



TRANSFORMATIONS
comparative study of social transformations



CSST
WORKING PAPERS
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor

"Mourning the Japanese Thing"

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CSST Working
Paper #98

CRSO Working
Paper #507

October 93

Mourning the Japanese Thing

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September 1993

It has become a truism to say that national culturalism is a powerful force in Japan. A range of insistences on Japanese uniqueness is pervasive in public discourse, yet what those insistences mark out is precisely the fear of somehow not being unique. They designate moments of cultural anxiety and category trouble which then obscure the dialectically entwined status of both the United States (as the paradigmatic "west") and Japan as national-cultural imaginaries. And therein lies the historical rub: Japan is literally unimaginable outside its discursive positioning vis-a-vis the "west." Like other colonized or near-colonized polities, Japan as a nation-state was instaurated in response to the threat of domination by the Euroamerican powers in the mid nineteenth-century. It is arguable that there was no discursively unified notion of the "Japanese" before the eighteenth century, and the particular articulation of a unified Japanese ethnos with the "nation" to produce "Japanese culture" is entirely a modern configuration.¹ What I mean by modern--as if one could simply define it--indicates not only the urban energies, capitalist structures, and mechanico-electrical forms of reproduction that came into sharpest relief in the Japan of the 1920s, but which had matured through the nineteenth century in Europe and elsewhere.² It indicates the very problem of the nation-state and its correlation with a capitalist colonialism that ensured that Japan (for example) would be pulled into a global geopolitical matrix.

In the process of warding off the intrusions of the west after Perry's 1853 arrival in Japan, the newly instituted Japanese state bent all efforts toward rapid industrialization and the formation of a unitary Japanese polity, often with brutal force and violent exclusions. The formation of a modern nation-state that could enter into the geohistorical nexus of western world history demanded the repression of internal differences in the service of what Slavoj Žižek has called the "national thing," one that could stand apart from and up to the powers of the west (seiyô).³ By the national thing--or the "nation thing"--Žižek means the particular nexus of national identification that is organized around what he calls "enjoyment" (jouissance) and that bears a particular relationship to the problem of national others. Žižek leans on Lacan and his notion of the "Thing," which derives from his anatomy of demand and desire and their emergence from an irrevocable lack within human subjects, such that the object of desire is always the desire of the other: within the realm of human signification, desire is always directed towards another. But that desire is a "non-object"; it can never be specified as such but is always displaced: "the object signified in the demand becomes the signifier of something else (of that impenetrable "Thing," das Ding, that Freud locates in the Nebenmensch [another human].)"⁴ The "Thing" is precisely not a thing--an object of knowledge, say--and in the psychoanalytic scenarios that Lacan drew upon, one word for the "Thing" would be "love,"

the love that no amount of proof can ever demonstrate. In the demands that I make upon another, the "satisfaction of the demand always leaves something to be desired--something that is nothing but is nevertheless always carried beyond the object of demand, as what this object is not: the paradoxical 'object' of desire."⁵ Another name for this mysterious "Thing" is Zizek's "enjoyment" when he turns to the register of the national:

What holds together a given community can never be reduced simply to the point of symbolic national identification: A shared relationship toward the other's enjoyment is always implied. Structured by means of fantasies, this thing--enjoyment--is what is at stake when we speak of the menace to our "way of life" presented by the other. . . . National and racial identities are determined by a series of contradictory properties. They appear to us as "our thing" (perhaps we could say cosa nostra), as something accessible only to us, as something "they," the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless, "our thing" is something constantly menaced by "them."⁶

The "nation qua Thing" thus subsumes contradictory imperatives: it is both something that is by definition not appropriable by another national community, because it is "our" thing, yet it is constantly menaced. If we try to specify what this national "Thing" is, according to Zizek, we are left with a series of tautologies: we can only specify it by reciting disconnected fragments of "our way of life," the "way we are," the details of the "American way of life," or "Japanese culture": "It's a national thing, you wouldn't understand." (Or, as I prefer: it's a national-cultural thing, you wouldn't understand.) Yet the "Thing" can't be reduced to those details themselves; there is something more that causes them to cohere into a nexus of identification and

belief, into "our" national thing as a fantasy of shared enjoyment (with the specific resonances that the idea of "enjoyment" generates).⁷

It's not entirely coincidental that Zizek turns to Japan as an example of American paranoia about national "theft of enjoyment," the way that national groups resent the excessive forms of others' structures of enjoyment. This projection onto others mirrors an interior, intimate alienation at the core of national identifications. So, for example, he lingers on

the obsession of the American media with the idea that the Japanese don't know how to enjoy themselves. The reason for Japan's increasing economic superiority over the USA is located in the somewhat mysterious fact that the Japanese don't consume enough. . . . what American 'spontaneous' ideology really reproaches the Japanese for is not simply their inability to take pleasure, but the fact that their very relationship between work and enjoyment is strangely distorted.⁸

This relationship is perceived as a threat to American superiority, one that inevitably reflects American desires: we find enjoyment in fantasizing about the Other's excessive relationship to enjoyment.

But what is left unstated in this proposition is the way that the desire of the Other is retranslated in Japan, and the forms of mirroring that determine the difficult contours of that retranslation. The internal antagonisms of capitalism produce an excess that can then be transmuted into the hatred of others who seem themselves the excessive producers of that excess (too many Japanese products; too much work). Yet a common Japanese view echoes this

spontaneous ideology: "we Japanese work really hard; Americans are lazy." The American perception of Japanese excess is ambivalently echoed in Japan as well, along with the uneasy recognition that the specific structure of Japanese enjoyment might be at stake as well within the relentless requirements of advanced capitalism. That is to say, because of the specific history of Japan and the United States (as the exemplar of the western "Thing"), the Japanese organization of its national particularity bears a phantasmatic relationship to the American (western) fantasy of the Japanese thing (which itself is a refraction of an internal alienation): the Japanese national-cultural thing became recognizable as Japanese because of its imbrication with the west.⁹

Recent works on colonialism and nationalism have tried to account for the working of mimetic desire in colonial discourses; in Homi Bhabha's terms, the colonized responds to colonial domination via a complex "mimicry," a mimicry that can never succeed in effacing the difference between the (western) original and the colonized copy. Colonized "mimics" remain as "not white/not quite" in Bhabha's formulation.¹⁰ Is it any wonder that Japanese have been extolled (and denigrated) as adept "mimics," good at copying but lacking "originality"? Or that the South African government had, at one time, given Japanese an official racial designation as "honorary whites" (in deference to Japan's status as South Africa's primary trading partner)? Yet the mimetic attempts of the colonized also

contain an element of menace (in Bhabha's formulation) because of their dangerous doubling and uneasy proximity to the colonizer's position: there is always an excess, a slippage that reveals mimicry as something more (and less) than the object of mimesis. It is no doubt Japan's presumption to have entered geopolitics as an entirely exotic and late modernizing nation-state instead of as an outright colony that has made its "mimicry" all the more threatening. As the one predominantly non-white nation that challenged the dominance of western colonizers on a global scale during the Second World War--and did so by becoming colonialist, imperialist, and fascist--Japan's role as quasi-colonized "mimic" has finally exceeded itself: now it is American companies, educators, and social scientists who speak of the necessity of "learning from Japan" in the hopes of copying its economic miracles, its pedagogical successes, its societal orderliness. If modernity and its apparatuses--particularly the American versions--are installed in the interior of the Japanese national imaginary, "Japan" conversely indicates a loss at the heart of American self-perceptions: "The Cold War is over, and Japan won." Japan's very devastation in World War II has allowed it to emerge belatedly victorious in the current wars of trade. Japan's martial loss thus prefigured a victory, a deferred victory that now marks the defeat of the United States. In the American national rhetoric of deficit, Japan marks out a nation-space of excess operating as the nameable supplement of the United States, the defeated term that comes both to add to and

invasively supplant the victorious one (even American cars are made with Japanese parts).

The excesses of mimicry remarked both by westerners and Japanese indicate the instabilities that founded the difference between quasi-colonial original and quasi-colonized copy in the first instance. And they point as well to the impossibility, in a radical sense, of instituting a sheer difference between Japan and the west, although the attempts to do so are far from abating. Euroamerican attempts to place Japan as unassimilably alter and Japanese attempts to live up to--to assert--that difference cannot be easily dissociated, despite the numerous efforts to maintain the distinction between the two unities. The efforts to sustain difference have never been without remainders, losses, violences not only within the "island nation" but outside; violences enacted not only to Japanese but by them. But those remainders have tended to be recuperated within the unitary national-cultural totality of Japan.

That supplemental relationship and the phantasms of history--the temporal deferral that retrospectively inscribes Japan as the winner in the global market wars, for example--point to a way to begin to loosen the entanglements of Japanese modernity. Japan's national successes have produced--along with Corollas and Walkmans--a certain crucial nexus of unease about cultural transmission and stability. This anxiety indicates the lack of "success" at the very interior of national self-fashioning. And the thematic of loss at the interior of this cultural anxiety--and questions

of its representation--forms a recurring motif of critical import in thinking about the instabilities of what is often depicted as uncannily stable. That is, there is widespread recognition in Japan today that the destabilizations of capitalist modernity have decreed the loss of much of the past, a past that is sometimes troped as "traditional." At the same time, there is a disavowal of this recognition through the massive investment in representative survivals refigured as elegiac resources. Through tourism, folklore studies, education, and mass media--and through everyday moments of national-cultural interpellation and identification--Japanese of all generations seek a recognition of continuity that is coterminous with its negation. As culture industries seek to reassure Japanese that everything is in place and that all is not lost, the concomitant understanding arises (sometimes obscurely) that such reassurance would not be necessary if loss, indeed, were not at stake.

The linkage of recognition and disavowal describes what in psychoanalytic criticism is known as the logic of the fetish, indicating the denial of a feared absence which is then replaced with a substitute presence.¹¹ But this very replacement inevitably announces the absence it means to cover up, thus provoking anxiety. This concurrent recognition and disavowal can only be sustained by a certain splitting of the subject, a certain topological segregation of the subject who knows (something is missing) and the

subject who, fixed on the replacement of absence, doesn't. Anxiety appears as the symptomatic effect of a self-sameness that can only be different from itself.¹²

The movements of national-cultural self-fashioning often retrace the lines of fetishistic investment in the most general sense (we are reminded again of Bhabha's ambivalence). In Japan, refined high culture is one such site where, for example, Noh theater, tea ceremony, and Kyoto politesse attain the realm of desirable banality for the domestic bourgeoisie and approved export status as icons of Japaneseness. Another locus we might call the generalized, customary everyday, where chopsticks, kimono, and sushi materially demarcate the Japanese thing (without, of course, subsuming it). Yet another asserts the sublimity of the Japanese language and the inscrutabilities of Japanese selves diametrically opposed to western logocentric individuals.¹³ Allied with this are the varieties of state-approved anthropological arguments for Japan as a "household" (ie) society.¹⁴ Arguably the most charged topos of all is the position of the emperor, who by the postwar denial of divine status and his placement as a powerless "symbolic" monarch--who nevertheless still remains in place as a deified icon for nationalists--literally embodies the logic of fetishistic denial, with all its troubling political effects.¹⁵ These registers of investment are of course not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interimplicated in the formation of a

national-cultural imaginary and the contours of enjoyment exclusive specific to the Japanese thing.¹⁶

Yet the simulataneously realized and denied loss of the Japanese thing is delineated perhaps most sharply where ethnos, voice, and nation-culture problematically coincide: the register of what is sometimes called the folkloric, sometimes temporalized as the essentially "traditional," concurrently located as the "marginal."¹⁷ Located in the ever-receding "countryside" (inaka) or on the edges of advanced capitalist prosperity--that is, distanced in some fashion from metropolitan sites of representation--these practices compel as recalcitrant spectacles of the elegiac, as allegories of cultural loss that Japanese often link, viscerally, with personal loss.

Not strictly confined to the enclosure of the pastoral (although located most paradigmatically there), they index the investment in the survival of a continuous communality, guaranteed by the thought of tradition (dentô) as unbroken transmission. This transmission is often assured by the redemptive mode of the dialogic presumed in its most unmediated form. "All returns to the past are a return to the voice": Michel de Certeau's assertion points to the intimate linkages of voiced speech and nostos, or the desire for origins.

I want to look at one site in contemporary Japan that allegorizes, in strange ways, the complexities of recouping the Japanese thing and the possibilities of mourning its

dispersal. It is a site that is explicitly devoted to the work of memorializing the dead; it is also formed by illicit practices of mourning that then trouble the dominant discourses of memorialization there. Memorialization and mourning operate as a crossed pair of tropes for coming to terms with the anxieties at the foundation of the modern Japanese thing.

The place is called Osorezan (its Japanese name could be translated as Mt. Dread or Mt. Terror), a mountain dominating the northernmost peninsular tip of Honshu, Japan's main island. Mt. Osore, as a singular, foreboding presence in what is sometimes romantically described as an "unexplored region" (hikyô), rises out of the center of the peninsula; covered with thick cypress forests, it precipitously reverses its slope at the summit. Almost coincident with this downslope comes something equally surprising: the unmistakable, overpowering odor of sulfur. The incongruous smell of sulfur announces what lies ahead, at the bottom of the downslope. For the summit of Mt. Osore is a crater, and the mountain itself is a dormant volcano.

The crater is an expanse of volcanic rocks, steam vents, bubbling sulfuric pools, and hot springs extending to the shoreline of a deep blue, deadly still lake (the sulfur kills fish). Deployed on this landscape, which resembles the aftermath of an atomic explosion whose residual radioactivity precludes the reemergence of life, is a Buddhist temple complex; some of its buildings have stainless steel roofs to

stave off the corrosive effects of sulfur. The complex resembles a frontier outpost, guarding what is said to be one of the last remaining approaches to the other world in Japan, as the buildings make no particular attempt to master or surpass their surroundings. The other "three great holy places" (sandai reijô) in Japan with which Mt. Osore is ranked (Mt. Kôya and Mt. Hiei) are topped with monumental, ancient, and enormous complexes: gates, pagodas, sub-temples, massive statuary, graveyards. Mt. Osore's bleakness undercuts the basis for a focus on architectural grandeur. More than most such famous sites managed by Buddhist institutions, the terrain itself overshadows its managing institution. In northeastern Japan, Mt. Osore has long been the final destination of spirits of the dead, the ultimate home where the dead continue to live a shadowy, parallel "life." More than just the home of the dead, Mt. Osore is a place of practices for consoling, pacifying, memorializing, and communicating with the dead.

Historically, Mt. Osore was a specific, local topos of death. To many folklorists of Japan, this specific locating of death in nearby mountains forms an original stratum of Japanese folk beliefs. Mountains were often actual burial sites, abodes of dead spirits and of gods at one and the same time. The projection of death and its aftermath onto mountains, called sanchûtakaikan (the "belief in the 'other world' in the mountains"), fused with post-medieval Buddhist conceptions which projected symbolic itineraries of pure

lands (jôdo) and polluted hells (jigoku) onto mountains to create a doubled structure of mountains as both literal and allegorical domains of death. Mt. Osore's strange topology and its remoteness augmented its image as an uncanny "other world" (takai) where the dead and the living exist simultaneously.¹⁸

The feast day of the deity Jizô (a deity who rescues the dead and is the special protector of children--especially dead children) falls on the 24th of each month and is the occasion for a gathering of a wide range of religious associations, many of them devoted to the figure of Jizô. The biggest of these feast days falls on the 24th of the sixth month of the old calendrical system, the so-called Jizô-bon. All of Jizô's feast days are connected with death, but Jizô-bon is the one most explicitly regarded as a day of return for the dead.¹⁹

Jizô-bon awakens the temple, which is usually as fitfully dormant as the steaming crater on which it's built, into preparations for the biggest event of the year on the mountain, the Osorezan taisai ("big festival"). Hundreds of Buddhist priests, workers, local faithful, curious tourists, and hopeful bereaved from throughout Japan ascend the mountain during the five day festival (now fixed at July 20-24). This "festival" is the greatest attraction of Mt. Osore, its main source of fame. The temple on the mountain (Entsûji) then holds an official range of rites and rituals aimed at memorializing the dead (kuyô). These memorial rites

have as their aim the pacification of the dead by remembering them with rites and offerings.²⁰ By correctly remembering the dead through these practices, the living hope to pacify and console them as well as keep them from troubling this world. At the same time, practices and beliefs which are not subsumed by official Buddhist methods for controlling the dead appear. What is unusual, however, at Mt. Osore is the simultaneous occurrence of mourning. Even though Buddhist temples form themselves around the managing of death, and temple fairs can also be occasions for memorializing the dead, it is not usual for people actively and openly to mourn the dead in close, confused juxtaposition to the space of festivity. Mt. Osore was and is a divided territory where this juxtaposition could occur. In addition to official memorialization and its various practices--practices that aim to settle the dead person and to distance, in effect, the living from a too-close association with the dead--there are other practices that supplement or even overturn, with a profusion of voices and ghostly epiphanies, official memorialization

In conventional Buddhist memorialization in Japan, a distinction is made between the "newly" dead and the "settled" dead. The newly dead are those that have died, usually, within the last forty-nine days and thus are not yet settled. There are many other kinds of unsettled dead, but in all cases, memorial services are performed to settle them. That is the primary goal of many Buddhist rites (segakie, for

example) and the domestic household rites connected with so-called "ancestor worship."²¹

Memorialization is really the remembering of the dead in order to settle them. When correct remembrance (i.e. memorialization) has occurred, the dead can become settled "ancestors" (senzo) who will benefit and protect the living. The opposition between shirei (the "newly dead") and sorei ("ancestral dead") reveals the clarity of the distinction between the two. By definition, the settled dead are those who are memorialized and remembered--in most cases they are the ancestors. The unsettled are those that are not remembered--or who have not been remembered adequately--and are thus on the loose, dangerous. If the living do not correctly remember the dead--if they forget or neglect to remember the dead--then the dead can become dangerous: they can then "haunt" the living as ghosts. Ghosts indicate that the structure of remembering through memorialization is not completely efficacious, that the line between life and death that remembering the dead institutes is not secure.

Memorial practices allow the living to work through grief, to idealize the dead, and to substitute images of the person as really "dead" for the memory of the person as he or she was in life. Through memorialization, memory becomes once-removed from all the images that surround the thought of the person and evoke grief.²² By "remembering" the dead, by carrying out practices that insure that they will settle into buddhahood and become beneficial ancestors, the living are

able to relinquish grief. Memorializing the dead is intimately connected with the fear of misfortune (provoked by the unsettled dead) and the hope for blessings (afforded by the settled dead). Both depend on the failure or efficacy of the living's remembrance of the dead.

Mt. Osore is constructed as one vast memorialization apparatus, through which the dead are properly remembered. Buying stupas, giving offerings, performing rituals to console muenbotoke, the "unconnected dead"--all these fall within an official round of memorial practices. They are practices that fall within the purview of the temple's ritual specialists, or that culminate in marked, designated allegorical inscriptions of space through which worshippers walk and follow along performing acts of kuyô ("Buddhist memorialization").

Access to mourning, however--to a bodily recalling of the dead instead of a bracketed "remembering"--is set aside, left for the intercessions of blind female spirit mediums called itako. Encounters with the mediums--attempts to speak with the dead, to hear their voices--become the real occasions for mourning at Mt. Osore. But within this doubled structure of reassuring memorialization on the one hand, and the cathartic recalling of the dead on the other, a third term intervenes: that of fear of the dead, specifically the fear of meeting with the unsettled dead. The circulation of ghost stories and tales of uncanny occurrences at the mountain attest to the prevalence of this fear.

The mention of Osorezan to contemporary Japanese elicits predictable adjectives: bukimi ("weird"), fushigi ("mysterious"), kimochiwarui ("creepy" or "disgusting"). Something that is weird often inspires a sharing of stories, of rumors. Stories told about Mt. Osore are correspondingly unearthly, as befits a place which links conceptions of otherworldliness with fear (again, osore). When Japanese refer to Mt. Osore as "bukimi," they are referring to the general of aura of death there, but they are often specifically thinking of an untoward meeting of the dead. There are both desirable and undesirable meetings with the dead; an undesirable encounter is always with a ghost, someone who should be absent but is uncannily present.

Although all memorial practices at Mt. Osore are aimed at ensuring the passage from unsettled, dangerous new death to settled, stable, and beneficial old death, the stories of ghosts (yūrei) at the mountain indicate that these practices are not always effective. There are gaps in the edifice of memorialization, and through these gaps the dangerous, unsettled dead appear. A ghost is a sign that memorialization is not fully adequate. Ghosts appear where they should not, at places where no one should be, at times when no one is expected to be present: a transgression of expectation. This undercutting of expectation about reality shows itself as a split between a phenomenon and its origin. In the descriptions of ghostly apparitions and auditions at Mt. Osore--and of tales told about ghosts--there is a often a

gap, a discrepancy between the aural and the visual. One hears a sound, looks to see, and no one is there. It is not just that one "hears voices," but that one hears voices emanating from places where no one is supposed to be, and where on inspection no one is: voices without a visual source. If an apparition appears, it is wordless, only peripherally apprehended. The voices of ghosts displace the visual origins of sound. This rift between an auditory phenomenon and its visual source appears as well in the spirit recallings of the blind mediums.

Buddhist narratives of redemption and the procedures and rationales for rites for the dead lie in the public domain. Enscripted and formalized, they set the outer limits of Osorezan's Buddhist control of the dead. The repeated telling--the enunciation--of reports of ghosts forms a circulating reserve of private, minute experiences not subject to formal verification. Ghost stories circulate, rarely promising or describing an actual communication with a specific dead one. Hearing a sound without a source or seeing a specter (again, rarely are the two conjoined) is an unsettling reminder of a failure in memorialization. Encounters with the dead are limited to those few who claim them, yet narratives of these encounters vicariously extend the possibility.

If ghost stories augment Mt. Osore's national image as a site of lingering mysteries by telling of the properly absent (the dead) becoming problematically present, then the blind

mediums go a step further with their promise of an actual communication with the dead. Kuchiyose (the calling down of spirits by mediums) not only promises a dialogue with the specific dead, it also becomes a source of knowledge about the future. Encounters with itako are both occasions for hearing and talking to the dead (which also involves mourning the dead) and for receiving predictions and recommendations from them. There is a double trajectory of wishfulness: towards the past, when the dead one was alive, and towards the future, which the dead have the power to foresee and to "protect" (mamoru).

A notice at the entrance to the temple proclaimed: "Osorezan is not the itako mountain and this is not an itako festival. We only lend the itako space at the time of the festival." The temple disclaims any official sponsorship of the itako and has asserted various controls over the gathering. The itako formerly set up their places throughout the temple grounds; through negotiations with representatives of the itako, the temple has, since the early 1960s, confined them to the area directly around the main Jizô hall.²³ There were about fifteen itako in 1984. Unlike photographs of earlier festivals, in which the itako had spread mats on the ground and were conducting their callings of the dead in the open air (surrounded by crowds and sometimes protected from the sun by assistants holding parasols), the itako now individually occupied identical army-fatigue green nylon tents arrayed in two facing rows.

The itako (and the others) worked continuously throughout the five days of the festival, late into the night. At one end of the tents was an herbalist, keeping up the non-stop persuasive patter for which peddlers and salesmen in Japan are noted. At the other end was an equally garrulous young man dressed in Buddhist black, imitating the demeanor of a priest and selling magical rings. Both were reminiscent of carnival barkers with the insistence of their voices and the extravagance of their claims. The rows of identical tents, with lines of people waiting to have an audience with the blind mediums hidden inside, indeed resembled a carnival sideshow, (known to Japanese as misemono goya, "spectacle tents"). By linking the mediums in their tents with the "quacks and peddlers" outside, the organizers were stating that they belonged in the same place: that the medium's disclosures of the dead and predictions of the future were of the same order as the amulet seller's or herbalist's assurances and vice versa. A conjoining of voice and commerce was kept out of the precincts of "proper" death and its inscribed places and prescribed routings of piety.²⁴

The customers take their turns one by one in the tents. Many bring offerings to the itako, such as fresh fruit, candy, packaged crackers; they put them down in front of the itako as they kneel, facing her. There is a prescribed set of questions that the itako asks the customer. Without fail, the itako must know the day of death (the meinichi), the sex, and the age of the person to be contacted. She also often

asks the relationship of the dead to the living questioner and how the person died; she does not ask the name of the dead person. This knowledge allows her to search for and locate the dead, and it also allows her to describe the present condition of the dead one accordingly. She then begins an incantation in which she calls up the dead person from the other world.

At the beginning of the incantation, the itako states that she is calling a hotoke who died on such and such a date and invokes myriads of kami to descend and watch over the kuchiyose. At an unspecified point in the incantation, the person of the speaker shifts to the hotoke, who then addresses the patron directly. This moment also marks a shift from an almost incomprehensible incantatory style to one that is more conversational.

The dead often start by thanking their living interlocuters for calling them back to this world. They sometimes say that they "never dreamed" they would be able to meet the living again. They state that they are now satisfied (manzoku) and can now hold their heads up and face the other dead ones. The hotoke then recount the conditions of the after-death state. The portrayal and revelation of the deads' experiences are consistent with their status and age at death. Although there are conventionally a number of distinctions itako make between new and old spirits, at Osorezan the purity of the distinctions is not always maintained.²⁵ The overriding tonality of this recounting of

the after death state is one of sorrow and regret, of unsatisfied desire.

There is then a shift towards recollections of life. These recollections focus on the experiences the dead person shared with the living interlocutor. After recollections of life comes a recital of wishes and unfulfilled desires, and ways to fulfill them. The customer can interrupt to ask questions: Is there anything you want? Do you ever get to see Papa? Is your cancer completely cured? Sometimes the dead answer directly; sometimes the itako comes in to answer or to clarify the question.

The dead one then gives a few general cautions and admonitions for the future (some of them on the order of "Be careful not to catch cold" or "Work hard"), as well as specific predictions: Don't go out of the house on August 25; watch out for fires on December 11. They say farewell, and then there is a return to the voice of the itako speaking in her own persona as she chants the hotokeokuri, the ritual send-off of the dead back to the other world. At Osorezan this whole process may take only five minutes, ten or fifteen at most. The fee for one kuchiyose, for each "mouth" (kuchi) opened, was ¥1500 in 1984, which the customer gives the itako at the end.²⁶

The kuchiyose, then, follows an order, and this order is repeated at each calling. Unlike sightings of ghosts, there is no surprise here. It is a repeatable, conventionalized, predicatable yet specific encounter with the dead. The

itako's voice does not change; there is no perceptible shift in her voice when the dead speak through her. For example, if she is calling down a man, there is no change in the pitch of her voice, although the use of status language changes accordingly. There is no explicit attempt to "sound" like the dead person. Why is it then that so many of the questioners--both those from the area and those from far away--are overwhelmed with grief?

To folklorists and anthropologists of Japanese religion, kuchiyose at Osorezan calls into question the authenticity of trance. Most agree that itako exhibit no trace of "real" trance: they are merely performing a series of patterned roles for their customers:

Clearly the itako were simply reciting the most suitable among a repertory of fixed chants learnt by heart in the course of their training as purporting to come from the dead. Their performance belonged to the category of geinô or folk drama, and at the same time functioned as a kuyô or requiem comfort for the dead.

On their audiences, however, the effect of these hackneyed effusions was pathetically touching. Round each itako was to be seen a little group of sobbing women, old and young, their faces screwed up with emotion. . . . Here and there I noticed women sitting in rapt attention, as though at the theatre, and eagerly begging with proffered coins for 'One more!' as soon as the itako's chanting stopped.²⁷

Carmen Blacker, the author of this description, puts these "hackneyed effusions" within a framework of theatrical or performative conventions: "That such utterances should still strike the sobbing audiences as convincing communications from the dead argues a suspension of disbelief

of the same order as that which sees the invisible world behind the sacred drama, the ritual mask or the recital of a myth."²⁸ What Blacker is questioning here is how the stereotypical could be believable, and therefore moving. In her analysis, only if one really believes that he or she is hearing the voice of the dead could one legitimately cry; otherwise, tears could only be the result of theatrical illusion. Because the itako's words are repetitive, they cannot be believable; i.e. they cannot be mistaken for authentic, spontaneous communications from the dead obtained in trance.

Blacker argues that "what passes for a trance among them is seen on shrewd inspection to be mere imitation."²⁹ She contrasts the authenticity of trance with the imitative (i.e. false) performance of trance which is kuchiyose. Thus Blacker supports the description of Japanese folklorists that the itako are gisei shaman ("fake shamans"). Later she implies that the itako do not even imitate trance: "They exhibited none of the usual symptoms of stertorous breathing and convulsively shaking hands."³⁰ Hori Ichirō adduces evidence why the itako are not shamans: they do not go into trance or "ecstasy" (ekusutashī) and their kuchiyose is monotonous, song-like, performatized.³¹ Blacker also states that kuchiyose is only a dilapidated trace of what used to be an authentically transgressive rupture. Kuchiyose claims to be transgressive, to broach a rupture between life and death, but it is not even that: it is a spurious transgressive.

The convulsive hands and gasps of the shaman indicate "trance," which further indicates an authentic contact with the dead. Descriptions of trance in Japanese anthropology are not only concerned to maintain the integrity and authenticity of something called "shamanic trance"; they are also concerned to say that this trance state has something to do with authentic communications from the dead. It is as if these descriptions postulate a real sphere of extraordinary knowledge that is signaled by the convulsed body. They imply that the message emanating from a gasping mouth has more truth value than the itako's performatized recitation. The convulsed hands of the shaman become the last guarantee of authenticity, a guarantee that the itako do not give.³²

The convulsive sobbing of the listeners, however, remains as the anomalous guarantee of kuchiyose's effects. Despite its depictions as merely a spurious reenactment of genuine trance, kuchiyose produces effects (for example, sobbing) which only a real communication with the dead should produce. It produces effects it has no right to produce, but we must start with those effects--specifically, expressions of grief--as indications beyond any suspension of belief: the genuine effects of a spurious spectacle.

Much of kuchiyose consists of what might be called ritual language: formalized, archaic, formulaic. These utterances are repeated at each kuchiyose. They, in fact, set up the encounter with the dead; they predict it. The patterns--the kata--of the performance are prescribed, yet this

prescriptive patterning does not indicate that the itako is therefore unbelievable. On the contrary, it indicates the itako's words as magical. In such language, the conventionality of language comes to the fore; the words are meaningless; they refer not in the least to the desired effect of the ritual or performance. Their unintelligibility and formalization mark them as exotic, as coming from without--and thus as socially determined. Only the force of society can insure that the conventional is believable, and signs of trance are evidently not necessary to induce authentic effects: sobs, protestations of belief, action based on the dead's predictions.

In its overall movement, the repeated, formalized unintelligibility of the itako's chants thus effects a disassociation between signifier and signified: language is unbound as the chanting foregrounds itself as pure utterance, divorced from meaning. The form itself is emphasized; content is marginalized. Any signifier can refer to innumerable signifieds, and since there is no intrinsic connection between them, the force of language makes itself felt, compellingly.³³ It is in this milieu of indeterminate utterance that itako compel the dead to descend. The function of this moment of kuchiyose is not to present the dead as "alive" again. On the contrary, its purpose is to establish the dead as "dead": as somewhere else, as inhabiting another scene. It thus establishes the dead person as recallable, retrievable.

The kuchiyose is not entirely unintelligible, however. There is instead a shift between incomprehensible, formulaic moments and understandable ones; between monologic chanting and dialogic exchange; between the medium as speaker and the dead as the ostensible communicator. This shifting between levels divides the authority of the speaker; there is no one source of speech, yet through this shifting the itako's voice qua voice does not change. The voice comes from the medium's body, but the words come from somewhere else outside the body, from the dead. The unity of the voice and the presence of the person behind it are thrown into question, as the speaking subject and the subject of speech move away from one another.

In the chanted moments, the unity of signification is rent; the signifiers acquire an authority of their own. In the moments of dialogue, this rent is restitched--there is a message here--but the source of the message is claimed to be elsewhere: a second rift, one between the medium and the message opens up. It is in this part of the kuchiyose that patterns of speech appear which correspond to different kinds of spirits: grandparents, children, fathers, wives. In both moments something outside the medium compels her speech: in the first case, language itself seems autonomously authoritative; in the second, the dead person, not the medium, becomes the source of speech.

There is thus a dual function in kuchiyose. One is to establish the dead as dead, as "not here"; they are somewhere

else, and thus can be recalled. An ensemble of repetitions, patterns, and unintelligibilities embodying the force of language thus sets up the dead as, indeed, dead. Yet the other function of kuchiyose is to recall, literally, the dead and through the voice to embody them, to establish them as "here." This moment occurs when the itako starts speaking in the first person of the dead, describing the after death state and its insufficiencies.

What was striking to me in listening with the crowds to the kuchiyose (which, I should say, is clearly accepted; crowds of listeners indicate an effective itako), was the realization that the point of transference of voices--when the dead speak through the voice of the itako--is also the point when most of the questioners started crying, when mourning in the sense of the expression of grief began in cathartic earnest. To wonder why this particular moment empowers grief is to wonder further about the fraught relationships between memory and language energized at Osorezan.

The dead person is still idealized--thus the role of the kata--and the dead speak as they should speak, according to their statuses.³⁴ Through this patterned description they retain their place as authoritatively dead, yet they speak directly to the questioner in the medium's voice: the subject of speech is different from the speaking subject. The idea is sometimes expressed that the silent dead borrow (kariru) the medium's voice, her body. But there is an immediate and

stunning difference between the dead one's remembered voice and the voice of the medium, unlike other forms of possession where the strangely altered voice of the medium mimetically doubles the spirit's voice. The itako at Mt. Osore do not attempt to imitate the timbre or pitch of the spirit's voice; there is no confusion between her voice and the remembered voice of the dead one. This would seem to be a moment of disillusionment, as it were, with the patent realization that the medium's words are not those of the beloved dead.

Yet this is the moment of grief, and I believe it is provoked not so much by a belief that the dead one is speaking, but precisely because of the difference that is instituted through the itako's voice. Here is the moment of realizing the irretrievability of what is lost, signalled by the irresolvable gap between the voice of the medium and the dead person's remembered voice. Expressions of grief occur as much from the realization of this gap--of the impossibility of a communication--than from any easy insistence that the dead have actually spoken. If mourning, as Freud said, has to do with the realization of loss--a process that must occur (at least, it seems, for many people in Euroamerica and Japan) before the comforts of memorialization--then kuchiyose is a scene for encountering this bodily loss, this "hole in the real" that death institutes. A split between the body and voice of the medium, and that which is disembodied and voiceless, thus

effects a bodily recalling that exceeds the idealized status of the dead enframed by official memorialization.

Am I thus saying that the auditors don't believe that the dead are really speaking, and that this realization of impossibility inspires their grief? Not simply so. What occurs constitutes a phenomenon that cannot become an object of positive knowledge, as in the case of the "uncanny." The medium's voice emerges as a "thing," a sublime (non)-object of desire. The contours of fetishistic remembrance come into view here through Octave Mannoni's understanding: "I know but nevertheless . . ." ³⁵ "I know that the dead do not speak, but nevertheless [I believe that they do]": a split between knowledge and belief that is sutured by the embodiments of the itako. And the resolutions are correspondingly precarious, suspended. Many of the people I spoke to at the site and elsewhere did not express a strong belief that they had spoken to the dead. They instead talked about the comfort they had received through the attempt at communication, of which I shall say more later.

The movements between registers of language and the senses redouble those at other sites on the mountain. Like a ghost story, kuchiyose uncovers a difference between seeing and hearing. One does not see the dead in kuchiyose, however; one only hears them. Hearing itself is already divided by the difference between the medium's voice and the remembered voice of the dead person. Yet the itako provides a visible source for the language of the dead, a source that

is missing in reports of ghosts at Osorezan. The itako embodies the split that ghosts imply: she provides the visible source of ghostly discourse. She embodies that difference between the dead and the living, the invisible and the visible. Her blind body becomes the sign of difference, of loss itself.

All the mediums at the mountain claimed to be blind or partially blind. Those who were fully blind had more customers at Osorezan than those who were not, suggesting that blindness was perceived as somehow allowing a more compelling access to the dead. In encounters with ghosts, the visual and the aural do not coincide. Yet with the itako, this discrepancy is not a problem because they cannot see. For them, voices never have a visual origin; voices always emanate from an invisibility. It is not simply that the itako "are blind and therefore they can see the invisible world," a logic of reversal that links blindness and insight. It is precisely because they are blind and they cannot see the invisible world that would permit them to hear the voices of the dead and become the visible form of the properly invisible.

Blindness is an image of primal loss, a bodily mark of something lacking. There is something missing in the itako, and what is missing is the imperative of sight to demand a visual origin for sound. This lack is supplemented by the itako's place as the visual and vocal point of origin for the

speech of the dead; their gendered status as women undoubtedly augments these images of privation and loss.³⁶

The elderly women from the area see kuchiyose as kuyô, as an occasion for grief, and as a source of knowledge about the future. It is repeatable, scheduled. Kuchiyose ends by redrawing the border between death and life that it worked to erase by recalling the dead; as a result it operates as a kuyô, the "best kuyô," as the devotees from Shimokita would say. The desperate metropolitan visitors who come to Osorezan expressly to contact the dead regard kuchiyose as an extreme measure, as a means to work through grief. In the first instance, the kuchiyose does contain the force of social convention, as kuchiyose has been a scheduled, almost necessary part of the household's relationship to the ancestors: the ancestors must be called at regular intervals, and these callings often require inter-household cooperation. In the second, the urban visitors have no particular relationship to the itako and no long-standing group investment in kuchiyose.

Many people who have traveled long distances to Mt. Osore to have an audience with an itako have come there out of a sense of desperation; they approach the itako as a last resort. They cannot forget the dead person and are still driven by thoughts of the dead person as "alive." They are still in a state of incomplete mourning and presumably all the various resources of kuyô have not allowed them to relinquish their grief. They come to remember (in the sense of memorialization:

to remind oneself that the dead person is "dead") the dead so that they can then forget the memories that haunt them.

I met two sisters, one from Tokyo, the other from northeastern Japan. The older one from northeastern Japan told me this:

My husband died last year. I wanted to come to Osorezan but I didn't want to come alone--that's why my sister came. My husband got sick two years ago. He was really sick for one and one-half years. Then he died. It's still so new, it's like he's still alive. [Her younger sister later said that he was yōki ("spirited"), that he liked to drink and sing enka ("Japanese popular songs")]. Somehow or other I understood some of what the itako was saying. He said he had been "returned" [modosareta] to some place, but when I asked where he was, he said he didn't know. He said he was thirsty--for three months before he died he was always hungry and thirsty, but he could hardly drink anything. So it was strange that he said he was thirsty. The itako didn't have any particular recommendations. . . [but later her younger sister said that she was supposed to give him water every day].

I asked if the purpose of having kuchiyose done was to console the dead spirit. She said, more than that, it was to be able to hear the person once again. She said she did not know if she believed, but somehow or other she was consoled. She felt she had to try to talk to him again; there was much left unsaid, and that is why she wanted to go and try to talk to him.

This woman's recounting of her reasons for coming to Osorezan and of her experience with kuchiyose were similar to others I heard. The weight of words "left unsaid" compelled her to try to complete a communication that was incomplete. She tried to fill this lack by calling the absent other into

presence again. To try to "hear the voice of the dead" just once more overrides the motive of consolation and propitiation through remembrance--kuyô--that is also said to be a result of kuchiyose. And it is the effort of communication that seems to offer self-consolation, even though she is not sure whether the dead one has spoken or not: "I know but nevertheless . . ."

The woman from Tokyo stated that "somehow or other" (nantonaku) she understood much of what the itako said. Yet on the important matter of suggestions from the itako on how ritually to take care of the dead, she and her sister had reached different understandings. This question of intelligibility is central to unraveling the efficacy of kuchiyose, because the itako speak in a dialect barely, if at all, understandable to the vast majority of Japanese who retain their services at the festival. The itako use, as well, a lexicon of "taboo words" (imikotoba) whose origins the itako themselves do not comprehend.³⁷ Only the most experienced people from the locale can understand the itako, and even they run up against a modicum of unintelligibility; even they, as well, sometimes misunderstand the itako from other parts of northeastern Japan attending the festival.

People standing around the tents, spectators from Tokyo, remarked that they could not understand a word. Others asked me how I could possibly understand anything, when "even we Japanese can't understand."³⁸ Some people carried tape recorders into the tents so that they could play back the

itako's words later; sometimes the itako's attendants or one of the elderly local women who stayed in the tents through hours of others' kuchiyose would translate into standard Japanese. The unintelligibility of the dialect (usually Tsugaru, not Shimokita dialect) and the taboo words was further heightened by the style of the recitation, sometimes whispered, often almost inaudible. The persistent calls of the sellers and the subdued talk of the crowds huddled outside augmented the difficulty of understanding for the customers in the tents. Often they would have to get as close to the mediums as possible in order to hear, and would ask the itako to repeat what she had said any number of times. There was a straining to hear, to understand what was often unintelligible.

For speakers of standard Japanese, then, kuchiyose is twice unintelligible. Not only is its "ritual" language incomprehensible, but the messages from the dead are as well. This incomprehensibility then requires a translator, a local person who will put the medium's words into standard Japanese. This person is a "secondary medium," yet another voice in a transmission conveying the words of the dead. The kuchiyose, and the words of the dead, are exotic, outside the body of standard Japanese and standard understandings. Because of that they convey an even greater force to those who do not understand them: they relay the interior difference at the core of the national thing at the same time that they speak of an intimate loss. Mediums and their

callings of dead spirits are supposed to incorporate what is most authentic about Mt. Osore. Yet even as these voiced recollections of loss are grasped as quintessentially Japanese, they appear, as they must, in the guise of something ineluctably Other.

In its common Japanese translation, "tradition" (dentô) implies an authoritative, conventional oral transmission. In the Japanese case, this transmission has a history of being legitimated ultimately by the ancestral dead. It is striking that this definition of "tradition," then, could describe kuchiyose itself: an authoritative oral transmission from the dead. But as we have seen, kuchiyose is also a figure for falsity, for theatricality, for obscurity, for unreliability, for what is scandalous and marginal from a certain contemporary perspective of national-cultural order. It becomes "traditional" because of these negativities. And thence the duplicity of "tradition" itself: a transmission that always contains the possibility of betrayal, of an arbitrary selection from the past.³⁹ Kuchiyose becomes a figure for the essence of Japanese national-cultural identity at the moment it is farthest removed from understanding; as such, it reveals the estranged familiarity of the nation thing itself.

What makes kuchiyose a particularly sharp reminder of an entire spectrum of modern losses are the modalities of voicings and the registers of desire it embodies. The expansion of those possibilities of desire--such that

kuchiyose appears to become the site for a doubled form of mourning work--is located within current Japanese encounters with loss. If all returns to the past--personal or national-cultural--are linked to returns to the voice, then the seduction of kuchiyose at Mt. Osore might mean this: the voices of the dead disclose both the promise and the betrayal of mourning the Japanese thing as the disappearing (non)-object of desire.

Notes

¹Naoki Sakai claims that Japanese language and "culture" were born in the eighteenth century, but he recognizes the difference between this eighteenth-century unification and the post-Meiji modern configuration. This difference is intimately entwined with the rise of the nation-state, in which "the unity of the Japanese and the 'interior' were equated to the existing language and community without mediation. . . .The Japanese language and its ethnos were brought into being and made to exist in the present and were thereby transformed into unobjectionable certainties as if they were entities observable in experience. Thus the Japanese were resurrected from the dormant past and, as a nation, began to play the role of the subject to and for the modern state. . . . Needless to say, this was the process in which the modern nation-state of Japan was appropriated into the nineteenth-century discourse of global colonialism, cultural essentialism, and racism." Voices of the Past: The Status of Language in Eighteenth-Century Japanese Discourse (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 336.

²The historian Miriam Silverberg has written with great insight about Japanese modernity, modernism, and mass culture, particularly during the interwar years. See her Changqing Song: The Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); "Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity," Journal of Asian Studies 51, no. 1 (February 1992): 30-54; and "Remembering Pearl Harbor, Forgetting Charlie Chaplin, and the Case of the Disappearing Western Woman: A Picture Story," Positions 1, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 24-76 for a range of arguments about the distinctiveness of Japanese modernity (as opposed to confluences of the "modern" with the "western," say). Late twentieth-century Japan poses other problems for a rethinking of the modern.

³Slavoj Zizek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead," New Left Review 128 (September/October 1990):

⁴See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's discussion of the relationship among need, demand, and desire--and the status of the "Thing"--in Lacan's thinking in his Lacan: The Absolute Master, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 207.

⁵Borch-Jacobsen, p. 209.

⁶Slavoj Zizek, "The 'Theft of Enjoyment'," Village Voice, May 1993.

⁷As Zizek argues, it is important not to conflate his notion of "enjoyment" with what we think of as "pleasure." In the Lacanian economy to which he is complexly faithful, enjoyment is "precisely 'pleasure in unpleasure'; it designates the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the 'pleasure principle.' In other words, enjoyment is located 'beyond the pleasure principle.'" Zizek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead."

⁸Zizek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead."

⁹Having established the special valences of Zizek's "Thing," I will use the lower-case.

¹⁰Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man" *The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, October 28 (Spring 1984): 125-133.

¹¹Freud's classic essay on fetishism--although he repeatedly addressed the issue throughout his career--is (not surprisingly) his "Fetishism" (1927), The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, trans. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955). The peculiar workings of the notion of "fetishism"--the correlate display and disavowal of absence through a substitute--is of course put into the register of the economic in Marx's "commodity fetishism." Recent work has pushed the fetishistic dynamic into new realms of analysis. See, for example, the recent volume Fetishism as Cultural Discourse, ed. Emily Apter and William Pietz (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993). Or see also the Princeton Architectural Journal 4 devoted to the fetish.

¹²As Zizek, following Octave Mannoni states: "We could thus say that the formula of fetishism is "'I know but nevertheless . . .'" ('I know that Mother doesn't have a penis, but nevertheless . . . [I believe that she has]') . . ." There is thus a movement of identification that exists only in difference, described as a split between knowledge and belief. Slavoj Zizek, For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor (London: Verso, 1991), p. 245.

¹³Those works included within the Nihonjinron genre usually assert such diametrical opposition to western individualistic selves. The genre finds its provenance in many of the prewar texts of Japanese philosophy, which probed the distinctiveness of a Japanese national subjectivity in the face of western domination. The difficulties of asserting difference from the west lay, of course, in the dialectical terms predicating those assertions. That is, in a necessity well-known to critics of orientalism and colonialism, the colonized must always assert its difference in relation to the west, and as such even its difference is

dependent on the other term. This dilemma has often led to an ever-greater hypervaluation of difference.

¹⁴See Murakami Yasusuke, Kumon Shunpei, and Sato Seizaburō, Bunmei to shite no ie shakai ["Household Society" as Civilization] (Tokyo, 1979).

¹⁵Norma Field uncompromisingly reveals the dangers of the "harmless" symbolic emperor through the stories of contemporary Japanese who have relinquished the comforts of the imperial fetish in her powerful In The Realm of a Dying Emperor: A Portrait of Japan at Century's End (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

¹⁶H.D. Harootunian spoke of the "Japanese thing" in analyzing late twentieth-century ideologies of the "holonic" society and state-sponsored theories of Japanese "culture." The "Japanese thing" operated as a literal translation of the ideologically charged phrase Nihontekina mono which was used repeatedly in the texts that he examined. See his "Visible Discourse/Invisible Ideologies," in Postmodernism and Japan, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 63-92.

¹⁷I use the notion of discourse in ways inspired by Foucault: discourse as a mode of language use that is articulated with forms of power, institutional and otherwise. But I am also indebted to Michel de Certeau's somewhat more open-ended perspective on discourse, in which he is acutely attuned not only to discourses as orders of representation, but also to the problem of alterity: that which is not representable. Discourses are constituted as much by their relationship to the nonrepresentable as by their status as representations. That is why the question of the irrational and the logics of psychoanalysis particularly engage de Certeau as a theorist of the "heterological" dimensions of modern discourses. See in particular his collection of essays Heterologies: Discourse on the Other, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁸There is an enormous amount of research in Japanese folklore studies centered on the significance of mountains. For a brief description of sanchūtakaikan, see Sakurai Tokutarō, "Minkan shinkō to sangaku shūkyō," in Sangaku shūkyō to minkan shinkō no kenkyū, ed. Sakurai Tokutarō (Tokyo: Meichō shuppan, 1976), pp. 27-32. Sakurai initially makes a distinction between the other world as a strange or foreign land (ikyō) and the other world as the after death state (shigo takai), but then says the two distinctions have much in common, particularly when mountains become the loci of conceptions of the other world. Also see Hori Ichirō, Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Allan L. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), especially Chapter 4, "Mountains and Their Importance for the Idea of the Other World," pp. 141-179; and Komatsu Kazuhiko, "Yosute to sanchūtakai," in Kamigami no

seishinshi (Tokyo: Dentō to Gendaisha, 1978), pp. 177-198. Komatsu's essay was an early (first published in 1972) structuralist analysis of mountains as liminal "other worlds."

Historically, mountains have been powerful locations of alterity in Japanese culture. They have represented the unknown, the unconceivable: sites of "terrible multiplicities." (Nakazawa Shin'ichi, personal communication). In both what is "terrible" (terror inducing or awe inspiring) and what is "multiple" (excessive, beyond language) mountains function as representations of what might be called a Japanese sublime. There is a whole discourse built up around mountains in Japan which fuses "death" and "mountains" as sublime unknowns, with attendant practices of framing, bounding, limiting, and troping this sublimity.

¹⁹Hori, Folk Religion, pp. 207-210.

²⁰Kuyō is defined by Kenkyūsha's New Japanese-English Dictionary as a "memorial service." Kuyō is a complex concept that refers to any Buddhist-influenced ritual performed in remembrance of living beings who have died, or objects which are broken or have outlived their usefulness. Thus there are senzo kuyō for the ancestral dead; segaki kuyō, for muenbotoke, the dead who are "unconnected," who have no known living kin to memorialize them; and hari kuyō, performed for old or broken needles. In Japan, kuyō also refers generally to any Buddhist matsuri, or festival. Kuyō is used almost interchangeably with another key term in Japanese Buddhism, ekō, translated by Buddhologists as "merit transference"--the idea that the living can store up merit and transfer it to others, in particular the dead--but defined popularly (and in the same Kenkyūsha dictionary as above) as a "memorial service" for the dead.

For a discussion of all aspects of memorialization and veneration of the dead, see Robert J. Smith, Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974).

²¹The most comprehensive English-language work on Japanese ancestor worship, memorial practices, and spirit beliefs is Robert J. Smith, Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974).

²²Freud explores this process of working through memories in his 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia" in Sigmund Freud, General Psychological Theory, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), pp. 164-180.

Freud states in this essay that the survivor must recall and work through all the memories of the loved person, confirming the reality of loss and withdrawing all attachments to those memories. Only after this lengthy and painful process is completed can the dead person be "remembered" without grief; only then can the dead's memory be set aside.

In Japan this process is helped along by the idealization of the dead that occurs through memorialization and accession to ancestral status. In another context, Java, there seems to be an almost complete lack of mourning as Freud describes it: the dead person is almost instantly idealized. James T. Siegel describes the interworkings of language, memory, and sensory experience in interpreting this Javanese absence of mourning in his "Images and Odors in Javanese Practices Surrounding Death," Indonesia 36 (October 1983):1-14. A strongly contrasting essay that describes the interweaving of grief, memory, and rage in Ilongot culture is Renato Rosaldo's "Grief and a Headhunter's Rage: On the Cultural Force of Emotions," in Text, Play, and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self and Society, ed. Edward M. Bruner (Washington, D.C.: The American Ethnological Society, 1984), pp. 178-195.

²³Sakurai, Nihon no shamanizumu, 1:151.

²⁴This marginalization reflects the itako's historical position as well. Plural etymologies of the name "itako" (a word disliked by Shimokita mediums for its subsidiary connotations of "beggar" or "vagabond") lead not to any certain historical origin, but to a series of possibilities. One etymology derives itako from eta no ko (a "child of the eta") one name for the so-called outcaste groups in Japan. The word eta itself is replete with different readings, but most of them point to an association with death and defilement.

Another origin of the word itako is traced to the writing of the dead person's posthumous Buddhist name (kaimyō) on a slat (ita), which the itako would use for Buddhist memorial services (ekō or kuyō). Thus the origin of the medium's local name is traced to a writing of the dead person's name, a function which we have seen is a priestly one in Buddhist institutional contexts. That this etymology would point to a replacement by the itako (who are blind) of the properly priestly function of inscribing the wooden stupa is all the more striking when we consider that the itako function as mouthpieces of the dead, that their powers are based on an oral recalling of the departed. This orality in itself and its tendency to get out of control is what is untrustworthy about the mediums from the standpoint of authority--the impossible promise of a communication with the dead, enacted indiscriminately for money from hordes of bereaved visitors to the mountain.

²⁵Sakurai states that at the newly formed itako machi, kuchiyose of shinbotoke (the "newly dead," also called niibotoke in some regions) cannot be performed. The itako say that the dead person will not speak until one-hundred days after death. Even if the dead person appears, he or she will not say anything. Thus, only kuchiyose for the settled dead (furubotoke) will work.

His partial explanation for this is as follows. In shinkuchi (the kuchiyose of the newly dead), the person who has recently died is called and speaks in turn to each of his

survivors. It is thus a group calling, and the dead person speaks to the survivors following the status order of the people who offered incense at the funeral. But in calling people who have been dead more than one-hundred days (the length of time varies according to region), one supplicant requests the calling of one or more dead people and asks questions in relation to only him or herself. There is usually an order to the dead called in this pattern also (although sometimes it is random): sometimes it parallels the nearness of kinship to the supplicant; sometimes the calling starts from the oldest (measured by date of death) spirit. Only individuals request kuchiyose at Mt. Osore; therefore, the itako can legitimately perform furukuchi in the absence of a larger legitimating kinship group. Sakurai, Nihon no shamanizumu, 1:132-133.

²⁶In 1973, the fee was ¥200; in 1974, ¥700, and in 1975, ¥1000. There is an agreed-upon price that all the itako charge at Osorezan during the festival, and which also holds in the hotoke kuchiyose in the villages of Shimokita. The old women of the region used kuchiyose primarily for memorializing the dead, and they could afford to call many dead relatives any number of times at one sitting. Now this function of repeated memorialization is unthinkable because of the expense. Takamatsu, p. 85.

²⁷Carmen Blacker, The Catalpa Bow, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), pp. 160-161.

²⁸Blacker, p. 163.

²⁹Blacker, p. 140.

³⁰Blacker, p. 160.

³¹Hori Ichirô, Nihon no shamanizumu, Kôdansha gendai shinsho, vol. 256 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1971), pp. 185-186. Hori also gives other characteristics of the itako which disqualify them as bona fide shamans.

³²I do not question a typology of outward symptoms that would indicate or contraindicate a particular state as "trance." Clearly by the typologies that Eliade and others have constructed, the itako are not in trance. They can not even be said to pretend to be. What I am questioning is an analysis that regards symptoms of trance as somehow naturally expressing a communication with the dead, that believes that trance is any less "performative" than any other mode of approaching the dead. What seems to be at stake in these discussions of trance, genuine and spurious, is false belief: if a shamanic trance is extreme, if it exhibits those convulsive or extraordinary characteristics that go beyond everyday experience, then trickery should not, could not, be involved. There is a notion of purity here, of authenticity that disregards Mauss's discoveries concerning the conventional power of magic and belief. Lévi-Strauss

retells the remarkable story of a Kwakiutl Indian, a native skeptic, who stumbled into the shamanic profession by an urge to learn the tricks of the trade. And so he did, as his "narrative recounts the details of his first lessons, a curious mixture of pantomime, prestidigitation, and empirical knowledge, including the art of simulating fainting and nervous fits, the learning of sacred songs . . ." Yet this fake shaman had great success as a healer, and what Lévi-Strauss elicits from the facts of this narrative is the power of a socially based complex of beliefs in determining "reality," even a reality as impervious to manipulation as illness. What Lévi-Strauss has uncovered is the role of trickery, of duping, in any system of conventions that calls for belief; he thus discounts the possibility of any "pre-performative" trance. Lévi-Strauss strangely denies the power of this insight later on in the same essay, however, by reverting to an explanation that now sees shamanic trance as reproducing an initial series of revelations "in all their vividness, originality, and violence." To this representation he assigns the psychoanalytic term "abreaction," and calls the shaman a "professional abreactor." He thus both asserts and denies the constitutive possibility of trickery in producing effects like "healing." Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and his Magic," in Structural Anthropology, trans. C. Jacobson and B. Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 161-180.

³³This is close to Lévi-Strauss's concept of zero symbolic value, which he uses in elucidating the concept of mana, the central organizing indeterminable of A General Theory of Magic. Mana is that concept which designates the compelling force of language as social convention. As Lévi-Strauss states:

Always and everywhere notions of this (mana) type intervene . . . to represent a value of indeterminate meaning (signification), which being itself empty of meaning (sens) is therefore susceptible to the reception of any meaning . . . whatsoever. Its unique function is to make good a discrepancy between signifier and signified, or, more exactly, to draw attention to the fact that in certain circumstances . . . a relation of inadequacy exists between signified and signifier to the detriment of the anterior relation of complementarity.

Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction a l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss," in Marcel Mauss, Sociologie et anthropologie, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), p. xliv. Translated in David Pocock, "Foreword" to A General Theory of Magic, p. 4.

³⁴In Japan the notion of conforming to a status pattern is widespread and accepted. The notion of rashisa, of "likeness" and of performing according to an ideal typical model also occurs in Japanese theater as well; thus, a female

impersonator or a woman is onnarashii, "ladylike" or "like a woman," in accordance with Japanese conventions of ladylikeness. Kata are the performance conventions that produce conventional likenesses. That dead spirits should speak just as dead spirits should speak, repeatedly, is perhaps less of a cause for disbelief or skepticism than it might seem.

³⁵In the idiom of psychoanalytic notions of fetishism, the formula would be rendered: "'I know but nevertheless . . .'" ('I know that Mother doesn't have a penis, but nevertheless . . . [I believe that she has]').

³⁶If one were to take a certain psychoanalytic logic further, blindness becomes the bodily mark of "castration" as the name for a primal loss. Women's bodies become the site for Oedipal fantasies around the loss of the phallus: women as "castrated" men. A blind woman, then, becomes a doubly invested embodiment (and reminder) of loss.

³⁷Sakurai gives examples of these words, also called itako kotoba ("itako words"). A man is called yumitori, a woman kagami ("mirror"), a husband and wife, ai no makura ("pillow of love"), and a child, takara ("treasure"). The dead spirits descend through the use of these terms of address. In calling the dead person, then, the itako use formulaic substitutes which have no particular relationship to the person called ("ai no makura" might be an exception), that are used at the point where one would use the normal term of address for a living person. He states that these words are almost all understood by the local clientele; they are not, however, generally understood by the one-time visitor to Osorezan. Sakurai, Nihon no shamanizumu, 1:59.

³⁸For an increasingly standardized Japanese cultural landscape, a perceived "internal exotic" becomes problematic. Remaining dialects--of which there are many in Japan--become held up, valorized as languages of difference within a much-valued culture of consistency. What is only marginally understood, from the standard perspective, becomes an exemplar of what is most traditional: the exotic and the traditional coincide at the farthest reaches of the Japanese national-cultural imaginary.

³⁹Recall again Raymond Williams's discussion in Keywords, pp. 268-269.

