the performer as well as the audience, emerges here. Hijikata often emphasises that theatre requires a sense of actuality (cf. Hijikata 1961, 48).

If we follow Shibusawa's argument, who punctuates the importance of *experience* and *performance*, the *butō* dancer *experiences* death, while *performing* (taken in its etymological meaning) death.

5 *Pallor Mortis* and *shironuri*

Not only *rigor mortis* is pursued, but also the other stages of death can be visibly and sensibly detected.

Pallor mortis is reflected in *shironuri*, the practice of painting the dancers' body white, implemented especially after *Anma*.[30] Conversely, in his earlier years, Hijikata tended to darken his skin with black greasepaint and olive oil (Centonze 2013; 2014, 80).[31] Compared to the black paint, which is more affiliated with 'relentless ardour' (Hijikata 1960), *shironuri* shifts towards algidity or the process of *algor mortis* and enhances the condition of ambiguity. As a matter of fact, this chromatic device leads to a deferment of aesthetics itself approaching the indefinable, which is the essence of the corruptible *nikutai*. The white naked bodies are projected into a refracted and distorted eroticism. On the one hand, the applied colour suffocates nakedness. On the other hand, it empowers the erotic expression by deviating it.

Putrefaction and decomposition are usual aesthetic aspects displayed in *butō* dance. Both are articulated also in relation to movement (Centonze 2016b). The white make up mixed with glue hanging from the performers' body like shreds may address the dirty and decaying body. It may appear as aesthetics of visual disturbance and, therefore, their nakedness does not necessarily titillate the audience's sexual desire.[32]

The *shironuri* may disguise the performer's age. This theatrical strategy creates a peculiar play of shadow and brightness, visibility and non-visi-

30 For the connection between the naming of Hijikata's dance and *shironuri* see Centonze 2012, 221. For additional aspects of *shironuri* see Centonze 2004, 69-73.

31 The bodies were painted with gold dust in the dance shows directed by Hijikata, a practice still cultivated today by Maro Akaji's Dairakudakan, in whose performances the dancers are sometimes also painted blue, suggesting also *livor mortis*. In contrast, the colour chosen by Murobushi, lately, is silver.

32 On the other side, due to their queerness, the dancers may appear more desirable. There is a connection with the aesthetics known under the name *ero guro nansensu*, based on the combination of eroticism, grotesqueness and nonsense expressed in modernist literature and art emerging between the Taishō (1912-1926) and the Shōwa (1926-1989) periods.

bility, and interacts with the stage lights. An important effect, I would like to stress here, is that this make up erases the identity, gender and social status of the performer, and appears as a strong expedient of pulverising residues of subjectivity.[33]

In addition, it disengages the performer from his/her human identity while levelling the difference between the human anatomy and the organic/inorganic surrounding space, landscape or natural elements, crafted objects facilitating the heteromorphic process.[34] The dancer moves between the appearance and disappearance of existence, presence and absence on stage, between this and the other world, which are undistinguished.

Skeletonisation is manifested as well. The bones and the skeleton of the dancer are emphasised in performative dynamics.

Gunji Masakatsu (1977, 43) reckons *ankoku butō* as a second coming of the dance of death, or *danse macabre*, diffused in Europe during the Middle Ages.[35] Gunji envisions Hijikata's dance in contrast to the metropolis of Tokyo, which flourishes in its economic growth following the postwar Reconstruction (43). He images the dancer with a skull mask and a big scythe performing secretly his skeleton dance in the city underground.

In his studies are traced several connections between the new dance and aspects of Japanese folklore and traditional dance, to the extent that, in his opinion, Hijikata's art, which shows the dying *nikutai* moment by moment, epitomises "a beautiful classical dance of death" (Gunji 1973, 121), which radiates eroticism.[36] The scholar specifies that it is not an artistic dance which renders the *nikutai* as its material. Instead, it is a pre-artistic dance of death, which is validated as such because it is the act in itself of devouring the same *nikutai* (122).

Examining the feeling of terror provoked by the white colour, Gunji (1985, 86) perceives that the white painted bodies confer a sense of being plastered in the wall, as if this condition would be a consequence of crime of rebellion and its punishment. Their whiteness does not connote a clear candour; rather, "at the bottom of these white, naked figures, after sinking into the black of darkness, a smell of concealment is queerly condensed" (Gunji 1985, 86).[37] Conversely, Ōno Kazuo's bright transparency "does not reveal this uncanny and sordid darkness" (86).

33 For Ōno Yoshito's discourse on *shironuri* and identity see Centonze 2004, 70.

34 It is important to note here that the metamorphic body does not perform an act of mimesis in Hijikata's *butō*.

35 For a comparative study of Tarantism, *danse macabre* and *butō* see Centonze 2008.

36 For an analysis on Japanese traditional performing arts and *butō* see Centonze 2004, 2008.

37 The dirty whiteness is also discussed by Shimizu Masashi (cf. Centonze 2004, 71-3).

According to Gunji (1985, 86), the bodies smeared with white mud echo the idea of all living creatures covered with the death-ashes of World War II. Since ancient times whiteness has been associated with the bleached white bones of the corpse. The scholar (1985, 88) argues that *ankoku butō* embraces *shironuri* full of vengeance, as a taboo rebelling against medical theory and science, which determine those who are subjected to social segregation. Its whiteness bears also the idea of the return to the womb (Gunji 1985, 88).

In a contrasting sense, the white make up is applied also in order "to connote the existence of the body [*karada*], defined as *nikutai*, inside darkness" (Gunji 1991a, 250). The corporality defined as *karada* plays a fundamental role in Japanese death culture, as underlined by Gunji Masakatsu (cf. Centonze 2008, 126-8). It indicates also the hollow container, the cicada.[38]

It is further suggested by Gunji (1991d, 260) that those irregularly white dappled bodies, with the powder peeling off and dropping from their skin, develop an image for which the sexual relationship exists only as a shadow. The white powder they are encrusted with cools down and provokes lead poisoning; therefore, this make up is associated with death ever since its use in Japanese classical dance. Gunji (1991b, 257) compares the white dancing figures to hibernating people, underlining the condition of their stiffness, which is related also to the climatic condition of the freezing Tōhoku, Hijikata's native region.

6 *Shitai* and *suijakutai*. The Dead are Dancing

Corporeality and its fluid nuances undergo an accurate analysis and investigation in Hijikata's dancing and writing practice. From the late sixties, Hijikata articulates the corporeality of the *suijakutai* with more emphasis. This body is bound to asthenia, debilitation, weakness, emaciation, feebleness and implies a critique against the prosperous and sanitised postwar society of Japan (cf. Hijikata 1985, 70). The *suijakutai* is a dehydrated body, which may be also viewed in contrast to the healthy and steady body heralded by the German *Körperkultur* (cf. Centonze 2015, 102-8).[39] It may be interpreted also as the contaminated or hybrid body (cf. Centonze 2008, 127-8; 2016c, 129).

Since the early seventies, death aesthetics and folkloric aspects have become more refined, as visible, for example, in *Hōsōtan* (Story of smallpox, 1972). Gunji (1991c, 84) notes that in a broad sense Hijikata's and Ōno

38 The term *karada* is composed by *kara*, meaning the slough (*nukegara*) completely deprived of its liquids and life, and the suffix *da*. It has been used during the Heian period (794-1185) in order to designate the cast-off skin of the cicada after its ecdysis or the dead body (*shitai*). For *karada* see also Centonze 2010, 115-7.

39 For the relation between *Ausdruckstanz* and dance in Japan see Centonze 2015.

Kazuo's *butō*, which incorporates the Japanese body fallen to pieces after the defeat, and its desperately grotesque reality, may be traced back to the "'*honegarami*' *no nikutai buyō*", the dance of the *nikutai* reduced to skin and bone, which he considers to be at the root of Japanese folk customs.

As observed by Shibusawa (1992, 229), the latter period of Hijikata's *butō*, with its choreographies constructed around Ashikawa Yōko, is characterised by a gender turn towards the female,[40] and focuses on Hijikata's above-mentioned thesis, which posits dance as a standing corpse.

A well-known *topos* in Hijikata's dance is that he identifies his *butō* masters with the dead[41] and that he lets his elder sister dwell inside his body (Hijikata 1985, 75).[42] He expresses this situation in terms of making the dead gestures die again within his body and making the dead die once more completely. For him, those who once died may die over and over again inside his body. In reference to his sister he adds: "when she stands up inside my body, I involuntarily end up sitting down. For me to fall is for her to fall" (Hijikata 1985, 75). In this case the performer acts and is made to act.[43] The dead may become more present or alive than the dancer himself, as if they would dictate the movement. They are co-workers of the performative act. The defunct is a body that moves inside the dancer, whose own body is foreign to the dancer him/herself. Enacting the contradictory unison of life/desire and death, the deceased stands up, sits down, while the foreign body opposes or parallels the dead's moves nearly automatically.

Although I elsewhere formulated this situation in relation to *butō* and memory as a process of "reification of memory" (Centonze 2003-2004, 34), I would say that, rather than to the mnemonic act, in Hijikata's *butō* priority should be given to the *res* of death, to its objectification, i.e. the reification of death.

40 Figures of deceased women as well become central in *butō* starting from the seventies.

41 Conversely, the motto *mortui vivos docent* adopted by the medical community conveys the meaning related to the scientific practice of anatomic dissection. Hijikata's assertion may be read also as an intention to undermine the *iemoto* system, the hierarchically structured schools in Japanese traditional arts, centred on the headmaster with a conditioned teacher-student relationship.

42 In Ōno Kazuo's dance his defunct mother and the modernist flamenco dancer Antonia Rosa Mercé y Luque (1888-1936), known under her stage name La Argentina, appear.

43 For the condition of 'being danced' see Centonze 2008. In relation to this idea, I also traced a connection between *butō* and the 'diacronic polymorphism' of *wazaogi* in Japanese performing arts (Centonze 2004, 73-5; 2008, 130-3). In *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan, 720) the first *kagura* (a stamping striptease dance) executed by goddess Ame no Uzume is defined *wazaogi*. *Wazaogi* is a polysemantic concept embracing the meaning of 'calling forth the souls', 'imitative gesture' or 'mimetic dance'. It further indicates the performance as well as the performer. Ame no Uzume is considered to be also the ancestress of the Sarume no Kimi, the female performer, who makes the *chinkon* ritual.

Figure 4. Gokurakuhama (Paradise Beach), one of the spots at Osorezan, the Mountain of Fear in Shimokita Peninsula of Aomori Prefecture. Osorezan is venerated as the door to the dead's world. The peaceful and beautiful area of Gokurakuhama is considered to be the place where the living can meet the deceased by calling their name. Photo by the author (August 2015)

The case "return of the corps" illustrated in Phelan's study (1997, 66-8), which deeply explores female corporeality in relation to psychic events and where problems concerning truth and time[44] – although declassified – are still at play, is linked to traumatic experiences and symptomatic manifestations. Conversely, in *butō* we may speak of the ´return of the corpse'. The appearance or presence of the dead in Ōno Kazuo and Hijikata's dance is detached from psychoanalytic processes. Present and past are not questioned. It is difficult to discern in Ōno Kazuo and Hijikata the common sense of mourning or grief. There is no loss of the (dead) person's presence. Rather, their dead-dance, although different from each other, unfolds a sort of *parousia*, taken in its etymological sense of physical presence or arrival – both incorporate feminine bodies/corpses and consequently pro-

44 Phelan (1993, 127-9) discusses the perspective of a 'second time', a concept adopted from Ilya Prigogine's theory on the reversibility in thermodynamics.

Figure 5. Murobushi Kō's stiffened body and his falling technique: Murobushi Kō. *Krypt* (2012). Kamakura Shōgai Gakushū Center Hall, Kamakura. Photo by Awane Osamu (Courtesy Awane Osamu)

duce transgendered dances assisted by cross-dressing, without erasing completely their masculine part. In Hijikata's case the feminine body is of the corpse, which questions the dancer (cf. Hijikata 1985, 75), whereas in Phelan's discourse on the phantom pregnancy of patient Anna O. and the feminine body is emphasised that: "femminity is that part of bodies that logic can treat only as a question: the feminine body, the psycoanalytic body, can take only an interrogatory form" (Phelan 1997, 67).

As Hijikata (1985, 74) outlines in relation to his dance and training, the movements in his *butō* (and, therefore, the dead's presence) are naturally forced out of his body, and "there is no time for expression". His dance is a matter of course, rather than a form of possession or trance.

7 The Reiteration of Death and the *miira*

The endless reiteration of death developed in *butō* unfolds as a constant at diverse levels, considering also the continuous engagement of the performer who faces his or her own mortality on stage. Murobushi Kō, for example, has persevered through decades in his death practice pursuing the dance of the *miira* or *sokushinbutsu*, 'the ascetics', as explained by Massimo Raveri (1990-1991, 250), "who sought to achieve salvation and immortality through self-mummification". Here we encounter one of the paradoxes in Murobushi, who approached exclusively the physical practice without aiming at 'salvation' and 'immortality'. In his performances he worms like an annelid into death, savours the rarefied and dense texture of it, and propagates its erotic and mortiferous resonance among the audience's corporeality.

The paradox displayed in *butō* is synthesised in the image of the mummy/*miira*. As Raveri (1990-1991, 256) points out, "ascetic self-mummification means the achievement of an ambiguous condition which is not life (because the *miira* does not have all the characteristics of a living person) but which also is not death (because the *miira* lacks all the classificatory features of a dead person)". The *miira* may be denoted as anti-establishment catalysts, who cast doubts on the cultural difference between life and death (cf. Raveri 1990-91, 257).

At the beginning of his career, Murobushi conducted on the site of Dewasanzan a research of the body-techniques of *shugendō*, practiced by the mountain ascetics, *yamabushi* (cf. Centonze 2009, 168-9).

In his essay on Murobushi's performance *Komusō* (1976),[45] Hijikata (1987c, 227-8) declares that he has discovered in Murobushi's strange dance a new form of Buddha's holy remains (*bukkotsu*), a new *miira*, a new *butō*, which he considers very close to the starting point of his own *butō*.

I would suggest that Dante's phonaesthesical hendecasyllable ||*E caddi come corpo morto cade*|| (And fell, even as a dead body falls) (Dante, *Inferno*, 5, l. 142; cf. Di Salvo 1987, 93) finds its embodiment when Murobushi smashes his body violently to the ground (fig. 5). Oda Sachiko (2016) describes the dancer's unique fallings as *hotokedaore* (lit. fall of Buddha), a terminology borrowed from Noh technique, which indicates the falling backwards like a statue of Buddha.[46]

A controversial facet is that Murobushi's body-practice is divorced from religious, mystical or ecstatic purpose; his performing art does not

45 *Komusō* are mendicant Zen monks, who conceal their head under a straw basinet.

46 It should be specified that Noh theatre and great part of Japanese traditional theatre are based on death and desire.

contemplate states of trance. This helps us to frame also the incongruent concepts of asceticism and sacrifice in Hijikata's dance, which slide on oxymora like what he has called the "sublime karmic suffering [*kugō*] of crime" (Hijikata 1961, 48).[47] The shrill dissonance of categories is highlighted also by Gunji (1991c, 84), who underlines that *ankoku butō* is characterised by sexual abstinence and, at the same time, develops eroticism.

Hijikata (1985, 72) stated that he learned his *butō* from the mud and that it is unrelated to the performing arts of shrines and temples.

A fundamental requisite in Hijikata's art is the distance between the dancer and his/her body, between the dancer and his/her movements. In his discussion with Suzuki Tadashi and Senda Akihiko (1977, 119-20), Hijikata observes that dance, the art that is based on one's own body, is easily susceptible to ecstasy, and recognises therein a danger. Consequently, he disapproves the tendency of modern dance towards "ecstasy without resistance", and rejects improvisation in performance, when it results as a 'superficial ecology' (Hijikata et al. 1977, 119-20).

Therein lies also the difference in respect to Bataille's disposition towards mysticism and ecstasy. In contrast to Hijikata, Bataille seems to defend the state of rapture:

> He who tries to ignore or misunderstand ecstasy is an incomplete being whose thought is reduced to analysis. Existence is not only an agitated void, it is a dance that forces one to dance with fanaticism. (Bataille 1985, 179)

8 The *shitai* under Critique. Death and the *nikutai* as Object

Hijikata's writings raise not only awareness of the unreadable nature our body is endowed with, but reveal also the unintelligibility of death. We all are acquainted with death, which electrifies our bodies and deepest part, but we never do experience it perfectly unless we are completely dead and mute. As he puts it: "even if I do not know death, it knows me" (Hijikata 1985, 75).

Hijikata's essay "Nikutai ni nagamerareta nikutaigaku" (The study on the *nikutai* scrutinised by the *nikutai*, 1969) stands as a *nikutai* that observes

47 Nevertheless, it should be noted that, some days before his performances, Hijikata practiced *danjiki* (fastening). Probably this should be interpreted in terms of 'preparing the body' for his dance practice rather than in terms of achieving purification or enlightenment. Here we should refer to the concept of *karada o tsukuru* (construct/make the body), which plays a fundamental role in Japanese performing arts (Centonze 2011, 213-5).

the cognitive practice concerning corporeality.[48] This 'bodily text'[49] emerges as a representative example of the intricate debate on the *nikutai* in the sixties. It is also an important key to access Hijikata's conceiving of diverse corporealities and their intriguing rapport with language and words.

Hijikata's corporeal investigation involves, for example, criminal bodies reflecting on utterances from their affidavit. Kodaira Yoshio (rapist and serial killer executed in 1949) and his relation with the female bodies he had raped are taken into consideration Without touching on moral issues, Hijikata approaches also Abe Sada's corporeality, whom he personally encountered (fig. 6).[50] Abe's scandal-ridden case became an emblem of sex and death, after she erotically asphyxiated her lover, Ishida Kichizō, in 1936. She castrated the corpse and carried his penis and testicles with her for days.[51]

Hijikata discusses also *nikutaigaku* (study on the carnal body) and *nikutaishi* (history of the carnal body). Both are not common designations. In my opinion, these neologisms are emphasised in relation to the *shintai* (body), the corporeality prevailingly considered in a philosophical survey. As a consequence, *nikutaigaku* and *nikutaishi* can be viewed in contrast to the common designation of *shintairon*, the theory on the body (cf. Centonze 2010, 2011). In relation to *nikutai*, *shintai* is further a sort of normalised body inserted into a social context.

Hijikata compares *nikutaishi* and *nikutaigaku* to bacteria and envisages both disciplines as a mythology, which is shared by a large number of people and lives on the surface of the carnal body. He ironically observes that these discourses on the *nikutai* are meant to keep the "hygiene of the body [*karada*]" (Hijikata 1969, 31). Here, again, he manifests a sort of critique against the hygiene norms introduced in Japan's postwar society by the occupying force. According to the dancer, this condition of the 'discoursified' *nikutai* is transitional and then he adds that 'real extinction' makes its entrance. Here Hijikata punctuates the difference between real extinction and the cadaver: the *shitai* does not take part in real extinction and, therefore, also the corpse is affected by mythological bacteria.

48 Here the connection between the *nikutai* and the discourse on the *nikutai* is inverted. Present dance studies punctuate this very aspect: the scholar's body should be included epistemologically in the analysis and corporeality should be brought back to its corporeal sense (Centonze 2016c, 134-5).

49 In this essay orality and writing, performance and literacy, bodies and words are melted. For bodily writing see Foster 2010.

50 Hijikata and Abe appear in Ishii Teruo's film *Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa: Ryōki onna hanzaishi* (Love and Crime, 1969).

51 Abe is considered as an icon of the *ero guro nansensu* culture. She is also world-wide known thanks to Ōshima Nagisa's *Ai no kōrida* (*In the Realm of the Senses*, 1976).

Figure 6. Abe Sada and Hijikata Tatsumi: flyer for *Shiki no tame no nijūnanaban* (Twenty-seven Nights for Four Seasons, 25 October-20 November, 1972). This performance series held at Art Theater Shinjuku Bunka by Hangidaitōkan included also *Hōsōtan*. The original photo depicting Abe Sada and Hijikata was taken by Fujimori Hideo in 1969 (Courtesy Research Center for the Arts and Arts Administration, Keiō University)

> The corpse [*shitai*] is a temporary extinction and resembles landscape [*fūkei*]. Even to this [corpse] stick the bacteria of myth. Our nikutai is a thing which precipitates into life while it already breaks, and we know it through physiology. (Hijikata 1969, 31)

Hijikata's lucid and radical critique of corporeality is carried to the extreme. Not only the *nikutai*, but even the *shitai* is put under examination, and the dancer individuates the cultural narratives it is subjected to.

In a further passage, Hijikata comments on the corpses of drowned children and focuses without rhetorical gloss on the relation between natural catastrophe and the infant body:

> Natural disasters and children are connected. There are many children considered to be the appendix to natural disasters. It is a natural disaster when they are swept away by illness, as well when a *mochi* [rice cake] gets stuck in their throat. Children are standing next to natural calamity. They scream, not because they have found their hat or one of their shoes has fallen, but rather because they cannot find their body [*karada*].
>
> I have made the experience, one after the other, of being nearly thrown into the iron pot, but I was not able to have such a natural disaster in the city. Speaking about natural disasters reminds me of the flood. Together with the flood come the corpses of drowned children [*kodomo no*

> *suishitai*], and when the children's white swollen belly comes drifting, it gives a cool sensation. (Hijikata 1969, 33)

His dry and cold-blooded words manifest an absence of desperation and lie outside the sphere to which moral judgments apply. The dancer appears even more 'impassive', when he describes the swollen bellies, which are 'grilled' by the sun and float on the water's surface, while they keep swelling and expelling objects. It happens that he confuses the cadaver with a doll, a straw bag or a dog, and prods at it with a stick (cf. Hijikata 1969, 31).

It appears evident that his assertions or images, and his death-dealing dance in general, are not meant in terms of *memento mori*. The examples given above confirm the reification of death and the dead in *butō*. The corpse is akin to objects, and the human body, dead or alive, and the object are equalised.

An important aspect in Hijikata's revolution, enunciated by Mishima ante litteram, is the relation between the body and the object, which is exemplified by the dancer as a patient affected by poliomyelitis, who tries to catch an object. Mishima envisages a process of estrangement in this relation and detects the thing (*mono*) as a dreadful thing-in-itself (*monojitai*) (cf. Centonze 2012, 224-5). I think that, what is described by Mishima, can be connected and extended to that specific corporeality of the *hagurete iru nikutai* (the alienated, lost *nikutai*),[52] often mentioned by Hijikata (Centonze 2016c, 132-3).

Ichikawa Miyabi focuses on this *nikutai*/object relation and discerns in Hijikata's dance an operation, which he defines as the *nikutaika sareta mono*, or the *nikutai*-zed thing (cf. Centonze 2014, 96-100; 2016b, 457).

In his 'dehumanising' dance centred on the *hiningen* (nonhuman), Hijikata dismisses an anthropocentric vision of dance in terms of human expression:

> In dance [*butō*], which amuses itself, […] the stimulus to forget the fact of being a human elicits the condition of feeling affection for things below humanity. The possession of nonhuman power and subhuman power reaches the caustic emotion, which enucleates the psychology of inanimate objects. (Hijikata 1987a, 92)

In "Nikutai ni nagamerareta nikutaigaku" Hijikata argues that too much has been written about the *nikutai* and that the *nikutai* scrutinised by theory is already a dead *nikutai*. He underlines then that he does not regard the other's death as his own.

Death is discussed also in relation to stillborn children, who do not have genealogy and whose beauty attracts him. The dancer specifies: "the

52 In Hijikata this definition takes on several connotations (Centonze 2016b, 455-6; 2016c, 132-3).

dead body standing straight while risking its life belongs to us and things projected into the distance are located in our *nikutai*" (Hijikata 1969, 31).

9 Against the Ideology of Death

In the light of the issues discussed until now Hijikata's perception of death, if viewed in a certain perspective, appears close to Herbert Marcuse's political speculation exposed in "Die Ideologie des Totes" (2002).[53]

Marcuse (2002, 102-3) criticises Western thought, which has posited death as a *telos* of life and an existential privilege as human being. He discusses death in its historical construction and demonstrates the process of its elevation to a metaphysical category. As Marcuse maintains (104), death has been submitted to an 'ontological inversion' and the biological process of dying, which is a matter of fact, has been culturally transformed into an ineluctable necessity, which allows human beings to fulfil their ontological being.

The philosopher shows evidence of the tight relation between power and death, and remaps the coupling between eros and death. Not only in the past but also in contemporary sanitised societies the power over death is one of the most important instruments of repression and the ideology of death is still at work. Therefore, repressive social control and coercion imply the institutionalisation of death and the right to dispense it. In this case the death penalty plays a fundamental role. Marcuse (2002, 109) deprives death of the fear it is made to evoke, of its violence and intangible transcendence. He asserts that freedom is possible only when death does not appear as negation of negation or as redemption from life. The power over death must be taken back and everybody should decide on his/her own end.

In Marcuse's terms (2002, 112-3) we may say that Hijikata "brings death under his autonomy" and subtracts it from imposed socio-political and cultural rules. The dancer undermines the foundation of social oppression by disintegrating the control it exerts over our bodies and by strengthening the corporeal consciousness in a complex and conflicting connection with (theatrical) fiction. Focusing his discourse on death penalty and corporeality (cf. Hijikata 1961), Hijikata addresses the direct expression of the ideology of death.

His iconoclastic operation achieved through words and body/dance disfigures and destroys the idea in itself of death, which he relocates at an organic/inorganic level. Nevertheless, Hijikata's disintegration of cultural categories goes further: his critique of the *nikutai*, the *shitai*, the *nikutai*-

53 First published in 1959 as "The Ideology of Death" in *The Meaning of Death* edited by Herman Feifel (New York: McGraw-Hill).

Figure 7. Utagawa Toyokuni (1823). *Ehon kaichū kagami*. Picture Book: Pocket Mirror, considered innovating for its macabre and violent themes at that time: death and desire as depicted in the Edō Period. Here the love story between a *rōnin* (masterless samurai) and a ghost woman is featured (Courtesy International Research Center for Japanese Studies)

ron and *nikutaishi* dismantles the ontic and ontology. He goes beyond conventional cultural terms concerning the cadaverous, defunctive and defective condition that the concept of death implies, subtly playing with presence and absence and erasing their common definition and perception. Hijikata operates in a context where existence and reality are placed in a different system. He destabilizes the concept of death by dissecting those of existence and presence, and by fragmenting the condition of *fuzai* (absence) and *hizai* (non-existence), transforming death into a different form of presence.

Deprecating the theatre of his time, Hijikata insists on the necessity of actuality (*akuchuariti*) and on the right to claim its assurance (cf. Hijikata 1961, 48). He divests culture produced by the machine civilisation and takes into consideration the *de facto* situation of his days, which is underlined by the repetition of *kyō* (today, nowadays). He reflects on the young generation, who enrol in the Jietai (Self-Defence Force), and defines them as "deadly weapons that dream" (48) whom, while desiring imposed

Figure 8. Utagawa Toyokuni (1823). *Ehon kaichū kagami.* Picture Book: Pocket Mirror. The woman is transformed into a skeleton and the *rōnin* continues to embrace her (Courtesy International Research Center for Japanese Studies)

suffering (*kugō*),[54] rather than worrying about their sustenance, sacrifice their life in the name of the ideal of death. In his essay "Keimusho e" Hijikata (1961, 48-9) connects his art to Marcuse's thought declaring that the concept of 'provocation' outlined by the philosopher is for him 'dance'. But, as the dancer underlines, this provocation is not addressed if "we lick the wounds of the machine civilization run out of control". In order to oppose "politics that inhales into their breast skeletonised functions" (Hijikata 1961, 49), in this actual situation it is necessary to arm ourself with a blackboard eraser and cancel "the culture of tearful and sorrowful cries, which exists in the carcass of victim mentality", and its signs of an impotent future.

54 I deliberately did not touch upon the issue of pain in *butō*, as it requires a peculiar section for its analysis.

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Death and Desire in Contemporary Japan
Representing, Practicing, Performing
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Portraits of Desire in Blue

Cinzia Cimalando
(Independent Scholar)

Abstract The fear of Death and the Desire to transcend mortality are themes that have recurred so often in film history: therefore, their link with cinema is worthy of attention. If many films have been portrayed as a meditation on human mortality, some seem to suggest confronting Death openly for greater personal growth and improving one's own existence. *Rokugatsu no hebi*, directed by Tsukamoto Shin'ya, may be supposed to be among these. The film tells a sensual and violent story of salvation through the reawakening of Desire and the repossession of the body in the modern metropolis, against the depersonalisation, crushing, and virtual tension of contemporary life. It also provides occasion for an interesting analysis of Desire and its position toward the crux of Death in the key of psychoanalytic interpretation developed by Jacques Lacan, substantially based on its vision. Hence, a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to the filmic text seems to be appropriate to the purpose and helps to bring to the surface the portraits of desire that inhabit it, thematically as well as in its staging. Director Tsukamoto appears to be very skilful on staging mental landscapes and psychological tension, which is the ground of the unconscious whereby Lacanian Desire finds itself perfectly at home.

Summary 1 Mental Landscapes. – 2 *Rokugatsu no hebi*. Coordinates for Viewing in the Sign of Desire. – 2.1 The Photographer and the Help Line Operator. – 2.2 A Couple Lifestyle in an Elegant Sterile Apartment. – 2.3 A Cruel Game. – 2.4 Pictures and the Voice of a Stalker. – 2.5 The Moment Has Come. – 2.6 Subtracted Body and Sick Body: *if I betray my desire, I'll sicken and meet my death*. – 2.7 Gifts (Confronting Disease). – 2.8 Tottering Between Life and Death. – 2.9 Discoveries and Forced Awakening. – 2.10 The Revolt. – 2.11 Death and Rebirth. – 2.12 Following the Same Path. – 2.13 Drive of Desire and the Defeat of Death. – 3 Rebellious Desire. – 4 Photographs.

Keywords Tsukamoto Shin'ya. *Rokugatsu no hebi*. Cinema. Psychoanalysis. Lacan. Corporeality. Eroticism. Desire. Death. Salvation.

Rokugatsu no hebi (A Snake of June, 2002) directed by Tsukamoto Shin'ya is one of those films that deal with the crucial questions of the finiteness of the human being, the fragility and mortality of our bodies, and the psychological and philosophical quandary posed by Death, in close relation with the significance every human being gives to her or his own life.

According to Daniel Sullivan and Jeff Greenberg (2013), the fear of Death and the desire to transcend mortality are themes that have recurred so often in different genres, eras, and nations in film history as

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to suggest that the association between Death and cinema is worthy of attention.[1]

If many films have been portraying a meditation on human mortality, some seem to suggest to the spectator the most productive position to take before this decisive point in existence, i.e. confronting Death openly for greater personal growth and improving one's own existence. As I will try to point out in this paper, I believe *Rokugatsu no hebi* to be one of these. Death is the film's co-star, and the ways in which the issue of mortality moulds its characters and narrative are well worth examining.

In this volume, our research deals with Death and Desire and I believe the film also provides occasion for an interesting analysis of Desire and its position with regard to the crux of Death in the key of Lacanian psychoanalytic interpretation. In fact, the lesson on Desire offered by Jacques Lacan (1975) appears to wield great relevance not only to psychoanalysis but also to understand the more general anthropological and social imprint of our times, and may therefore be justifiably applied to the analysis of filmic text as well.

Gabbard (2001) observes that the semiotic theories of spectatorship have spawned a greater awareness of the interplay between a film and its audience and a good deal of recent psychoanalytic film criticism is based on the notion that specific assumptions in the spectator interact with the visual aspects of a film and its narrative to illuminate particular psychoanalytically informed meanings. My study seems to be emblematic of this approach, because the dense layering of *Rokugatsu no hebi* arouses my *desire* to strip away every layer and penetrate its complexity.

I believe that Shin'ya Tsukamoto is one of the most interesting auteurs (considering his total involvement in the production of the filmic work) of our times, and that he can effectively contribute to the debate on those human existential issues.[2]

I dedicated my research to director Tsukamoto and his work since the beginning of the last decade,[3] deepening the specificity both of productive and social environment in which he operates and also comparing myself to the main studies about that context, both European and American (among

1 Psychological and philosophical perspectives suggest this is a unifying concept that might prove useful in analysing film works because the question of Death and human psychological response to it contribute to the possibilities open to cinematography, while films contribute to the discussion of these crucial concerns in their own way (Greenberg, Sullivan 2013).

2 For its depth and complexity, the work of the director Tsukamoto has recently awakened the scholars' interest also in the field of the film philosophy theories; I find intriguing the essay on the materiality of mourning in *Vital* (2004) proposed by Havi Carel (2011).

3 Since then, the director has also granted me several meetings, both in Japan and at Venice International Film Festival: more specifically, a long conversation (unpublished) in Tokyo, on 5th December 2003, which was essential for my past and present studies. Once again, special thanks to Director Tsukamoto for taking the time to answer my questions about his work.

others, Brown 2010; McRoy 2005; Martin 2015) as well as in Japanese language (Tanaka 2003; Kobayashi 2010); context from which, however, I will distance in this paper.

In this study I intend to prove that director Tsukamoto can tell us something interesting about Death and Desire in his own peculiar way, and I will do it through the textual analysis of *Rokugatsu no hebi*, making a creative use of the instrument of inferred script/découpage (Burch 1980; Bruni 2006) to read it in a Lacanian key.

My interpretation is to be considered very personal and based substantially on the vision and analytical transcription of the filmic text, in the perspective of the psychoanalytic concept of the Desire postulate by Lacan.[4] A Lacanian psychoanalytic approach to it would, in fact, be appropriate to my purpose and would help bring to the surface the portraits of desire that inhabit it, both thematically and in its staging. I will also fit concepts borrowed from other various disciplines to the objects of my investigation, be they from linguistic, philosophy, sociology, or semiotics.

In particular, I will take advantage of the methodological aid offered by studies on the philosophy of language about figuration (Volli 2002) and on the paradigms of desire elaborated by Lacan (Recalcati 2012); studies that deal precisely with the identification of those portraits of desire into modern society. I will try to demonstrate how Tsukamotian portraits in blue match and meet those postulates of desire and confront the crux of death.

In my textual analysis, I will also show that the existential issues tackled by the narrative are echoed by the form of the film and by Tsukamoto's aesthetic choices as well.

Rokugatsu no hebi provides an intriguing figuration of the power of the desire's drive, through the unique idea of an act of perversion hatched by a molester. We will see that, despite the perverted idea, director Tsukamoto's aim is not to shock but to offer an intense meditation on the embodied nature of desire. Similar acts of perversion became tropes in some horror or pornographic films but, as I will try to point out in my analysis, the film aesthetic and emotional tension towards empathy[5] manages this issue in a very different manner.

The relationship with death is a central concern for the protagonists

4 As Bellavita (2006) points out, thinking of Lacanian psychoanalysis as a hermeneutical discipline means querying the text directly and the medium of psychoanalysis of cinema is nothing but cinematographic language. In this perspective, the application of the Lacanian discipline to the film text has to analyse the language of cinema and its use, i.e. the process of enunciation.

5 During our conversation (unpublished), answering my questions, director Tsukamoto told me: "In the first part of the film, the protagonist Rinko is harassed and tormented by a stalker. But, actually, during the shooting I felt sorry for her. So, I started thinking that I would have liked her to be happy" (Tokyo, 5 December 2003).

who, constantly tottering between life and death, seem to choose to run voluntarily into its arms. But the director, by systematically overturning the taboos of voyeurism, violence and disease, intends to open a breach in the prison of the inorganic (infiltrating, like the rain that seeps unfailingly into every crack in the cement) and, thanks to an act of perversion, sweeping away every moral judgment, forces the pair of protagonists to regain a satisfying life and find fulfilment and happiness. In conclusion, Tsukamoto seems to be telling the viewer that it is through the expression of desire (recovering our own body) that the drive towards exhaustion and the inorganic (death) can be opposed most profitably.

As I hope it will be clear, the body – and its face – will be the paradigmatic sign of those portraits of desire; they will guide us, and I believe they could be the key tool for further investigations on director Tsukamoto's work.

1 Mental Landscapes

I consider Tsukamoto as a master of staging mental landscapes and psychological tension, and the terrain of the unconscious in which Lacanian desire finds itself perfectly at home.[6]

Throughout his filmography, Tsukamoto has shown his skill at giving shape to precise mental landscapes[7] and staging the most hidden inner impulses that rattle and change/mutate human bodies. The structure of *Rokugatsu no hebi* is essential and rigorous: each element is an indispensable piece in the creation of a stylised mosaic, a thriller starring desire.

The story turns around three main characters rendering the primary shape of a triangle composed of two men – Iguchi Michio, the stalker photographer, Tatsumi Shigehiko and his young wife, Tatsumi Rinko, at the apex. A limited number of actors, enclosed places, condensed duration, and precise stylistic choices contribute to the making of an original authorial perspective. Attendant to his own *desire* for cinema, as usual, Tsukamoto is not only the director but also the author of a linear and fluid script (never more clearly resolved in his previous work than here), of a precise editing driven by introspection, the photography – in an inspired b/w toned to

6 For Volli (2002), the fundamental figure in the investigation of desire – according to the well-known contemporary theory of Desire proposed by Lacan (1975) in which "every desire is a desire for the Other" – is the body, the *physical* nature of desire. This seems particularly pertinent to the staging of Tsukamoto's bodies throbbing with desire.

7 As regards this talent of his, the director finds cinematic expressive medium to be a particularly appropriate tool, because the fictional film has the strange power of reconciling three extremely different levels of consciousness for a moment: the impression of reality, the impression of dream, and the impression of fantasy, which cease to be contradictory and mutually exclusive and establish new relationships (cf. Metz 1989, 130).

blue – and the choice of using 1.37:1 aspect ratio for the frame, which is almost square and cut around a single body. He also personally takes charge of the sound and noise register, which he uses methodically to accompany his mental landscapes in blue. In a very intriguing way, the reawakening of desire shows an aural nature, paralleled by a skilful aural cinematic technique. Obviously, then, he cannot help getting in front of the camera, saving the role of the perverse molester for himself, the man who spins the other two into motion, in this way also doubling his role as director.

The characters are precise 'portraits of desire' (an expression borrowed from Recalcati 2012) and the film itself – from a Lacanian point of view – is a portrait of the desire of Tsukamoto, the director. Namely, his desire for cinema as the preferred vehicle for his rebellious, uninhibited and passionate, erotic and violent expression, his desire for the spectator, his desire for an Elsewhere,[8] after overcoming the limits of mortality through cinematographic artistic expression.

The film tells a sensual and violent story of salvation through the reawakening of desire and the repossession of the body – an erotic body[9] – in the modern city of steel, glass and concrete, the Tokyo Metropolis, the great antagonist that crushes the bodies and confines the minds of the characters of Tsukamoto's filmography.[10]

June's monsoon rains never stop pouring in the metropolis; the rain flows thick and fast into every crevice, pushing forward into the heavy manholes in the asphalt; it slides down every window, soaks clothing and drenches bodies, contaminates and fertilises every image as if in a state of permanent erotic arousal, deliberately permeating the b/w photography with blue. Water – along with earth, air and fire – is a fundamental element in the imaginary experience: the use of the colour blue itself is ably combined with the sound effects, and the unceasing pounding of the rain – also with interventions of extradiegetic nature in the modulation of the volume – suggests the surrealistic nature of the setting,[11] its dreamlike/internal nature of mental landscape.

8 According to Recalcati: "desire as an opening in the direction of Elsewhere, as transcendence, as invocation of another possibility than mere presence of the existent" (2012, 90). Moreover, "desire is based not on the existence of the Object but a subjective decision. Just what am I going to do with my desire? How will I be able to make it fruitful, not wasteful? I do not think it at all insignificant that Lacan proposed translating the German term with which Freud defines desire (Wunsch) into the French term Voeu, vow, vocation, invocation" (91). In this regard, it is interesting that Tsukamoto chose *Kyrie eleison* – invocation expression – to accompany the key sequence of the couple's final embrace.

9 Because Recalcati (2012) asserts that life needs enjoyment (i.e. the physical pleasure), and the human body is structurally an erotic body.

10 For further discussion on the theme of Tokyo Metropolis in the films of Tsukamoto, see Cimalando 2010.

11 The iconography of interior space is composed of surrealistic images, which are an integral part of Tsukamotian poetics.

2 *Rokugatsu no hebi.* Coordinates for Viewing in the Sign of Desire

2.1 The Photographer and the Help Line Operator

In the opening sequence, a photo shoot for soft porn magazines, there are close-ups of a camera with a big objective lens, the flash of the bulbs and a female body, combined with the feverish sound of the shutters and the young girl's sighs. Then, there is a cut to close-ups of the erotic photos taken, laid on the editor's desk alongside others picturing commercial objects for advertising. Contemporary society – the society of pleasure and enjoyment as an end in itself – avidly consumes images of the erotic body (female) and craves the possession of objects in an induced way, such as the advertising shots of items on sale. Here is precisely portrayed character Iguchi's chosen profession.

The photographer is alone in his studio. A phone call starts and the voice of an operator (character Rinko) at a mental health help line is heard in reply. Close-up of the telephone (a fetish object).[12] After some hesitation, Iguchi communicates his intention to take his own life.

After the opening credits, here is the close-up of a slimy snail (organic) sliding slowly over the surface of a big hydrangea leaf wet with rain (fig. 1), followed instantly in reverse shot by a cold framing of Tokyo Metropolis with its steel, glass, and cement buildings (inorganic), soaked in the blue of the driving rain (fig. 2). These are the film's two pivotal metaphorical images rich in meaning that return again and again in a circular narration scheme (just as the circularity of Lacanian Desire) featuring repetition. The first is the portrait of the awakening of desire, and it is staged in contrast with the second, which is the portrait of the great antagonist to the desiring humans of Tsukamoto's filmography; the desire of the body (and the mind) against the depersonalisation, crushing, and virtual tension of life in the big metropolis.

At the mental health centre, the operator Rinko is at her desk, wearing headset and microphone, gentle and attentive in her conversation with her invisible caller (who is bypassed by the phone). Outside, June's torrential monsoon rain continues flowing relentlessly into the concrete city's iron manholes.

12 The telephone object, during the film, becomes a fetish object through which all the interrelations between the characters pass. Rinko and Iguchi on the help line, Iguchi who sends a mobile phone to Rinko for the purpose of calling and directing her, and then Rinko who calls Iguchi with the same virtual prosthesis, Iguchi who calls Shigehiko, Shigehiko, who after finding refuge in his favourite café, talks over the phone instead of arranging his mother's funeral personally.

Figure 1

Figure 2

2.2 A Couple Lifestyle in an Elegant Sterile Apartment

A man (character Shigehiko) with the sleeves of his spotless white shirt rolled up well is cleaning the bathroom sink frantically, scrubbing hard, but without using water. When his wife, Rinko, returns to their elegant and tidy apartment she starts a conversation, but it is more of a monologue; he is too involved in what he is doing. She has brought home some take-away food for herself; he has already eaten. They do not share pleasure, not even the intimacy of a family meal.[13]

The woman immediately feels to blame herself: if the bathroom was dirty, she should have been the one to clean it (assuming the precise role society assigned her). Her husband, a mature man with a good job, tells her that he likes doing it. A dialogue follows between the two from different rooms, both intent on their own doings. She would like a pet. He disagrees entirely (he is, in fact, horrified at the idea) and asks her in a scolding tone to keep her books scattered around in better order. Here are portrayed Shigehiko's neurosis: the need to control everything, the need to be aseptic, Lacan's cloistering.

Rinko has fallen asleep with the light on. As she does not feel him in the bed, she gets up and takes a blanket, knowing where to find him (habit); he sleeps on the *chaise longue* (the quintessential design object) in the study. The young woman tenderly gazes at her husband and lovingly covers him up. Then driven by her desire, she steps into the closet and rummages

13 In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud argues that lifestyles are technical answers, finalised to the problem posed by pleasure, and methods that are more or less effective in coming to terms with happiness' impossibility (cf. Freud 1978, 557-630). This concept is well exemplified in the couple's lifestyle, until Iguchi's action brings them into contact with their desire.

Figure 3

Figure 4

among Shigehiko's clothes searching for something to take to bed in order to luxuriate in his smell and make up for his absence.

Portrait of desire in blue (fig. 3): Rinko immersed in the bathtub stares intensely at the rain falling outside onto the round skylight pane above her – only its shadows penetrates the room –, the face soaked in sweat. Close-up of her gaze looking into the distance (fig. 4), lost in her desire (for the Other).

2.3 A Cruel Game

Then Rinko receives an envelope in the mail with the words (in Roman characters) "*Danna no himitsu*" (your husband's secret). Here's the start of a perverse game.

Close-ups of photographs taken out of the mysterious envelope: her face, her body, and her solitary masturbation, reproduced by the nervous way she flips those pictures through her fingers faster and faster (fig. 5). Her autoeroticism is not filmed or shown by the camera but performed by the movement of her hands flipping through the photos. This interesting operation of *mise en abyme* of Rinko's erotic body is a key sequence, one of the film's climaxes, and a meta-cinematographic example in which the very mechanism of the rolling of the film frame itself is revealed to us (no longer 24 frames per second but at manual speed). Those pictures have been taken from outside, through windows panes, through the round skylight. We cannot help but feel estrangement, perceive the unreality of the point of view, the vanishing point outside the frame – extradiegetic – possibly in coincidence with the viewpoint of the spectator and the position of the camera. In other words, the point of view of the director, reinforcing the operation of identification and doubling of Tsukamoto as director (operating outside the film frame) and Tsukamoto as character Iguchi (acting

Figure 5

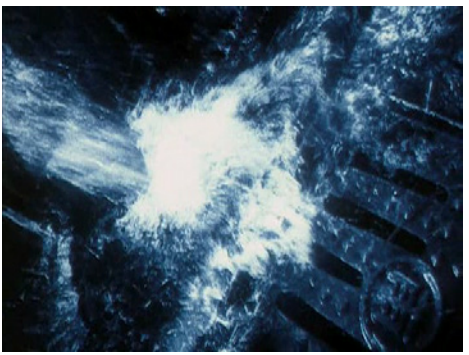

Figure 6

from inside), and the overlap of the film's project with the plan concocted by the stalker.

At her job, Rinko receives another phone call from the other day's caller (the photographer Iguchi): he no longer wants to kill himself because he has found an objective to pursue, and this is something that should make her happy.[14]

As a good wife should, Rinko assists her elderly mother-in-law at the hospital instead of her husband, who simply ignores the problem by glibly blaming work commitments. Old age and illness are enclosed in the perfectly aseptic walls of society's designated place with the effect of removal.

2.4 Pictures and the Voice of a Stalker

The young wife receives another envelope. The rain's roaring pervades every frame. New pictures show her shortening one of her skirts with a sharp cut of the scissors, then putting it on and carefully applying makeup, her face gazing intently at herself in the mirror (a Lacanian mirror, in which a human being has the first fundamental experience of self-recognition). A mobile phone rings shrilly from inside the envelope. The stalker's voice (Iguchi's voice) gives her disturbing instructions for what he wants her to do. According to his words, for what she herself truly desires to do. This is the condition he sets for returning the other photographs he has taken of her.

14 Rinko works at the telephone help line, where human relationships are filtered through objects. Headsets, telephonic voices, virtual reality, no physical contact, not even visual. The content instead is utterly human; a human voice (her voice) can save lives, deflect suicidal intentions and desire for death. Also the stalker acts at a distance, through the telephone and the earphone, in a possible parallel between Rinko's work and Iguchi's action (or mission).

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Rinko buys a Taser stun-gun, a shield to defend herself from the molester, while in reverse shot torrential flows of rain continue gushing through every crack in the metropolitan cement before plunging into a close-up of a heavy iron sewer (fig. 6). The water finds ways to penetrate every shield in its path.

At home, she finds a new envelop, this time addressed to her husband, with other pictures of her autoeroticism; in the last one her gaze seems to be looking directly into the objective lens. This is the beginning of her coming to awareness.

2.5 The Moment Has Come

Rinko takes her miniskirt and leaves the apartment wearing the earphone, and the perverse game begins. In a subway toilet booth the stalker's voice orders her to change clothing, telling that something has woken up inside her and must be obeyed. Then, he forces her to enter a department store

wearing the miniskirt without her panties. Rinko complies, keeping her legs closed tightly, embarrassed to have to mingle with the crowd. The use of the hand-held camera and the editing make her/us feel that everyone is stealthily shooting her disapproving glances. Her anguish is transmitted by shaky and blurry subjective shots. Through the earphone, the stalker orders her to go and buy a vibrating dildo. In the sex shop, the lascivious glances of the customers (i.e. the consumers of the pornographic pictures of the opening sequence) humiliate her. The molester gets the vibrator's remote control inside a public bathroom without showing himself up, and then oblige the woman to stick the dildo inside her and go walking in the street. She protests, asking why he is subjecting her to such a cruelty. He replies as before; you saved my life, now I would like to return the favour. You would like to have sex, but nobody touches you. I will give you the chance to do what you desire, to live the way you want to live. In an extreme close-up, Rinko begins to listen more closely to the off-screen voice (fig. 7), and everything is played out in the expressions on her face.[15]

The young woman obeys. The rain is pouring down when she leaves the bathroom. The voice forces her to buy fruit and vegetables in phallic shape (aubergine, banana, cucumber, porn fetishes). The grocer stares at her with disapproval as she begins to feel bad due to the vibrator between her legs, operated in remote control by the occult molester.

Rinko returns to the public toilet stall deeply upset. The dildo's remote control and a thick folder of photographs are there. Now, she operates the vibrator by herself, adjusting the intensity and enjoying the effects. She begins to feel the pain transforming into pleasure, dominated by a big metal fan squeaking as its spins on the wall above her head (the cogwheel of the mechanism of desire). The clattering fan and the blinking light reflected on the toilet stall's door create a disturbing effect; the sound of the reawakening of desire, for the heroine, in that moment, is incomprehensible, terrifying, threatening (fig. 8). The extreme close-up of her face from the bottom up takes in the churning fan as well (fig. 9); the fan seems to oversee that forced pursuit of pleasure. A cut to the frame of the slimy snail gliding over the big hydrangea leaf emphasises the emergence of desire through an operation of Lacanian condensation obtained by skilful editing.[16]

15 Noa Steimatsky (2017) asserts: 'somewhere between its visual-sensory apotheosis, its psychic and ethical appeal, and the vast metaphysical horizons, the experience of the human face is strong, and it is elusive' (2).

16 It might be worth noting that, throughout the entire film, it is hard to discern whether the theme of the snail on the hydrangea – Tsukamotian figure of desire – is diegetic or not, in confirmation of its mental and metaphoric effect. For further detail on the concept of Lacanian condensation in cinema, see Metz 1989.

2.6 Subtracted Body and Sick Body: *If I betray my desire, I'll sicken and meet my death*

At home Rinko embraces the leather armchair at her husband's desk, rubbing her face along the back in substitution of her husband's absent/subtracted body. The slow movement of her face recalls the movement of the snail. A ringing phone interrupts this rite. "*Anata*!" ('you', the affectionate and familiar form of address to the husband of a Japanese wife), Rinko hopes/desires this to be Shigehiko. According to Lacan, amorous desire is the desire for the name.[17]

Once again, however, it is the stalker, and this time on the home phone. "Go to the doctor" says he without adding more. Alone in his room, Iguchi watches the rain slide down the window, and then delivers an abrupt punch to the mirror that shatters into pieces reflecting his face (here is another Lacanian mirror).

The motion-picture camera shoots from outside the studio window of the physician who is providing Rinko with a diagnosis of her illness (proximity to death); a *mise en abyme* of the moment using the window frame combined with the roar of the rain that also prevent from hearing the words spoken (fig. 10). This is another key sequence, a new climax. Here is the film's psychoanalytic paradigm: if I betray my desire, I will sicken and meet my death.[18]

2.7 Gifts (Confronting Disease)

Rinko receives a box with a hamster inside, a gift from Iguchi. In reverse shot, the rain rushes down the concrete steps. Meanwhile the young woman flips through all the photographs that depict her in various moments of her days, passing her hand over the plastic of the containers, caressing them, closing her fist around them, seeking physical contact. There is also a photo album that Iguchi has composed for her. She begins browsing: there are portraits, close-ups of her face with different gazes. The young woman is

17 Amorous desire loves the irreplaceable singularity, the uniqueness of the beloved object. It is not dispersed through the pointless pursuit of one object after another nor obsesses over universal. For this reason, it needs a distinct name in order to take possession of the unique and the unrepeatable. Amorous desire is an expression of the ability to associate a name with a body, to make a body of the name and to desire that body for its name (Recalcati 2012, 103-12). For Rinko, the gratification of her sexual desire cannot be separated from her amorous desire. Rinko desires Shigehiko (the name), and also her sexual desire is piloted by her husband's clothing, a fetish object.

18 According to Lacan, through Recalcati (2012), in psychoanalysis what makes life satisfying and worth living is not to betray the vocation of desire. Our ethical duty is to second our desire, since removal leads to disease. Being faithful to one's desire is the possible key to our happiness on this earth.

Figure 10

Figure 11

both touched and disturbed, while the hamster runs nowhere on the wheel in his cage.

Picking up the mobile phone of the cruel game, this time is Rinko that calls Iguchi. She asks him how he knew and he pronounces the terrible word: cancer. Disease, the messenger of Death. He saw something in those pictures that had to do with her breast. Also Iguchi has cancer – a cancer of the stomach, in the terminal stage (neither has Iguchi been able to turn his life account, and now he is just a man alone with himself, gazing at his reflection in the mirror, and seriously ill; fig. 11) – that was the reason he called the phone help line in the first place, thinking of taking his own life.

2.8 Tottering Between Life and Death

Rinko breaks the news about her breast cancer to her husband – in reverse shot, a river of rain keeps on plunging into the iron manhole without pause: she can save herself if she has her breast removed. Shigehiko reacts by furiously cleaning the bathroom drain, complaining about the hamster's fur and stench (Iguchi's gift introduces a living, natural element into the couple's sterile apartment, which is the emblem of Shigehiko's need for isolation, contaminating it). Rinko understands that her husband refuses the idea of the mutilation of her breast, which is more unbearable for him than her death. The rain is incessantly pouring (framing in blue and deafening noise). The theme of the pouring rain is repeatedly used for the cinematographic staging of the unconscious pressure exerted by desire, which pursues its ends and makes its way through all barriers without any possibility of stopping it, like the flowing of the water into every available slit.

In the sequence of the perfectly aseptic death of his mother, Shigehiko has taken refuge in his preferred café (habit), communicating with his wife only by phone. The man himself, despite his need for control, cannot stop

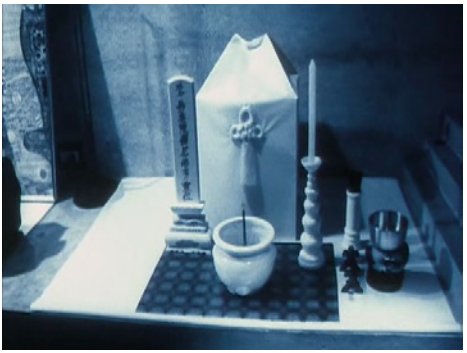

Figure 12

Figure 13

looking at the rain that keeps beating mercilessly on the window's panes. Iguchi is there, sitting at a small table aside, and observing him.

At home, the urn bearing the ashes of Shigehiko's mother (fig. 12) has been place on the small altar his wife has set up.[19]

Rinko does not go to have her operation performed, but reassures her husband when he asks how it went, telling him that it was no longer necessary.

19 The course of the illness and death of Shigehiko's mother in the hospital is significant and exemplary. Her son never visits her and delegates every duty to his wife, even the funeral and cremation that aseptically close the issue. Here Tsukamoto re-proposes (after *Tokyo Fist*, 1995) his vision of the relationship with the death of beloved elders in Tokyo Metropolis (Cimalando 2010), criticising the customs of contemporary Japanese society that demands the antiseptic disappearance of the dying and the cancellation of every trace of the event. In regard to how death is considered nowadays, according to Greenber and Sullivan (2013, 8-9): "many scholars (cf. Ariès 1981; Goldberg 1998; Shilling 1993) have noted a curious phenomenon in the social history of death. It is argued that, beginning in the nineteenth century but especially in the twentieth, death became 'less visible' for many middle-class and upper-class people living in the industrialized world. From the beginnings of human culture, death has being recognized as a major event that was symbolically incorporated to the communal culture through funerary rituals design to strengthen the social fabric in the wake of an individual's passing (cf. Block, Parry 1982). Through much of human history, death has been a common and socially shared experience. Funerary rituals continue to exist in the present, of course. However, with medical and technological advances in the past two centuries as well as general changes in social organization, death has become increasingly both a more private and a more 'institutionalized' affair, occurring largely in hospitals beyond the immediate awareness of anyone save for a few number of family members and experts (Ariès 1981). Curiously, at the same time that death has become seemingly more remote from people's everyday experience, there has been a proliferation in people's exposure to *images* of death (including vivid graphic images) in narrative cinema, television and the news media (Goldberg 1998, Shilling 1993)".

2.9 Discoveries and forced awakening

Shigehiko finds one of Rinko's pictures, and then receives a threatening phone call from the stalker, so he goes down into the street in the rain and, during the heated discussion that follows, he faints and ends up (significantly) with his face in a trash can. Iguchi had previously drugged his drink at the café and has plans for him as well.

The molester forces Shigehiko into a surreal situation that leaves him bewildered and terrified. He compels him to take part in a violent and lascivious spectacle – in which, in an expressionist pantomime, a couple is forced into a sexual act and then immersed in a strange aquarium immediately filled with water up to a possible drowning – together with other men similar to him; spectators obliged into a focused vision through bizarre conical visors with monocular lens placed on their faces, transforming them into grotesque pointing dogs (fig. 13). Once again, this is a meta-cinematographic staging in which we are clearly shown our condition as spectators watching through the motion-picture camera's monocle.

When Shigehiko discovers the existence of the stalker who photographs his wife and begins receiving that molester's attention himself, he wants to have her followed, and contacts some detective agency for the purpose, once again antiseptically, by phone. But then, the force of desire begins to act and he decides to do the task in person, putting his body at stake and exposing himself to the rain.

2.10 The revolt

Rinko, who by now has become aware of her desire, takes control of the game into which Iguchi had thrust her by force. Here is the revolt. She asks him to follow her and photograph her once again, this time consciously, with her consent. Rinko no longer wants to be the hamster in a cage running nowhere on a wheel. Maybe she has also understood that her husband will follow her.

In the alley, voluntarily exposed to Iguchi's camera, Rinko does not refuse the rain. As she undresses, touching herself and getting completely naked, she seeks out and desires the rain, opening her mouth to drink it and be possessed by it, to the rhythm of the popping flashbulbs in Iguchi's camera.[20] Here is the cinematographic staging of the vital drive of desire,

20 In a possible parallel with the opening sequence of the soft porn photo shoot, Iguchi uses the same methods (a large flashbulb and large objective lens) to obtain the same results – Rinko's orgasm – but with diametrically opposed ends. Rinko intends to leave an undying image of her desire to her husband while Shigehiko, shaken and overcome by the erotic body of his wife, reacts by masturbating in turn. But this does not involve an act of

erotic and poetical, in which Freud's Eros does not exclude Thanatos (the Freudian impulse towards the inorganic, the fatal, liberating quiet) and even runs towards it, given that, because Rinko refused to have her operation, she is consciously moving towards her death. Through her intense gaze (fig. 14), she seems to cry out that if she cannot physically share Eros and life itself with Shigehiko, then she might as well embrace Thanatos.

Shigehiko is there spying on her, and after dropping his umbrella – his final barrier against penetration by the rain – overcome by the revelation of the erotic body of his wife, overwhelmed by Rinko's Eros, he cannot but touch his own body as well, a body that he had kept in isolation (cloistering) and then forgotten. He is as permeated by desire as he is by the rain, and this drives him to autoerotism, following suit to Rinko. In this way, the *petite mort* of orgasm strikes both in unison, even if they are still physically distant. Now also Shigehiko hears the rain roaring loudly.

2.11 Death and Rebirth

Iguchi obliged Shigehiko, who still wants to recover all the photos of his wife, to meet and interrogate him on the reason why Rinko did not have her operation (as he saw her naked breast in the alley). He realises that Shigehiko had voluntarily ignored the question (just as he had done with his mother's illness) and preferred her dead to being mutilated. Iguchi then reveals that Rinko had herself photographed so that those pictures, in the beauty and integrity of her body – shot at the peak of her pleasure, in "that moment of absolute splendor in which the body becomes itself"[21] – might be given to her husband as her legacy after her death. Iguchi makes Shigehiko strip naked (removing all his clothes as every other defence) and beats him up, while telling him that repressing desire leads to cancer (the Lacanian paradigm of the film). Iguchi then mortifies his body, soiling and hitting him. The surreal tentacle that protrudes from the belt around his waist and

voyeurism as an end in itself, a solitary pleasure (neither can the action undertaken in their regards by Iguchi be considered as such) that consumes itself. Shigehiko overcomes all the limits he had severely imposed in himself, allowing himself to get wet and be penetrated by the rain that he tried so hard to keep out of his own sphere (just as he had done with his wife), and finally experiences his own body: he has an erotic body of his own – which is the body desired by Rinko, that body and no other, not a body to be used once and then thrown away. The man finally catches his wife's gaze: she is watching herself (or what she will be leaving for the future after her death); she is watching him – even if she cannot see him hidden around the corner; she is watching him asleep on the *chaise longue* in the study; she is watching him when he will be left alone with these pictures of her.

21 The gratification of desire is pleasure and orgasm itself may be considered the most intense appropriation of pleasure. Lacan believes, following in the footsteps of Aristotle, that pleasure is a sort of perfection in action (Volli 2002). Rinko desires to obtain it for the precise purpose of leaving it as a bequest to her husband.

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

begins choking Shigehiko around the neck, and the oily, dark substance that he has thrown at him, give the man the grotesque appearance of a newborn just expelled from the womb (fig. 15). Iguchi, who is dying, leaves his own desire in legacy to Shigehiko, his desire for Rinko (and for a happy life as part of a couple). Rinko's desire can bring about the birth of a different man (a synthesis of the two men previously existing, in a recurring triangular scheme in Tsukamoto's films; cf. Cimalando 2010, 53).

When Shigehiko regains consciousness, he is the one drowning in the glass tank, with the image of his wife who is posing in the rain just for him in his eyes. Iguchi has driven him to panic, which in Lacanian key will lead him to the point of freeing himself from his cloistering.[22]

22 In concurrence with Shigehiko's surreal experience of being enclosed in that tank of water, a part of Iguchi's situational theatre: "it is precisely panic that in the end places before us the truth of the paradox of cloistering; the panicking person perceives the Elsewhere, Otherness, even if in the terrifying form of a loss of control, of falling, dizziness, sinking, suffocation" (Recalcati 2012, 95). Iguchi tears Shigehiko from his cloistering, driving him to the point of panic, in this way giving him the chance to perceive the Elsewhere, to open

2.12 Following the Same Path

In the sequence of the self-portrait picture of Iguchi for posterity shot with the tiny camera assembled when he was a child, Iguchi chooses the physical object that represents his youthful desire for photography (for the Elsewhere) to achieve his death shot and close the circle. Then, a close-up of the imperfect circular eye of the hand-built tiny camera ready to *take* him (away). The pictures taken are two: one is his self-portrait; the other shows the same background empty, without him in it, as a presage/declaration of his imminent disappearance (fig. 16).

Lovingly cooking a meal for her husband, Rinko listens to Iguchi saying that he is about to leave over the phone. She replies to those words with a sigh of assent while the sound of the rain driving down outside intensifies, overflowing into the frame of her pensive close-up. After the line has fallen, she tells him/herself: "I'll be leaving soon, too"; because she has chosen not to undergo breast surgery, she will follow Iguchi on the same path to death.

2.13 Drive of Desire and the Defeat of Death

But Shigehiko, awoken from his torpor, is running home. In a flashback, the surreal prior events that led him to this undignified but determined race, with his face swollen from Iguchi's beating and his shirt stained with blood, abandoned his former stiffness and cold demeanour.

Shigehiko shows up at the apartment in a state of catharsis, virtually unrecognisable but immediately recognised by his wife. This immediate recognition of the desire for the Other is emblematic in the couple's exchange of intense glances, accompanied in counterpoint by an ironic little tune and the voices of policemen chasing him (caused by his unlikely snatching of a pistol from a policeman's holster to shoot Iguchi, an event that took place off-screen). Shigehiko has, in fact, established contact with his body (an erotic body according to Lacan) and rediscovered his own desire that through his orgasm (the *petite mort*) by masturbation has synchronised with Rinko's desire, and this reunification carries the seed of both the couple's rebirth and the distancing of death.

The shrill intrusive sound of the police car's siren emphasises Shigehiko's reawakening. His desire for the Other enables him to overcome his fear of the mutilation of his wife's body (in addition to overcoming his cloistering and all the other phobias that quenched every form of desire),

himself to desire, to recognise Rinko's desire, transfixed in her gaze that has been captured by the photographer's lens in the rain that day in the alley.

further to the point, it drives him to desire, to love that same mutilated and imperfect breast, kissing it tenderly.[23] Rinko laughs and cries with tears streaming down her face, and husband and wife dedicate themselves to the enjoyment of the erotic body, coupling in a desired embrace. In this way, Rinko and Shigehiko succeed in fulfilling what has been postulated as fundamental in obtaining a rich and satisfying life from a Lacanian psychoanalytic point of view: linking the One of enjoyment to the Other of desire. It has finally stopped raining, and the sun's warm light filters through the round skylight now.

The mystical chorus of *Kyrie eleison* accompanies the sequence, almost as if to indicate that this reunification/re-equilibrium in a human being's life acquires religious value that approaches the Infinite, the vanquishing of Death and immortality, while also bearing in mind the fact that the couple's carnal congress – the sexual act, the orgasm in itself – implies the possibility of procreation, offspring, and the transcendence of mortal finiteness, unlike the photograph Iguchi leaves of himself, the presence of what has been and is now no more, Death.[24]

3 Rebellious Desire

According to Volli (2002), modern society must be considered as a virtual society due to the prevalence of technical systems based on the illusion of presence – such as the telephone with which Rinko works – that transfers relationships between human beings, even the most significant, to a plane devoid of corporeality, that negation of corporeality against which the characters in Tsukamoto's films struggle. Even in a psychological or existential sense, we inhabit a virtual world, tending more and more to express and satisfy our desire in purely imaginary ways. Rinko desires Shigehiko, in fact, but does not tell him so; she limits herself to watching him sleep and then rummages among his clothes in the closet to nourish her desire in a solitary way. Rinko *breathes* Shigehiko through his clothes and imagines making love with him, because in such a world, following Volli (2002), not

23 Tsukamoto stages Shigehiko's mental image of that mutilation, filming it in a surreal framing because the spectator knows that Rinko has not yet had her operation.

24 Dying Iguchi's self-portrait remind me Alexander Gardner's *Portrait of Lewis Payne* (1865) proposed by Roland Barthes (1980): the photo shows a prisoner sentenced to death. We know that he is already dead, because it was taken over 100 years ago. Yet seeing him before us *now*, still alive, breaks up the timeline and summons the thought that when this portrait was made, he *was about* to die. Here's the Barthesian *punctum* of photography: a dizziness, a sharp point that pierces. Barthes (1980) sees a relationship between Death and photography, because in philosophical terms, a photograph – as immobile as a lifeless body – freezes the instant and extracts what it portrays from the dynamic flow of events, in the same way that Death carried us out of life.

only the desires of human beings but also the satisfaction of such desires takes place at a virtual level, in the immaterial world of dream. In this way, Rinko lives the life of a perfect wife in strict observance of Japanese social rules that require her to be remissive, reserved, always orderly, and caring without ever expecting to receive in exchange the same care and attention from her husband.

Contemporary society tends to conceal the desire's subversive dimension behind a thick barricade of definitions of what can be or should be desired, and the catalogue of desires is physically contained in shopping centres (we see Rinko push to enter one of these during Iguchi's persecuting game), which is illustrated in magazines and continuously re-proposed. You have to desire what there already is, what is on sale, what the other people have. Significantly, as a professional photographer, Iguchi takes products for commercial catalogues, inserting himself perfectly in the mechanism.

But Lacanian desire, denying actual reality in order to imagine a more satisfying situation in its place, is by definition *subversive*. I believe that this is precisely what Iguchi sees in Rinko's solitary desire: its potential, its rebellious and regenerating power. And, consequently, Iguchi's action, in which he becomes a stalker, the premeditated persecution of Rinko and her husband, is revealed to be perverse only in appearance, because it has a subversive and beneficial purpose that carries the seeds of the revolt that signals rupture with the existent for each one of the couple, triggering in them a movement of the body that invokes change and carries with it the passion of awakening and the active acceptance of one's desire.

4 Photographs

The pictures of Rinko shot by Iguchi were not taken for his benefit (the action he performs before dying is instead for his own benefit) but for Rinko's, to let her see herself, her own face (the mirror of Freud and Lacan). Our face is the blind point of our body. Indeed, we cannot look ourselves in the face without a mirror. We see the gazes of people looking us, but never our own (or the expression on our face) on others.[25] Iguchi gives Rinko the chance to see herself through the photos. In this way, after overcoming her initial disgust for Iguchi's perverse action, Rinko finally sees herself and then looks, outside and inside herself. According to Roland Barthes (1980), more than any others, the photos of faces possess the *punctum*, that decisive detail that often lies in the subject's

25 For Metz, also a film is like a mirror but differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: as in the latter, anything and everything can be projected, but there is only a thing that is never reflected, i.e. the spectator's body (1989, 49)

gaze. The Barthesian *punctum* really appears to emerge from the gaze of the portrait in blue made of Rinko: the glow of a naked exposure and the chance of understanding a personality deeply. Along with photography, also cinema appears to offer the opportunity to enclose a world in an image that reproduces a gaze.

The photographs taken by Iguchi, the ones that portray her alone at home touching her body, pose a question insinuating a doubt in the spectator's mind: from which possible position had the stalker been able to take those photos? On a closer inspection, it is a position that does not seem to correspond to a place in which it is physically possible to take them. It seems, instead, the all-seeing position of the motion-picture camera. Can we imagine Iguchi perched over the round skylight photographing Rinko in the rain without being seen? The shooting positions seem entirely surreal, improbable. So, we might think that Iguchi does not exist, or better, that Iguchi is *rokugatsu no hebi* (the Snake of June): the personification of the desire that emerges and, in psychoanalytic terms, awakens the starring couple to the consciousness of what is required for them to live happy and complete lives as human beings. Therefore, the twin photographs taken by Iguchi with his childhood hand-built machine – the one that portrays him seated on a *tatami* mat and the other empty – might also be a portrait of pure inner space, that is portraits of Desire in blue.

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The Magnified Body of Survival
Tracing Communication Paradigms in Hiroshima and Nagasaki's Storytelling

Francesco Comotti
(Liceo Linguistico "Giovanni Falcone" di Bergamo, Italia)

Abstract This essay concerns a number of problematic aspects of literary communication within works of literature about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Specifically, it tries to compare and put into perspective the different approaches and motivations by authors who are also survivors and readers who are not into the literary text, when what is at stake is the knowledge of extremely violent experiences as Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombings. After a partial survey of writings about the atomic bombings produced outside the two cities by non-survivours, the essay will focus on some characteristic traits of Hiroshima and Nagasaki's witness literature, in the light of which the paradigm of literary communication will be questioned and integrated to account also for the difficult relationship between the act of writing something that resists being put into words, and the attempt at participation that is the act of reading.

Summary 1 The Uninteresting Weapon. A Different approach to Hiroshima and Nagasaki's Bombings. – 3 Mushroom Clouds. A Look at Hiroshima and Nagasaki from Afar. – 4 Vulnerable Literature. Problematic Aspects in the Fruition of Literary Works about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. – 5 Conclusions.

Keywords Hiroshima. Nagasaki. Witness Literature. Atomic Bomb. Storytelling. Literary Theory.

1 The Uninteresting Weapon. A Different Approach to Hiroshima and Nagasaki's Bombings

In 1946, responding to those asking what she thought of the atomic bomb, Gertrude Stein wrote a short reflection, which was opened by a seemingly dismissive statement: she "had not been able to take any interest in it".

> I like to read detective and mystery stories, I never get enough of them but whenever one of them is or was about death rays and atomic bombs I never could read them. What is the use, if they are really as destructive as all that there is nothing left and if there is nothing there nobody to be interested and nothing to be interested about. (Stein 1973, 161)

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The apocalyptic, end-of-the-world symbology surrounding the bomb is intentionally overturned by Stein: the atomic bomb is of the utmost unimportance to the human mind, exactly because it was conceived (and displayed) as the most destructive weapon known to humankind. She then proceeds remarking that a world where nobody survives is not even worthy of discussion:

> I never could take any interest in the atomic bomb, I just couldn't any more than in everybody's secret weapon. That it has to be secret makes it dull and meaningless. Sure it will destroy a lot and kill a lot, but it's the living that are interesting not the way of killing them, because if there were not a lot left living how could there be any interest in destruction. (161)

Here Stein defies the ominous commentary on the atomic bomb that had been so frequent at the time, only to point out a simple yet fundamental fact: a story is worthy of our interest insofar as it regards human survival, instead of mechanically wrought death and destruction.

Stein's take at the preoccupation with the nuclear weapons anticipates the inherent complexity of the act of looking from a distance at such disastrous events as Hiroshima and Nagasaki: it is necessary, she implies, to have 'stories' as points of observation, as well as the intention to step onto those standpoints and look at the scene. Stein noticeably uses the future tense when she speculates that the atomic bomb might "destroy a lot and kill a lot". The reference to fiction, together with the absence of any mention (at least explicit) to the two Japanese cities where the bombings were very real, past- and present-tense issues, suggests that she might have been referring to hypothetical future scenarios, rather than the reality of what had already happened. The atomic bomb as something conceptually surpassing human capabilities of imagination and understanding is what she refuses to be concerned with: her resistance to grant any special status to the bomb lies below the surface of the text, her attitude aimed at reducing the importance given to the atomic bombs in particular and the industry of death in general. Stein was clearly attempting to reverse the rhetoric through which the atomic bomb was often discussed at the time: the ultimate weapon of mass destruction, both terrifying option of future self-annihilation and present epitome of human technological development. The secrecy that Stein calls "dull and meaningless" hints at that ambivalence: what stirs both the fear for the survival of life on Planet Earth as well as the intoxication for the power gained through scientific knowledge retains so dangerous a contradiction, that humankind should know better than even entertaining with the thought of it. Nobody should think highly of the atomic bomb (and of himself through it) – a thought that stands in stark contrast, for example, with the verse from the *Bhagavad-Gita* that J. Robert Oppenheimer recalled coming to his mind right after conducting

the Trinity atomic bomb test in New Mexico in July 1945: "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds". Stein's stance is ethical: she intentionally looks away from the thing that in 1946 was the most dreaded means of mass murder and destruction, treating it as bad science fiction, in order to reinstate human existence at the centre of her discourse. Moreover, we can already infer from her words most of the questions underlying the discussion on the atomic bomb as a matter of human experience: why do we take interest in the atomic bomb? Where do we place ourselves confronting it? What do we do of stories, photographs, drawings, films and performances concerning the bomb? What are their mutual similarities, and how do they differ from each other? How differently are we affected by each one of them? And ultimately, what is there to know about the atomic bomb? If we were to follow Stein's suggestion and substituted the words 'atomic bomb' with 'the living' or 'human being', we would find out that these are possibly the most tantalising questions about our existence and how we shape it into communicative forms. In turn, we also could substitute 'atomic bomb' with other violent experiences of extreme proximity to death, only to realise that, before being allowed to approach any ground zero and the people who survived, we should develop an awareness of where and why we are going to do so.

2 Mushroom Clouds. A Look at Hiroshima and Nagasaki from Afar

A considerable number of thinkers, writers and artists all around the world have been taking interest in the nuclear issue since the two bombs were dropped in 1945. For the most part, however, they do not seem to find it necessary to explain their reasons in addressing the atomic bomb, almost implying it to be an obvious continuation of their own concern for humanity; furthermore, they often cite Hiroshima and Nagasaki as mere place-names retaining all their exotic remoteness, used as objective correlatives of the atomic bomb. One surprising example of this tendency is Elias Canetti: despite his thoughtful observations on Second World War's atrocities in Europe, he writes about the two atomic detonations in Japan in one entry of his notebooks, omitting both cities' names altogether and fitting the issue within his main discourse: his personal struggle to defeat death (Canetti 1978, 66-7).

It is true that the information available to Canetti at the time were scarce. By the end of 1946, John Hersey's reportage from Hiroshima, first published in *The New Yorker*, had already had wide circulation in the United States, the United Kingdom and France, displaying a completely different point of view to its readers: that of six Hiroshima citizens who had survived the blast and had been willing to share their testimonies. The

title itself, *Hiroshima*, left no doubt about the setting of the account: for the first time, the public outside Japan was allowed to look at the bomb from the ground up and have a better knowledge of the extent of the destruction and the suffering it had caused, instead of contemplating the gigantic mushroom cloud, in awe but unaffected, from the point of view of the crew members on board of the two B29 planes, Enola Gay and Necessary Evil, who had filmed and photographed it. The reasons for publishing it were also made clear by the editors:

> The New Yorker this week devotes its entire editorial space to an article on the almost complete obliteration of a city by one atomic bomb, and what happened to the people of that city. It does so in the conviction that few of us have yet comprehended the all but incredible destructive power of this weapon, and that everyone might well take time to consider the terrible implications of its use. (*The New Yorker*, 31 August 1946)

Hersey's *Hiroshima* exerted a great influence on all the debates that henceforth ensued about the employment of nuclear power both for military and civilian purposes. The atomic bomb could no more be justified avoiding the victims' reality of pain and loss. After *Hiroshima*, which was itself an innovative example of journalism verging toward literature, a large amount of philosophical and artistic commentary spurred in the countries where Hersey's text was made available: an early example is Georges Bataille's essay "A propos de récits d'habitants d'Hiroshima", in which, upon reading Hersey's reportage, he interprets the bomb as the paradoxical product of a world based on the anxiety for everything that is unpredictable and unexpected, a world of human systems where every attempt at preventing future 'misfortune' turns right into what brings that same misfortune onto each individual, who is made unable to face it:

> It is strange that concern for the future at the level of the State immediately diminishes the individual's security and chances of survival. But this is precisely the sign of human indifference toward the present instant – in which we suffer and in which we die – [an indifference] that leaves powerless the desire to live. The need to make life secure wins out over the need to live. (Bataille 1995, 229)

As a possible way to overcome this existential impasse, according to Bataille, a 'sovereign sensibility' should be embraced, a state of being "quite close to pure animal sensibility" that "does not see beyond the present moment" and that, in doing so, constitutes "an effort, based on evasion, that can only *reduce* the portion of misfortune". To him, Hiroshima is an experience that is "better to live up to" rather than "lament it, unable to bear the idea of it"(Bataille 1995, 232). Bataille encourages a confron-

tation with the atomic bomb as a moment of heightened awareness of our being in the present, recognising at the same time as counterproductive any dreadful projection into the future as well as any description of it in terms of unbearable horror or mournful tragedy. The instinctual heroism in the face of atrocity that Bataille calls up to, rich in Nietzschean overtones, is intended as a way of bringing the unprecedented scale of destruction caused by the atomic bomb back to the human measure, to its visceral and truest sensibility.

In the following years, while the Soviet Union developed its own nuclear program and the Korean War escalated to the point that U.S. President Harry J. Truman would not exclude the use of the atomic bomb in order to resolve the conflict, the list of people who addressed retrospectively the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or argued about future risks associated with the increase of nuclear arsenals, grew longer. The products originated from this new concern varied considerably, both in forms and assumptions: together with works of historical reconstruction and analysis, there were atomic bomb-themed narratives, films, art and music from several European and American countries. Authors who attempted to specifically portray Hiroshima and Nagasaki's ordeals constitute a minority: while Hersey's reportage stood unparalleled in terms of efficacy and popularity, works which enjoyed a certain attention from the public include Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, based on the original screenplay by Marguerite Duras; the philosophical and journalistic writings of German philosopher Günter Anders; *Children of the Ashes* by Austrian writer Robert Jungk; *The Flowers of Hiroshima* by Swedish-American writer Edita Morris; and two children books inspired by the life of atomic bomb child survivor Sasaki Sadako, *Sadako Will Live* by Austrian writer Karl Bruckner and *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by American writer Eleanor Coerr. Most of the authors listed above had visited Hiroshima city before writing about it, or had the chance to listen to witness accounts of what Hiroshima had been like in the aftermath of the bombing; many among them were also political activists, hence the distinctive anti-nuclear and pacifist undercurrent in their works. The majority of works related to Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombings, on the other hand, are based on various conceptualizations of the real events, which were kept more often than not in the background: the rising fear of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, the nuclear tests, and the production of nuclear energy for civil purposes imbued post-apocalyptic novels like *On the Beach* by British-Australian writer Nevile Shute and science fiction thrillers about the outburst of nuclear war like *Red Alert* by British writer Peter George, which gave impulse to a subgenre in its own right. Existential reflections about the meaning of human survival in the nuclear age are well represented by Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, American Beat Generation

poet Gregory Corso's *Bomb* (an ironic ode to the atomic bomb composed as a calligram creating the shape of a mushroom cloud), and *Cat's Cradle* by American writer Kurt Vonnegut. In music, Polish classical musician Krzysztof Penderecki composed *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*, a composition for strings which he dedicated to the enduring memory of the people who perished in Hiroshima's bombing.

Yet, for all the interest they were able to gather around the nuclear issues and the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, almost all these attempts at expressing the epoch-making appearance of the atomic bomb into the world share a common controversial trait. Authors who engage in the representation of the atomic bomb with indirect knowledge of it are focused on its totality: whether they evoke the scale of destruction in the event of a future nuclear conflict or recount the actual bombings through testimonies, they struggle for reliability and accuracy pursuing the total scope of the bomb. The disparate singularities of the survivors are in some cases put together and multiplied in order to gain a full view of the scene; otherwise, survivors are simply referred to by subtraction in the count of the hundreds of thousands of victims: Hersey opted for the former expedient, while figurative arts have usually recurred to the latter, allowing representations dominated by the silhouette of the mushroom cloud in which the living are missing (as in Janet Sobel's 1948 painting *Hiroshima*, Richard Pousette-Dart's 1948 *The Atom. One World*, Andy Warhol's 1965 montage *Atomic Bomb*). The public's expectation to be shown a total representation of the bomb is matched by the authors' concern to recreate it. This spiralling movement around the atomic bomb, in the attempt to wholly encompass it, points to the fact that both the source and the trajectory of the representations become absorbed with the bomb itself, which turns out to be the unidimentional point in space and time from where every representational effort seems to radiate and onto which the imaginative and hermeneutic process seems to collapse. The spectator's eyes and minds end up merging with the aerial picture of the mushroom cloud: its disproportionate size reduces to one single nothingness everything that one might have imagined to exist underneath. Consequently, interest in what is below the cloud seems to be aroused insofar as it gives information about the cloud itself towering above it. Both authors and the public appear to strive at the same time for the origin (the epicentre of the blast) and its maximum expansion in space (the farthest margins of destruction, i.e. the highest point of elevation reached by the cloud). Even when the descriptions of the blast borrow from the testimonies of the survivors, the atomic bomb is treated as a dreadful Big Bang, a cosmological event interpreted as a source of new knowledge and action, the outcome of which is again directed at knowing the source itself, instead of real people and places that were forced to endure the destruction. Most representations of the bomb from afar or, more precisely, from outside Hiroshima and Nagasaki, con-

solidate the myth of unity underlying the human need for any event to be comprehensible and meaningful, even if that characterisation obliterates the multifaceted reality of something as plural and scattered as life before and after Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombings. There is the expectation for a beginning to their stories, whereas the bombs were sources of nothing but loss of lives, devastation of the environment and eradication of cultural heritage. The idea of total destruction also reinforces the cathartic sense of both safety and of voyeuristic dominance on reality engendered in the beholder. A poignant representation of this paradoxical stance is given by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa in *Hachigatsu no rapusodī* (Rhapsody in August): when the elderly grandmother Kane shares with her grandsons and granddaughters the memory of the day when she saw the bombing of Nagasaki from her house behind the hills, she compares it to a giant demonic eye in the sky looking down on them; Kurosawa edits the portion of blue sky above the hills in the frame, covering it with red clouds ascending, among which two eyelids split horizontally revealing an enormous eye with an almost totally shrunken pupil and cold-coloured iris. Spectators, used to the mushroom-cloud imagery, unconsciously but relentlessly adhere to the point of view of the eye in the sky, standing metaphorically above the destruction, because that is the sight the public have come to expect to find in front of them when looking at the atomic bombs. That expectation grows along the iconic picture of the mushroom cloud: through its neat contours and its graphic stillness, it lures into thinking that one is grasping something that is finite and safe to look at. Through pictures, the observers might easily become convinced that they have a hold onto the enormity of the past event and use that sense of certainty to reflect on the present and fantasise about future bombs both in real life and fiction. Today's public's photographic mind conveniently subordinates the multitude of partial and unverifiable individual memories to the concise, ready-made format of pictures, facilitating the identification of the object as part of a common narrative, open to be brought forward. As Susan Sontag notes:

> Photographs lay down routes of reference, and serve as totems of causes […] Photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about. It calls these ideas 'memories', and that is, over the long run, a fiction. […]
>
> All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds. (Sontag 2004, 76-7)

It is the bomb, then, that attracts one's desire of knowledge and experience: the bomb becomes the source at the centre of creative processes

and imagination, obliterating the survivors and the dead by including them metonymically. Authors in Japan have followed a similar pattern: works like Honda Ishirō's film *Godzilla*, Ōtomo Katsuhiro's manga *Akira*, Buronson and Hara Tetsuo's manga *Hokuto no Ken* (Fist of the North Star), Murakami Takashi's pop teratology, among the others, articulate on the issues of the atomic bombs and the dangers of nuclear energy through imaginary radioactive monsters and post-apocalyptic worlds where human society starts anew in a primitive struggle for survival. Hardly discernible from the explicit elements of these representations, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are still behind it, legitimising representations of rebirth and second coming inspired by the bombings.

In the light of this hypothesis, it is striking how ethically aware was Gertrude Stein's choice to avoid any discussion about the bomb. As a stranger to the facts, taking active interest in the bomb retains the danger of imposing a second symbolical annihilation to those who survived it, denying each one of them the uniqueness of single experiences. Indeed, it has been less frequent that survivors from the two cities were heard as individuals, rather than under the collective name of *hibakusha*[1] whose presence have been often limited to the narrow compartments of commemorating events and promoting peace culture. This is especially true outside Japan: rarely *hibakusha* from Hiroshima and Nagasaki appear onto the scene in the works of European, American and Asiatic authors. The reasons for this fact are complex. Censorship in Japan under the U.S. Press Code during the Occupation, which lasted until 1952, certainly made it difficult for any material about the two bombings to spread beyond the local: Hara Tamiki's novel *Natsu no hana* (Summer Flower) was published in its uncensored form in 1953; Nagai Takashi's *Nagasaki no kane* (The Bells of Nagasaki) was granted publication in 1949 only upon the addition of an appendix, edited by the U.S. General Headquarters, about the massacres in Manila by the Japanese military, titled *Manila no higeki* (Manila's Tragedy); Hiroshima poet Shōda Shinoe published her collection of poems *Sange* (Penitence) in 1946 in secret, despite being told she could be put to death for it.

Moreover, each country cultivated its own prevalent interpretation of the bomb, which crystallised over time through their respective educative systems and public debates. Whereas in the United States the discussion explored war responsibilities and the rhetoric of necessary evil, in many European countries major attention was given to questioning the ethical premises of science and to voicing ecological concerns such as, for example, in the play *The Physicists* by Swiss writer Friedrick Dürrenmatt. In the Asian countries invaded by Japan, the accounts of slaughter and abuse

1 Literally, the word *hibakusha* means "those who were hit by the bomb".

perpetrated by the Japanese military during the invasions and occupations throughout the first half of the twentieth century mostly overshadowed the interest for the atomic bombings (a tendency well documented by South Korean writer Pak Kyongni's epic novel *The Land*).

Similarly, in Japan, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have been usually associated with pleas for world peace and dismantlement of nuclear arsenals. In the common debate, the 6th and the 9th of August 1945 are more often cited in connection with Japan's surrender on the 15th of the same month, rather than the exceptional hardships and despair of the life in the two cities after the war. The laconic ending of "Otona ni narenakatta otōtotachi ni..." (To Our Younger Brothers Who Could Never Grow Up...), a short autobiographical story by Yonekura Masakane about war seen through the eyes of a child that has become a standard in the educational curriculum of Japanese students, sums up this perception very well: "on the sixth of August, nine days after my little brother died, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later, on Nagasaki... And then, after six more days, on the fifteenth of July the war ended"(Yonekura 2013, 107; Author's transl.). In school textbooks very few works of literature by authors who survived either Hiroshima or Nagasaki have been included[2] – a fact that, in turn, had a negative impact on their availability to the Japanese public in bookstores and libraries.

Only few works that dealt with the aftermath of the bombings have enjoyed steady popularity and gained visibility outside Japan: Shindō Kaneto's film *Hiroshima no ko* (Children of Hiroshima), Ibuse Masuji's novel *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain), together with the film adaption by Imamura Shōhei, doctor Hachiya Michihiko's *Hiroshima nikki* (Hiroshima Diary), Nagai's novel *The Bells of Nagasaki*, and Nakazawa Keiji's manga *Hadashi no Gen* (Barefoot Gen) are some of the most notable examples.

This long list of examples, albeit partial and in no way exhaustive, hints at the recurrent antagonism within the creative effort to portray and tell the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: that is, the struggle between trying to grasp the total scope of the event and to account for the singular, local experiences of it. It is a conflict that can also be found in the monumental topography of the two cities. In the Peace Park at the centre of

2 According to Tōsho Bunko Textbook Library Search Engine, Hara Tamiki appeared only in textbooks published by Kyōiku Shuppan and Mitsumura Tosho Shuppan between 1978 and 2002; Tōge Sankichi only in textbooks by Sanseidō between 1978 and 2002; Nagai Takashi in textbooks by various publishing houses between 1950 and 1962; Kurihara Sadako only in two textbooks by Kyōiku Shuppan, in 1987 and 1990; Takenishi Hiroko only in one textbook by Kyōiku Shuppan in 1981 and one by Sanseidō in 1990; Hayashi Kyōko only in textbooks by Kyōiku Shuppan and Sanseidō between 1981 and 2012, being the most enduring presence in school textbooks among *hibakusha* authors. Ōta Yōko, Shōda Shinoe, Yoneda Eisaku, Yamada Kan and others have never appeared in any. URL `http://www.tosho-bunko.jp/search/` (2017-03-10).

Hiroshima, for instance, there are two main commemorative buildings: the older one is the Peace Memorial Museum, built in 1955; the other is the National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims, built in 2002, both based on projects by Tange Kenzō. The older of the two is a conventionally structured museum, organised in two parts: one historical, where the facts leading to the atomic bombing and the aftermath are presented along with information about the risks of nuclear weapons; and one displaying how the atomic bomb affected the environment and the human body, where melted glass bottles, piles of coins fused together, clocks with the arms stopped at 8:15 am and stone slabs with human shadows impressed on them are on display along with human nails, hair and surgically removed scar tissues. The memorial hall of the newer construction is an underground cylindrical building: from the outside it looks like a small hill covered with rubble, with a clock that signs 8:15 am on top; after going in from the entrance, which is on the right side of the structure, there is a narrow corridor going down in a spiral, encased between the sidewall of the building on the right and another, concentric inner wall on the left. While the path slowly descends in the half-light toward the bottom of the cylinder, the only audible noise is the sound of water. At the end of it, it is finally possible to access the inside of the circle: from a small light blue fountain shaped as a 8:15-signing clock at the centre of the room, water flows constantly; on the circular walls, a 360°-view of Hiroshima shortly after the bombing is engraved in black and white; a leaflet both in Japanese and English with a detailed list of the names of the city districts at the time allows to establish their location within the scenery. In the adjacent room, a touchscreen computer system gives access to the database of the deceased in the bombings, with names and photographic portraits when available. The two buildings complete each other, linking the two perspectives on the bombing: the older museum stands for the foreign gaze at the terrifying destruction, while the memorial hall stands for the survivors who tried to trace back their homes, relatives and acquaintances, and then struggled to live on. Interestingly, the latter hall is much less visited than the main museum, and was opened to the public only in 2002, forty-seven years after the bombing. They both are within the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, a space that was intentionally devised to be the hollow centre of the city: as much as a beautiful and quiet place right in the middle of a bustling city, it also represents the irreparable loss it suffered. As a symbolic space, it is not a place where to live or stage stories about surviving. Indeed, the stories of survivors, which revolve more around the hardships of living in the aftermath of the bomb, often take place in the slums along the river where many *hibakusha* lived in poverty, or at the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC)'s research facilities where they went to receive check-ups and ask about what little was known about the consequences of radiation exposure. These places appear mostly in narratives, rather than in other art forms. They refer to a

wider collective narrative: the local history of reconstruction, which is more difficult to access from the outside. The predominant interest for the atomic bomb as the magnetic pole of attraction of many representations leads to overlooking the lingering human aspect to the survival experiences in the two cities. The large scale project by Metabolist architect Ōtaka Masato for the high-density housing estate in the Hiroshima districts of Motomachi and Chōjuen, west of the Hiroshima castle, where the slums hitherto existed, is usually ignored as a site of interest with regards to the atomic bombing's history. In Nagasaki, it is possible to find a similar contraposition between the Atomic Bomb Museum and the cathedral in Urakami district.

It seems that the neatly defined spaces of the museums summarising the atomic bombings, in spite of the horrors shown there, have been taken in more easily than other places standing for the rebuilding of the community, which require not only major linguistic and cultural mediation to access, but also the intention to obtain information and stories beyond the two circumscribed events. Having a deeper comprehension of the lives of people and the history of the land requires a much greater effort, because it implies the building of closer communicative relationships with their experiences. However, engaging in this kind of dialogue, be it face to face or mediated by artistic, narrative or performative vehicles, places the spectator in an extremely weak, vulnerable position: while there is little room to question what words and images are given about the facts, one is also repeatedly told that ultimately comprehension will not be possible, that what is being shown and shared is not at all what it was to be there. Even the instinctive realisation that to be forever excluded by the experience of the bombs is for everybody's own good does not prevent the frustrating feeling inherent to such a contradictory communication: as the receiving end of the process, the spectator is induced to realise not to be entitled to participation nor interpretation, since the outcome would be inevitably fallacious.

This hermeneutical conundrum seems to have specifically undermined the reception of the works of literature written about the bombings. In fact, as a representational theme, Hiroshima and Nagasaki do not necessarily compromise the success of any work created about them. Adding to the above-mentioned films and novels, other acclaimed artists took interest in Hiroshima and Nagasaki: photographer Hosoe Eikō, painter Okamoto Tarō (whose gigantic panels inspired by the atomic bombings entitled *Ashita no shinwa* – The Myth of Tomorrow – have been installed in Shibuya train station since 2008), singer and songwriter Katō Tokiko, playwright Inoue Hisashi, with his play *Chichi to kuraseba* (literally "If I lived with my father"; English translation *The face of Jizo*), also adapted for the screen in 2004. Yet, it is difficult to draw up a similar list of names in literature. Figurative and performing arts seem to encounter the public's favour more easily: a disadvantage for literature that somehow parallels the tendency to overlook the local previously discussed.

3 Vulnerable Literature. Problematic Aspects in the Fruition of Literary Works about Hiroshima and Nagasaki

On the one hand, it is true that works of literature (being them autobiographical or fictional) about Hiroshima and Nagasaki bear strong marks of their original environment, therefore resulting into difficult reads to approach even for mother-tongue readers: the heavy rely on dialogues in Hiroshima and Nagasaki dialects, as well as the profusion of place-names of quarters and streets of the two cities, leave the impression that those texts were intended for local readers in the first place. At the same time, this same local character has been used as the main argument in frequent criticism by the literary establishment based in Tokyo. Its main content is summed up best by Kin Kokubo:

> When we publish magazines in Hiroshima, people from Tokyo and other places criticize us whether we write about the A-bomb or not. If we write about the A-bomb, they say "You write about nothing but the A-bomb"; and if we don't, they say, "You neglect the A-bomb". This sort of thing is very harmful to young writers like myself. Suppose someone lived near Auschwitz and had seen the slaughter there. You wouldn't necessarily ask them to write about it. In the same way, even though we live in Hiroshima, it is not just *our* obligation to write about it – *everyone* should write about it. (Kokubo quoted in Lifton 1991, 439)

In other cases, criticism has not been limited to the double-faced dissatisfaction toward writers who were found to be either neglecting or obsessed with the atomic bomb as a literary theme. One of the most notable examples of how harsh the dismissal of authors' writing about Hiroshima and Nagasaki could become is Nakagami Kenji's comment on Nagasaki author and A-bomb survivor Hayashi Kyōko, upon discussing her work with Karatani Kōjin and Kawamura Jirō in 1982:

> I have never, even once, recognized as fiction anything that Hayashi has written. […] Basically she believes that merely writing about atomic bombings achieve something literary, but […] if she thinks the atomic bomb automatically equals literature by making a text out of it, then I guess we've got to conclude that the A-bomb has finally shown us how literature is to be done, don't we? (Nakagami quoted in Treat 1995, 109)

Leaving aside disqualifying verbal assaults as when Nakagami calls Hayashi a "literary fascist" and a "fetishist" of the bomb, his criticism strikes a chord. Is the atomic bomb the ultimate literary theme, one that only by being mentioned is capable of branding any writing as literature? Answering such a question is not easy. The unprecedented nature of the

two bombings as well as their magnitude motivated many writers to take on the responsibility of writing about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet, when the preoccupation with the scale and the novelty of the two bombings underlies a work of literature, it seems to often engender controversy, criticism or underestimation, especially if it attempts to feature the total scope of the event. This is true for survivor as well as non-survivor writers: notable examples include Ōta Yōko's *Ningen ranru* (Human Rags),[3] Ibuse Masuji's *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain)[4] and Ōe Kenzaburō's *Hiroshima nōto* (Hiroshima Notes).[5]

The controversial implications of any kind of striving for totality are multiple. One is, of course, the risk of shifting the point of view from the living, walking on the grounds of the two cities, to the weapon itself and its distant onlookers, as Stein's words already implied. Another one is the tendency to superlative characterisation of the events as the 'most' destructive, deadly, terrifying. As Todorov suggests, ranking any violent event at the top of a chart is a frequent symptom of "sacralization" (Todorov 2000, 177-9). In trying to draw the attention to the atrocity, the writer ends up isolating it and alienating the reader by hindering the only thing that a stranger to the facts could possibly do: to take interest in it and try to empathise.

Another form of totality is found in the consideration of the entire body of works about Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a source of collective memory or, as Tachibana puts it, as counter-memory (Tachibana 1998, 6). Not only does it blur the line between testimonial accounts as historical documents and literature even more, but the concern with the truth of what really happened is a never-ending controversy in itself, from which any writing generally comes out defeated either on the grounds of its reliability or its literariness, or both. A possible way out of this theoretical dead end is offered by Horace Engdahl. In his essay "Philomela's Tongue", he first underlines the inner difficulty in testimonial writings that posit themselves as literary works:

> There is a clear objection to coupling testimony with literature. What we normally require of true evidence is the opposite at every point of what we usually allow in a literary work, since literature enjoys the privilege of talking about reality as it is not, without being accused of lying. (Engdahl 2002, 6)

3 See Nagaoka Hiroyoshi's criticism in his foreword to the second volume of Ōta's collected works. Nagaoka 2001, 351-3.

4 For an exhaustive review of the critical reception and controversial aspects surrounding *Kuroi ame*, see Treat 1995, 265-77, and Kuroko 1993, 48-59.

5 See Treat's pointed criticism to Ōe's *Hiroshima Notes* in Treat 1995, 255-6, as well as Yoshimoto Takaaki's, quoted in Kuroko 1993, 78.

Since testimony cannot rely on fiction's characteristic way of inventing the truth, it appeals to the listener's disposition of tying a bond of trust: bearing witness requires the public to deem trustworthy the words they are being told. When this necessary bond is translated into literature in order to validate the communicative process underlying the testimony, what comes into play is a feature that usually characterises autobiographies, defined by Lejeune as the "autobiographical pact" (see Lejeune 1989, 15-9). It is a commitment on both parties involved in communication: the writer will be as honest and truthful as possible; the reader will welcome the effort. Yet, this pact is compromised by the aporetic nature of testimonial literature: in most narratives, the reader is being told through intelligible words of facts that the writer declares unspeakable, beyond human comprehension. The writer's statement that a fracture separates language from experience can be seen as a mere figure of speech, but a particularly detrimental one for testimonial literature, since it encodes any utterance in a language that – according to the speaker – does not say what it says, or at least cannot express more than a small fraction of what it should. Articulating on this problematic aspect, Engdahl draws from Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub's ground-breaking work to suggest a solution:

> To testify, one must understand the logic in the course of events one is describing. The difficulty in communicating is therefore not only due to the audience's lack of experience of the kind of privation represented, but also to the witness's inability to bring coherence to what he has experienced. In some sense, the speaker and the listener are equally foreign to the event. The difference is that the former has been subjected to its violence and therefore in spite of everything bears a physical knowledge of it. […]
>
> For a tie to be re-established between the victim and humanity, perhaps they have to meet in this very lack of understanding of what happened. (Engdahl 2002, 9)

Whereas survivors and witnesses (or anyone who decides to speak out for them) are moved by an ethical obligation to elaborate the testimony in the form of literary narratives, the readers have to embrace the ethical obligation to accept the vulnerable, unstable and contradictory nature of those literary efforts. As a matter of fact, it is in this particular fracture that a communicative pattern specific to testimonial literature can be found. It is in this paradoxical functioning that a suggestion of what survivors live in their flesh can be traced, a key to decipher the 'strange murmur' of the body that bears witness to the extreme violence it suffered.

Figure 1. Diagram showing the unfolding of the imagery in the description of the wounded body in Hara's poem

Hiroshima poet and atomic bomb survivor Hara Tamiki encapsulated in his poem *KORE GA NINGEN NA NO DESU* (These are Human Beings) the complex entwining of traumatised body, survival, bearing eyewitness, voicing of the experience and search for a friendly listener.

THESE ARE HUMAN BEINGS
PLEASE LOOK AT THE CHANGES THE ATOMIC BOMB HAS CAUSED
BODIES HORRIBLY SWOLLEN
MEN AND WOMEN ALL TURNED INTO ONE SINGLE FORM
OH THOSE CHARRED, DEVASTATED,
SMOLDERED FACES, FROM WHOSE BLOATED LIPS A VOICE EXHALES
"PLEASE HELP ME"
FEEBLE QUIET WORDS
THESE THESE ARE HUMAN BEINGS
THE FACES OF HUMAN BEINGS.
(Hara 1983, 233)[6]

In the attempt to redefine what a human being is while observing the atrociously mutilated yet living bodies, Hara reconnects the dots of human beings whose constituents have been scattered by the atomic bomb, and restores the unity between a person's integrity (the body), identity (face), ability to communicate (voice) and consciousness (words) (fig. 1).

Hara leads the reader's attention onto the bodies, describing them, interpreting their words, and translating them into a domesticated definition of human being even when what is commonly considered human

6 The translation of the poem is made by the Author. The choice of using capital letters reflects the Author's intention to convey Hara's use of *katakana* syllabary in the original text.

is no longer recognisable. This mediation performed by authors of testimonial literature is of crucial importance: the place where they stand is a dangerous border, near which the reader-spectator is allowed as long as the writer-witness feels it safe to be there, for the both of them. There is no turning back from so gruesome and deadly sights: in the Armenian poet Siamant'ō's poem "The Dance", the German woman who is about to recount a scene of slaughter perpetrated by the Turkish gendarmes starts with an invocation similar to Hara's:

> This thing I'm telling you about,
> I saw with my own two eyes. […]
> Don't be afraid. I must tell you what I saw,
> so people will understand
> the crimes men do to men.
> (Siamant'ō 1996, 41)

Significantly, she concludes her testimony with a desperate rhetorical question, making it clear that a witness's sanity is never spared by the horror he or she sees: "How can I dig out my eyes?"(Siamant'ō 1996, 43). Japanese author and Hiroshima witness Ōba Minako also expresses a similar feeling, when she explains that her imaginative process forever bears the marks of the horrific sight of Hiroshima after the bombing, whatever she is writing about. It is especially true in her poetry, as in the following poem titled "Kuroi shimi" (The Black Stain):

> The Earth is a burning Technicolor film
> People have no time to stare at
> the fishes shedding tears as they float on the waves.
> Through their eyelashes, lovers
> have no time to lament the ripples on their lips.
> Nervously they rub their tired bodies against each other
> They writhe over the film
> where fire has already spread.
> Since the bells are tolling madly,
> as their breasts are seared black,
> as their hair burn noisily like torches,
> they believe their love is passionate and wild
> while the Atom has gained the status of Creator.
> Since over the Sun, a black stain
> is spreading day by day.
> (Ōba 2005, 64; Author's transl.)

Ōba talks about romance in the time of the atomic bomb: every image is scorched by fire and radiations, on the backdrop of an ever looming

nuclear shadow. A consistent segment of Ōba's œuvre is devoted to the description of human relationships, sex and love in the post-atomic era. Hiroshima's aftermath, in Ōba's view, does not coincide with a new beginning; on the contrary, she finds continuity in the bombings, as she interprets them as the ultimate expressions of the humankind's primeval desire. It is a core human drive that is translated into survival instinct as well as lust for self-annihilation. To better account for it, she sets out to write an updated *makura e*, a pillow book for the nuclear age, in which men and women express their desire through contort sexual acts, betrayal, mutilation and murder in the desperate attempt to find companionship and survive. The imagery traces back to the days the young Ōba spent in Hiroshima immediately after the bombing, surrounded by debris and corpses, assisting the dying in their last hours. By Ōba's self admission, everything that she experienced afterward was affected by the trauma of witnessing a massacre of such extreme proportions. As the Japanese word for the act of witnessing suggests, the witness's eyes are stricken (*mokugeki*): as a consequence, his or her sight splits permanently into a double-layered vision, in which the layer of the atrocity keeps superimposing on everyday life's scenery.

This coexistence of separate sights and moments in time, as well as the ominous feeling that everything might quickly turn into something dangerous and terrifying, has a lot to do with the definition of a better paradigm to approach the testimonial literature in general, and literature on Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombings in particular. What happens to the body and psyche of the witness closely parallels the sudden and violent transformation caused by the atomic bomb to the human environment, from a safe space devised for the living to one saturated with brutality and murder. Overturning the situation back to one that favours the living is a hard task for the witness, on a primary psychosomatic level. This dynamic translates into one of the specific traits to the works of literature about surviving Hiroshima and Nagasaki: one's own body becomes a fractured entity, in which life is so entangled with death that leaving the place where trauma is continuously reenacted becomes more and more difficult. This state of being is best exemplified by Ōta Yōko's *Shikabane no machi* (City of Corpses) very first chapter, in which Ōta describes herself as she obsessively scrutinises her body in search for the deadly marks that forebear its decease:

> Nor do I know when death will come to me. Any number of times each day I tug at my hair and count the strands that pull out. Terrified of the spots that may appear suddenly, at any moment, I examine the skin of my arms and legs dozens of times, squinting with the effort. Small red mosquito bites I mark with ink; when, with time, the red bites fade, I am relieved they were bites and not spots.

> Atomic bomb sickness inflicts strange, idiotic bodily harm: you remain fully conscious, yet no matter how dreadful the symptoms that appear, you are aware of neither pain nor numbness. For those suffering from it, atomic bomb sickness represents the discovery of a new hell.
>
> Incomprehensible terror when death beckons and anger at the war (the war itself, not the defeat) intertwine like serpents and even on the most listless of days throb violently. (Ōta 1990, 153)

Ōta chooses to focus the opening of her recount onto her own body, which she describes both as something fragile she desperately clings to as well as a scary object: the endangered body of the writer is the unsettling premise to the narrative, acting as the basis upon which the very existence of any writing depends, while also being a menacing, time-ridden thing that threatens to turn into the threshold to a 'new hell'. Readers who approach Ōta's writing find out that what occupies the narrative scene is less the mushroom cloud than the inscrutable entity the body has become for the survivor; that the survivor's body dominates the scene as macroscopically as the erased city does. The survivor's body is the paradigm to any attempt at comprehending the experience of the atomic bombings: while scientific data constitute abstract descriptions of the event, being often outside the scale of what a human being could possibly register with perception alone, it is the survivor's body, as repository of words, the only measure non-survivor spectators could refer to as they try to imagine what the bombings *felt like*. Yet, that same body sets apart those who experienced from those who did not: far from being a fetish for truthfulness, it hinders participation and isolates the one who bears it; having the manifestations of its physiology become unfathomable and it is perceived as working against bearing testimony. Here lies a key component to the communicative status of survival: the body that suffered might be expected to incarnate a tale of survival by itself, as clear and self-explanatory as its resilience might suggest. It turns out that is not the case: the traumatised body seems to become a magnified presence over which the survivor obsesses, while also rendering every word more opaque rather than clearer, insufficient in the face of the full extent of the experience. It is this magnified body that is of hindrance to the communication, by casting a shadow on the usual words' efficacy (or, more precisely, on the accord over the words' efficacy between the parties involved in the communication). The author's body – implicit premise to any communicative act about anything the author intends to discuss – erupts onto the scene as the toxic concretion of the author's violent experience: instead of testifying for the facts put into words, the body ends up obscuring them while threatening the very sustenance of the storytelling. The author-survivor is coerced into a state where the body of evidence proves to be a dramatic distraction from the viability of the utterance – a

subversion of the ontological relationship between the body and the act of writing as it is eloquently put by Jean-Luc Nancy:

> The body's no place for writing […] That we write, no doubt, is the body, but absolutely not where we write, nor is a body what we write – but a body is always what writing exscribes.
>
> There is only exscription through writing, but what's exscribed remains this other edge that inscription, though signifying on an edge, obstinately continues to indicate as its own-other edge. Thus, for every writing, a body is the own-other edge: a body […] is therefore also the traced, the tracing, and the trace […] In all writing a body is the letter, yet never the letter, or else, more remotely, more deconstructed than any literality, it's a 'letricity' no longer meant to be read. What in a writing, and properly so, is not to be read – that's what a body is. (Nancy 2008, 87)

Nancy's remark that "a body is the letter, yet never the letter" well resonates with Hara's lyric attempt at reinstating words at the core of the act of writing about the traumatised body, as well as with Ōta's struggling against her own body to create a *good work of literature* about Hiroshima's atomic bombing (Ōta 1995, 228). These authors' works are permeated with the intuition that an epistemic precariousness has infiltrated the foundation of their literary expression – a sense of extreme discrepancy between the experience and the writing, the body and the words – the theorization of which pertains more to the meta-textual level than the intra-textual one. The problem is not the text as a string of words onto which the author-survivor hesitantly rely, while simultaneously denying its efficacy: readers are free to ignore the declared disproportion between words and their message, or also to reduce it to a mere figure of speech. Yet, dismissing it as a nonsensical statement would erase that magnified body pressing onto the scene from beyond the borders of the text, the same body the author-survivor is keenly aware to be writing *against*.[7] Attempting a theorization of this magnified body as a semiotic function is crucial to validate a form of communication as vulnerable as the authors-survivors' attempts at turning their experiences of extreme violence into works of art open to other people's aesthetic fruition. Many works, especially works of literature, would benefit from this revised communication paradigm, which acknowledges its own unbalance and turns it into a meaningful experience.

A helpful starting point is found in the description of literary communication given by Cesare Segre as a "double dyad": expanding on Jakobson's

7 A powerful example of the conflicting interaction between a traumatised body and writing is found in Shōda Shinoe's collection of poetry *Miminari* (The Ringing in the Ears) especially in its sixth section titled "Nikutai o mushibamu genbaku" (The atomic bomb as it consumes our flesh).

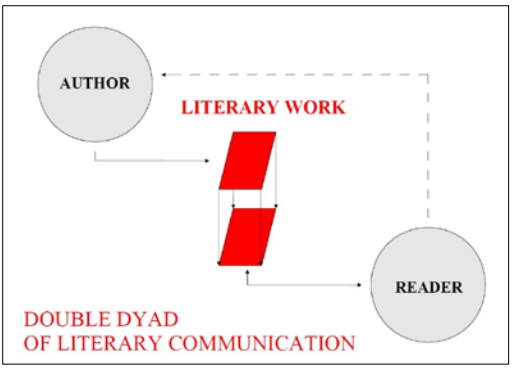

Figure 2. Graphic representation of the double dyad of literary communication according to Segre

classic communication pattern, Segre points out the unstable nature of literary communication, in which the reader (the *addressee*) has the unilateral role of bringing the literary message to its realisation, by choosing it out of personal interest and engaging in its interpretation. Only through this interplay between an object (the literary text) that stands both for the addresser and the message, and a subject who becomes the second maker of it, does a work of literature come into existence (fig. 2):

> in literary communication the addresser and the addressee are not co-present; indeed, in general they belong to different periods of time. It is exactly as if literary communication worked not with the addresser-message-addressee triad but with two dyads instead: addresser-message and message-addressee. It follows that communication is all one-way; there is no possibility, as there is in conversation, either of the addressee's checking his understanding […] or of any adjustment of the communication to accord with his reactions. In consequence, the contact itself is a fairly unstable one. To begin with, it involves only the message-addressee dyad; it is also entrusted entirely to the addressee's interest in the message. The addresser, absent or no longer alive, enjoys at most the possibility of concentrating within his message incentives toward its utilization. (Segre 1988, 4)

The fact that literary communication implies an inevitable blurring of the message along the line connecting the writer-addresser to the reader-addressee is acknowledged as one of its intrinsic features: the literary text, as long as it is physically and linguistically accessible, is open to fruition out of readers' pure volition and subject to multiple interpretations. It is this openness that constitutes the enjoyment every reader experiences approaching it.

Literary works on the atomic bombings challenge this pattern. The author-survivor undermines it in many ways: by refusing to be a faceless

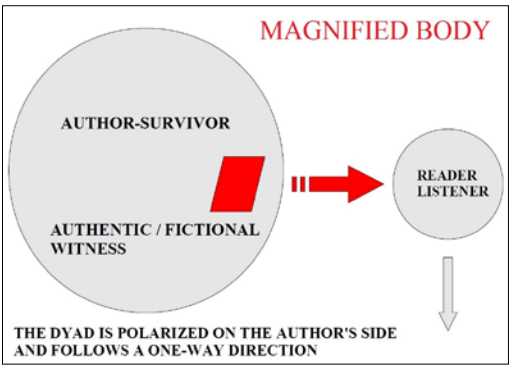

Figure 3. Altered pattern of literary communication in the atomic bomb literature

addresser, not being prone to disappear into the message's texture; by declaring the inefficacy of the message, therefore narrowing the reader's path to interpretation; by splitting his or her very presence within the text as both the subject that emits words of testimony and the object that dooms to failure its chances to survival and sharing of the violent experience. It is this strong perturbation of the communicative pattern, which readers might interpret as an obtrusive presence of the author-survivor in their own range of action, that can be called 'magnified body' (fig. 3).

It is ultimately an open wound in the surface of communication: through it, readers are forced to peer through the cut into the traumatised flesh of the survival, only to be told that they are actually seeing nothing, that what they are looking at is nothing like the real thing. The frustrating experience of being refused access not only stresses the temporary experience of impotence on the reader's side, but it accounts also for what could be considered the most ethical trait to literary works about survival: to deny a sense of communion in sharing violent experiences is to protect from their reiteration, even if by words that are as commanding as much as they are ultimately powerless.

4 Conclusions

Adopting a semiotic pattern of literary communication not only turns the aporetic declaration that words are failing to mean what they mean into an empowering communicative function on the author-survivor's side. It also indicates a different and more poignant way of interaction for the reader: diverted from the voyeuristic strive for totality induced by the mushroom cloud imagery, the reader is led to experience what Hiroshima and Nagasaki's bombings have been through the mediation of the author-survivor's body – a body transformed into a literary figure that overwhelms

its spectator and invades the communicative space usually allowed to the reader. It is important to notice that this is actually a vantage point of access: allowing the single body of survival, that is the author-survivor's tale, to become the total scape of storytelling, the reader is made aware that welcoming both the uncertainty around the meaning of words and the obstruction to the message's interpretation is the best attempt at possibly understanding any narrative about surviving to such traumatic experiences in such extreme circumstances.

On the basis of this communicative awareness, also an important feature of literary works that sets them apart from written or spoken accounts by Hiroshima and Nagasaki's witnesses becomes clearer. Also the semiotic function that here has been called 'magnified body' is translated into the impression that, whatever narrator was devised into the text, the storyteller is present to the communicative act and asks the reader to take in the tale and find a way to perform it. It is through this act of performance that the author-survivor is effectively rescued from the isolation of survival (which in Hiroshima and Nagasaki's aftermath also translated into frightful forms of discrimination.) The analysis of what kind of characteristics this performance might actually show will require further study, but a clear suggestion is given, for instance, by the works of Inoue Mitsuharu: his literature about Nagasaki's bombing as well as the dangers in the use of nuclear power is pervaded by the conviction that the reality of the victims ought to be addressed as a "personal problem", that welcoming their feeling inside him is "the first step on the path toward a life of authentic solidarity" with them. Since the atomic bombs were dropped not only on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but "on all Japanese's heads, on every human being around the world", it is only by taking in the victims' bodies and psyches in pain that humankind will be able to heal them as well as overthrow the very possibility that an atomic bomb will be used again (Inoue 1983, 292; Author's transl.). Inoue sets out to do so by climbing into the victims' reality, using his imagination (Inoue 1988, 77). Literary imagination, as Inoue suggests, does not contradict the truthfulness of the storytelling, but actually amplifies it and invites readers to participate in a way that is political as well as ethical. Through literary reenactment (although, at this point, the scope could widen to include other forms of performing art), the author-survivor's writing is delivered from its constraints and finally safe to be made one's own.

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Yonekura Masakane (2013). "Otona ni narenakatta otōto-tachi ni..." (To Our Younger Brothers Who Could Never Grow Up...). Miyaji Yutaka et al. (eds.), *Kokugo 1*. Tōkyō: Mitsumura Tosho, 100-7.

The title of this volume refers to the Buddhist concepts of suffering, impermanence and dependent origination, which link the ideas of Death and Desire. This book stems from a research conducted in the last few years at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, supported by the Japan Foundation. A great deal of work has been done by scholars in various disciplines about dying in Japan, but research has tended to focus on the practices through which death is settled and institutionalised. Yet, what about untamed and unsettled death? What about the cases in which death cannot be successfully coped with by ritual means? What happens if institutions and discourses are not enough to tame it? What about the cases in which unsettled death suddenly intrudes the social? What are the forms it takes and the consequences it has in the social? These are the questions that the volume addresses, by enmeshing representations, practices and performing arts, through contributions that rely on approaches from different disciplines. Each of them analyses one of the multiple and fragmented possibilities in which untamed death can tame the social.

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