Touching Conversion:
Tangible Transformations in Sūkyō Mahikari

In our present state of degeneration, it is through the skin that metaphysics should be made to re-enter our minds.

Dans l'état de dégénérescence où nous sommes, c'est par la peau qu'on fera rentrer la métaphysique dans les esprits.

– Antonin Artaud (1964: 153)

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Introduction

'Panel Exhibition of the Mahikari Technique' (真光の業パネル展), read the sign on the stairwell of the Akashi dojo. I went up, my shoes removed, and washed my hands in the little sink. (One should always wash one's hands before going into a Mahikari dojo.) Inside, the dojo-space had been divided into two sides by a row of large panels suspended from the ceiling. The side on the right was set out with some low tables, with juice, tea, and bowls of rice-crackers; refreshments for visitors to the exhibition, though few visitors turned up. On the left side, beyond the panel-wall, people were sitting in pairs on the *tatami* mats, practising *okiyome* (お浄め), the Mahikari technique.

The panels themselves were advertisements for the powers of *okiyome*: 'Through boundless space-time, now the Mahikari technique, the miracle beam, returns!' (*hateshinaki jikū wo koete ima yomigaeru mirakuru biimu mahikari no waza* 果てしなき時空をこえて今甦るミラクルビーム真光の業). Below this slogan on the first panel was a picture of an angel, floating in a cloudscape. Rather Pre-Raphaelite in style, I thought, white-robed, blonde and solemn: a thoroughly western vision. She held out her hand in the gesture of *okiyome*. Next to this, another western image: Jesus laying on hands; a gesture of *okiyome* again. And beside Jesus was an illustration of Sakyamuni (*Shakuson* 釈尊, the Buddha), a cursive line of light flowing from his open hand.[1] The accompanying text explained that, just as the Bible says that 'God is Light' (*kami wa hikari nari* 神は光なり) and Buddhism speaks of 'immeasurable light' (*muryōkō* 無量光), so indeed, 'the real form of the *kami* [that is, divinity] is light' (*kami no hontai wa hikari de aru* 神の本体は光である).

I passed onto the second panel. Under the heading, 'The poisoning of the human race' (*jinrui dokuka* 人類毒化) went the warning that we have entered the time of the Baptism of Fire (*hi no senrei* 火の洗礼), the 'great turning point' (*ōmagarikado* 大曲がり角). Below this was featured a panorama of pollution: a car on a road, and close-by, a factory with dirty, smoking chimneys. A sewage pipe stuck out into a river. Other dangers illustrated: medicine, synthetic detergents (*gōsei senzai* 合成洗剤) and food additives (*shokuhin tenkabutsu* 食品添加物), and up in the sky, a fighter-plane, its wings well-laden with hydrogen bombs. Continuing the theme, the next few placards were devoted to the hazards of agricultural chemicals and everyday medicines: 'An increasing number of people take too much medicine and are

[1] Both of these images, of Jesus and Sakyamuni, are much reproduced in Mahikari literature (e.g., see Yasaka 1997: 55). The illustration of Sakyamuni depicts him giving salvation to the world of hungry ghosts. The original copies of this image are held in the National Museum of Tokyo and in the headquarters of the Ōbaku Zen sect (see Shimizu 1987: 71-72).

becoming ill' (*kusuri no nomisugi de byōki ni naru hito ga fuete kite imasu* 薬の飲み過ぎで病気になる人が超えてきています). Medicines give rise to deformities, the text went on, alongside a strip of unpleasant photographs showing the malformed hands of children.

Next up, the topics of the body and decontamination: 'The phenomenon of the cleansing of the body's insides' (*naitai no kuriiningu genshō* 内体のクリ–ニング現象. A cartoonish image of a little boy was shown, stuffing his face. 'Eating, drinking, breathing,' warned the poster, 'everyday all sorts of toxic things get into the body' (*taberu, nomu, suu: mainichi kakushu no yūdoku-na mono ga tainai ni haitte kuru* 食べる、飲む、吸う:毎日各種の有毒なものが体内に入って来る). Below this ran a programme of the body's operations in dealing with pollution:

> Accumulating (*tamaru* 溜まる): Poisons build up everywhere inside the body.
> Hardening (*katamaru* 固まる): Accumulated toxins solidify.
> Melting (*tokasu* 溶かす): Hardened toxins melt.
> Flowing (*nagareru* 流れる): Melting toxins flow inside the body.
> Excretion (*haisetsu* 排泄): Flowing toxins are discharged from the body.
>
> Modern medicines, the text explained, block the body's capacity for flow, but with 'True Light' (*mahikari* 真光), body-toxins (*taidoku* 体毒) will be actively expelled.

Immediately beneath, the text turned to the problem of 'attaching spirits' (*hyōirei* 憑依霊), making plain that the term refers to 'spirits that catch hold of people' (*rei ga hito ni kakaru* 霊が人にかかる). There was another image of a comic-book boy, sitting on the floor with a dark, smoky ghost – the spirit of an old man – hanging in the air behind his back.

The next panel was entitled, 'The guardian spirits which protect you' (*anata wo mamoru shugorei* あなたを守る守護霊). Above the drawing of a man, a dotted, golden line zigzagged upwards, indicating relations to various types of spiritual beings – guardian spirits, then gods of one's birthplace (*ubusunagami* 産土神) and tutelary divinities (*ujigami* 氏神), then above that, the 'Forty-eight deities' (*yotoya no kami* 四十八の神), and right at the top, the divinity called Su (*Sushin* 主神)

I was looking at this last placard when a woman came over and asked me what I thought of the exhibition. She wanted to draw my attention to a row of jam jars displayed on a table. The jars were arranged in pairs, and all contained foodstuffs of one sort or another. The first two contained cheese, I could see. The cheese in one jar still appeared to be fresh, while the cheese in the other was furred over with mould. These jars were experiments on the effects of *okiyome*, the woman explained. As she chatted to me, I noticed Yamamoto-san, a Mahikari member I had met before at the Akashi dojo, talking enthusiastically about the exhibition and the Mahikari Training Course to a young man, who was clearly a non-member. Yamamoto-san turned to me, to solicit my opinion: 'Taking the training course is fun, isn't it?' (*kenshū uketara omoshiroi deshō* 研修受けたら面白いでしょう).

The exhibition appears to introduce a mix of visions, at once scientific, Christian, environmentalist and animist; a seemingly strange juxtaposition of images: angels and buddhas, medicine and poison, spirits and sewage pipes. We see divinities arranged in

a hierarchy, bodies conceived in terms of flows and obstructions and open to spiritual infiltration, and we glimpse a mobile notion of pollution, in which the spiritual and the chemical interchange. Then there are the jam jars and the training course, and above all, a miraculous technique of radiating light from the palm of the hand. In this thesis, I will be concerned to elucidate some of this imagery, as well the techniques and instruments by which it is enacted and articulated.

The organization which forms my subject matter takes its name from the miraculous light which it elicits in its practices. Sūkyō Mahikari (崇教真光 'True-Light Supra-Religion') is a Japanese religion with a purported membership of half a million. It is one of a galaxy of new religious groups that have emerged in Japan since the latter half of the nineteenth century. In keeping with the fractious filiation of these groups, Sūkyō Mahikari (henceforth, Mahikari) is an offshoot of an offshoot: a breakaway organization from Sekai Kyūseikyō (世界救世教 'Church of World Messianity'), itself a breakaway from Ōmoto (大本 'Great Origin'), an influential organization that did much to galvanize the imaginations of subsequent Japanese new religions.[2] Mahikari traces its own origins back to the early hours of 27 February 1959, when Okada Yoshikazu 岡田良一 became the recipient of an urgent revelation from god: 'The time of heaven has come. Rise. Your name shall be Kōtama [光玉 'jewel of light']. Raise your hand [*te wo kazase* 手をかざせ]. The world has entered severe times' (Sūkyō Mahikari 1983: 12). The god was Su no ōmikamisama (主の大御神様 literally. 'lord-great-god Su' – Su god, in short) and the imperative reference to 'raising the hand' (*te o kazasu*) has to do with what would become Mahikari's main practice: the transmission of divine light from the open hand. Okada Kōtama, as he was now called, began to attract followers, and this led to the launching of the Mahikari organization in 1962. That same year – as further revelations had anticipated – was a turning point in cosmic history: the beginning of the "baptism of fire" (*hi no senrei* 火の洗礼), the late phase of a divine plan and a period of escalating disasters and contaminations that will eventually end in a great blaze of purification. According to Okada, human beings, ancestors and animal spirits will only be saved if they attune themselves to the unfolding of the divine plan; taking up the 'practice of the true law' (*seihō jissen* 正法実践) in preparation for the coming 'spiritual civilisation' (*reibunmei* 霊文明) that will be founded in a purified and restructured world.

Mahikari means 'true light', but as the other name of the organisation reveals – in a play on words that is standard practice for the movement, as a means of making known the truth of the divine – Mahikari is not a 'religion' (*shūkyō* 宗教); it is 'above' religion, a 'supra-religion' (*sūkyō* 崇教), claiming to surpass all religions and religious groups. The founder called repeatedly for religion to go back to its pure beginnings, for the mission of Mahikari 'transcends sects and denominations' (*chōshūha-teki shimei* 超宗派的使命) (Sūkyō Mahikari 1983: 149). Mahikari, he said, is not some religious faction invented by human beings, and neither does it 'make believers' (*shinja tsukuri* 信者作り) for the sake of any such faction (Sūkyō Mahikari

[2] Strictly speaking, Sūkyō Mahikari is itself a breakaway from Sekai Mahikari Bunmei Kyōdan (世界真光文明教団 'Church of the World True-Light Civilisation'). Following the founder's death in 1974, there was a dispute over the succession to the leadership that led ultimately to the formation of Sūkyō Mahikari in 1978, by Okada Keishu 岡田恵珠, the founder's adopted daughter. For accounts of this schism, see Davis (1980: 6-7; Hatanaka 1993: 20-24; Matsunaga 2011: 241-242).

1983: 143). Instead, Mahikari is a coming back to *sūkyō*, a return to an eternal, supra-religious truth that is, at the same time, a 'divine science' (*kagaku* 神学).

Conceptually, Mahikari shares many features with the cosmologies of the groups from which it emerged; most notably, an interest in the occult operations of spirits and divine powers, a concern with toxic threats to the body, and a recognition of the periodic necessity of cosmic regeneration. A significant difference, however, is that, while its predecessors developed certain techniques of purification, Mahikari's own practice is more systematic and, importantly, its exercise is not limited to those with specialist knowledge or charismatic capacity only. Rather, the ability to perform purification is open to everyone; all one has to do is to take a three-day training course (Davis 1980: 88; Okada 1993: 100-1, 123-4).[3]

The core practice of Mahikari is the practice of purification, *okiyome*, otherwise known as the 'Mahikari Technique' (*Mahikari no waza*). The practice involves the radiation of divine light from the open hand, a light that is deemed to purify anything it contacts, although it is most often bodies that are the centre of purifying attention. Under the hot light of *okiyome*, the hardened poisons lodged in the body can be melted and accumulated karma dissolved, so the self can be brought closer to divinity.

As with other 'new religions' (*shinshūkyō* 新宗教)[4] in Japan, Mahikari draws on an extensive cosmological cache which forms the deep, conceptual and historical background common to so many Japanese religious practices. This is not to say that such cosmological notions and their implementation have remained unchanged. The 19th century (from the late Tokugawa period onwards) saw the rise of a number of new religious collectives, 'new forms of communitarian and voluntary association' (Harootunian 1995: 101), which sought to combine and revitalize existing socio-cosmic concepts and ways of relating, between humans, and between humans and spiritual beings. Such groups as Kurozumikyō (黒住教), Tenrikyō (天理教), and Konkōkyō (金光教), had the aim of realigning society by means of pragmatic programmes for the alleviation of suffering and the achievement of salvation, very often understood to be goals that were obtainable in this world. These projects were, in many respects, revolutionary, aiming to bring about wider socio-cosmic changes, often by means of revolutions performed at the level of the self (Hardacre 1986; Köpping 1977, esp. 144; Staemmler and Dehn 2011). Furthermore, common to the cosmological and conceptual infrastructure of Japanese new religions, is the idea of a charismatic founder who is either the embodiment, or temporary host, of divinity, or who has otherwise achieved unique spiritual insights, usually after a life of much suffering and hardship. The prevalent conception that personal actions take on cosmological significance is often articulated via the notion that all human beings contain a fraction of divinity within themselves, that they all possess a 'fractional soul' or 'spirit' (*bunshin* 分神, *bunrei* 分霊 or *wakemitama* 分霊) of the parent deities (see Hardacre 1986: 53, 89). But since this original element has become obscured or

[3] Everyone, that is, with the exception of children under ten years of age.

[4] I do not intend to engage in the debate regarding the question of what constitutes the 'new' with regards to religious groups in Japan. Regarding Nishiyama Shigeru's typology of 'new-new religions' (*shin-shinshūkyō* 新新宗教) to refer to groups which came into prominence in the 1970s – which would include Mahikari – I am inclined to agree with Astley (among others) that this represents an unecessary 'proliferation of terminology' (see Astley 2006: 95; Hardacre 1996: 205).

clouded over with impurities, it can only be restored or reenergized through the performance of the correct spiritual exercises.

But if such ideas are generally held in common, one can, of course, make out important differences of emphasis. Nishiyama (1988), for example, has usefully discerned a difference between religious groups whose conceptions centre on the imagery of *kokoro* ('heart' 心) and those focused on the notion of *rei* ('spirit' 霊). Groups in the former category tend to stress the importance of moral regeneration and spiritual diligence by means of practices of 'rectifying the self' (*kokoro naoshi* 心直し lit., 'curing the heart'). Whereas groups (which would include Mahikari) classed according to the concept of 'spirit' are characterized by a manipulative, technical tendency, in which both the existence of spiritual beings, as well as the efficacy of techniques which harness the powers of the spirit world, are often deemed to be capable of being established by means of experimental practices (see also Yumiyama 1999). Nishiyama's argument has not gone unchallenged (see Berthon and Kashio 2000); nevertheless, I regard his distinction as useful because it helps to draw attention to a number of important aspects of Mahikari practice; namely, a concern with experiment, with spiritual efficacy and material evidence. These are themes I hope to throw more light on during the course of this dissertation.

Of the three hundred-plus groups listed in the *Dictionary of New Religious Groups and Personages* (*Shinshūkyō kyōdan*, *jinbutsu jiten* 新宗教教団人物辞典) (Inoue et al. 1996), most have received little or no treatment in English. Mahikari, on the other hand, is one of the more well-documented new religions. It has been the subject of two monographs in English (Davis 1980; McVeigh 1997), an unpublished PhD dissertation (Miyanaga 1983), as well as – just recently – a full-length study in French (Louveau 2013). There is an edited volume of contributions in Japanese which covers different aspects of the organization (Knecht and Hatanaka 1993), as well as a more popular publication, heavily illustrated with photos, which features articles by many of the same authors (Hatanaka 1987). In addition, Bernard-Mirtil (1998) has published a sociological study (in French), and there is a short introduction to Mahikari by the Italian sociologist of religion, Massimo Introvigne (1999). Mahikari has also been the subject of various articles in journals and edited collections (e.g., Köpping 1967; Miyanaga 1980; Young 1990; Cornille 1991; Shimizu 1994; Pfeiffer 2000; Matsunaga 2000; 2011; Smith 2002; Swift 2012; 2013).

By far the most incisive studies of Mahikari, in my view, happen to be the earliest and the latest. Klaus-Peter Köpping's article from 1967 is an investigation into the cosmic vision articulated by Mahikari, carried out by means of an analysis of the founder's often difficult doctrinal formulations and spiritual recalibrations of language. The article retains its importance, not simply owing to its stress on cosmology, but also because Köpping, the young ethnographer, was actually able to interview Okada Kōtama (or Kōgyoku 光玉, as he then styled himself)[5] (see also Köpping 1974: 77-88).

The most recent treatment of Mahikari, by Frédérique Louveau (2013) is the other superior study. Louveau's account is a multi-sited ethnography of Mahikari in France

[5] *Gyoku* being an alternative reading of the *kanji* character 玉. At some point, a change took place to the pronunciation of Okada's name. It is worth noting, however, that Kōtama is evocative of the patronymic of the Buddha, Gautama (Jap. ゴータマ), as Mahikari teachings like to point out.

and West Africa (namely, Benin, Ivory Coast, and Senegal). To be sure, Louveau does not treat with Mahikari in Japan, but the value of her ethnography is its comprehensive coverage of the organization, both at various local levels, and as a transnational network. What is of especial interest is that, although Louveau shows in detail how Mahikari members attempt to reconcile Mahikari conceptions with indigenous understandings, what is remarkable is the extent to which the infrastructure of Mahikari holds its form across contexts (and continents). From the forms of the dojo to the formulations of prayer (still invoked in Japanese), Louveau demonstrates the extent to which Mahikari practices have remained untransformed in transit. (I will have something to say about form in Chapter 5, albeit at a more microcosmic level of analysis: the physical and metaphysical infrastructure of ritual. But I would suggest that the crucial importance given to the maintenance of particular forms in Mahikari ritual goes some way towards explaining why this ritual infrastructure, as a particular 'material assemblage' (Harvey, Jensen and Morita 2017: 5), is able to be recapitulated at a transnational level; and also why this exact duplication is seen to be necessary.)

Be that as it may, still the best-known accounts of Mahikari are Davis (1980) and McVeigh (1997). The value of Davis' book, in my view, chiefly consists in the efforts he made to determine the composite character of Okada's conceptual framework. That is, in order to deconstruct Mahikari claims of original revelation, Davis tracks down the antecedents of Okada's ideas as well as the precursors of Mahikari practices. In what he calls 'the logic of gospel *bricolage*' (1980: 94), Davis demonstrates that Mahikari teachings are an amalgam of ideas borrowed from popular religious practice, occult literature, as well as from Sekai Kyūseikyō and Ōmoto. There is value in such an exercise in so far as it firmly situates Mahikari within a historical process of conceptual transmission and adaption. After all, as Goodman showed, worlds cannot be composed without some degree of derivation: 'Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already in hand' (Goodman 1978: 6). The problem is that, in exhaustively exposing the derivative nature of Mahikari knowledge-practices, Davis passes over the originality of the end product, the inventive aspects of the world that Mahikari enacts.

There is a more serious failing, however. Davis and McVeigh (1997) – as well as Miyanaga (1983), for that matter – all approach the world that Mahikari enacts as a belief system, and so the overriding question becomes one of how it is made emotionally and epistemically compelling. As McVeigh states plainly, when someone enters a movement like Mahikari, 'something is put into place and assembled, in a more or less systematic fashion, that was not there before' (1997: 12). This roughly systematic 'something' is the system of beliefs, which is fabricated, made persuasive, and maintained by means of an array of ideological instruments, including the evocation of an atmosphere of 'hysterical suggestibility' (Davis 1980: 139) and the 'socio-political use of emotions (McVeigh 1997: 147). But this over-emphasis on ideological, cognitive or credal construction arguably takes analytical attention away from the conceptual infrastructure it is supposed to explain. Or, to put it differently, such arguments attempt to account for how a make-believe world is assembled and rendered credible at the expense of trying to understand how that world – as a real world – works. Equally, to paraphrase Asad (1993: 187), it is hardly analytically enlightening to be informed that a particular religion is in fact an ideological construct; to advance such an argument is simply to confirm habitual academic prejudices. As Susan Harding puts the matter rather bluntly – although, I suggest, all too truthfully – what motivates such approaches must surely be the idea that '"nobody

in their rights minds would believe this stuff"' (Harding 1999: 383). Needless to say, this is not the motivation for the method I adopt here. Like Louveau, I do not propose to treat Mahikari members as ideological recruits, or, as she has it, 'victimes d'une machination' (2013: 17).

All the same, this is not an uncommon perception. On telling Japanese friends of mine about my research on a new religion, the wry response would often be, 'Well, don't get caught up in it!' (*hamattara akan de* 嵌ったらあかんで), or jocular expressions of concern were made that I might get 'brainwashed' (*sennō sareru* 洗脳される). In the academic and secular terms of the sociology of religion, this translates into a concern with outsides and insides: an account that sticks too closely to the interior of an alternative conceptual scheme risks the charge of 'collaborationism', an endorsement of unpalatable visions (see Beit-Hallahmi 2001; cf. Hardacre 2003). On the other hand, it seems to me that the analytical boundary between insides and outsides is rather more labile and chiasmic than has been supposed. Thus, the model of hypnotic suggestion which Davis employs is only viable in so far as it is founded on a rigid distinction between the analyst and the subjects of his analysis, entirely forgetting, in the process, the practices in which *both* are intersubjectively engaged; after all, Davis became a Mahikari member for the duration of his research. Perhaps, as Michael Lambek suggests, the idea should not be 'to establish or rely upon a distinction between inner and outer…Scepticism is no more – or less – private or internal than is conviction' (Lambek 2007: 75). Or, as a Mahikari member put it to me, in explaining a more complex, chiasmic notion of relationality: 'You don't know where the outside becomes the inside' (*omote wa doko kara ura ni naru ka wakaranai deshō* 表はどこから裏になるか分からないでしょう).

Rather a long time ago, Köpping remarked on the lack of seriousness with which the foreign scholarship on Japanese new religions approached its subject matter (Köpping 1974: 44). If anthropology, as Viveiros de Castro holds, is the activity of taking things seriously, then all I attempt to do here is to pay close attention to what it is that Mahikari members themselves take seriously (see Viveiros de Castro 2015: Ch. 4). I maintain that one of the things which they take very seriously indeed is transformation, along with the means to achieve it. This may be evidenced, in rather prefatory fashion, in the array of terms for 'turning' which the movement uses: *shinkō* (神向 'turning towards God'); *henka* (変化 'change') *shinseika* (神性化 'divine transformation'); *sōnen tenkan* (想念転換 'change of the innermost attitude'); *dai yūtaan* (大Uターン 'the great U-turn'), and so on. Pye (2013: 42) has asked the question, in the context of ideas of transformation in Japanese religious practice, 'what exactly is the locus of religious or spiritual transformation in any one case?' The answer, in the case of Mahikari, is that the locus of transformation is potentially *everywhere*.

In order to make sense of this idea of change, I have seized upon the concept of conversion as the optic for my analysis, although 'optic' will turn out to be the wrong metaphor. It might be objected that my discussion does not concern conversion at all, in so far as the technical Japanese term for religious conversion – as deployed, for example, in sociological analyses of religious movements (e.g., Watanabe 2007) – *kaishin* 回心 features nowhere in my analysis. As Kawakami observes (2007: 23), however, without the qualifying adjective 'religious', the most basic translation of the English word 'conversion' into Japanese would be *tenkan* 転換 ('change', 'transformation'). The relevant question, then, as Kawakami goes on to ask, is *what* it

is that changes in any particular instance. The answer, once again with regards to Mahikari, is almost *anything*.

But this idea that conversion as an operation is not easily containable in terms of its scale, or readily definable in terms of its effects, is steadfastly *not* how conversion has been envisaged in academic writing on religion. In the sociology of religion, especially, conversion is straightforwardly understood as a process that happens to converts (even if the process itself has been understood as not so straightforward). This might well sound like a statement of the obvious. But it is an important part of my argument to suggest that the sociological literature on conversion all too often proceeds on the assumption that it already understands very well what conversion *means*, and that this understanding is arrived at in advance of any engagement with the discourse of the social actors whose affairs it purports to be an explanation of.

The arguments of Stark and Bainbridge (1996) are typical in this respect. In an explanatory move which is common to the sociology of religion, Stark and Bainbridge proceed by establishing an equivalence between conversion and 'affiliation', that is, adherence to a religious collective. They do so, as they explain, because conversion, as a term, is tainted: as a concept 'saturated with magical connotations', it is pronounced invalid as an aid to explanation. The term is 'unscientific', they say, 'because it suggests a radical, perhaps supernatural transformation in the nature of the person who is converted' (Stark and Bainbridge 1996: 195). Since it is supernatural, conversion is undetectable; it is not susceptible to rational and dispassionate procedures of measurement and is therefore invisible to secular, sociological analysis. Affiliation, or recruitment to a religious group, on the other hand, is 'easy to measure' (1996: 195); a sociologically respectable concept put in place of a term which connotes a suspicious, mystical process.

But consider the analytical results won from such an operation of replacement. To take an instance, Stark has applied this model of conversion-affiliation equivalence to the complex historical case of the rapid expansion of Christianity in the Roman Empire (Stark 1997). (The model itself, incidentally, was previously conceived in a study of the Unification Church (see Lofland and Stark 1965).) But precisely because he all too easily equates conversion with affiliation to a religious group (Stark 1997: 15-21), his analysis thereby passes right over what is most historically (and anthropologically) interesting about the extant evidence, which is that social actors in antiquity simply did *not* configure conversion in these terms. Paul, for example, described the process of becoming Christian in terms of 'calling' (*kaleó*). By this, he was assuredly not referring to institutional recruitment, but to the act by which people were called to God (See Chester 2003: 59-75). What Morrison has to say of Christian conversion is the twelfth century is equally telling: what conversion *meant* was that 'the heart turned, not to an institutional Church, nor even to a formal structure of doctrine called Christianity, but to Christ' (Morrison 1992a: 7). In other words, in assuming that affiliation will do duty as a conceptual substitute for conversion, Stark therefore presupposes exactly what it is that most requires explanation; namely, the question of just what conversion *was* in Late Antiquity.[6]

Curiously, the Comaroffs – whose intellectual motivations and theoretical preferences could not be more different – have nevertheless come to the same conclusion as Stark and Bainbridge. The Comaroffs argue that, although conversion may naturally serve as a topic of investigation, it is of no use as an 'analytical tool' owing to the fact that it is an 'ideologically saturated construct' (Comaroff and

[6] I am grateful to Joe Streeter for providing me with this example.

Comaroff 1991: 251). That is to say, the term is too loaded down with the conceptual baggage of Protestant Christianity. But to contend that conversion, as a concept, simply stands for *this*, is to suppose that its operations and effects are too well known for it to be applicable in analysis. To the extent that conversion is well understood, then one is able to make judgements about its potential applications. But one of my guiding principles in this thesis is to start by supposing that we do *not* know what conversion is or what it might be capable of (cf. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 12). There is, for instance, no reason to suppose that conversion need necessarily be understood as an exclusively religious designation – after all, the conversion of currency refers to a particular material action of transformation. Nor are we justified in assuming that it is a category restricted to Christianity. In so far as conversion simply means 'change', 'transformation', the relevant anthropological question becomes one of determining *what* it is that is changing, *where*, and by what means.

The problem faced by the sociology of conversion (as I shall aim to show in Chapter 2) is the curious constraint that it places upon its object of study. Since it is taken for granted that conversion refers to an interior process, the process itself is deemed to be inaccessible to the investigator. As Shimazono (2004: 178) puts it, 'Unless it is reported by those who have experienced it, there is no way we might know what it means.' In other words, from the point of view of sociology, conversion does not constitute what Hampshire (1971: 40) would call a 'clockable episode'. Conversions (to quote Hampshire again – entirely out of context) are neither 'visible, audible, or otherwise open to inspection by witnesses, who must therefore guess or infer their occurrence or simply wait to be told' (1971: 41). Since it is invisible, conversion as a process can only be detected indirectly. As Harding astutely points out, social scientists therefore find themselves in a position in which all they can do is to 'scrutinize the external psychological and social conditions of converts, looking for clues, patterns, and causes' (Harding 1999: 382).

But this presumption that conversion, because it is a subjective, and so apparently purely private experience – hence, not available for inspection by witnesses – even finds its way into more sophisticated presentations.

In two illuminating studies, Karl Morrison, who I referred to above, has mulled over the meanings of conversion against the historical background in which the work of the term is most well known: that of Christianity (1992a, 1992b). Indeed, Morrison argues that the term 'conversion', in its most potent sense, is the proper name of something singularly Christian and Western, a home-brewed notion, to which the West can claim exclusive rights (1992a: xiv; 1992b: xii, 146). As such, he says, the term is so deep and difficult ('profound, mystical') that it is of dubious comparative value (1992a: xiv-xv). But I do not think that this really holds. It does not, as I have already suggested, providing that we avoid any a priori notions of what conversion is up to, or what it is about, in any particular context. Even in the history of medieval Christianity, as Morrison shows (1992a), diverse events, passages and returns, in the human heart and in the world – but *always* in relation to God, passed under the name of conversion. In fact, Morrison's work on conversion in twelfth century Europe yields up comparative possibilities precisely because he pays such careful attention to the context and sticks close to the texts in all their nuances. He chides the academic notion that conversion is a decisive event, decided once and for all, that is sealed through the formal act of initiation into an institution. Such thinking follows a logic that is outside the world of the texts and cuts conversion adrift from what was understood to be the *real* in conversion, that it was an act of God, a gift of Grace (1992a: 3, 7, 24, 186; 1992b: ix, x). Conversion, Morrison demonstrates, was not

conceived as some definitive, final transformation, but as a lifelong, ascetic project, so that entry into the monastic order 'was not the full *conversio*, but only its beginning' (1992a: 14), the beginning of a striving with the self, that could only be said to have been decided, once and for all, with death (1992b: xi).

Morrison wants to discover what went under the name of conversion in a few chosen moments in the European past. Because, then, what he is doing is history, and all there is are texts, Morrison says that he can only talk of texts and not experiences. The experience of conversion (the 'living event') (1992b: 2) is lost; all that remains is the text, writing about conversion, which, though it may commemorate the event, is not a retrieval, but an inscription of the event in a different order. The event, so inscribed, is thus made-up, which is to say, as everyone does nowadays, that it is not false, but something constructed, and it is only of this textual thing – conversion as written – that we can speak (1992b: vii). To be sure, this is a commendable point of method, going as it does against the naïve assumption that one can somehow see through texts, seeing straight, without mediation, into the mind or experience of the writer (see Sharf 1998: 111). But hearken to how Morrison figures the difference between texts and experiences. The text is a 'thing made', the durable product of an intentional act of creation. The experience, on the other hand, is 'a thing felt', something given that goes in the blink of an eye (1992a: 5, 23). In experience 'conversion is not so much understood as felt. The experience is esthetic, which is also to say affective, and often instantaneous' (1992b: 2). Thus, the experience comes under the side of the aesthetic, the text, of the poetic, and the relation between them is the reduction of one to the other: 'the process by which what began in esthetics was rendered into poetics' (1992a: 3).

But this way of putting it makes me wonder about conversion and feeling and making. Morrison distinguishes making from feeling, and I raise no objection about this, but then, if I read him right, he says that conversion is the retrograde sense made of sensation. In other words, that in something called conversion, feeling comes first and is made over, subsequently, into a text. Could it not be, instead, that feeling and making implicate each other, that their relations are, in fact, chiasmic, so that one cannot say for sure where, on which side, the process begins? To imagine the aesthetic as prior to the poetic is to imply that the experience is pre-textual, that it is a singular event outside of language altogether. We cannot see through texts, perhaps, but there, behind the text remain the traces of the experience, the afterglow of the event that, only in and after the text, is made into a thing called 'conversion'. But surely, the experience of conversion, this apparently private, solitary event, cannot come prior to all texts or interpretation – prior to its reduction 'to the name' of 'conversion' (1992a: xiii), or else it would not be an experience as such. That is, there cannot be *first* a pure experience that later becomes, is given the name of, 'conversion' only through its inscription in a text. It is only possible for an experience to be called 'conversion' at all because it receives it definition within a particular collective. One can see a similar assumption at work in Whitehead's ethnographic study of Scientologists, when she argues that conversion is the process by which a symbolic system gives 'a name and a set of implications to the otherwise senseless elements of experience' (1987: 26). Here, Whitehead's senseless experience matches Shimazono's unknowable process.

Morrison's focus on feeling is helpful, however. I suggested above that conversion would serve as my analytical optic, but it would be more appropriate to speak of a tactic, since my aim will be to deploy the concept of conversion tactically, tactfully –

if you will – as a counterpoint to a notion of conversion conceived as an invisible, interior happening. Conversions in Mahikari are events that implicate bodies; they are very often sensuous events, visceral processes, actualised in the skin. In terms of Morrison's two categories of sensation and creation – crossed-over rather than serially related – I will try to show how conversion in Mahikari is a matter of sensuous making and the making of sense. Equally, as I hope to show, the scale and duration of change is by no means fixed or foreseeable. Many transformations in Mahikari consist of multiple, minor sensory turnings – small-scale emanations and emergences, which are nevertheless taken as evidence for more extensive cosmic processes. But whether minor or major, ephemeral or enduring, conversion is a matter of sensation, and the connection to divinity is a form of relationality that is often defined in terms of tactility. The relationship between tactility and religious practice has been explored in a number of a works in anthropology and material culture studies (e.g., Chidester 2000, De Witte 2015; and the contributions in Classen 2005: Part VIII), but the notion of conversion as a materially mediated condition and process remains relatively untouched as a topic (but see Belzen 1999; De Witte 2011; Swift 2012). As such, my argument here is intended to contribute to this emergent field of inquiry. As the founder of Mahikari has preached to his followers: 'Get in touch with the *kami*, get in touch with the light' (*kami ni sesse yo, hikari ni sesse yo* 神に接せよ、光に接せよ) (Shodai Oshienushi 2003: 40). My anthropological exposition of Mahikari practices is an attempt to get in touch with what this touching means.

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

In Chapter One, I introduce the Primary Training Course (*shokyū kenshū* 初級研修), participation in which is the means of entry into Mahikari, and I provide an ethnographic description of my own experience of taking it. Although the course itself appears to be didactic in design, I suggest that, as an event, a different dynamic is at work, in which the major aim is less about the transmission of information than it is about the elicitation of transformation.

In Chapter Two, I turn to consider Mahikari's key practice of *okiyome* (お浄め), a purification procedure which involves the radiation of divine light to different parts of the body. Since *Okiyome* is understood by its practitioners to produce palpable effects, I explore these tangible sensations of transformation and consider what the consequences of such changes might be for the sociological concept of conversion.

Chapter Three is devoted to an exposition of the experimental tendency in Mahikari; namely, the idea that *okiyome* is a power that may be tested in experimental trials, which often include jam jars. By means of a conceptual contrast drawn between two differing types of activities – representation and intervention – I propose that Mahikari experiments disclose an understanding of *okiyome* as an empirically verifiable and efficacious practice of intervention.

In Chapter Four, I focus further on the practice of *okiyome* with respect to the function of its form. In particular, I consider how, in a particular phase of *okiyome*, there is a risk that possessing spirits might emerge in the person receiving light. Under

the rubric of what I term 'ritual physics', I argue that the importance given to form can be understood as a means of managing this risk, and of simultaneously eliciting it.

Chapter Five is concerned with the way in which Mahikari members engage with the teachings of the movement. I document a number of activities that members are enjoined to engage in, such as study sessions, and I describe the spiritual and ethical expectations and objectives that members attempt to achieve in their practices. From a consideration of the common expression, 'to incorporate the teachings' (*oshie wo mi ni tsukeru* 教えを身に付ける), I explore how this imparts a notion of learning as a form of tactile contact.

Chapter Six describes a journey by bus (*basu sanpai* バス参拝) to the centre of the Mahikari world, the Suza Main World Shrine in Takayama, to which members travel by bus every month, in order to be in the presence of revelation. I contemplate these trips in the light of theories of pilgrimage and give consideration to the manner in which Mahikari members experience the space of Suza as a dazzling, saturating experience.

In the Conclusion, I examine how the types of transformational practices found in Mahikari might relate, once again, to prevailing concepts of conversion in academia, and I end by highlighting the relation between conversion and anthropological translation as activities of transformation.

Chapter One:

Bodies in Place: Luminosity and Lateral Transition in the Mahikari Primary Course

If, as Le Corbusier (1995: 83) famously remarked, a house is a 'machine for living', then a Mahikari dojo is a machine for purification. A Mahikari dōjō (道場) is typically situated on the top floor of a building, or, in cases where the building is dedicated to the exclusive use of the Mahikari organisation, then the dojo proper will be located on the uppermost floor. There is a good reason for this: elevation is a function of purity, and altitude correlates with spiritual attitude. A Mahikari dojo is a space of practice which houses a divine object known as a *goshintai* (御神体　lit., honourable *kami* body). As in Shinto shrines, the *goshintai* is a material support or repository for a divinity (see Grapard 2016: 85-86). It would thus be highly disrespectful to position this object in a place where people could walk above it. One evening at the Osaka Main Dojo, noticing that a curtain had been drawn in front of the *goshintai*, Suzuki-san, a *dōshi* (導士 minister), explained to me that workmen had been on the roof and so the *goshintai* had temporarily been taken down, since it was not permitted for people to 'be above Su god' (*su no kamisama no ue ni* スの神様の上に).[7]

Su god – or more properly, Mioya Motosu Mahikari Ōmikami-sama (御親元主真光大御神　lit., 'Honourable parent-origin-lord, true-light, great-honourable-god') – is the principal divinity in Mahikari, rendered present in the form of a comma-like mark (*chon* チョン) in the middle of a golden disk painted on a hanging scroll. It is the scroll itself which is the *goshintai*, and it hangs in a shrine against a golden background, brightly lit with electric lights. Just as a vertical principle determines the position of the dojo, so too within the dojo itself, height is a relative indicator of the sacred and an affordance for reverence. The *goshintai* constitutes the central axis of practice in Mahikari, and as Louveau (2012: 178) notes,'the whole organisation of space revolves around it'. At one of the regular 'clean-up' days (*bikabi* 美化日) at the small dojo in Akashi, Shōji-san – a male Mahikari practitioner I got to know quite well – and I were tasked with wiping down the fluorescent striplights that ran across the dojo's ceiling. But this necessitated my getting up onto a stepladder, and so passing higher than the *chon*, the divine mark which punctuates the *goshintai*, even though a curtain had been drawn across it for the occasion. Accordingly, Shōji-san

[7] A similar procedure applies to Shinto shrines. As the priest at Hitomaru Jinja (aka Kakinomoto Jinja) in Akashi explained to me. When repairs to the roof of the inner sanctuary (*honden*) are carried out, the *kami* is temporarily conveyed to another place (an operation known as *kari sengū* 仮遷宮, 'temporary shrine transfer'). The operation of moving the '*kami* body' when a Mahikari dojo relocates is known – as it also is in Shinto – as *senza* 遷座 (lit., 'transferring the seat').

advised that we should make prayers (*omairi* お参り) to apologise to the *kami-sama*, as well as to inform the deity of our intentions. Indeed, even the dispensation of cleaning cloths was determined by criteria of verticality and proximity vis-à-vis the *goshintai.* Cloths marked with a red tag were meant only for cleaning above what is called the *goshinzen* (御神前 the 'space in front of the honourable *kami*'); those with a blue tag for below; and for the space outside the *goshinzen*, green for above, and yellow for below.[8]

But it is the more regular dojo practices of praying and, most importantly, of dispensing purification (*okiyome* お浄め) that are oriented according to the position of the *goshintai*. In praying, as well as in receiving *okiyome*, one faces towards the *goshintai*; in giving *okiyome* one faces away from it. A Mahikari dojo is generally a space spanned by *tatami* mats; across the middle of that space is usually a wide strip of red carpet, which extends like a runway up to the *goshintai*. One traverses this carpet in order to perform prayers and to make monetary offerings (the offering box is placed directly in front of the *goshintai*). In keeping with, what we might call, the formal topography of respect and hospitality, the side of the dojo furthest from the entrance is designated the 'upper seat' (*kamiza* 上座).[9] Thus, a horizontal distinction is introduced, in addition to the vertical, for the other divine image, which complements the *goshintai* in Mahikari dojos, is a small statue of Izunome-sama (more formally, Izunome Ōkunitama Ōkuninushisama 伊都能売大国魂大国主様 who governs the material world).[10] The image of Izunome-sama is always positioned on the *kamiza* side of the dojo – that is, the side where the distance to the entrance is furthest. But laterality plays a more crucial role in the practice of *okiyome*, for the person receiving divine light sits facing the *goshintai*, while the person giving light is required to sit with their back to it. This is so because the divine light (*mihikari* み光) streams down invisibly from the *chon*, high up on the *goshintai*, into the light-giver's back, and so out through the palm of their hand. When a number of people are engaged in *okiyome*, the practicing pairs will form up in rows on the *tatami* mats on either side of the red carpet, and care is taken, when moving around the dojo, not to walk between pairs of *okiyome* practitioners, or otherwise cross sideways, between the light-emitting *goshintai* and the back of a person giving *okiyome*, for to do so is to cut across the light rays.[11]

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[8] Okada (1993: 138) reports a more elaborate classification of cleaning materials in Mahikari into twenty-eight types. Such a rigorous classification, as he says, is 'less practical than it is religious' (実用的なものというより、宗教的区分である). The division of cleaning cloths according to their use can, however, commonly be seen in other disciplinary contexts, however, such as the 'cleaning time' (掃除の時間) performed by pupils in Japanese schools.

[9] On these principles as they are instituted in formal social occasions, see, e.g., Kawano (2005: 68-69).

[10] In appearance, the image of Izunome-sama closely resembles Daikoku (see Davis 1980: 24), a divinity associated with prosperity – he carries a bag over his shoulder and wields a wish-fulfilling mallet. In truth, although prayers made at the dojo always include Izunome, transformations and other spiritual and material benefits that Mahikari members may experience are not generally ascribed to this deity. One member I knew – Maki-san – wasn't even sure what the function of this divinity was. Louveau (2012: 182) reports similar uncertainty.

[11] Regarding this code of dojo conduct – of not crossing between *okiyome* partners – Miyanaga (1983: 98) states that it is 'strictly prohibited'. This was not so in my experience, where it was rather more a prescription than a proscription. In any case, there are those who don't follow the rules, such as young

The practice of *okiyome* outside the dojo may also be aligned according to the radial distribution of divine light. Thus, in Mahikari centres which occupy more than one floor, in cases when *okiyome* cannot be performed in the dojo proper – when, e.g., a study session is in progress – members engaging in the practice will often position themselves in relation to the *goshintai*, even though they cannot see it. In Osaka Dai-dojo (大道場), for instance, a sign on the wall indicated the position of the *goshintai* in the dojo on the floor above, so that members could orient themselves accordingly. Or, again, when Shōji-san would insist on giving *okiyome* to me in my rented room, he would take up a particular position on the floor – with his back facing towards the north-east – which, he explained, was in the direction of Suza (主座), the Mahikari main shrine in Takayama, almost two-hundred miles away, in Gifu prefecture. The overall importance of the orientation of the body in Mahikari practice is underlined by Okada Kōya (岡田晃弥), the Acting Master of Teachings (*Oshienushisama-odairi* 教え主様お代理). In a sermon on the determinations of direction in prayer, he emphasizes how essential it is to establish proper directivity (*hōkōsei* 方向性) towards divinities. To pray in the wrong direction is to risk attracting the attention of 'false gods and spirits' (*jashin jarei* 邪神邪霊) (Okada 2003: 22).

Thus, in orienting oneself in the space of the dojo – as well as in the orientation of dojo-space itself – ritual attention is paid both to verticality and laterality.[12] Where verticality correlates with purity (i.e., the height of the dojo; the correct positioning of the *goshintai*), laterality is identified with purification (that is, the position of the body during the practice of *okiyome*). It would be easy to multiply examples. Indeed, this concern with the vertical and lateral axial dimensions in ritual operates according to something like a fractal principle in Mahikari, since it recapitulates across scales, and is reproduced across contexts, from the installation of the *goshintai* and the protocols of behaviour with respect to it, to the standard operating procedures for handling the *omitama* (御み霊 lit., 'honourable spirit'). The *omitama* is a divine device carried next to the body, which enables the capacity for Mahikari members to perform *okiyome*. Resembling a golden locket, it is often referred to in the English literature on Mahikari as an 'amulet' (see, e.g., Davis 1980), but it is perhaps better described as a high maintenance, wearable technology, with salvific applications. The *omitama* is to be worn on the body at all times, but this object has a front (*omote* 表) and a back (*ura* 裏) and *kamikumite* are cautioned not to wear it the wrong way round. Neither should it be allowed to hang below the waist, and for these reasons, it is pinned inside a special pocket sewn into one's underwear. In exceptional circumstances, when the *omitama* must be taken off (for example, when taking a shower or a bath, when swimming or having sex, or when one undergoes an X-ray), it should be carefully deposited in a place – purified in advance by means of *okiyome* – which should be above waist height.

Taken all together, these correlations disclose a cosmology in which purity and position are cardinal concerns; purity – to invert Mary Douglas' celebrated formulation on pollution (Douglas 1966) – being very much a question of matter in its

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children. See Reinders (2015: 23) for an example of how children can be oblivious to the logic of practice associated with a 'ritual topography'.

[12] On the organization of the dojo-space in Mahikari in general, see Miyanaga (1983: 95-103); Louveau (2012: 178-183, 231).

right place. But the significance of position in relation to purity has further cosmological and ontological implications.[13]

As Shōji-san explained to me on a number of occasions, purification is a 'cosmic function' (*uchū no hataraki* 宇宙の働き). As such, human beings have been given only two 'methods of purifying' (*kiyomeru hōhō* 清める方法) their bodies. One is through the dispensation of divine light; the other is through the cleansing that comes with illness and affliction. Mahikari members or *kamikumite* (神組み手 lit., 'those holding hands with the *kami*') are able to transmit purifying light because they are equipped with an *omitama*. Since they have been gifted with this ability, *kamikumite* are 'able to choose' (*erabu koto ga dekiru* 選ぶことが出来る), but *mikumite* (未組み手 non-members of Mahikari) cannot. Not possessing an *omitama*, *mikumite* are unable to make a choice in how the cosmic function of purification will affect them. They are confined to a passive position – cosmologically and spiritually 'stuck', since, as Shōji-san put it, they are only capable of 'movement sideways' (*yoko ni ugokeru dake* 横に動けるだけ); and so they 'cannot rise upwards' (*ue ni agarenai* 上に上がれない). Mahikari members, on the other hand, are able to purify themselves and so raise their 'spiritual level' (*reisō* 霊層). That is to say, endowed with powers of ritual intervention, *kamikumite* are, in effect, capable of ascension, of vertical movement along an axis of increasing purity. Although, to be sure, any increase is incremental since it is attendant on continual practice, and the accumulation of pollution remains a constant (see Louveau 2012: 196). Equally, even for a *kamikumite*, upwards movement is relative. Shōji-san was rather a desperate case in point, since, as he said to me once, somewhat despairingly, he had taken the Mahikari 'Primary Course' (*shokyū kenshū* 初級研修) some seventeen years previously, and had yet to advance to a higher level. Vertical movement in this sense, into the higher levels of membership, is conditional on bringing others into Mahikari by persuading them to take the 'Primary Course' in turn. Above this, there are two further levels, with corresponding courses: the Intermediate (*chūkyū kenshū* 中級研修), and the Advanced Courses (*jōkyū kenshū* 上級研修). For the Intermediate Course, the entry requirement is that a member brings two people into Mahikari, and for the Advanced Course, five (see Okada 1993: 118).[14] The Advanced Course is only held in Japan, but lower levels of *kenshū* regularly take place in Mahikari dojos around the world, with the Primary Course generally taking place once a month.

Admission to Mahikari requires only that one takes the three-day Primary *kenshū*. The course does not end with any examination; those attending it are not required to show how much of the doctrine they have taken in, as is the case with some of the newer, new religions in Japan (see Hardacre 1996: 202). In Kōfuku no kagaku (幸福の科学 Science of Happiness), for example, passing an entrance examination was, once upon a time, a prerequisite for membership (Fukui 2004: 134-135),[15] and the

[13] A comparable cosmological topography has been brilliantly documented by Grapard in the case of Shugendō, where equivalences 'between altitude, cleanliness, morality and desire, and salvation' were established on Mount Hiko in Kyushu (Grapard 2016: 136).

[14] McVeigh (1997: 56) has the same information, but in a paper published a few years later, Smith gives figures of five for Intermediate, and twenty for Advanced *kenshū* (Smith 2002: 160), which suggests that the regulations were subsequently changed.

[15] Entrance exams have since been stopped in Kōfuku no kagaku, but the group still holds voluntary exams internally, for members to improve themselves by testing their knowledge of doctrine. See Fukui (2004: 141).

neo-Buddhist movement Sōka Gakkai (創価学会 Value Creation Society) holds exams which test the candidates' knowledge of Nichiren doctrine (McLaughlin 2010: 11). But Mahikari's Primary Course is distinct from this in that it involves no assessment at all; indeed, the only criterion for passing the course is to attend it. To attend the course is to receive the *omitama*, the 'amulet' which endows the wearer with the miraculous capability of giving *okiyome*, but attendees on the course, even if they fall asleep during it, will still receive the *omitama*, all the same.

From the fact that the only requirement for admission into Mahikari is attendance on the Primary Course, regardless of whether or not one pays attention to the knowledge being communicated, I shall suggest that Mahikari *kenshū* is conceived as less pedagogical – in terms of the transmission of ideas – than as ontological, in terms of the transformation of persons. And relatedly, that this transition is enacted and consecrated by means of a physical and lateral shift of position, a rotation which correlates with a change of position which is both spiritual and vertical. Such a movement, I will argue, is entirely intelligible within a system in which the personal is deemed to be intimately associated with the cosmological.

I arrived at Osaka Dai-dojo, as instructed, just after 9.30 in the morning, half an hour before the Primary Course began. Taking off my shoes at the entrance and finding a space to slot them into the shoe-racks that are already fairly full, I was recognised by a young woman who said that she has been waiting for me. She was wearing a green blazer and cream-coloured skirt, the uniform of the Mahikari Youth Corps (*Mahikari seinentai* 真光青年隊). Introducing herself in English as Eriko, she said that she would give me *okiyome*. She told me, as we went up the stairs, that she was until recently affiliated to the dojo in Vancouver. We reached the second floor – the top floor, busy with people. Here, the large hall had been rearranged for the training course. The *goshinzen*, the place "in front of the *kami*", usually an open space spanned by *tatami* mats in which *okiyome* is practiced, was now laid out with lines of desks and chairs. Some people were already sitting down, others were engaged in *okiyome* in a narrow strip of free space by the entrance. Eriko and I sat down here. We prayed quickly, and then I shut my eyes while she called out the *Amatsu norigoto* and gave *okiyome* to my forehead. There was neither enough time nor space for more thorough purifications, so we finished after ten minutes, praying once again. With a little time left before the course, Eriko directed me to a display of accessories on sale; little things useful for the Mahikari member-to-be. I bought a couple of prayer book covers and, in readiness for receiving the divine amulet (the *omitama*) on Sunday, a small box for safely putting the *omitama* in, on those exceptional occasions when it has to be taken off the body.

I was heading for my desk – all the desks were designated with name-badges – when I bumped into Maki-san and her friend. I had expected to meet Maki-san, she would take the course again, she told me, but seeing her friend surprised me, since I had met her only once before, on an occasion (which had nothing to do with Mahikari) when Maki-san had asked me to give a short talk about Britain at a high-school in Wakayama prefecture. I supposed that, somehow, Maki-san had talked her friend round to doing the training course. Still brooding over this, I took my seat, and pinned on my name-badge. On every desk was a copy of the tan-coloured textbook for the beginner's training course. My textbook was in English – I could only take the course in translation, I had been told – and next to it a little radio transmitter for

broadcasting the course in English. Yoshino-san, a middle-aged woman who sat behind me, translated the course extempore, speaking softly into a microphone.

Every one was seated by now. Looking around, I counted some sixty-five people taking the course; a fairly even mix of men and women, and about ten children. The mood in the room indicated that something was about to start, and sure enough, a Mahikari *dōshi* (a minister) appeared, dressed in a dark suit, and began instructing us on how to do the *Amatsu norigoto*, the Prayer of Heaven. Practice every morning and evening, he said. And he gave us a short demonstration of the prayer in a voice that relayed powerfully through the loudspeakers around the room. The *dōshi* then informed us of some (very slight) variations in the pronunciation of the prayer. The last line, for example, can be said in two different ways. Either is okay, he pronounced (*dochira demo kekkō desu* どちらでも結構です). Again, he said, while calling out the prayer, when one needs to draw breath, this is okay at any point (*doko demo kekkō desu* どこでも結構です). Armed with this advice, the *dōshi* led everyone in practicing the Prayer of Heaven, going through it slowly together. Most – myself included – had not yet memorised it and so they read it out from the prayer books they held up in front of their faces. The bowing and clapping that accompanies the prayer was also somewhat awkward done seated at a desk, since the prayer is normally done down on one's knees. We practiced slowly again. The *dōshi* advised that calling out the prayer should take about one minute and twenty seconds. We practiced again once more, and then the *dōshi* withdrew. There was a pause. Everyone waited, shuffling. Then a woman's voice announced from the loudspeakers that we should pray silently for a space of time (*mokutō* 黙祷). Looking up again, I could see Kimura *dōjōchō* (道場長), the dojo president, at the far end of the hall. He led us in a prayer to Su-god, to *Mioya motosu mahikari ōmikami*, more bowing and clapping, and then the training course formally began.

Standing at the lectern, Kimura *dōjōchō*, wired with a microphone on his lapel, declared that what we were about to learn over the three days would not be common sense, that only children aged ten or over may take the course, and that there would be no time for any questions during the lectures. He moved to a big blackboard next to the lectern and began chalking up information. 'Lucky Healthy Yang Light Children', he wrote (*L.H. Yōkōshi no tomo* LH 陽光子の友), which was the original name of the Mahikari organisation. Then, 'Reverend Okada Kōtama', the founder of Mahikari, *Sukuinushisama* (救い主様 the Master of Salvation) as he is respectfully known. Next, *Sūkyō Mahikari*, True Light Supra-Religion. The dojo president told us that, although Mahikari is registered under law as a religion in Japan, Mahikari is *not* a religion. There are five major religions in the world, he said, and wrote their names in a line across the blackboard: Buddhism (*Bukkyō* 仏教), Islam (*Kaikyō* 回教), Christianity (*Kirisutokyō* キリスト教), Confucianism (*Jukyō* 儒教), and Taoism (*Dōkyō* 道教). He drew a line above each, running up spokewise towards a central point, above which he wrote 'the great origin' (*ōmoto* 大元). Mahikari is the foundation of the five world religions, he proclaimed. And so, a Buddhist, for example, taking the training course will come to a better understanding of Buddhism, because Mahikari is the very source of Buddhism itself. Mahikari is not a religion (*shūkyō* 宗教) it is *sūkyō* (崇教), *above* religion. It is the true form (*hontai* 本体) of religion. There are Buddhists and Shinto priests in Mahikari, he revealed, backing up his point with a story about a Mr Okamura, a Buddhist priest, who, on completing the training course, was able at last to understand Buddhism for the first time.

Often, in the moments when Kimura *dōjōchō* paused briefly in his talk, a young man – a member of the Mahikari Youth Corps – quietly standing on the left, stepped forward to wipe the blackboard clean with careful, measured movements of his arms, in steady sweeps of the board-rubber downwards. This was in marked contrast to the hurried motility of the dojo president at the blackboard; a kind of urgency in his arm and hand, writing out *kanji* in a quick flow of strokes in chalk. Then, after a fast-paced, earnest exposition of the concepts on the board, unfolding the ideas through parables and analogies and little anecdotes, the writing was erased to clean space for the next topic, and so on and so forth. Many people in the hall, I could see, looking up from my own note-taking, were bent over their notebooks, rapidly copying what the dojo president wrote up. More than this, in fact, some people tried to copy out the particular terms and slogans from the board in the same colours that they were written in, sometimes switching pens (red, yellow or blue) when Kimura switched the chalk to a different colour.

The dojo president went back to the blackboard, writing up the word "medicine" (*igaku* 医学). Mahikari encompasses medical science, he stated. Its aim is to free people from illness. The principle of health (*ken no ri* 健の理) he wrote in red chalk, is freedom from illness (*mubyōka* 無病化) he wrote in yellow. Mahikari also encompasses science, asserted Kimura. Therefore, he said, summing up, because it is above religion, more than religion (*sūkyō*) Mahikari contains religion, science and medicine. Mahikari offers principles for all humanity (*jinrui genri* 人類原理). Mahikari members are 'people of light' (*hikari no hito* 光の人) he told us, moving on to a new theme. In our everyday doings with other people, we should maintain a sunny disposition, be bright and cheerful (*akarui* 明るい). Greeting people cheerfully, saying 'Good morning!' gladly, for example, will brighten up a situation. Aim to become someone who is missed on those days when you don't go in to work, Kimura suggested. Such people are people of light. Over the next three days of the training course, we can all become positive and sunny people of light.

The dojo president wrote up another maxim: 'The principle of step-by-step' (*dan dan no ri* 段々の理). He explained that the transformation into a person of light comes gradually, little by little. By attending the training course, some of us may begin to feel sick, to have headaches, or diarrhoea. We should not be fearful of such experiences, since these are the effects (*kōka* 効果) of purification. The whole dojo is filled with divine light and we are bathing in it; the dojo is a 'hot spring of light' (*hikari no onsen* 光の温泉) If your head begins to hurt, or your nose starts to run, these are not the symptoms of a cold, they are proofs that our bodies are becoming purified. Our bodies are 'steadily becoming clean' (*don don kirei ni natte imasu* どんどんきれいになっています), the dojo president told us.

There followed a couple of stories – that I did not quite catch – about Mahikari members in Brazil and Peru, and the miraculous benefits they had received through taking the training course. Though what you are learning now may sound strange, Kimura said, in three to five years you will realise that everything in Mahikari is true. He went on to explain the three kinds of attitudes that we ought to maintain in listening to the lectures. Firstly, 'Remove your preconceptions' (*sennyūkan o toru* 先入観を取る), he wrote up in white chalk. Suppose that you have a cup full of tea, he explained, before one can pour new tea in, one must throw the old tea out. Similarly, we must jettison all our prejudices if we are to let the truth of Mahikari teachings into our lives. The second attitude required is to be obedient, receptive (*sunao* 素直), to be

docile as a child in accepting the will of the *kami*. This sentiment is made manifest in a play on words, an alternative spelling of the word *sunao* that the dojo president had written on the blackboard. He instructed us that *sunao* (素直) is taken to be *Su-nao* (ス直) in Mahikari, where the *Su* stands for Su-god. A *sunao* attitude, then, means being obedient to god; literally 'straight' (*nao* 直) with Su-god. Consider birds and butterflies, the colours of flowers or the flight of dragonflies, Kimura reflected. These are all things that surpass the work of science; they are 'not makeable things' (*tsukureru mono de wa nai* 作れるものではない). Because of this, they point to the reality of will in the world. To be *sunao* is therefore to be accepting of the will of the *kami*.

The last attitude to adopt is 'humility', 'humility of heart' (*kokoro no geza* 心の下座). This is a lowliness of mind that we should adopt before Su-god. As Kimura explained, conjuring up the metaphor of the teacup again: if a cup is held higher than the teapot, one cannot pour the tea into it. The cup – whether well made or not – will be able to receive tea only when it is below the teapot. In the same way, the more humble we are before God – the lower we position ourselves – the more divine light will enter us; the more easily we will be purified and saved.

Moving on, Kimura told us to refer to page eleven in our textbooks. Under the rubric 'The common wish of humanity' (*jinrui kyōtsū no negai* 人類共通の願い), the text poses the question 'what is happiness?', and the answer given is: 'health' (*ken* 健), 'harmony' (*wa* 和) and 'prosperity' (*fu* 富). The dojo president considered how convenient our lives are nowadays – travel by train or plane is quick and inexpensive, for example – but has the world improved? No, Kimura suggested. Nowadays, we live in a world of terrorism and traffic accidents. Medicine may have advanced but chronic illnesses (*mansei no yamai* 慢性の病) and strange diseases (*kibyô* 奇病) are on the increase. And scientific progress has lead to further problems, such as global warming and the destruction of the ozone layer. Our oil is fast running out. Our energy, too, is fast running out (*don don naku natte imasu* どんどんなくなっています), he repeated. Kimura observed that humanity might have little time left. Despite our advances, we have been moving in the opposite direction to happiness. The dojo president offered the following parable. Imagine that you board a train at Nagoya with the intention of going to Tokyo, only to find yourself on the way to Fukuoka in Kyushu (in the opposite direction). So too, we wish for happiness (*kōfuku* 幸福) but we are destined for unhappiness (*fukō* 不幸). We are riding on the wrong train, he said. The training course is our chance to change trains, to turn around, to make a "big U-turn" (*dai yūtaan* 大Uターン). We should be riding on the train line made by god.

While the dojo president was speaking, while I was trying to take everything in – to take it down on paper – I noticed the two middle-aged women sitting in front of me. One, her body sloping forward, focused on her note-taking, while the woman next to her, clearly a Mahikari member, was holding her right hand over the head of the other, quietly giving *okiyome* to her neck and shoulders. Indeed, from time to time, I could see Mahikari members give *okiyome*, hands poised over the shoulders or the back of the person sitting beside them, purifying their bodies as they listened to the lecture. My attention began to waver. Kimura was speaking of the importance of showing gratitude (*kansha* 感謝) to , to our ancestors and to others. We will be able to change trains, he said, returning to his earlier theme, only if we abandon our preconceptions, act with humility of heart, learn the teachings and put them into

practice. Everyone has a role (*yakuwari* 役割) given by Su-god, and they will be trained on the way towards the fulfilment of their roles. The training (*kitae* 鍛え) and trials (*tameshi* 試し) will be more severe for the person allotted a greater mission in history. The dojo president made mention of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the Tokugawa warlord, and Ninomiya Sontoku, a reformer of agriculture in the nineteenth century, as figures who had struggled through much hardship to achieve great things. Ninomiya was a paragon of the virtues of hard work, who, as a child, spent his days collecting firewood and his nights studying by the light of the moon reflected off the snow. Kimura also referred to Moses who, he said, underwent years of training in the Sinai desert before he encountered God on the mountain.

At this point, the dojo president stopped his talk for the lunch break. The mood in the room became relaxed. People chatted and took out their packed lunches. Some, like me, had paid a small sum for Mahikari to organise our lunch. A member of the Youth Corps brought a bento box to my table. In front of us, a large poster had been fixed up onto the blackboard – 'Words of gratitude before a meal' (*shokuzen kansha no kotoba* 食前感謝の言葉). Eriko, the Mahikari Youth member who had given *okiyome* to me that morning, appeared at the blackboard, and called out the words, encouraging us to read them aloud along with her:

We offer gratitude for all the blessings of heaven and earth and for the efforts of everyone involved in making this. *Itadakimasu*.

Tenchi issai no megumi to, kore o tsukurareta hitobito no gokurō o kansha shite itadakimasu (天地一切の恵みと、これを作られた人々のご苦労に感謝をして頂きます).

I got up and left quickly without eating, keen for some fresh air and a cigarette – if one can square those contradictions. Outside, in the car park next to the dojo building, a few men and women were stood about smoking in the bright, cold November sunshine. Feeling somewhat better, I went back inside, upstairs into the dojo, and ate my bento lunch in a hurry. Eriko came out to the blackboard again, leading everyone in the 'Words of gratitude after a meal' (*shokugo kansha no kotoba* 食後感謝の言葉).

Kimura *dōjōchō* emerged once more at the far end of the hall. He knelt down towards the *goshintai*, with his back to us, and we followed him in prayer, bowing and clapping, while he gave thanks to the *kami* for the lunch, and for allowing us to recommence the training course. Moving to the lectern again, the dojo president apologised for the brevity of the lunch break, but there are many more teachings to impart to you, he said, and he launched into his talk once again…

The rest of the day dragged on, with the dojo president resolutely pressing on with the lecture, working through the themes in the textbook. The pace of revelation was fast and difficult to follow. In the abstract, Kimura would introduce a particular principle of order – a divine law that governs the functions of the universe – and would instruct us in a right mode of behaviour that we ought to follow in accordance with that principle. Commonly, this was taught through stories of transgression and recovery; stories of lives led at first backwards, in opposition to divine principles, in which suffering and ill luck were constant obstacles. But, these lives would straighten out with the turn to Mahikari. We were given many examples of people who had put

the divine principles into action, and who had been blessed with health, harmony and prosperity as a consequence. In actuality, however, these laws and lessons were accompanied by frequent excursions into more complex territory: divine etymology, astrophysics, Buddhist metaphysics… At one point, during a dense discussion of the upper atmosphere, Kimura filled the blackboard with scribbled diagrams and *kanji*. Between the blue arc of the ionosphere and the white-chalk earth, a stream of red dashes described a flow of high-energy particles (*kō enerugi bunshi* 高エネルギ分子). Above and all around, plus and minus signs in various combinations were said to illustrate the charged elements of electrons and mesons.

All this sort of information was intended, I guess, to make clear the truth of the divine principles, and to justify them by means of accumulated proofs. But, listening to the lectures, and trying to take down on paper what was being said, I found it difficult to separate what was relevant from what was not. It was hard to pick out the excursive, the additional, from the essential. Perhaps everything said was essential, I thought, and so I tried to write everything down, but, of course, this was not possible. The sermon was constantly turning to new topics, always moving forward, although I never knew where it was going. The only endpoint that one could look forward to with any certainty was the end of the course, the moment, on Sunday, when we would receive the *omitama*, the divine amulet. The objective of the training course was, at one level, the movement towards this moment. Up to that time, however, trying to keep up was a struggle.

At the beginning of each day, there was an earnest mood in the dojo, a feeling of serious study as most people sat with pens in hand, listening attentively and taking notes. But as the day wore on, attention spans began to flag, and I could see some people bent over asleep at their desks. None of the Mahikari staff or the members of the Youth Corps – who were stood around the dojo throughout the lectures, seemed at all concerned by this. During the lunch-break on Saturday, I was having a cigarette outside. Two young men were smoking nearby, hardly speaking. But then one said to the other in an exasperated tone, 'I'm really sleepy' (*mecha nemutai naa* めちゃ眠たいなあ). 'It's harsh, isn't it' (*kitsui ne* きついね), his friend responded. This little exchange, I think, puts the experience of doing the training course in a nutshell. The three days of lectures taxed both energy and understanding.[16]

Now, I took the course in translation, as I indicated above. Yoshino-san – a woman who did much work for the International Section (*kokusaibu* 国際部) of the Mahikari organisation – translated the lectures into English. With no transcript to read from, she translated what Kimura was saying off the cuff, a formidable achievement. Her voice was constantly in my left ear, transmitted through an earpiece connected to a little receiver on my desk. At the same time, however, I was trying to pay attention to what the dojo president was saying in Japanese. In effect, then, I heard the lectures twice over – Japanese in one ear, English in the other; bilingual in mono. Yoshino-san was always trying to keep up with the dojo president, to catch up his words and translate them. Running behind, I found that I was trying to keep up with both of them. Now and again, Yoshino-san would interrupt her translation with the comment that a certain term was difficult to grasp, difficult to render into English. On an occasion when, for example, Kimura was discoursing on concepts of the body in Shinto and Buddhist thought, and the mutually implicating and interrelated nature of phenomena

[16] In a book intended primarily to win over non-members to Mahikari, Tebêcis cheerily describes the beginner's training course as 'a lot of fun' (1988:57). It seems to me that he is trying to sell the attractions of the course to his audience a little too hard.

(*sōsoku sōnyū* 相即相入), Yoshino-san remarked that the vocabulary here was obscure 'even for Japanese [people]'.

In fact, listening to the lectures in this way – in Japanese overlaid with English – I found that, in the passage from one language to the other, translation did not render the lectures that much more intelligible, and this was through no fault of the translator. The difficulties in the way of understanding lay in the grain of the lectures themselves, in their style and substance as a fast, unfolding series of revelations. It was often hard to fathom the sense of the topics, hard to figure out what motivated the relations between them. Added to this was the energetic tempo at which the lectures where delivered. In short, then, I frequently struggled to comprehend the lectures, and I received the impression that most of the others in the dojo – the children especially – were also finding the course hard to follow. They were all, in a sense, having to engage in acts of translation, making efforts to bestow sense on a difficult discourse. Indeed, early on in the lectures, the dojo president compared the reception of the divine truths of Mahikari to learning a language. Over these three days, he said, you will be learning the words (*kotoba* 言葉) that will allow you to make sentences (*bun* 文) in future. The significant implication being made here was that the truth of Mahikari teachings could not be understood all at once. To be sure, they might not be understood at all, in the beginning. It is only by putting the teachings into action – by making sentences – that one can come to comprehend them. This is what Kimura meant when he asserted of Mahikari truth that, 'If you don't experience it, you won't understand' (*taiken shinai to wakaranai* 体験しないと分からない), a phrase that I often heard from *kamikumite*.

What is taught over the three days of the training course is not expected to be understood there and then. Indeed, in a sense, it *cannot* be understood. Understanding is held in abeyance. As Okada Hiroki (1987: 99) suggests, 'It just does not seem possible to understand within the time of the lectures themselves' (*totemo kōgi jikan dake de wa rikai deikisō ni nai* とても講義時間だけでは理解できそうにない). The truth of Mahikari, it is supposed, will only be understood, realised empirically and incrementally, in future practice. It is for this reason that fully-fledged members are encouraged to take the Primary Course again (an activity called *saichōkō* 再聴講, lit., 're-auditing') – indeed, to retake it as many times as possible.[17] When I took *kenshū*, Michael, the Australian *kamikumite*, advised that I leave gaps in my notebook, for the next time. One comes to understand the divine teachings differently each time, he told me. I estimate that out of around a hundred people who took the course when I did, about thirty were doing *saichōkō*.

But those who take the training course for the *first* time have difficulty keeping up, difficulty, at times, sitting up and staying awake. The course, as event, is something more undergone than attended to. Hence, I suggest that it is more like an initiation than a programme of study. To take the course for the first time is to begin in Mahikari, to be initiated into it on the final day. This occurs with the gift of the *omitama*, the divine amulet, on Sunday.

I have arrived at a dojo late, with a hangover. My girlfriend was flying was flying back to London, and the night before there had been a farewell party of sorts. Waking

[17] Tebêcis recommends that one should 'receive *kenshū* again and again whenever possible' (Tebêcis 1988: 55).

up late, I had had to take a taxi. The house in Higashi-Osaka was a considerable distance from the dojo, in the north of the city. Fortunately, in the rush to leave the house, I had remembered to put on the special vest with the *omitama* pocket sewn onto it. This was a vest with a little cloth pouch that had been sewn on for me by a Mahikari member. I had been instructed to wear this on the final day. It had been explained to me that the *omitama*, once received, should be worn at all times, safely tucked and pinned into the pocket on the vest.

In the dojo, most people were already in their seats. There was no time to receive *okiyome* from Eriko, as I had on the two previous mornings before the course. I hurried to my table and sat down. Yoshino-san was there, sitting behind me. She seemed relieved that I had managed to arrive in time. In the chair next to me was Michael, an Australian who had first introduced me to the Osaka main dojo. He had been attending the course since Saturday – 'reviewing' it, as he put it. Like a number of other Mahikari members in the hall (including Maki-san, for example), he was taking the course again.

Then a man in a suit appeared at the other end of the hall. Kneeling down, his back to us, he led the prayers to begin the final day of the course, and we joined in, bowing and clapping according to a routine that was by now familiar. Turning to the lectern, the man introduced himself as the president of a different dojo in Osaka. He would be giving the lectures today.

The hall was packed; tables ran right up to the walls. I counted a hundred or so people in the room, around a third more than Friday and Saturday. The extra people had come from other dojos in Osaka prefecture. Having attended the first two days of the course in local Mahikari centres, they had gathered for the last day in the Osaka main dojo for the conclusion of the training course; the reception of the *omitama*.

The lecturer was already talking at speed. He was spelling out the significance of the *omitama*, a gift that will link us to god via a 'spirit-line' (*reihasen* 霊波線). Through this connection we will receive the light of the *kami*, he explained. The *omitama* thus makes possible our own salvation and gives us the power to save others. The lecturer told us not to treat such a great gift lightly. Emphasising the paramount importance of the divine amulet, he referred us to Chapter 27 of the textbook, calling our attention to a statement saying that the *omitama* should be thought of 'as more important than your life' (*inochi yori taisetsu ni* 命より大切に) and should be 'handled with maximum [care]' (*saikō no otoriatsukai* 最高のお取り扱い). We were asked to underline this sentence with a red pen. Staying with the text, the lecturer proceeded to read through an inventory of observances – correct procedures with respect to managing the *omitama* – that should be faithfully obeyed at all times. Coming top of the list were the following pair of conditions: first, to keep the *omitama* free from contamination – never, for example, put it on the floor; and second, to wear the *omitama* at all times, 'day and night' (*shirokujichū* 四六時中). In the main, all other acts of care for the divine amulet follow from these two conditions, and are further governed by the propriety of place and occasion. In circumstances, therefore, when to wear the *omitama* is to risk contaminating it, it should be taken off; but to take it off is, again, to risk contaminating it, and so it should be put in a pure place. The *omitama* should not become wet, and so, to prevent this it should be wrapped 'respectfully' (*teinei ni* 丁寧に) in layers of cling-film and then slipped into the pocket sewn onto one's underwear. In the instance of taking a bath or a shower, one should remove the *omitama* and put it somewhere 'pure and safe' (*seijō de anzen* 清浄で安全).

While he was going through these guidelines, the lecturer would instruct us to underline certain passages of importance in the textbook. To give a further instance of one of these: the caution to insure that, when removing one's underwear, the *omitama* is not still pinned in so that it might inadvertently end up falling on the floor, or going into the washing machine.

All this talk was, of course, intended to make us ready for the reception of the divine amulet that afternoon, but it also drove home the almost hair-raising level of responsibility that seemed to be required in caring for it. In spite of this, however, not everybody was paying attention. A few people in the dojo were asleep, and I, too, was beginning to feel very tired. Two days of solid concentration and the after-effects of alcohol from the night before had levelled my energy. The lecturer had moved on to another topic – the importance of prayer (*norigoto* 祈言), but I found that his words, and Yoshino's also, became distant, outreaching my capacity for attention. I confess that I dozed off a number of times that day. The lunch-break came as a relief, a breathing spell between the hard, fast words of the lectures. Once Eriko had enjoined us all to read out the 'words of gratitude before a meal', I got up to go outside for a cigarette. Michael, next to me, laughed and said that I had made a pretty good pretence of taking notes during my naps! Coming back again to eat my lunch, I remarked to Michael how ironic it was that, in the midst of all we were learning about purity, I should be going out to smoke cigarettes. He laughed, and said – with no apparent irony – that, anyway, what 'with the amount of light [that is, divine Light] in this room' the toxins built up in my body from smoking were being melted away.

The remainder of the afternoon went by in sort of blur. I struggled to stay awake and take notes as the lecturer talked about the great mission of Okada Kōtama – the founder of Mahikari – that began with the first revelation that the *kami* gave to him in 1959. He talked about the *kami*'s great plan for the world (the *gokeirin* 御経綸) and said that we are now in its latter stages; in the middle of the 'Baptism of Fire' (*hi no senrei* 火の先霊), the apocalyptic shift in world-history that has been gathering speed since 1962. And he talked about the divine principles of the 'True Cross' (*majūji* 真十字), the basic symbol of Mahikari, a blue horizontal upon a red, vertical axis; two colours and two orientations that, in combination, demonstrate the harmony of opposites (of fire/water; male/female; left/right; above/below, etc.) that are the 'basic principles of the structure of the universe' (*uchū kōsei no konpon genri* 宇宙構成の根本原理). The lecturer was spelling out these combinations, filling up the blackboard with red and blue crossings and their significations. I copied these down mechanically, without understanding. By now, the information was coming out in such a rush – the talk was so fast, that I gave up. Even Yoshino-san seemed to be feeling the strain. She simply could not translate in time. She could not keep up with the lecturer. The pace is 'very quick', she said apologetically. Hardly anyone was taking notes, I noticed. And then, all of a sudden, the lecture came to an end. Feeling exhausted, dazed but relieved, I went out for a cigarette.

The training course had come at last to its high point, the *omitama* reception ceremony (*haijushiki* 拝受式), but I was in no mood to appreciate it. I was desperately tired, and the run of the event remains for me only as a series of dim images, of low resolution in my memory.

All the desks in the dojo had been cleared and covered with white paper, I recall. And the women and girls were instructed to sit on the right side of the hall, the men and boys to sit on the left. Eriko came over and explained that, when my turn to receive the *omitama* came up, my name would be called out and I should respond

with an emphatic '*hai!*' (はい Yes!). After the *omitama* is placed around your neck, you shouldn't touch it, she said. Just come back and sit down. Then Kimura the dojo president came out, wearing a crisp white, sleeved apron (*kappōgi* 割烹着) over his suit jacket. At the end of the dojo, where the lectern had been, a table had been set out with a white box upon it. Kimura stood behind this, with a couple of Mahikari Youth members close by in attendance. One by one, people's names were called out over the loudspeakers. Each time, the person would reply 'Yes!' and go over to the table where Kimura was to receive their *omitama* from him. A Youth member assisted in putting the *omitama* on. After this, each time, there was a polite round of applause. When my name was called, a member of Mahikari Youth led me over to the table. He placed his hands lightly on my shoulders, indicating that I should bow. Kimura carefully lifted out a little golden locket suspended from a chain. He slipped the chain over my neck while the Youth member made little adjustments, making sure that it was hanging correctly. Smiling, Kimura shook my hand. *Omedetō gozaimasu* (おめでとうございます), he said. Congratulations.

With everyone back in their seats at the white paper-covered tables, we were assisted in wrapping up the *omitama*. A Mahikari member sat beside each person, taking them through the procedure. Yoshino-san assisted me. The paraphernalia of wrapping she had spread out on the table: pre-cut pieces of cling-film, white paper and cotton wool. Cleaning our hands with wet wipes, Yoshino-san lightly held the *omitama* and wrapped cling-film around it. She twisted the plastic film around the chain as well, where it went through the little metal loop on the top of the locket. If you sweat, she explained, this will stop any sweat from running down the chain and seeping into the wrappings. She helped me to place the *omitama*, now all bundled up in plastic and cotton wool, into the pocket on my vest. It was then fastened securely with a safety pin.

The course was now nearly over. The tables were taken up and folded away. All of us – the newly inaugurated *kamikumite*, Mahikari members – were directed to the far side of the dojo and marshalled into rows for a group photograph, with Kimura the dojo president sitting in the middle.

Then, finally, we faced the last exercise: our first opportunity to perform *okiyome*. We each paired up with an experienced Mahikari member, and sat down with them on the *tatami* floor. My partner was Mary, an American woman from Washington. Like Michael, Maki-san, and others, she was a Mahikari member who had taken the training course again. Sitting in the position of someone giving *okiyome*, I sat for the first time with my back to the *goshintai* – the large hanging scroll at the hall's furthest end. Mary, in the posture of receiving *okiyome*, sat facing me with her eyes shut. A member of the dojo staff walked around the hall, guiding us through the routine. We all recited the Prayer of Heaven together, reading it out from the prayer book. Then I held up my hand, as instructed, in front of Mary's head. We finished this initial phase after ten minutes. Our partners turned around so that we could give *okiyome* to the back of their head. And then, ten minutes later, our partners laid face down on the *tatami* mats, and we gave *okiyome* to their prostrate bodies. When we had finished, Mary told me, with a sort of quiet delight, that she had really 'felt the light'. By which she meant that she had really felt the divine light that was channelling through me, from my hand, when I gave *okiyome* to her.

Going back that evening, I was in such a haze of tiredness that I boarded the wrong train at Osaka station. I fell asleep in my seat and only realised my mistake on waking up to find myself somewhere remote and wholly unfamiliar. Wearily, I changed trains and headed back again to Osaka, and from there, home.

The requirement for entering Mahikari is that one makes an offering of a fixed sum of money for taking the Primary Course[18] (the 'gratitude for attendance', *jukō onrei* 受講御礼) and that one sits through the course from beginning to end. By attending the course from Friday to Sunday, a person formally enters Mahikari on the third day, with the gift of the *omitama*, the sacred apparatus that connects the person to Su-no-kami, allowing them to receive divine light and power just as an antenna picks up radio waves.[19] Henceforth, the person is placed in a special relation to the *kami*; connected to the god by means of a spirit-line (*reihasen* 霊破線). The person is instated as a *kamikumite* ('hand-in-hand with the *kami*'), able, through the *omitama*, to give out divine light; an invisible power cast from the open hand that saves and purifies.

At first glance, *kenshū* would appear to be a kind of instruction. It mainly involves, after all, three days of lectures, and we have seen above the sort of schoolroom atmosphere that the dojo takes on: the people dug in at their desks, taking notes and trying to keep up with the pace of the talks. But these talks were difficult to follow, both because of their speed and in the sense they made. This was a discourse that often ran away, and many in the room gave up trying to keep up.

In his report on a training course which he attended at a dojo in Hiroshima, the sociologist Okada Hiroki catches the mood very nicely. At first, he says, everyone tries to concentrate on the lectures, but soon 'the words start going over their heads and begin to slip away. Soon, one comes to feel that this discourse stands out only in the midst of a sort of dream' (*sono uchi kotoba ga atama no naka de toraerarenaku nari, suberi-hajimeru. So no uchi hakuchūmuno naka ni tada kotoba dake ga sonzai suru yō-na kibun ni natte kuru* そのうち言葉が頭の中で捕らえられなくなり、滑りはじめる。そのうち白昼夢の中にただ言葉だけが存在するような気分になってくる; Okada 1987: 99). Most people, he observes, are not able to take notes quickly enough, and, while the majority appear earnest, some look at the lecturer quite blankly. During the lunch-break, Okada asks an elderly couple how they feel about the course. 'This is our first time', the husband replies. 'I don't understand it much' (*yō wakaran* ようわからん). The talks are difficult, although they are interesting, he adds (see Okada 1987: 100). Looking back on the lectures, Okada himself reflects that it would be difficult to summarise the substance of the course, and he adds that only certain words and parables are left over in one's memory (ibid, 1987: 99).

If we consider the lectures as a whole – though this is no attempt at précis; I could not condense their content either – then let us make the broadly Bakhtinian point that the lectures as language were alive with two opposing kinds of force, one centripetal, the other centrifugal (see Bakhtin 1981: 270-272). As an example of the former, a tendency that pulled the discourse together at certain points, giving a certain coherence to the spread of the lectures, were a series of key concepts relating to ethics and the self that are common currency in the Japanese worlds of work, of sport, and are especially prominent in the new religions (see Rohlen 1974: 194, 207-211;

[18] In 2002, the fee was ¥15,000.

[19] As a book of notes and queries (given to all new Mahikari members) states: 'put simply, [the *omitama*] is a thing that receives the light and power of the *kami*, like an antenna' わかりやすく言うと、神の光と力を受信するアンテナのようなものです. See *Sūkyō Mahikari* (2002:57).

Hardacre 1986: 17-36; Moeran 1989: 55-74; Kondo 1990: 76-109). These concepts are organised according to what Harpham (1987) has christened an 'ascetic imperative', in which a moral person is constituted through hard work, through selfless devotion to a practice or a task as a means of perfecting the self. Self-cultivation is a project of 'polishing' (*migaku* 磨く) the self. In addition, the ethical self radiates 'gratitude' (*kansha* 感謝) and acts towards others and in all things 'sincerely' (*makoto ni* 誠に).

These sorts of ideas came up again and again in the lectures and, I dare say, they provided little moments of intelligibility, pinning down, as it were, the more loosely flowing texture of the talks. These concepts came up, for example, in Kimura's appeal to the importance of receptivity and obedience (*sunaosa* 素直さ) to the will of God. Or again, they appeared in the dojo president's stories of great men (and they were all men in these stories) like Ninomiya Sontoku or Yukawa Hideki, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist, who had disciplined themselves, achieving purity and inner strength through constant hardship and hard work.

So much for the centripetal. At the same time, the sense of the lectures was being unravelled and spun apart by a contrary tendency: by the frequent interpolation of technical languages – scientific, medical, Buddhistic, etc. As Okada remarks (1987: 99), 'special terms, such as scientific terminologies, fly about' (*tokushu-na yōgo ya kagakuyōgo ga tobikau* 特殊な用語や科学用語が飛び交う). And, in addition to this, there was the lecturer's particular use of word-play: of *kotodama* (言霊 lit., 'word spirit'), an important conception in Mahikari, according to which there is a spiritual truth inherent in (Japanese) words; whose operations can only be revealed through occult etymology. In this way, words that would be familiar to the audience were shown – through the substitution of alternative *kanji* or *kana* characters – to mean something slightly different; their true meaning was disclosed. To take an instance mentioned above, we were told that the notion of being 'obedient' or 'receptive' (*sunao* 素直) has the spiritual meaning of 'being straight with Su-god' (*su-nao* ス直). Now, these recalibrations of language – are only an intensified and spiritualised form of word play which is, in fact, quite common in Japanese language games – often deployed, for example, in advertising (see Nakabayashi 1993: 64-68; Inoue et al. 1994: 297-301), but their usage in the lectures does nothing to ease their intelligibility, as some academics have complained.[20]

Given, however, that the Primary Course involves no examination, nor that participants are even required to pay attention to the contents of the lectures, we must surely conclude that *kenshū*, as an event, is not, in the first instance, about the transmission of knowledge. The efficacy of the event is not explicitly correlated with a rhetoric of persuasion, or associated with an idea of conversion as the production of conviction (see Harding 1999). Nor are the more cryptic aspects of the discourse intended as an effort to produce what Fernandez has called 'edification by puzzlement' (Fernandez 1986); that is to say, the generation of perplexity by means of the creative juxtaposition of images, in order to engender deeper insight. I suggest that *kenshū* is none of these things because the forces understood to be operating during

[20] In an attempt at paraphrasing an example of spiritual wordplay, Davis regrets that what he will say might 'sound like gibberish'. A little further on, he tells us that he won't go into any more instances of *kotodama* owing to their 'complexity and tedium'. See Davis (1980: 35, 39 note). Cf., also Okada (1987: 99).

the event are not primarily illocutionary. To the extent that the event is held to be transformative, then the medium of transformation in *kenshū* is less linguistic than it is atmospheric. Okada Hiroki importantly gestures at this (1987: 100) when he remarks that *kenshū* seems to be more about 'attendance' (*sanka suru koto* 参加すること), being in the dojo, than about 'learning' (*manabu suru koto* 学ぶすること).

On the contrary, Miyanaga, in her own study on Mahikari, regards *kenshū* as being concerned with 'the assimilation of doctrine' (Miyanaga 1983: 132).[21] By and large, the scholarship on Mahikari has concurred with this opinion (see Davis 1980; McVeigh 1997); Mahikari practices, and especially activities within the dojo, have been regarded as so many forms of persuasion – events which are designed to change minds, to instil conviction. Connected to this is a particular view of the Mahikari dojo as a space for the creation of certain effects, effects that are assumed to be cognitive or subjective. Accordingly, a dojo is less a machine for purification than it is a machine for belief, an engine for the generation of credibility. Winston Davis, in particular, has memorably characterised the Mahikari dojo as a 'hothouse of emotion', an 'affective climate' which faciliates the creation of ideological consensus (see Davis 1980: 97, *passim*). The enthusiastic atmosphere of the dojo aids in the formation of suggestible subjects.

Now, I do not disagree that a Mahikari dojo – and, especially, events like *kenshū*, which are held within it – can be understood to create the conditions for a certain kind of receptivity in persons, but I would argue that this receptivity is neither usefully described nor analysed if it is framed in terms of the inculcation of beliefs. For one thing, such a position takes for granted the very thing that needs to be explained – namely, the notion of 'change' in play in this particular case. But equally, the three major English-language studies of Mahikari – Davis (1980), Miyanaga (1983), and McVeigh (1997) – all fix on the question of how Mahikari, as a specific system of beliefs, is made absolutely persuasive. What Luhrmann (1989: 6) says of her inquiry into neo-Pagan practitioners in London, could well characterise the concerns of these three studies: that they aim to investigate the 'process that allows people to accept outlandish, apparently irrational beliefs'. But in the course of accounting for the machinery of persuasion – at work in events such as *kenshū* – all three authors assume a far too rigid architectonics of 'belief building', as if the dojo, as ideological apparatus, exerts an irresistable force on the subjects that enter into it. And yet, *kenshū*, and Mahikari practices more generally, are by no means so compelling. As Eileen Barker observed of workshops held by the Unification Church (better known as the Moonies), given the high rate of attendees who did *not* go on to join the church, in spite of taking the courses, 'If the social context is so persuasive,' Barker asked, 'why did they not become Moonies?' (Barker 1984: 144). Similarly, in Mahikari, it has been estimated that only twenty to thirty percent of those who take the Primary Course subsequently stay in the organisation (see Okada 1993: 115; cf. Davis 1980: 229). In other words, joining Mahikari is fairly easy, but (as I will attempt to show in Chapter 5) to remain as a diligent *kamikumite* is to commit oneself to regime of daily life practice. As Louveau remarks, 'If it's easy to raise the hand, maintaining the effectiveness of the sacred is conditional on rigorous practice' (2012: 196).

Configuring *kenshū* in terms of the transmission or assimilation of beliefs, I have suggested, is to misrepresent what the event is, in terms of its effects. To attend *kenshū* is to automatically receive the divine amulet – the *omitama* – and to

[21] See also Miyanaga (1980: 120), where she argues that *kenshū* is connected to 'doctrine' (*kyōgi* 教義).

immediately become a member of Mahikari. It is noteworthy then, in terms of the conceptualisation of connection, that Mahikari members do not refer to themselves as 'believers' (*shinja* 信者) but rather they characterise themselves as *kamikumite* (which literally, we recall, means 'hand in hand with the *kami*'). That is, the relation to the *kami* is not usually conceived in terms of belief; the conception of relation at work here is more intimate and, indeed, tactile. Likewise, the *omitama*, which attendees at the Primary Course receive on the Sunday, is an object which establishes a 'link' (*otsunagi* おつなぎ) to the *kami*, a 'spirit-line' (*reihasen*) to Su-god, and this device is to be worn against the body at all times. Thus, the *omitama*, as an object which both materially instantiates and actualizes a divine relation, can be understood as a much more emphatic or supercharged instance of the shrine and temple charms (*engimono*) which, as Daniels (2003) shows, act to objectify relationships between shrine-visitors and divinities.

But, to return to the question of *kenshū*, the logic of the event corresponds, in fact, to Aristotle's description of the mysteries at Eleusis: that those who underwent them were expected not to learn (*mathein*), but to experience (*pathein*) (Frag. 15 in Aristotle 1955: 84); it is, in other words, more therapeutic than didactic in intent. To the extent that the event is deemed to achieve effects, such effects are made to happen by virtue of the dojo as the container for a particular kind of atmosphere. Indeed, Davis' model of the 'hothouse' does have merit in so far as it directs our attention to the dojo in terms of the specific climactic conditions it enacts.

As Kimura, the President of the Dojo, put it during the course, the dojo is a 'hot spring of light' (*hikari no onsen*). One can find similar ideas in Mahikari literature. The dojo is an 'oasis of light' (*hikari no oashisu* 光のオアシス; Okada 2000b: 69; Yasaka 1997: 48; Tebêcis 2006: 32), a 'place for elevating the spirit' (*tamashii wo kōjō suru ba* 魂を向上する場; Okada 2000b: 69). We might consider the dojo in terms of Bille and Sørensen's notion of a 'lightscape', that is, a material and social space of luminosity within which 'light is practised and inhabited' (Bille and Sørensen 2007: 266). Mahikari members typically describe dojos as 'bright, cheerful' (*akarui* 明るい; see McVeigh 1997: 114). Such remarks do not merely refer to the brightly-lit interiors of Mahikari dojos; they also implicate what Serres (1995) would call a 'metaphorics', a particular conceptual field of forces. Thus, dojos are 'bright' by virtue of the light-propagating *goshintai*, but *okiyome* given to places also has the capacity to illuminate them and change their nature. Thus, Mori-san, a *kumite* and mother of a friend of mine, explained that the members of the local dojo were given to visiting a shrine to the deity Inari, in order to give *okiyome* to it. Previously it was a 'gloomy feeling sort of shrine' (*kurai kanji no jinja* 暗い感じの神社), but with repeated applications of *okiyome* it had 'become brighter' (*akaruku natta* 明るくなった).

Furthermore, members come to develop a sensitivity to light, becoming receptive to its intensity and to different distributions of radiation. The light in Osaka Dai-dojo, according to Shōji-san, was 'strong' (*tsuyoi* 強い), which made for a 'different atmosphere' (*fu'inki ga chigau* 雰囲気が違う). Or again, light from Odairi-sama (the Acting Master of Teachings), radiated at the assembled members during the Grand Purification Ceremony (ōharaesai 大炎開陽霊祭) in Autumn, is said to be 'too strong' (*tsuyosugi* 強すぎ). Now, as McVeigh has noted (1997: 82-104; see also Okada 1987: 105 1993: 133-134) this spectrum of intensities of light is correlated with orders of verticality, or with the hierarchical cosmopolitical infrastructure within Mahikari. There are relative and tangible differences in the degrees of light distributed

through the system. The light within a 'large' (*dai* 大) dojo will be greater than that within a 'small' (*shō* 小) dojo, because the *goshintai* in the former is bigger in size. In the same way, a *kumite* who has taken the Advanced Course (*jōkyū kenshū*) will, in principle, be capable of radiating a stronger light than someone who has only taken the Primary Course, again, because their *omitama* is larger. At the highest point in the vertical hierarchy, emitting the largest quantities of light, stands Suza (the Main World Shrine), the Master of Teachings (*Oshienushisama* 教え主様) and her representative (*Odairisama* お代理様).[22]

Hierarchy and verticality are undoubtedly important themes in Mahikari, as I have already mentioned above, but in McVeigh's analysis they only feature as mechanisms of persuasion, elements of a massive didactic apparatus for the reinforcement of Mahikari ideology. As such, divine light is interpreted as an ideological projection, 'a metaphoric means of establishing a discourse about sociopolitical relations' (McVeigh 1997: 80). Light, in McVeigh's translation of it, becomes a mere epiphenomenon of ideological force. But light in Mahikari is not merely a metaphor, as McVeigh himself acknowledges: according to *kamikumite*, it is 'something concrete, felt, sometimes even seen' (1997: 82).[23] This is precisely how light is described, not as something believed in, but as something varying in intensity, tangible, proximate, and intimate. To be present in the dojo is to be 'close to the *kami*' (*kamisama no chikaku ni* 神様の近くに), a sensibility I have seen enacted in the dojo, where to get nearer to divinity was literally to move one's *zabuton* (cushion) closer to the *goshintai*.[24]

It is this tangible apprehension of light, as a generative force which produces palpable effects, which Bille and Sørensen (2007) miss, in spite of their admirable stress on the sociality and materiality of luminosity. Examinations of the imagery and effects of light in differing traditions of religious practice have focused on the connection between transformation and the experience of inner illumination (see Eliade 1962; Kapstein 2004), but have likewise failed to treat with the concept of light as a tactile experience. As we shall see in the following chapter, light in Mahikari is a presence and experience which is not generally connected with interior radiance, but is instead apprehended as a force which produces transformations that are expressed on a body's surfaces.

In addition – and perhaps contrary to what one might expect, given the ubiquity of light as a theme in Mahikari discourse – few associations are made between the ideas of light as a transformative force and 'enlightenment' as knowledge. In so far as the divine light emitted from the '*kami* body' (*goshintai*) in the dojo, or from the open hand during *okiyome*, is a means of realising the truth, then such truth, states a Mahikari text, is not apprehended 'conceptually' (*gainen toshite de naku* 概念とし

[22] The gradation of intensities of divine light is determined by the concept of *mi-izu* (御稜威), a kind of force-field of prestige accorded to the relative rankings within the system (see Okada 1987: 105; 1993: 133-134; McVeigh 1997a: 103-104). It is a term that Mahikari owes to Shinto (see Bocking 1996: 121).

[23] Compare Bernard-Mirtil (1998: 78): 'La notion d'"énergie spirituelle" ou "lumière" n'a pas une connotation abstraite ou métaphysique'.

[24] As Okada remarks (1993: 133), by giving *okiyome* in the dojo 'it is possible to receive intense light because it is the source of light, and closer to the *kami*' (*su-kami ni chikai sonzai ni ari, hikari no gensen de aru node tsuyoi hikaru wo ukeru koto ga kanō de aru* ス神に近い存在にあり、光の源泉であるので強い光を受けることが可能である).

てでなく) but through the body (*hadami de* 肌身で) – literally, 'through the skin' (Sūkyō Mahikari 2002: 62).

With this notion that truth is a matter of palpable, rather than purely intellectual, effects, we can perceive a relation between the realisation of truth and the receptivity of bodies that is neither explicitly associated with pedagogics nor with persuasion as a rhetorical expedient for the production of conviction. Rather, truth is more like something which is capable of being corporeally absorbed, something which is admitted into a receptive body.

There are some suggestive sentences in Foucault, which might make this relation clearer. Foucault proposed that, prior to Descartes, it was

> always held that a subject could not have access to the truth if he did not first operate upon himself a certain work which would make him susceptible to knowing the truth – *a work of purification*… To put it another way: truth always has a price; no access to truth without ascesis. In Western culture up to the sixteenth century, asceticism and access to truth are always more or less obscurely linked (Foucault 2000: 278-279; my italics).

But not just in 'Western culture'. The notion that the means of approach to truth is necessarily an ascetic project has been an enduring idea in Japan as well. Access to higher powers, techniques of merit-cultivation, healing and emancipation, are well known in the mountain asceticism of Shugendō (修験道), for example, and it is the body which is explicitly recognized as the medium for their realization (see Grapard 2016). But acquiring the capacity to access such powers requires prolonged and severe ascetic practice (*shugyō* 修行) in wild places. In Mahikari, on the other hand, all it takes is a three-day long course in a dojo close to home. Thus, Mahikari literature draws a pointed contrast between the ease of doing *kenshū* and the more arduous methods of traditional asceticism. As it states in one publication, in order to obtain spiritual powers, it is no longer necessary to engage in 'decades of hard austerities' (*nanjūnen to iu kibishii shugyō* 何十年という厳しい修行; Sūkyō Mahikari 2002: 16).[25] The reason for this is that the ease of access to special powers of purification is a consequence of the increasing speed with which the 'divine plan' – as it is translated into English (*gokeirin* 御経綸, lit., 'honourable governance') – is progressing. As Okada Kōtama warned (in Shibata 1983: 146): 'The human race doesn't have time to wait for salvation from religious people' (*jinrui taishū wa, shūkyōsha no sukui o matte iru hima wa nai* 人類大衆は、宗教者の救いを待っている暇はない).

What Mahikari offers, then, in the form of *kenshū*, is a kind of express, compressed ascesis over three days, and the determinant circumstances for making the participants 'susceptible to knowing the truth' are the climactic conditions of the dojo. *Kenshū* is defined by a metaphorics of immersion, of saturation – the dojo is a 'hot spring' or 'oasis' of luminosity; for those taking the course, their bodies are bathed in 'a shower of light from the *kami*' (*kami no hikari no shawaa* 神の光のシャワー; Yasaka 1997:

[25] Compare Yasaka (1997: 50), who poses the question of how people can perform miracles (*kiseki* 奇跡) after only taking a three-day course; and all this without having to 'perform austerities for decades in the depths of the Himalayas' (*himaraya no okuchi de nanjūnen mo shugyō o suru koto* ヒマラヤの奥地で何十年も修行をすること).

48). The implication of this is that those taking the Primary Course for the first time are not so much auditors (listening to the lectures), than they are absorbers (becoming saturated with light). They are patients, rather than students, since the divine light is the agency which permeates and purifies their bodies.

It is when *kamikumite* take the course again that they come to participate in a more active sense. But at the beginning, as yet unequipped with an *omitama*, all the attendees have to do is to soak in the atmosphere, to become receptive in the purifying light of the dojo. A Mahikari minister, quoted by Okada Hiroki (1987: 100), makes the point very concisely when he says to the audience at the start of the course: 'It's alright if you don't understand this now. It is also OK if you fall asleep. It is enough just to have come here to receive the light of the *kamisama*' (*ima wakaranakute mo iin desu. Netete mo iin desu. Koko ni kite kamisama no mi-hikari wo itadaku dake de jūbun desu* 今はわからなくてもいいんです。寝ててもいいんです。ここに来て神様の御光を戴くだけで十分です). For those in this patient position, *kenshū* is expected to produce material, corporeal effects (Louveau 2012: 194). Among the 'astonishing effects' (*odoroku-beki kōka* 驚くべき効果) of taking the course, Yasaka (1997: 48) mentions reports of stiff shoulders, stomache aches and constipation all being cured, while Tebêcis relates the case of an Indian man, suffering from severe gastric problems, who had come over to Malaysia from Singapore to take the Primary Course in English, in spite of the fact that his grasp of English was poor. Following the course, his previously sombre demeanour became bright and cheerful. Regarding this remarkable, visible and verifiable transformation ('I met him again', says Tebêcis, 'later in Singapore and verified that the changes were stable') Tebêcis determines that this was brought about by 'the spiritual effects of kenshū' rather than 'the knowledge conveyed by the lecturer', since the man could hardly have understood what the lecturer was saying (see Tebêcis 1988: 56-57). Even the feeling of becoming drowsy during the lectures is attributed to the effects of *kenshū* (Tebêcis 1988: 55).

Note that these *kenshū*-effects are automatic, concrete and immediate – the atmospheric consequences of being physically present in the dojo. That is, bodies are affected regardless of the person's particular moods, their behavioural dispositions or propositional attitudes. In short, *kenshū* is deemed to produce transformative effects without reference to a subject's intentions or beliefs. All that matters during *kenshū* is that their bodies are *in place*.[26]

This has important analytical consequences if we want to understand what 'conversion' might mean in this particular context, what it does, and what kind of conceptual economy it inhabits and articulates. The transformations – both micro and macro – taking place in, and as a result of, *kenshū*, if conceptualised as conversions, speak to a concept of change that is not predicated on the acquisition of 'true' belief but is instead premised on presence ('being there') and position. This does not mean that attitude or commitment are of no consequence in Mahikari; as we will see in Chapter 5, especially, committing oneself to 'practice' (*jissen* 実践) – the giving of *okiyome* and the application of the divine teachings to one's everday life – is regarded as vital. But what it does indicate is that belief is neither a necessary nor sufficient

[26] This notion, that mere presence provides the condition for the producion of effects, is not limited to Mahikari. Regarding the Rinzai Zen Buddhist group, Myōshinji, Borup (2008: 204) remarks that, 'When people present at a dharma talk or a sermon do not actually listen to the contents, it is not only because of lack of interest but also because of the logic of gaining merit through mere participation'.

condition for conversions to take place. Conversions *happen* to persons, whether they believe in them or not.

Following the reception of the *omitama* on the final day of the course, the transition to the new status of *kamikumite* is enacted by means of a fundamental and physical shift of position, when the newly ordained Mahikari member turns around, and is able to give *okiyome* for the first time. Prior to this moment, the *kenshū* participants sit facing the *goshintai*, occupying an equivalent position to the person who receives light (the *jukōsha* 受光者) during *okiyome*, while the lecturer stands with his back to the *goshintai*, a posture that corresponds to the person-giving-light (*sekōsha* 施光者). But once endowed with the *omitama* and now empowered with the ability to perform *okiyome*, the new *kumite* faces away from the *goshintai*. This rotation of the body is, I suggest, an enactment of conversion in its literal sense – namely, a 'turning', or as Hadot defines it, 'a change in orientation' (Hadot 1993: 223). This interpretation finds support in the Mahikari comprehension of the concept of 'faith' (*shinkō* 信仰 in ordinary Japanese). Following the logic of *kotodama*, this term is recalibrated to mean 'turning towards the *kami*' (*shinkō* 神向). To be sure, on the final day of *kenshū*, with the rotation away from the *goshintai*, it is as if one turns *to* the divinity by turning one's back on him, but the adoption of this position is the demonstration of the ability to give *okiyome*, a *kami*-given power of intervention. Furthermore, as Matsunaga points out, regarding Mahikari, since 'back is related to front…as spiritual is to physical' (Matsunaga 2000: 208), we might further infer that this physical turnabout is the performative affirmation of the principle of the pre-eminence of the spiritual, codified in Mahikari according to the maxim of 'spirit first, mind follows, body belongs' (*reishu shinjū taizoku* 霊主心従体属).[27] The spiritual may well come first, but the motions of the body are crucial to the movement of the spirit. As Kondo (1990: 108) notes of more general conceptual associations made in Japan, 'Physical action can in fact be perceived as isomorphic with spiritual change'.

With the adoption of this new position, Mahikari members are henceforth capable of actively intervening in the world, by purifying others and themselves in turn, thereby raising their own 'spiritual levels' (*reisō* 霊層). Recall Shōji-san's remark to the effect that *kamikumite* are capable of elevation, while non-members of Mahikari can only move sideways. Lateral transition in the dojo – the rotation of the body away from the *kami*-body, that makes the giving of *okiyome* possible – is both the precursor and precondition for spiritual improvement, and so vertical movement.

[27] This Mahikari principle is an adapted and extended rendering of an original Ōmoto doctrine: *reishu taijū* 霊主体従, or 'spirit before body'. See Inoue (2003: 187); Stalker (2008: 58-59).

Chapter Two:

Touching conversion: *henka*-effects as tangible transformations

For the finishing touch to his "discourse of the Machine" (the famous Wager), Pascal attempts to bring the unbelieving reader round to the realization of conversion's infinite dividends with the following instruction: to practise Catholic ritual "just as if" you believe, "taking holy water, having masses said, and so on" (1966: 152). That is, in Pascal's programme, the "machine" of the body is the engine of conversion. Now recall the move made by Mauss, when, in the final powerful paragraph of his lecture on body techniques, he states his belief that, "precisely, even at the bottom of all our mystical states there are body techniques which have not been studied…I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into 'communication with God'" (Mauss 1950: 386). In this article, I want to take up this Pascalian position – and the corresponding Maussian motion – in order to divine the kinds of relations that connect bodies to techniques to conversions. More specifically, I will try to show how, in the practices of Sûkyô Mahikari, a Japanese new religion, bodies are enacted as a technical means of contact with the divine, and, consequently, that conversion is a transformation that can be felt concretely: in the movements of the body, swaying and praying, in its effusions (in tears, sweat, etc) and in its textures and temperatures (in its hard, cold, or hot and soft surfaces). In Mahikari practice, conversion is a tangible happening, a palpable enactment, and to be guided by this is, I think, to come into contact with a rather different configuration of the concept; a version of conversion that turns on the body and that is, in significant ways, realized and organized by means of tactile sensations.

These assertions require ethnographic fleshing out, of course. But before doing so, I want to undertake a somewhat summary review of the role of the body in the scholarship on conversion. The sociological literature on conversion is dazzlingly massive. The enigmatic voice that was the catalyst for Augustine's own conversion may well have said, "Pick up and read," but faced with the same injunction, the student of conversion might justifiably balk at the scale of the task. Nevertheless, it would appear that, with few exceptions, bodies – and by extension, corpuses of techniques or practices – have not been the subject of serious analysis in the work on conversion.[28] One might as well begin with William James and his *Varieties of*

[28] Exceptions include Belzen (1999), Coleman (2000: Ch. 5), Preston (1988). See also Glazier (2003: 165-166) and Norris (2003), whose contributions I will comment on above. Pascal – and what I take to be the performative import of his argument – has so far been neglected in

Religious Experience (James 1985); still, to my mind, one of the most stimulating accounts in the field. Yet, for all its depth of description, James has little positive to say about the collective and corporeal involvements of practice. His interest is in the intense and inventive modes of conversion experience: in the hot, plastic enthusiasms of original mystics. Collective religious practice, too common and demotic, by contrast, is demoted to the level of a cool routine, rigid and derivative (James 1985: 6). It follows that the crux of conversion – its "vital turning-point" – is alien to practice: it is "no affair of outer works and ritual and sacraments" (James 1985: 210). The problem here is exactly that what, for James, constitute exemplary religious experiences all come from too small a selection of cases. Simply put, his varieties *are not various enough*; and what governs the limits of the range on display are certain Protestant theological assumptions, not the least of which is a suspicion of the efficacy of ritual practice that Mary Douglas, for example, has so often skewered (e.g. Douglas 1970).[29]

Yet these same propensities – a view of ritual (and, therefore, of bodies) as extrinsic or marginal, along with a corresponding stress on the primacy of interiority – remain operative in models of conversion advanced in subsequent scholarship. In sociology, especially, the problem of conversion became one of correctly calibrating it, of attempting to establish a typology of faithful indexes of conversion in order to measure the extent of its presence as a process within individual subjects (Snow and Machalek, 1983, 1984). Again, however, these typologies are organized according to the notion that conversion consists, ultimately, of radical and internal mental transformation (Snow and Machalek 1983: 264-6, 279). So structured, the model therefore plays down the possibility of practice as having a constitutive capacity in the work of conversion; it minimizes the idea that a body might, as it were, have a hand in transformation. Indeed, just as it is for James, ritual, in Snow and Machalek's usage, is merely a synonym for insincere or inconsequential performance (1984: 172-3).[30]

The axiom that conversion is a fundamentally mental event leads to odd methodological consequences. Practices are understood to be supplemental or secondary to the primary process of conversion itself, occurring in the mind; but since it is psychological, conversion can only be reckoned with, hence measured, indirectly. The only available data, then, are the very doings and sayings of so-called converts,

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the research on the body's relations to conversion. The thinker most often invoked in this regard is, in fact, Bourdieu who was himself fond of citing the particular Pascalian *pensée* with which I begin this article (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1990: 48-9). But Bourdieu's own invocations of Pascal show up why his theory of the *habitus* is a problematic candidate for making sense of conversion. Bourdieu's interest is not in conversion – at least, not in the conversion of social actors; the conversion of the sociologist is another matter – but in the social reproduction of belief by the body. This reading of Pascal – as an unlikely theorist of ideological embodiment – goes back to Althusser and can be seen, with rather different intellectual effects and motivations, in the work of Zizek (1989: 36-9).

[29] To say all this is merely to repeat the main criticisms made by Mauss in his review of James's book in 1904 (see Mauss 1968: 58-65). Observing the lack of fit between the apparent amplitude suggested by the book's title ("*Varieties*") and the narrowness of its actual content, Mauss rather mischievously proposed an alternative appellation for James's Gifford Lectures: *A Study of Some Psychological States Pertaining to Religion* (Mauss 1968: 63).

[30] Snow and Machalek are quite unequivocal on this point. Practices such as baptism, testimony, etc, "often signify little more than ritualized performance…[of] little enduring significance" (1984: 173). Yet Gooren – in his own overview of the sociology of conversion – cites Snow and Machalek's paper as being one of the few contributions to have, he says, emphasised "the importance of rituals" (Gooren 2007: 348).

which the methodology finds so suspect. This dilemma in the method is what Bromley calls the "observability problem" – viz, the problem that "the transformation itself is not directly observable" (Bromley 2001: 322). Transformations assuredly take place, as Bromley acknowledges (2001: 325), but their autopsy is impossible.[31] Thus, according to this particular sociological vision, there are, apparently, two parallel processes: firstly, conversion *itself*, itself inaccessible; and secondly, conversion-behaviour, which is accessible but derivative, and somehow deputizes for the former. All the conspicuous business that one might associate with conversions – testimonies, gestures, prayers, confessions, and other such practices – intervene between the sociological observer and the supposedly *actual* action of conversion: a state of mind, staged unseen, as it were, in a Cartesian theatre.[32] Sociology thus attempts to diagnose the conditions of conversion, for which practices are thinly symptomatic. Hence the repertoire of terms used to characterise such conduct: "empirical indicators"; "rhetorical indicators"; "indirect indications" (Bromley 2001: 322; Gooren 2006: 27-28; Shimazono 2004: 178; Snow and Machalek 1984: 185). Corporeality is reduced to something very like the status of a Leachian aesthetic frill: a non-essential and expressive edge around a necessary and productive centre (see Leach 2000: 153-55).

There are some signs – empirical indicators, if you will – suggesting that the psychologism of the model is finally being recognised. In a collection of anthropological essays on conversion (Buckser and Glazier 2003), Glazier (2003: 165) notes the connection between conversion and particular styles of appropriate bodily bearing, and he cites Rambo's synoptic account (Rambo 1993) and the latter's application of Bourdieu, in order to call attention to the importance of the body in conversion. The only trouble is that the page of Rambo referred to, contains no consideration of Bourdieu; nor, indeed, is Bourdieu mentioned *anywhere* in Rambo's book.[33] In a more promising contribution, Norris explores the embodied dimension,

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[31] To be sure, Bromley's article (2001) is not concerned with the mechanisms or effects of conversion, but rather with the conflict of interpretations being fought over the legitimacy of the two terms, "conversion" and "brainwashing." Yet he regards these designations as mere labels for a process ("transformation itself") that takes place beyond their influence. In other words, he seems to believe, along with other sociologists of conversion, that transformation has some separate existence on the hither side of discourse, practice or similar mediations by which transformation is instituted. Compare Shimazono (2004: 178), who remarks of conversion that, "Unless it is reported by those who have experienced it, there is no way we might know what it means." The same objection applies. Conversion, as a purely self-present, exclusive experience would simply lack all meaning *as* conversion. See Keane (2009: 109) for a more general argument along these lines.

[32] If, from the point of view of sociology, conversion cannot be seen, it is somewhat ironic; since, within the history of Christianity, and clearly visible beyond it in other techniques and traditions, conversions have so often been connected with an economy of vision, with the restoration and transformation of sight, with witnessing, and with seeing more deeply (see Eliade 1963; Hadot 2002: 223-35).

[33] One might be inclined to say that this purported reference to Bourdieu is, like conversion "itself," not directly observable. It seems to me, in any case, that appeals to Bourdieuean theory are of questionable utility for understanding conversion. For, in so far as conversion is a question of *transformation*, Bourdieu's *habitus* is a rather inflexible construct. The *habitus* is the space of unconscious reproduction, untouchable to intentionality and utterly unmoved, as Bourdieu says (1977: 94), by "voluntary, deliberate transformation." This immunity of the *habitus* to the effects of intentional action renders his theory unable to make much sense of practices of self-cultivation, innovation or change. (This difficulty often appears to pass unrecognised by those who deploy Bourdieu for these purposes, e.g., Flood 2004: 6.)

characterising conversion as a change in "embodied worldview" (Norris 2003: 171). But this is, I think, an awkward formulation, still captive to a cognitive vision, as is made plain when she writes that the "convert *experiences* conversion as a reorientation to a new religious belief system" (2003: 171; my italics). This is an epistemological claim, not a phenomenological description, and the difference usefully demonstrates the prevailing tendency in the literature, which is that the analysis of conversion has so often been couched in the idiom of epistemology (see Holbraad 2009: 100). Exemplifying the tendency, Miyanaga argues that conversion in Mahikari concerns "an absolute change of an individual's epsitemological orientation" (see Miyanaga 1991: 106). Here and elsewhere, conversion is conceived, in effect, as the reordering of one's world-picture, in which novel representations (or beliefs or propositions) are imported into the mind. Since this epistemological paradigm is, I contend, the dominant operating system within the sociology of conversion, I will, for present purposes, name and frame it in the following terms: as Windows epistemology.

Now, it might be observed that there is, on the contrary, general agreement that there can in fact be *no* uniform model of conversion, because the outcomes of conversion are dependent on the specific social relations in play – with their attendant pressures and persuasions acting on the convert – as well as on the particular beliefs of the religious collective (see Bromley 2009: 732-733; Gooren 2007: 347; Rambo 1993). And yet, this recognition of variation – of conversion as a plural process – masks an underlying presupposition of invariance, since, beyond its various actualisations, it is taken as axiomatic that conversion just *is* epistemic transformation, a rearrangement of beliefs or worldviews. In short, Windows epistemology, wherever one cares to look.[34]

In an effort to re-configure this complacent vision of conversion – complacent because it has taken on all the firm and familiar consistency of unexamined common sense – I want to suggest that we leave behind the well-trodden province of epistemology and turn towards the more experimental territory of ontology. Such a move is not without precedent. Victor Turner cut the trail for this train of thought in his famous exploration of rites of passage; such rites, he maintained, involve "not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being" (Turner 1967: 102). Turner's

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Moreover, Bourdieu himself does indeed speak of conversion (and of *metanoia*, its Greek equivalent), but this designates a power of transformative vision available only to sociology. For it is the sociologist uniquely who may, through the hard act of epistemological conversion, ascend to a quasi-transcendental perspective of the social world; a world in which others who might claim to have been converted can only be living in a state of *illusio* (see Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 248-53).

[34] For affirmations of the "worldview" worldview, see Bruce (2006: 1, 10), Buckser and Glazier (2003: xi), Gooren (2007: 350). For an early and influential expression of the idea that conversion can be defined as a change of worldviews, see Lofland and Stark (1965). Snow and Machalek (1983) were quite right to point out that the "what" of what changes in conversion is seldom spelled out in the literature. Their own solution (that what changes is the convert's "universe of discourse") is an undoubted advance on previous hazy formulations, since it recognised that conversion goes deeper than a change of "beliefs"; it being no mere "matter of rearranging the trivial elements of one's consciousness as one rearranges furniture" (Snow and Machalek 1983: 265). Yet, to the extent to which conversion is still figured as a "transformation of consciousness…indicated by the [convert's] talk and reasoning" (1983: 279), the conceptualisation of conversion remains epistemic; it just takes place at greater depth. It is, then, merely an updated version of the Windows framework: a Vista epistemology, if you will.

argument, in other words, is that rites of passage actuate transformations that are much less epistemic than they are *ontological*. My argument here is that conversion merits consideration in the same terms. I should make it clear that my argument is emphatically *not* that epistemological issues are not implicated in conversions; for, no doubt, conversions involve their own particular modes of knowing, their own pedagogies, etc. (See Faubion 2001: 25-29). What is at issue, rather, is the epistemological model implicit in much conversion scholarship, wherein conversion *qua* transformation is assumed to be epistemic in a curiously restricted sense, understood merely as a shift from one cognitive scheme to another, or as a switching of pictures ("world-views", and so on). There are then, I suggest, numerous benefits in taking up this ontological perspective for the study of conversion; not least, what this approach can do for difference (which I take to be the anthropological property *par excellence*).

Within Windows epistemology, difference is only admissible at the componental level, in the local and particular arrangement of social relations and the ingredient beliefs of the collective in question. But at the most fundamental level, that of the concept itself, conversion is basically the same in all of its instantiations. But as I have already argued (in the intro), In the ontological approach, by contrast, difference is admitted at the very start, for the question of what conversion might be awaits its determination in the encounter with actual ethnographic cases (see Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007).

A further advantage in adopting the ontological position relates to the materiality of religious practice. So long as conversion is conceived as epistemic, there is a tendency to assume that it is an ultimately invisible or inaccessible operation – an assumption that gives rise to the clock-handed language of "indicators," of outward signs dimly denoting more important processes happening elsewhere. Indeed, Keane (2009) has recently argued that religion cannot be understood apart from the manner in which it is semiotically and materially mediated. Thus, concurring with Keane, and contrary to Zock, who asserts that "the social sciences aim at shedding light on the psychosocial reality *behind* conversion" (Zock 2006: 41; my emphasis), the method I advocate here will stick closely to conversion's *surfaces*. For, if the epistemological impulse leads sociology to posit remote operations that take place behind the back of practices and materiality, my premise in this essay is, instead, that conversion is not something that can be said to be somehow present prior to, or beyond, the ways in which it is structured, storified, made material, or otherwise given body by practice.

It is with these considerations in mind that I will aim to explore the ontological dimensions of conversion as these are disclosed in the practices of Mahikari. In this particular ethnographic case, I shall consider the ways in which conversions are rendered sensibly and palpably present, in particular, through tactile practices. Conversion, in Mahikari practice, is bound up with what Taussig (2006) calls "viscerality" – that conjugation of flesh and sense, in which bodies constitute the prime materials for the play of revelation. Conversion so construed, as a kind of visceral contact, offers a challenge to the Authorized Version of conversion accepted by so much sociology of religion. Arguing anthropologically, I suggest that the Authorized Version is up for revision. But first, some necessary introductions are in order.

Purifications

Mahikari's central practice – the manual transmission of divine light – is formally referred to as "the Mahikari technique" (*Mahikari no waza* 真光の業), but more normally known simply as *tekazashi* (手かざし 'raising the hand') or *okiyome*, "purification." As Mahikari members say, *okiyome* may be done "at any time, anywhere, to anyone" (*itsu demo, doko demo, dare ni demo* いつでも、どこでも、誰にでも Okada 1993: 100-1), but it is most commonly done in the dojo, the training hall, the regular space for all serious practice, and, more specifically, the place where one "gets in touch with god" (*kamisama to sessuru* 神様と接する), as Shōji-san put it to me (cf. Davis 1980: 1-2; Okada 1993: 127). *Okiyome* is a practice of purification, then, but many Mahikari activities have cleansing effects: reading divine books, cleaning the dojo, working at the reception desk, handing out leaflets in the streets, etc. Everything, in fact, that constitutes 'practice' (*jissen* 実践) in Mahikari involves purification; and, in this sense, doing is almost always purifying. Purification is thus something you do, but it is also something that happens. Sweating, for example, is purifying. A brief example: on one of those hot days in July, I meet Shōji-san, standing in the street by the train-station – his usual spot – trying to give out Mahikari leaflets to the people walking past. I complain about the weather: "It's too hot", I say. But he corrects me. One ought to feel gratitude (*kansha* 感謝) for the heat, he advises. Say thank-you to the *kamisama*, because the heat makes us sweat and sweating purges the body of the 'dirt' (*yogore* 汚れ) that is inside it. As Tebêcis explains the principle: "People often complain that it is too hot, but it is important to remember that sunshine is a particular life-sustaining energy and the hot sun detoxifies much of the organic waste material that may otherwise pollute people…Also, perspiring is a wonderful way of cleansing the body" (1988: 201). And according to Oshienushisama (Okada Keishu 2000a: 97-98; 2003: 74-75), when people "pour out their discontent, saying 'its hot, its hot', hot, close vibrations (*atsukurushii hadō* 暑苦しい波動) fill the air', so that they become become hotter still. One ought, instead, to say thanks and "sweat with love" (*aikan no ase* 愛汗の汗).

This little illustration shows that purification occurs, it is something that we receive from God, like sweat on a hot day – but also fever, a runny nose, coughing and crying; all these, as well, are everyday purifications (see Tebêcis 1988: 215) for which we should feel gratitude (*kansha* 感謝). Thus, in this cosmology of essential corporeal functions, our bodies are obliged to the operations of purification.

As a practice, *okiyome* is seen as central because it allows human beings to actively intervene in the ever-accelerating process of pollution. The world, warned Okada Kōtama, the founder of Mahikari, is 'a world full of toxic energy' (*dokki jūman no yo* 毒気充満の世 cited in Yasaka 1997: 59). These toxins comes in many kinds, from the accumulated impurities of karma (*zaie* 罪穢), to the new pollutions of industrial modernity: pharmaceutical products, chemical additives, ultra-violet rays, acid rain, and so on. Every day, as Yasaka (1997: 59) explains – in a book which conveys Mahikari's urgent message – the bodies of human beings are shot through with 'poisoned arrows' (*dokushi* 毒矢) of pollution. All such toxic imports lodge in bodies to form "mud-poisons" (*dakudoku* 濁毒), coagulating impurities that, unless melted and expelled by the autonomous actions of the body – defecation, perspiration, etc. – will engender "spirit-blocks" (*reishō* 霊障), a name given to any sort of obstruction or suffering. Long ago, during the divine era (*kamiyo* 神代) humans had pure spirits, but over time, their "spirit patterns" (*hinagata* 霊成型) have distorted, and their spirits

have become 'enveloped' in impurities, as the divine teachings put it, in an assonating play on the words for 'wrapping' (*tsutsumi* 包み), 'stacking' (*tsumi* 積む) and 'transgression' (*tsumi* 罪).[35] A body's own purgative powers are, therefore, now no longer capable of dealing with the continual inflow of contaminants; hence the regular necessity of *okiyome* practice. The divine heat and light of *okiyome* works by liquefying these karmic and chemical pollutions, dissolving spirit-blocks and re-opening vital flows, both within the body and more widely without.

It is important to emphasize however, that, notwithstanding its potential therapeutic effects, the primary purpose of *okiyome* is not curative, but salvific.[36] Healing and sundry other benefits that practitioners testify to having received – bundled together under the slogan of 'health, harmony and prosperity' (*ken*, *wa, fu* 健和富) – are deemed to be side-effects of the more essential operation of salvation that *okiyome* is designed to produce. In Mahikari understanding, then, *okiyome* is a technique for the production of salvation. But since purity and salvation are so intimately tied to the technical, they remain forever as contingent conditions, dependent on practice for their activation. Purity is always provisional; salvation is never safe.[37] As I will explain further in Chapter 5, Mahikari members are therefore enjoined to engage in a kind of perpetual practice, an ongoing programme of transformation that could well be described – in Foucauldian terms – as comprising "technologies of the self" (Foucault 2000), so long as we recognise, with Hadot, that such transformative exercises refer not merely to a self itself, but also have, crucially, a cosmic range of reference (see Hadot 2002: 323-32). In this respect, Mahikari thought accords with broader Japanese cosmological conceptions, especially developed in the new religions, wherein the self is the vital centre of a mobile and extended network of material, spiritual and ethical connections. Transformations at the level of the self have the potential to transmit their effects across the system, with cosmological consequences (Hardacre 1986: Ch. 1; Köpping 1977: 141-43). It is for these reasons that transformative techniques, and the exigency of their regular repetition, are held to be so central in Mahikari and in other Japanese religious groups. By the same token, the body, as the vehicle of technique, is regarded as a major cosmic and soteriological operator.[38] But this mention of the body leads me to turn to the matter of conversion, for it is my claim in this chapter that in Mahikari conversions, it is bodies that matter.

Conversions

As might, perhaps, be expected, there is in Mahikari a whole battery of terms that stand for transformation, both as happening and as aspiration. Among them, *sōnen*

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[35] This association of words occurs repeatedly in the *Goseigen* (御聖言), the book of divine messages which Su god transmitted to Okada. See Okada (nd: 113, 207, 209, 268, 338, 437-8, etc.).

[36] See, variously, Tebêcis (1988: 47); Yasaka (1997: 110); Sūkyō Mahikari (2002a: 8); Louveau (2012: 324). Hence, I think that Pierre-Louis – in an otherwise excellent article (1997) on Mahikari practice – is mistaken in designating *okiyome* as a 'healing ritual' (*Heilungsritual*).

[37] This notion of the everyday inevitability of pollution and the concomitant contingency of purity is a recurrent theme in Japanese cosmological formations more generally, especially evident in ascetic practices. Thus, see Blacker (1999: 42), Raveri (1990: 259).

[38] On the significance given to the body in Japanese religious practices in general, see Pye (1997); Schattschneider (2003); Kawano (2005); Bowring (2005: 237). Watanabe (2008) is an excellent ethnography on the central recognition of the transformative capacities of bodies in Shingon Buddhism.

tenkan (想念転換 "change of the innermost attitude"), *shinkō* (神向 "turning towards God"), *shinseika* (神性化 "divine transformation"), and so forth. Now the sense of these expressions all turn on "turning" – that is to say, on "conversion," which is just what conversion, etymologically speaking, means (see Hadot 2002: 223-4). But most pertinent for the purposes of my argument is a further term: *henka* (変化). In ordinary Japanese, *henka* simply means "transformation," "change" (though without the economic or transactional implications of the latter word), and in Mahikari, the term carries the same meaning, but its usage tends to be tied to a particular context: that of the practice of *okiyome*. The term *henka*, then, is typically used to refer to the transformative effects of divine light, given or received in *okiyome* practice. Thus, it is not uncommon for the recipient of *okiyome* to be asked the question, just after a session is finished, "Did you have any *henka*?" (*henka arimashita ka?* 変化ありましたか). A typical reply would be to say, for example, that one's body felt warmer. One member of a Mahikari dojo I often visited, once asked me, in a more extensive sense, whether I had had any *henka* since joining the group. I had to think a little. Well, I said, I thought I was drinking less. For her part, she said that her desire to drink alcohol had gone away.

Such cursory examples show that *henka* therefore designate changes of various scales and intensities, great or small, immediate or those more slowly unfolding, from variations in temperature, to shifts in temperament. It is important to stress, however, that the references of *henka* are not to abstract or intellectual changes, but almost always to specific, sensible and tangible transitions. That *henka* so often nominate some particular, palpable experience is indicated by the fact that, following a session of *okiyome*, a representative reply (were it to be in the affirmative) to the question, "Did you have any *henka*?" would be a deictic response, to say, "Yes, – *here*," and touch a place on one's body. And I suggest that it is *here*, in contact with this *henka*-effect, that the seemingly untouchable model of conversion advanced in sociology comes to be much less convincing. (If I translate *henka* as "conversion" it is in order to bring this particular Mahikari concept of change to bear upon our own well-worn notion of what passes for "religious change," and, to recall my discussion of transformative translation in the Introduction, the intention and effect of this transposition is to *change* the latter.) For, when tactically opposed to the sociological model, the tactile and sensuous sense of *henka* transgresses the model in all kinds of anthropologically interesting ways. Not least because, as I have already attempted to argue above, the sociological comprehension of conversion – the Windows vision – is unable to grasp what conversion, as transformation, might be, beyond epistemic change. The Mahikari theory of transformation subverts a number of sociological certainties. Among them (less a principle of method than a generally unexamined article of faith), the view that conversion can only be apprehended second-hand or indirectly, because its ultimate point of origin lies beyond corporeality, untouched by the effects of practice. The Mahikari practice of *okiyome* suggests otherwise, and we will need to consider its performance, and the scope of *henka*-effects it can produce, in more detail, in order to see how this is so.

The procedure of purification

How, then, does the technique of *okiyome* proceed? As a technique, *okiyome* is, in fact, fairly easy. It is also highly flexible; all that is really required is the *omitama* (the divine amulet) and an open hand. The doing of *okiyome* can range from the most

casual of actions – like my frend Maki-san discreetly giving light to her cinnamon cake as we chatted in a café, her hand slightly cupped, wrist resting on the table; a quietly disguised gesture in a public place – to the full-blown formality of practice in the Mahikari dojo.[39] In its standard format – as practiced in the dojo – *okiyome* is performed by two people sitting on the floor. One, the "light-giver" (*sekōsha* 施光者) holds up their hand and transmits divine light to the body of the other, the "light-receiver" (*jukōsha* 受光者), who either sits or lies down; their direction and position determined by whichever area of their body is being purified. Normally, *okiyome* proceeds in three phases, in which purification is given to the three most vital zones of the body respectively: to the forehead, to the back of the head, and, finally, to the small of the back. A comprehensive session of purification lasts around fifty minutes, during which the three phases are oriented towards various "vital points" (*kyūsho* 急所), twenty-seven specific positions that punctuate the body, that have a somewhat similar function to the pressure points (*tsubo* ツボ) in acupuncture. Indeed, as a practice concerned with maintaining the proper currency of the body via diverse points charted across the body's surfaces, *okiyome* has certain affinities with acupuncture. The special point of the *kyûsho*, however, is that they mark the locations where toxins coagulate inside the body, the "places where poison accumulates easily" (*doku ga atsumari-yasui tokoro* 毒が集まりやすい).

In order to illustrate how *okiyome* plays out in practice, in its most common configuration, I will describe a practical study session which new members are expected to attend at some point after taking the Beginner's Training Course.

The Basic Study Meeting (*kiso benkyōkai* 基礎勉強会) was held in the Osaka main dojo at the end of most months. All new members are expected to attend at some point after taking the Beginner's Training Course. As my care-taker (*osewagakari* お世話係), Yoshino-san had been hopeful that I would go, hoping and praying perhaps – she often prayed for me, she said. I had returned to London for a space and now, in Japan once more, had finally arranged to turn up for the study meeting, some six months after having joined Mahikari. Yoshino-san and I had agreed on the morning session; the meeting took place twice, in the morning and the evening. Arriving at the dojo just before half past ten, I signed in at the reception and was given my 'new member' (*shinkumite* 新組み手) badge with its image of a green, sprouting seedling. Yoshino-san appeared and we went upstairs together, washing our hands at the long metals sinks on the way. At the top floor, Yoshino-san paused by the rack of pigeon-holes that ran wall to wall before the entrance to the dojo proper. These compartments were stacked high with *hanshi* (半紙), small paper envelopes for making offerings. 'I've already seen yours this morning', she said, saying without saying, as it were, that I ought to make a donation. Feeling slightly awkward, as I often did about this, I leafed through a pile until I could find a *hanshi* with my handwriting on it, and slid in 200 yen; an offering for *okiyome* appreciation (*okiyome onrei* お浄め御礼). Carefully dropping the envelope into the *gohônô-bako* (御奉納箱), the offering box, and bowing, I went into the dojo.

[39] Giving *okiyome* – especially in public places – may be done quietly and casually – without the invocation of the *Amatsu norigoto* prayer or other accompanying ritual actions. See Louveau (2012: 213), for a nice example of a *kumite* who inconspicuously gives divine light when she visits the supermarket.

There was a keen atmosphere in the hall, the people there getting settled down on the *tatami* in pairs. Yoshino-san introduced me to my partner for the meeting, a young man, whose name I forget. He took the training course just a month ago, so I am, in a way, his senior, his *senpai*, she said. As such, Yoshino explained, I should give *okiyome* to him first. He would give light to me afterwards. This reciprocal giving of light is called *okiyome kōkan* (お浄め交換), *okiyome* exchange; a common practice in the dojo. We sat down in *seiza* fashion, all of us facing the far end of the dojo, towards the *goshintai*, the hanging scroll housed in a wooden shrine, its golden interior glowing under electric lights. To the front of this, a Mahikari minister, a *dōshi*, came and sat down, leading us all in *kaishi omairi* (開始お参り), the opening prayers. Bowing and clapping, we tried to keep time together. Next, Fukuyama-san, the minister, turned to greet us with a polite 'Good morning, nice to meet you.' We all responded. Then, with instruction from the minister, we began *okiyome* according to the correct protocols. Still on our knees, still facing the *goshintai*, we offered up prayers again; bowing, clapping, asking of God that we may give light, then turning around to our *okiyome* partners, we bowed, less deep this time, and quicker, saying that we will now do *okiyome.* All of this was said in the proper way, in *keigo*, honorific Japanese, the register of hyper-politeness, which, put into English literally, comes out as a lot of unwieldy words; something like, 'I will be caused to be humbly allowed to do *okiyome*'.[40] Speaking at the same time, the young man – my partner – bowed, expressing his acceptance.[41] I motioned to him to take his place first, a matter of good form. Sliding sideways on his knees, he installed himself on a *zabuton* (座布団), one of the square, white cushions that were laid out in pairs across the dojo floor. I settled down on the other one. In this position, my partner was facing towards me and towards the *goshintai* behind me at the back of the hall. His eyes were shut and his hands held up, palms together, ready to receive *okiyome*. The minister directed those of us about to give light, to begin reciting the *Amatsu norigoto*, the 'Prayer of Heaven', counting us down so that we could keep time together. We clapped three times and, with hands together, called out the prayer in a measured pace. The hall filled up with sound; a slow, rolling concatenation: GOKU-BI-JI-SSŌ-GEN-GEN-SHIKAI, TAKA-AMA-HARA-NI KAMU-TAMA-HI… – and so on. With the ending of the prayer, I raised my hand, holding it in the air in front of my partner's head before me. Fukuyama-san, the *dōshi*, began to move up and down the room and give out advice, while Yoshino-san, sitting beside me, attempted translation for my benefit. As with the beginner's training course, where Yoshino-san had translated the lectures, I was once again hearing double, as it were, and I tried hard to hear over her English, welcome though it was, in order to get at the minister's Japanese explanations.

My left hand upheld, palm outwards towards the young man's head, his eyes closed, I was giving *okiyome* to him. Meanwhile, the minister gave instructions. The first point (*dai-itten* 第一点), he said: try to keep your outstretched arm and shoulders relaxed. The light radiating from your hand is not coming from you. It comes from the *kami* and it is only passing through you, through your *omitama*. You are not its origin, he explained. Indeed, I had heard this before. Tanizaki-san, a *kumite* from the Osaka

[40] *Okiyome o sasete itadakimasu, dōzō yoroshiku o-negai itashimasu* お浄めをさせて頂きます、どうぞよろしくお願いいたします.

[41] *Dōzō yoroshiku o-negai shimasu* どうぞよろしくお願いします, he said, which could be construed as 'I should be obliged'.

main dojo, had once told me something similar when I was giving him *okiyome*. Loosen up your wrist and your shoulders, Tanizaki-san had recommended, 'It's better not to put force into [your arm]' (*chikara ga hairana hō ga ii* 力が入らないほうがいい). A tense gesture – one's arm raised firmly and forcefully – is an emphatic gesture; it suggests that one is not compliant, neither receptive to god nor grateful for the gift of giving light.

Point number two (*dai-niten* 第二点), the minister went on, is to imagine the light as penetrating, running through (*tōrinukeru* 通り抜ける) your partner's body before you. One should have 'piercing thoughts', or 'an attitude of passing through' (*tsuranuku sōnen* 貫く想念). That is, think of the light flowing from your hand as penetrating the head of your partner, running through it and out into the wall (*kabe ni* 壁に) at the back of the dojo. As he spoke, Fukuyama-san supervised our practice, walking back and forth along the runway of red carpet that led up to the *goshintai*. He took care not to cross the room widthwise, for to do so, to transverse the dojo-space in which we all sat in rows, doing *okiyome*, would be to break or interfere with the lines of light passing through our bodies from the *goshintai*. (As I pointed out in Chapter 1, not to walk in this way – crosswise and between people who are engaged in purification – is a matter of quite ordinary etiquette in the dojo.)

The third (*dai-santen* 第三点) and last of the minister's instructions: don't be conceited, he told us (*ga wo dasanai* 我を出さない). In doing *okiyome*, don't be full of yourself, thinking high-mindedly, for example, how well you can heal (*naosu* 治す) the person before you. One should, instead, give light with gratitude and with love, thankful to the *kamisama* and full of love for others (*rita-ai* 利他愛). Having issued these three guidelines, Fukuyama-san briefly raised the subject of spirits, speaking of those 'occasions', during *okiyome*, 'when spirit movements appear' (*reidō ga dete iru baai* 霊動が出ている場合).

The person in the position of receiving light (*jukō* 受光), he remarked, is run through by the light. Any spirits that may be attaching to that person are similarly purified and, as a result, may come out, emerging in 'spirit movements' (*reidō* 霊動). I listened to this, all the while with my hand raised, giving *okiyome*, and I observed the young man right in front of me. But he sat unmoving, his eyes closed, and his hands, loosely held together, rested on his lap. There were, indeed, no signs of spirit movement anywhere in the dojo that day.

But now, with the first phase of *okiyome* almost over, the minister directed us to prepare for the *chinkon no waza* (鎮魂の業), the technique of spirit pacification. After giving light to the forehead (*miken* 眉間) for some ten minutes, the person doing *okiyome* calls out '*oshizumari!*' (お静まり Be still!), three times over their partner, thus bringing to a close the initial stage in the course of purification. Accordingly, Fukuyama-san told those of us giving light to put our hands together (*gasshou shite* 合掌して) and to intone *oshizumari*. Be sure, he advised, to enunciate the five syllables, O-SHI-ZU-MA-RI, loudly and clearly (*hakkiri to* はっきりと), as these contain strong *kotodama*, spiritual powers. Moreover, when calling out *oshizumari*, make sure to keep your eyes open, he said, without any further explanation. Last of all, we were instructed to make a sweeping motion with both arms past the head of the person receiving light, the arms arcing down in the shape of the Chinese character for the number 8 (*hachi* 八), and this to be done three times with each calling out of *oshizumari*. We all performed the *chinkon no waza* as directed, a moment of sweeping arms and invocations. Then, inviting my partner to

open his eyes, I asked, as one is supposed to do, if he was 'clearheaded'; that is to say, was he awake and able to see (*hakkiri shite imasu ka* はっきりしていますか).[42] Yes, he responded, and so we moved on to the next phase of *okiyome*. The young man turned around, his back towards me now, and shifted into a cross-legged posture, more comfortable than the *seiza* style that I was yet sitting in. For the next few minutes, I would be giving light to the back of his head, to a particular place at the base of the skull that is generally referred to, simply, as 'number seven' (*nana-ban* 七番). This is one of the twenty-seven 'vital spots' or purification points, located across the body.

For the beginner, coming to know the locations of these points can be somewhat difficult. One finds them by feeling the body of the person receiving light, by probing and pressing with the fingers, and sometimes, by asking the person if one has hit the mark, laid one's hands upon the right spot. Now, apologizing (*shitsurei shimasu* 失礼します) for touching my partner, according to etiquette, I felt the back of his head, trying to feel out the location of number seven. Fukuyama-san advised us. Find the back of the skull, in the centre, he said. About the width of one finger to the left or to the right, is a slight hollow (*chotto hekonde'ru tokoro*). This, the minister pronounced, is number seven. (Number seven, I should explain, in fact denotes two symmetrical spots – one left, one right – on the back of the head) Having found what felt like the spot, I took my hand away and held it in the air, giving *okiyome* to the purification point.

All the while, Fukuyama-san continued his talk. Long ago, when he first took *kenshū*, the beginner's training course, he could not understand the teachings, he told us. But he had reached understanding slowly through practice (*jissen*), through the giving and receiving of *okiyome*. In purifying, and in being purified, he had come to grasp the vital points, their locations and significance, through the bodies of others, by feeling for the *kyūsho* when he gave light; through his own body, being felt when he received light; through 'touching' (*sawaru* 触る), he said, and 'being touched' (*sawarareru* 触れる). The minister impressed upon us the importance of practice, of doing *okiyome* 'thoroughly' (*tettei shite* 徹底して).

And then, he told us to stop and swap with our partners, so that they could now give light. The young man turned himself around, shifting off the cushion. We bowed to each other, exchanged thanks for purifications given and received, changed places, and began the procedure all over again.

As performed in the dojo, then, the programme of *Okiyome* consists of three phases: divine light is directed at the forehead, at the back of the head, and then at the lower back. (I should point out that this third phase was left out of the study session, probably owing to reasons of time, as a comprehensive session of *okiyome* requires about fifty minutes to perform.) Each phase is also timed; generally ten minutes for the first phase, fifteen for the second, and anything from five minutes to about half-an-hour for the third. Mahikari members themselves do not talk in terms of 'phases', but generally refer to the different periods of *okiyome* by the points or places purified. Thus, my 'phase 1' is often simply spoken of as 'number 8' (*hachi-ban* 八番), as when a *kumite*, for example, offering *okiyome*, asks me if I have already received light to my forehead: 'Have you received to number eight yet?' she inquires (*mō hachi-ban ukeraremashita ka?* もう八番受けられましたか). Or again, Shōji-san, signalling to

[42] In Japanese, the expression is fairly non-specific, simply something like 'are you clear?'

me that we should start the second phase, simply pronounces, 'Right, it's the back of the head next' (*jaa, tsugi kōtōbu desu* じゃあ、次後頭部です); or (of phase 3) he could just say 'Now, the kidneys' (*kore kara jinzō* これから腎臓) or 'Now, number 1' (*kore kara ichi-ban* これから一番). The numbers, names and positions of the other vital points (recalling that there are twenty-seven in total) may be more or less well understood, according to experience, but as Fukuyama-san – the minister – had explained, learning to identify all these places on the body is a haptic matter; one discovers them empirically and intersubjectively through 'feeling' and 'being felt'. Unpractised members may receive guidance from the more accomplished *kumite*. But dojos also often display a visual aid in the form of a large chart, a technical, surgical diagram of the vital points. (see figure 1).

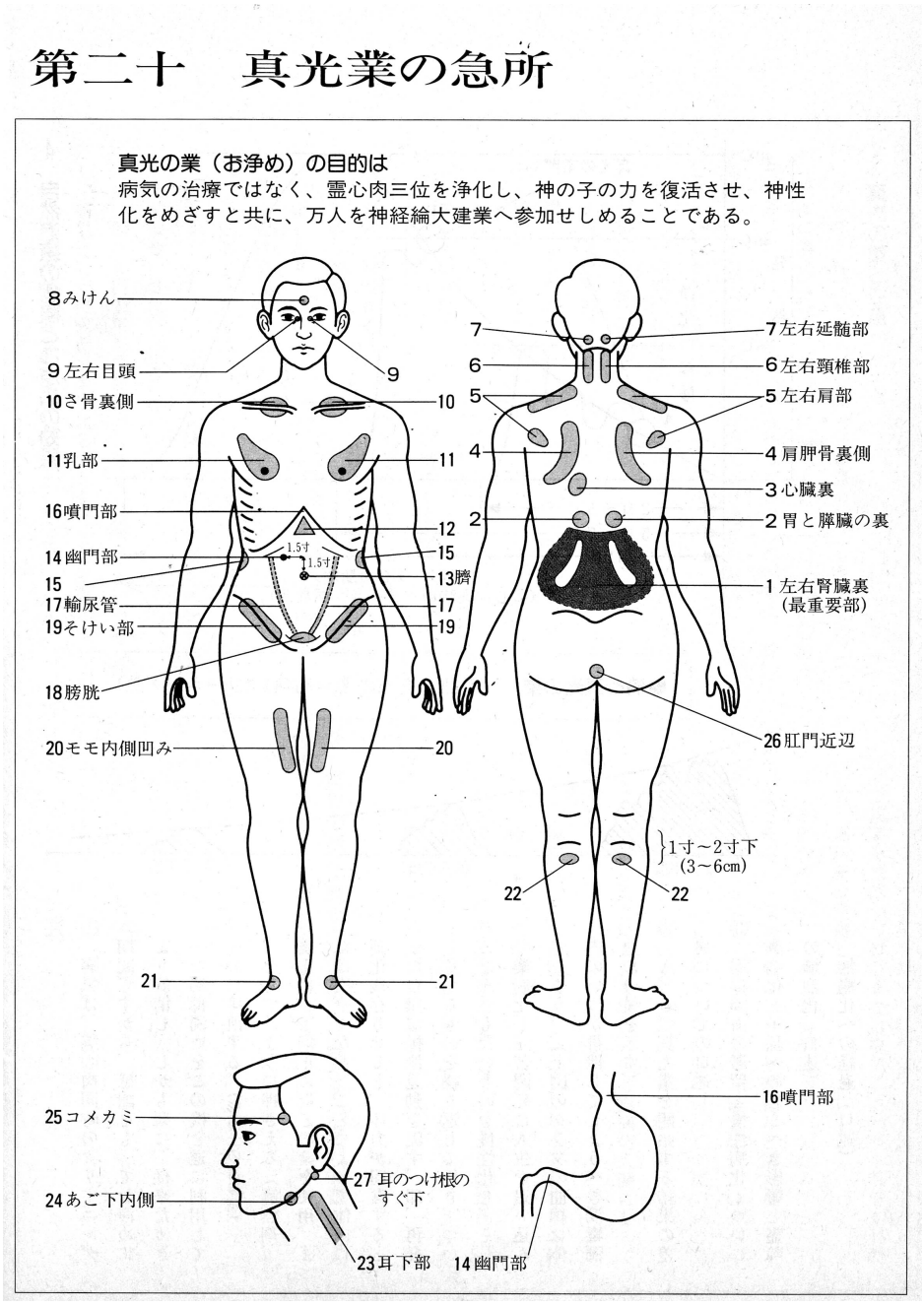

Figure 1. 'The vital points (*kyūsho* 急所) of the Mahikari technique'.

During the Primary Course, much of Saturday evening was devoted to different problems, illnesses, injuries, their respective spiritual causes and the various vital points to be purified in each case. Thus, for pleurisy, *okiyome* should be given to points 17, 18 (on the abdomen) and number 1; for high blood pressure, purify numbers 24 (below the jaw) and 10 (two spots on the collar-bones), and so on, for strokes, cataracts, neurosis, etc., etc.[43] In a regular session of purification, as already mentioned, four points claim most attention: number 8, then 6 and 7, followed by number 1. These last three spots pinpoint areas where the promotion of bodily flows is regarded as especially important. Number 1, for instance, designates the back of the kidneys (*jinzō no ura* 腎臓の裏), organs that should be purified often and kept 'soft' because they filtrate toxins. Number 8, on the other hand, is exceptional, as it marks the place of the 'primary soul' (*shukon* 主魂) situated 10 centimetres behind the forehead, in the pineal gland (*shōkatai* 松果体). Purification of this point is considered vital and, if nothing else, one should receive *okiyome* to number 8 every day, if possible. This is so, not only because this spot is held to be critical, but also because the infiltration of toxins into the body is constant, a continual defilement. Day by day purification of point 8 is thus regarded as the bare minimum. Some days in Akashi, when I didn't go to the dojo, Shōji-san would phone me up, quite emphatic that, if I had not been given *okiyome* that day, I ought to receive it to number 8 *at least*. He would then offer to come round to my room to do it, insistent since this phase of *okiyome* 'only takes 10 minutes' (*juppun dake de* 十分だけで).

Purification of the primary soul is imperative because this point is the main, and most effective aperture of divine light. *Okiyome* to the forehead (phase 1) is the most intensive phase, a ten minute period, generally, of closely focused work in which the light-receiver sits with eyes shut throughout. It is in this moment that any 'attaching spirits' (*hyōirei* 憑依霊) – spirits fixed to the light-receiver – may come out, confounded by the light, emerging in gesture or the gentle rocking of the body or even, sometimes, spilling into speech. Such spirits are held to be the principal cause of *reishō*, spirit-blocks. But whether they come out or not, the purification of this vital point is seen as indispensable and is thoroughly encouraged. As I will argue in Chapter 5, however, we should not let the high-priority given to this single period of light blind us to the significance of the other phases. The full fifty-minute programme of *Okiyome* is directed towards the body as a whole. It is a haptic practice targetted at certain sectors of the body with the aim of softening and so unblocking obstructions.

In order to demonstrate this more clearly, I will describe an instance in which I was given light by Tani-san, a Mahikari member in his sixties. I had already received *okiyome* to my forehead from another member, when Tani-san offered to take over and begin the second phase, in which divine light is directed at the back of the head.

Tani-san placed his hand on the back of my head, apologising for his impoliteness as one commonly does before touching the other's body during *okiyome*. I felt him

[43] The lecturer did not recommend *okiyome* for all cases and conditions. In the case of concussion – a person falling down the stairs, for example – we were advised to 'leave them as they are and call a doctor' (*sono mama ni shite, isha o yobu* そのままにして医者を呼ぶ). During his own *kenshû*, Davis was told the very same (see 1980: 38).

pressing the back of my neck hard, probing the flesh with his thumb – an almost painful exploration – his hand working slowly down, digging into my vertebrae.

With the second phase finished, Tani-san asked me to lie down on my stomach and he spread a blanket over my legs. Kneeling close on my right side, his back towards me, he found point number one and began giving light to it. Minutes later, I felt his hands on my back again.

"It's blocked here," (*koko, tsumatte'ru* ここ詰まってる) he pronounced, indicating a particular spot. That is why your spine is curved, he continued. "The mud-poison is pushing at the bone" (*dakudoku ga hone o oshite'ru* 濁毒が骨を押してる). He twisted his body round so that I could see him and, lifting his arm, he crooked his wrist to illustrate the effects of distortion, the process that he had diagnosed inside me. I admitted to him that I have always had bad posture (*nekoze* 猫背, lit., a "cat's back").

"Your back will continue to bend," Tani-san warned. He set about giving light to it. From time to time he would probe the line along my spinal column; it almost felt to me as if he was trying to divine some sort of channel, some direction in which the toxins were moving. I decided to ask him as much: "Have you found a line of flow (*nagare-kata* 流れ方)?"

He hesitated. "Not sure," (*wakaranai kedo* 分からないけど) he said eventually. Then he pointed out a place on my lower back. "But if I do *okiyome here*, it feels different," (*kanji-kata wa chigau* 感じ方は違う) he ventured. I asked if he could feel toxins melting there.

Again, he voiced some uncertainty: "I don't know completely" (*hakkiri wakaranai* はっきり分からない). Tani-san continued feeling and giving *okiyome* down the line, until he reached a place at the base of my spine. He prodded a spot. "It's blocked here," (*koko tsumatte'ru* ここ詰まっている) he asserted. Because of the blockage, he went on, the toxins cannot flow through and they are causing the bend in the backbone higher up.

Tani-san moved on to investigate my shoulders. He found a place behind my shoulder-blade. "*Tsumatte'ru,*" it's blocked, he said. He held his hand over the area, giving it *okiyome*. Next, he turned his attention to my left arm resting flat on the *tatami* mat. It feels hard (*katai* 堅い), he suggested, massaging it, and he gave it light as well. Returning to my shoulder-blade, he felt that he had located another area of accumulated mud-poison. Purifying the location, he worked his way up to my neck and, finally, the space behind my left ear.

"The time is up," Tani-san announced at length. I got up onto my knees and we prayed together.

Conversion and contact

There are different tactics of touching in *okiyome*, different styles of manual contact. Some people are very methodical, massaging the flesh in quest of the vital points and other hard spots under the skin. Others, women especially, touch more lightly, barely brushing the skin with their fingers. More than a few avoid direct contact – for the sake of politeness – interposing a handkerchief between their hand and the unclothed parts of the other's body, the back of the neck in particular. Sometimes, both hands are used, in feeling for the *kyūsho* point number one, for example, with fingers and thumbs passing down the spine and then moving outwards across the small of the back, in order to discover the point above the kidney. Or a hand may be used to hold

the body steady. There are other occasions when only a light, flat contact is required, a gentle press of the palm against the body, so as to measure the level of heat on the body's surfaces. The palm of the hand is like a thermometer (*ondokei*), Mahikari members sometimes say, and hot parts of the body indicate areas where toxins are melting. Different styles of palpation, different manners, differing exertions of pressure: some exercising a subtle touch, others pushing their fingers in. I could feel that Tani-san was unmistakeably of this latter sort, as he firmly thrust his fingers into the muscles of my back, in search of obstructions.

Now, it is quite clear from my account of Tani-san's practice – a typical instance of *okiyome* performance – that my body for him was a substance touched by internal interruptions, the congestions of mud-poison. He felt as if he could uncover different densities in the texture of my body – my back was blocked in places, my upper left arm, for him, felt hard – and that this was a detection done more by touch than by sight; it was, for the most part, a haptic examination. Just as evident, however, is that my body was not a transparent medium but a cryptic substance that could only be read on its surfaces, the processes at work in its depths divined mainly through the hands, hence Tani-san's hesitations and admissions of uncertainty. Tani-san was feeling for a diagnosis, but did not diagnose alone, he also aimed to intervene, aiming his hand at my back, my arm, my neck, in order to purify and remove the obstructions under my skin; the object of his practice was to interrupt these interruptions. This, then, is what we might speak of as the circular reasoning of *okiyome*: it works towards the restoration and promotion of flows, dissolving the toxic circuit-breakers in the body and re-establishing circulation.

Light and tactility

Under the light of *okiyome* bodies are said to "become soft" (*yawarakaku naru* 柔らかくなる), to "become warm" (*at'takaku naru* 暖かくなる) or, just generally, to "become better" (*yoku naru* 良くなる). In giving *okiyome*, one searches the other's body, on the look out for hard places, cold places – such areas are "sick"; they are areas of *reishō* ("spirit-blocks"). But one also attempts to find warm places, hot spots, felt most effectively with the palm of the hand – the manual thermometer. If part of the body feels "hot" or "feverish" (*netsu ga aru* 熱がある), if it feels like a "place that is burning up" (*moeagatte'ru tokoro* 燃え上がってる所) then this is taken as a hesitant indication that toxins "seem to be melting" (*tokasō* 溶かそう) at that spot. In either case, one should direct *okiyome* to both cold and hot locations, either to heat up and soften the body, or to further heat up, and so further promote, a melting in the body that is already occurring. At all points during the process, one should be purifying and testing, purifying and testing again, assessing the texture and temperature of the body for any changes. Yumiko-san, an older member, put the matter clearly. Advising me while I was giving *okiyome* to the back of her head, she suggested that I feel her neck, "check if it has become soft" (*yawarakaku natta ka tashikameru* 柔らかくなったか確かめる). If so, then this is evidence that "the dirt is flowing" (*yogore ga nagarete'ru* 汚れが流れてる).

It is common among Mahikari members to have an appreciation of light, of the tangible sensations of *okiyome*: hot, radiant contact. Receiving *okiyome*, people will often say that they feel "warm" (*at'takai* 暖かい) or that they can "feel the light" (*mihikari o kanjite iru* み光を感じてる). One woman in the dojo said to me, as I gave *okiyome* to her neck, that "I'm getting fantastic light – it's warm" (*sugoi*

mihikari o itadaite'ru ne. At'takai desu 凄いみ光を頂いてるね、暖かいです). And, again, afterwards, "A really good feeling. It's warm" (*sugoi kimochi yokatta. At'takai desu* 凄い気持ち良かった、暖かいです). Such sentiments are fairly typical. Another member's exclamation, just after *okiyome*: "I received enough light that it almost brought me out in a sweat!" (*ase deru gurai mihikari o itadaite'run desu* 汗出るぐらいみ光を頂いてるんです). And a woman, during *okiyome*, quietly conversing with her partner, was describing *okiyome* she had received from the dojo president, the day before. "*Amazing* light!" She said. "The way it melts is different…" (*mihikari sugoi! Toke-kata ga chigau* み光凄い！溶け方が違う). Here we see that the light of *okiyome* is said to differ not only in its texture, but also in its intensity.

But I would like to draw attention to a fact that is perhaps less obvious, that, just beyond the surface of the sense of *okiyome* – the sense of melting heat and amazing light – is this more general matter of the body being contacted, and it is this contact that touches off transformation. By this meaning of "contact," it might be thought that the only touching done in *okiyome* is the conspicuous feeling of the body in search of the vital points and the testing of the body's texture. There is also, though, a kind of contact that is more mysterious but no less palpable: the touch of divine light. To be sure, at the very moment of giving *okiyome* one raises one's hand over the body of the other, one does not touch the other, skin to skin – this being a gesture made before or after radiation, in order to check its effects or to explore the body for the next point of purification. But, in a sense, the touch of light goes deeper than the actual touching of the hand, since, as Mahikari members will say, the divine light "penetrates" the body, "runs through" it (*tōrinukeru* 通り抜ける*, tsuranuku* 貫く), and, in giving *okiyome*, one is supposed to focus one's attention on this piercing action in order to further incite it.

There is, then, the possibility of a tangible sensation of light in giving *okiyome* – Tani-san's saying that the *okiyome* to a part of my body *felt* different – and in receiving it too, in feeling warm, feeling good, feeling flows inside the body. And so, while I place great importance on the manifest and intimate touching of the hands on the body in *okiyome*, I would also insist on this other touch: the tangibility of light, for light, too, touches. "Tactility," as Vasseleu points out, "is an essential aspect of light's texture" (Vasseleu 1998: 12).

A body touched by *okiyome* is said to feel changed – purified, above all, but under this heading also melted, softened or, in some way, moved. There is a horizon of expectation about how a body may feel in *okiyome*, a range of possible movements and sensations that are, however, neither precisely fixed nor foreseeable. It is generally expected, however, that the contact of divine light is transformative, and that such transformations are concretely sensible, tangible and very often visible. These transformations may be empirically registered in the form of reports. In every Mahikari dojo there are certain records kept that chart an individual's reactions to *okiyome* over time. One such is the *seshin* kādo 施真カード, the 'True Treatment Card', a confidential record accessible only to staff members and to the person concerned, but there are other forms, simpler, though similar in appearance, which any Mahikari member may use to report the progress of a person's *okiyome*.[44] On

[44] One is required to fill in the *seshin kādo* on joining Mahikari (it will be kept at the dojo where one is registered). Although its format appears to differ according to the dojo, the information it requests is generally the same; and it is interesting. One is required to record one's genealogy (*keizu* 系図) back to the third generation – at least in the document I was

several occasions, then, a *kumite* who had just given me light would fetch a copy of my *okiyome* report, noting down the numbers of the vital points purified and the periods of light given to each point. There was a further blank space on the form for the registering of *henka*, and these too – were they to have occurred – would be logged, including details of their locations and the sensations involved. To give a brief instance of this from the Akashi dojo: I had received *okiyome* to all the main points when Ōkawa-san, my partner, asked if there was anywhere else I would like light. I told her that my throat had been sore recently; and so she instructed me to lie down on my back while she gave *okiyome* to my neck. Now and again, she reached down, checking the flesh just below my jawbone. Then, with the session over, Ōkawa-san fished out a clipboard and began jotting down the particulars on my *okiyome* report – the vital points and the times taken. She inquired if there were any *henka*. Well, my throat had begun to hurt a little, and so I told her this. Ōkawa-san duly made a note.

Thus, a body touched by divine light may register its transformations in the smallest of ways, as a tingling heat on the skin, for instance. Or, one can feel more deeply touched, a sense of movement right inside oneself – visceral tactility. Feelings of flow, of passage and outpouring are not uncommon. A person may say that they sweat, they may cry – during the first phase of *okiyome*, a person receiving light may shed tears, on occasion.

Or, one can expect more dramatic eruptions, more violent streamings across the body's surfaces. Yasaka relates an episode from the early spiritual career of Okada Yoshikazu, before he had founded Mahikari, but after he had received a divine mandate to 'raise his hand' (*te wo kazasu* 手をかざす). Working as an itinerant tradesman in Tokyo in the aftermath of the war, Okada began giving divine light to people in need. During one home visit, a woman told Okada that her daughter was suffering from acute appendicitis, and so Okada gave her light. "After twenty minutes or so, the daughter had completely come around and suddenly stood up, saying, 'I need to go to the toilet'. When she came out, she broke out into a smile and said that she had just had diarrhoea " (Yasaka 1997: 30). Tanizaki-san, a Mahikari member at the main dojo in Osaka, who always had a supply of fascinating stories on tap, told me once that, years ago, when he had just begun in Mahikari, he was drying himself after taking a shower, now pressing the towel to his face, when he saw that the towel was wet with his own blood; his face was perspiring blood, a palpable sign of intense cleansing. In fact, one hears such accounts all the time, ordinary reports of the miraculous that constitute *taikendan* (体験談 "experience stories"), members' testimonies that are delivered at meetings and published in Mahikari books and magazines. One popular work in English is thick with experiences of the after-effects of *okiyome*, of upsurging legions and effluvia, of "pain, fever, sniffling, phlegm, mucous, coughing, vomit, diarrhoea, boils, pimples, skin rashes, discharges of dark

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presented with – with any atypical deaths to be specially marked. Such data are intended to enable Mahikari staff to locate the cause of any possible spirit disturbances, should these occur. For the same reason, the form also has a small section on one's medical history, including any operations ever undergone, injections received, medicines taken, etc. Yoshino-san told me that this information was not essential, implying that it might only take on significance were one's medical record to be especially long and involved (and thus, again, of consequence for spirit disturbance). There is, lastly, a blank page upon which dojo staff may log the history and results of any spirit investigations (*reisa* 霊査, that is, interviews with attaching spirits) to be initiated in the event of spirits emerging during *okiyome*.

blood (from the nose, ears, bowels, genitals)," etc, etc. (Tebêcis 1988: 215) Members testify, sometimes in graphic detail, to the transformations happening in their bodies. One speaks of his "whole head feeling full of fluid" and then the unblocking, the "bright yellow gunk that just kept pouring out" every time he blew his nose. Another tells of the "blood" and the "rainbow of pus" that streamed from his ear (Tebêcis 1988: 214-226). Here, bodies bear witness to the truth of *okiyome*. Touched by the light, a sweating, streaming body, a body moved, transformed, is both the expectant outcome of *okiyome* and the concrete affirmation of its truth; both the proof and the process, testimony and effect. As one Mahikari member signs off his account of miraculous healing: "Thank you Su God for such an elimination and demonstration" (Tebêcis 1988: 223).

Conclusions

"Flesh," write Deleuze and Guattari, "is only the thermometer of a becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 179), and we might remember that the light-giver's hand has this function, employed as a manual thermometer (*ondokei*), to be occasionally pressed flat against the recipient's skin, in order to measure and monitor the transformative reactions of a body to divine light. That is to say, contrary to sociological orthodoxy, conversion *can* be felt by a person seemingly external to its process. For the Mahikari practitioner, giving light, the body of her partner presents itself as a field of tensive and soft surfaces, of colder and hotter folds, ridges and hollows. The constellation of *kyūsho* ("vital points") serve, in part, as points of orientation around this territory so familiar on its surfaces, enfolding the cryptic tissue of the interior, a visceral space of flows to be promoted and obstructions to be unblocked – the problem of conversion, figured and felt out in practice. But the flesh is not a thermometer only; it is both the measure *and* the medium, for, as both Mauss and Pascal argued – arriving, as it were, at the insights of a Japanese new religion without knowing it – the body is itself instrumental, generative; the vital vehicle of its own transformation.

In Mahikari, then, as I have endeavoured to demonstrate, the paramount practice of *okiyome* is said to effect sensuous transitions and movements, tangible transformations. As Louveau has asserted, members of Mahikari are able to "experience the reality of the light in their flesh, on their skin; sensations which are decisive in the recognition of the effectiveness of the ritual, which would not be realised without this physical contact" (Louveau 2012: 341). The extent of these *henka*-effects range from the very skinniest of occurrences – the softness of a neck, the heat that one might feel in the small of someone's back – to more irruptive flows and streamings. But whether these are minor corporeal sensations or more sensational stirrings of the body, all such transitions disclose the palpable presence of conversions in Mahikari practice; conversions that are intensively ontological operations, concerned, as they are, with the problem and project of becoming. Such intersubjectively sensible changes arguably call into question the sociological model of conversion as an unobservable, interior episode or process. The dynamics of conversion – configured in terms of *henka* – in Mahikari are neither wholly outside nor inside entirely, but operate in that haptic space of bodies in contact, in that indeterminate zone between the touching and the touched, the contingent zone of the in-between which gives rise to transformations within bodies. Or, as Köpping argues, in an outstanding inquiry into the transitory transformations that are experienced by participants at certain Japanese festivals (*matsuri* 祭り): "*inter-somatic* contact plays

the main role in *intra-somatic* transformations and experiences" (Köpping 2002: 156; his italics).

If conversion's turn is ontological, less an acquisition of knowledge, than a change in being – to return to Turner's formulation (Turner 1967: 102) – then it is not my intention to suggest that conversion, always and everywhere, must necessarily conform to the visceral, tactile type exhibited in Mahikari. I do not think, however, that this is a wholly foreign concept, for it sometimes shows up closer to home, in the more familiar territory of Christianity. Tanya Luhrmann (2004) has demonstrated, for example, how American Evangelical Christians experience what she calls 'metakinetic' sensations of relation with God – emotional, corporeal and interpersonal feelings of connection. Yet again, in a marvellous, open moment in his Gifford Lectures, William James – sounding very like Taussig – touches on the viscerality of conversion when he writes (of saints like Paul and of prophets like Fox) that, ''The subjects here actually feel themselves played upon by powers beyond their will. The evidence is dynamic; the God or spirit *moves the very organs of their body*" (James 1985: 478, my italics). Or consider Kenneth Burke, who entertains the possibility of a body being 'engraved' by revelation, touched or stigmatized by conversion, and he concludes that "Since passing anger can be externalized in a curl of the lip, why cannot the exaltation of any prolonged 'insight' be found finally in the very shaping of the organs, if we but know how to read the characters there?" (Burke 1984: 158). But if, as I have tried to argue, Mahikari practices demonstrate that conversions may be both visceral and visible, in the next chapter, I will turn to consider how conversions may be made verifiable, via experiments.

Chapter Three:

Divinity and Experiment: Conversions in capsules

'Never interpret; experience, experiment' – Gilles Deleuze (1995: 87)

What happens when divinities come to conjugate with experiments? Nothing much, from the point of view of established opinion. Divinities inhabit the domain of religion; experiments properly occupy the very different territory of science, and so the two cannot conjugate at all. 'Science', as Richard Dawkins explains, in his typically intransigent fashion, 'is based upon verifiable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence, its independence from evidence is its pride and joy' (cited in Cantor 2010: 285). And yet, for all that, the evidence of ethnography is that spiritual beings may indeed provide proofs of their existence in experiments. As an ethnographic case in point: on the 21st of September 1995, Hindu divinities momentarily demonstrated their presence in the so-called 'milk miracle'. Starting at a temple in New Delhi, and rapidly spreading to temples around the world, in what Vidal (1998: 157) has characterised as an 'experimental frenzy', the divinities were seen to exercise their agency by absorbing milk from spoons which were offered to their images. Such empirical, visible effects of oblation were not determined by 'religious faith' since even sceptical experimenters were able to reproduce them (Vidal 1998: 162-163; cf. Rao 2002). And in spite of attempts to redefine these experimental miracles by means of the peculiar physics of liquids – the milk-drinking images being explained in terms of the effects of surface tension and capillary action – nevertheless, these effects were still taken to be evidence of divine presence.

Some entities are not susceptible to testing, however. That is, they cannot be made to produce evidence of their existence in the 'regime of proofs' (Claverie 1990). The earth-beings of the Andes, for example, as de la Cadena has so entrancingly argued, are neither amenable to experimentation or reproduction (2015: 18). Andean earth-beings 'do not require proof to affirm their actuality' (2015: 150). But Mahikari spirits are not like this, for their existence is deemed to be something that can be verified by means of experimental practice. *Okiyome* is experimental in this sense, since one of its functions as a practice is that it brings to light, as it were, the 'existence of spirits' (*rei no sonzai* 霊の存在; see, e.g., Shimizu 1987: 66; Yasaka 1997: 61). But *okiyome* is experimental in another sense, in that its own efficacy can

be put to the test, and that it is deemed to be capable of producing effects regardless of 'religious faith'.

In the previous chapter, I examined how *kamikumite* experience the tactility and transitivity of divine light (*mihikari* み光), tangible effects of transformation that can be felt both by the person giving light and the person receiving it. Here, I want to consider how the light may be rendered detectable by means of experiment.

My subject matter is expressly concerned with what Serres might call a 'space of interference' (1995: 64), a domain in which divinities mix with science, and experiences fraternise with experiments. Indeed, I intend my argument to be a pint-sized experiment of its own – a litmus paper, if you will, that dips into two problems at once. The first problem is ethnographic and concerns the efficacy of experiments in a Mahikari. These experiments often involve jam jars, into which substances – commonly foodstuffs – are placed; they are then radiated with divine light and their subsequent changes recorded over time. Briefly put, the problem is this: what do these experiments do? The second problem is anthropological: what do *we do* with these experiments? That is to say, what are we, as anthropologists, to make of them? And what different kinds of effects are produced by the particular theoretical interventions we choose to make? Were we to have recourse to the usual interpretative procedures, we would very likely conclude that divinities can have nothing to do with evidence produced in experiments, since, as Dawkins states, 'independence from evidence' is the hallmark of religious faith. Hence, these jam-jar trials must be about something else, with the solution to the problem being no doubt locatable in another kind of container altogether – the heads of the experimenters, or the psychological space of 'belief'. As Stolow smartly summarizes this widespread tendency of thought, 'the actions and perceptions falling under the rubric of "religion" are assumed not to produce any objectively measurable effects within the order of the real', the 'real' in religion must therefore be subjective (Stolow 2008: 669). In other words, where science has come to preside over the realm of 'measurable effects', religion has been confined to the territory of subjectivity. Science (to paraphrase Vasconcelos) is associated with 'experiment', religion with 'experience' (Vasconcelos 2008: 14).

But what if we were to try out a method that would allow Mahikari experiments to, as it were, speak for themselves? Put this way, as a choice between methods and the kinds of differences they make to the ways in which ethnographic material gets conceptualised, I want to claim that the second, anthropological problem is intrinsically linked to the first, and is no less connected to efficacy. This is so because, as Stengers (2008: 53) points out, our theories 'are always efficacious, they always add to the situation, even when they only aim at diagnosing it'.

The question, then, concerns the difference that our additions make, because different effects are produced depending on the ways in which anthropology chooses to intervene theoretically. What I mean by this is simply that different ways of knowing things create different kinds of possibilities and consequences. In the Introduction, it may be recalled, I drew a distinction between two strategies of anthropological translation: between a domesticating translation as transposition (of 'their' terms into ours) and a foreignizing translation as transformation (of our terms by means of theirs). Here, I want to extend this a little, by establishing a corresponding contrast between two kinds of theoretical intervention and their attendant effects: interpretation – analogous to a domesticating translation – on the one hand, and experiment, on the other. Two types of method, then: interpretation and experimentation; and my argument, in sum, is that the former has the effect of

assimilating other people's concepts to our own, of recasting them to the consistency of our common sense.

To see that interpretation has the effects I claim it has, consider Godfrey Lienhardt's (1987) classic monograph on Dinka religiosity – the title of which I have obviously alluded to in naming this chapter. In *Divinity and Experience*, Lienhardt brilliantly shows how, in various ways, divinities are the objects of intimate encounter in Dinka social life. Indeed, he says that, for the Dinka, it is the divine powers that make certain kinds of experiences possible. But then he says that his readers would find this claim hard to understand, so he reverses the relations: if, for the Dinka, experience is a function of divinities, then for anthropology the divinities must be a function of experience. As he explains: 'to a European, the experiences are more readily understood than the [divine] Powers, and the existence of the latter cannot be posited as a condition of the former' (Lienhardt 1987: 170). Thus, what Lienhardt calls the 'interpretative task' is to show that Dinka divine powers are 'representations' (or 'images'), and what they represent are experiences (Lienhardt 1987: 147). Elsewhere, Lienhardt argues that the representation of experience is also the object of Dinka rituals: 'If they [Dinka rituals] do not change actual … physical events – as the Dinka in some cases believe them to do – they do change and regulate the Dinkas' experience of those events' (Lienhardt 1987: 291).

Now, Lienhardt's book blazed a trail; he was busy with experience while everyone else at the time was occupied with social structure. But his analysis poses a problem. It is, I think, the problem of what interpretation *does* – of what interpretation, as a kind of theoretical intervention, does to the things in which it intervenes. Interpretation, I want to argue, is a kind of intervening that changes 'interventions' into 'representations'. (I should explain that I borrow these terms, 'representing' and 'intervening', from the philosopher Ian Hacking (1983: 31). To represent is to say what the world is like; to intervene – as in the practice of experimenting – is to change it.) Thus, when I just suggested that 'interpretation is a kind of intervening that changes "interventions" into "representations"' what I meant was this: Lienhardt's Dinka informants stated that their rituals do produce changes in the world. Their practices, then, would seem to be forms of intervention. But here is Lienhardt's interpretation: Dinka ritual does not actually change the world (because it cannot), but it does change how the Dinka *see* the world. What for the Dinka, then, is a mode of intervention is for the interpreting anthropologist a mode of merely representing. Interpretation intervenes, and changes 'their' intervening into 'their' representing.

It is arguably the case that Lienhardt's argument – that Dinka ritual does not really do what the Dinka say it does – follows from the notion that the only place where religion can be said to 'work' is within the space of subjectivity. As Luhrmann once categorically asserted: 'The real questions behind most anthropological work on ritual are old philosophical questions on the nature of mind' (Luhrmann 1989: 384). It was an idea of this kind that became enshrined in the anthropological axiom (famously articulated by Edmund Leach) that ritual – as opposed to technique – neither makes nor does anything 'actual' or 'physical'. Instead, ritual is a sort of tag-end of technique, an 'aesthetic frill', a symbolic accompaniment to technique that says something, while technique actually does something (Leach 2000: 153-155, 168-169). As such, ritual is a sort of whistling while we work; a form of symbolic expression that accompanies the real work that technique actually achieves. Ritual whistles, as it

were, while work works. The paradox here is that ritual generally appears, quite conspicuously, to be about *doing*. As Hubert and Mauss observe, in their classic treatise on magic (1950: 11), ritual actions are 'eminently effective; they are creative, they do'.[45] And again, magical ritual is 'essentially an art of doing' (1950: 134). But their attentive efforts to address how it is that ritual is operational – or how to understand sympathetic magic sympathetically – are often in contention with an opposing assumption of theirs that ritual is only operational on the surface, but that deep down, it is not. Hence: ritual 'does nothing or almost nothing' (1950: 134). Or again, in admitting what alchemists say, that they work rationally, deductively, according to scientific laws along with a difficult system of signs and signatures, Hubert and Mauss decide that, in fact, the system 'is only a sort of garment with which they wrap their techniques'. The designation of science to all this is 'only a decorative title' (Hubert and Mauss 1950: 94) – in other words, more ritual frills.

All this is more or less well known, of course. But what I want to draw attention to is that if, for interpretation, ritual cannot be a form of intervention – because it possesses no efficacy to change the world – but can only change the way the world *looks*, then interpretation *itself* is understood to be thoroughly efficacious. As a form of intervention, it possesses the capacity to go beyond appearances and to access the real meaning of things. In doing so, it exerts a transformative capability, changing what people say they are doing into what their doing is really supposed to be: that it is, in fact, just a form of saying – of representing. In interpretation's wake, ritual does not actually change the world: it merely says something about the world, or changes the way the world is experienced. Feyerabend, I believe, fully understood this transformative effect of interpretation on native knowledge. 'When', he says, 'anthropologists collected and systematized this knowledge, they transformed it in an interesting way. They emphasized the psychological meaning, the social functions, the existential temper of a culture, *they disregarded its ontological implications*' (Feyerabend 1978: 77; my italics).

Now, to turn to Mahikari, the practice of *okiyome* is understood by *kamikumite* to be a technique of intervention. As Louveau has quite rightly remarked, Mahikari members have a 'deep awareness that they possess a force which allows them to intervene positively [*interférer positivement*] in everyday events' (Louveau 2012: 361). But equally, in so far as Mahikari advertises its technique of *okiyome* as a practical means of intervening, the efficacy of *okiyome* is also deemed to be detectable by means of experimental trials. This notion – that spiritual practice is compatible with scientific experiment – is, incidentally, by no means unique to Mahikari, and can be found in a number of other Japanese new religions (see Stein 2012: 116). Mahikari makes explicit its affinity with science – while simultaneously demonstrating its own truth as surpassing the knowledge which contemporary scientific practices are able to produce – by means of a spiritual word play. The spiritual definition of the standard Japanese term for 'science' (*kagaku* 科学) is that it is in fact 'divine learning' (*kagaku* 神学). It is this divine science which Mahikari claims to actualise in its practices.

[45] It is revealing, I think, that the sentence I quote above, in part, is translated by Robert Brain (Hubert and Mauss 1972: 19) to read, rituals 'are essentially *thought* to be able to produce'. There is no such qualifying language in the original. That is to say, it is as if Brain inserted this qualification because ritual cannot actually be operational, but only appears to be.

Be that as it may, scholars who have studied Mahikari have reached a rather more critical verdict: that Mahikari experiments are less like tests and more like tricks. Thus, McVeigh writes: 'Regardless of Mahikari's reliance on science to gain legitimacy, its actual use of science is methodologically unsound' (2004: 248; cf. 1997: 105); while for Pfeiffer (2000: 166), such experiments lack 'the scrutiny of the scientific method as we know it'. 'The aim of the "experiments,"' states Davis, 'is to confirm miraculous experiences, not to falsify scientific hypotheses' (Davis 1980: 97).

Once again, such remarks rather substantiate Klaus-Peter Köpping's claim regarding the overly censorious tendency in studies of Japanese new religions (see Köpping 1974: 44). But what is also interesting about such statements is less the question of whether or not they are accurate as judgments, than the fact that these authors felt the need to adjudicate in the first place – as if sociological analysis must necessarily be a matter of Popperian legislation. Now, it is of course a perfectly legitimate question to ask whether or not, or the extent to which, Mahikari experiments are 'experimental' in some sense or other. But I fail to see how denunciation – in advance of any serious consideration of what these practices are about – furthers our understanding of them.[46]

But if such experiments are really ruled to be nothing of the sort, then what are they? What do they do? The answer, it appears, is that, if experiments in Mahikari do anything, then their efficacy is wholly ideological. These authors all assert, with varying degrees of emphasis, that Mahikari experiments are mere legitimating tricks designed to reinforce what we might call (with apologies to Althusser) the Ideological Faith Apparatus of the Mahikari organisation. As McVeigh (1997: 108) summarizes it: 'employing the trappings and terminology of scientific discourse is a strategy for making the doctrine look more legitimate'. Although Mahikari members are quite emphatic that the practice of *okiyome* is a method of intervention – actually, an intervention of the most critical kind, since it is the paramount means of achieving salvation – scholarship decides otherwise; Mahikari practice is a means of representing – in fact, of *misrepresenting*, since the way it says what the world is like is spurious. But note the effect of interpretative intervention here: that, by zeroing in at once on ideology, these accounts pass right over the *stuff* – the slowly transforming substances which are the subject of experiment – inside the jam jars themselves.

But it is not just in Japan that social scientists are telling the natives that they are not really doing what they say they are doing. Consider what Tanya Luhrmann (1989: 125) has written about the practices of New Age magicians in London:

[P]ractitioners do not in fact go to great lengths to treat their rituals like experiments, to tabulate the results and judge the hypotheses. To describe some theory as falsifiable – the fiercest test for a science – there must be a clear-cut set of hypotheses which are

[46] Thus, Jarvie argued that anthropological explanation was intrinsically a matter of evaluation; a project of describing others in such a way that it 'satisfies our "scientific" culture's criteria of rationality or intelligibility' (Jarvie 1970: 236). Feyerabend was rather more forthright. Referring to the way in which scientists deal with astrologers, he (or, strictly speaking, a character in one of his dialogues) said: 'They don't study them, they simply curse them, insinuating that their curses are based on strong and straightforward arguments' (see Feyerabend 1991: 74-75).

tested against empirical events and rejected should the test repeatedly fail. In magic, that elaborate set of hypotheses is rarely present, let alone subjected to scientific test.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that what Luhrmann has to say about the force of persuasion and the effects of induction is strikingly similar to Davis. Davis (1980: 96-97) states that,

The cumulative effects of this massive "evidence" is to lull the mind into acquiescence… A stream of deeply emotional stories is constantly poured forth by the Mahikari press in order to prove that okiyome really works miracles… The effect of relentless theological induction is therefore to confirm specific ideas or miracles without actually verifying the general claims of the church.

While Luhrmann puts it this way:

Dramatic stories are recollected and recounted while ambiguous outcomes fade into the murky past… The cumulative effect of these stories is impressive: as a magician, you are told incident upon incident in which the rites apparently effected change. The psychological pattern is to remember the dramatic incidents, and to induce from those incidents remembered rather than the host of more ambiguous incidents in which they were embedded that magical ritual produces non-coincidental results.

Despite the fact that these natives say that their practices produce actual empirical effects, Luhrmann has interpreted otherwise. What *really* happens – the only actual transformation – is the slow switch that Luhrmann christens the 'interpretative drift'; the transition, over time, from some prior beliefs (among them, the proposition that ritual does not work), to a new view (the assumption that it does). Ritual experimental interventions, then, do not really create changes; they just induce the experimenters to believe that they do. But it is worth observing that the interpretative drift is itself an interpretation of Luhrmann's. To consider, then, the effects of her own interpretative intervention, we might better speak of the 'interpretative shift', insofar as the effect of interpretation itself is displacement; it shifts the source of efficacy elsewhere, away from the ritual experiment and into the mind of the experimenter. Change, transformation, does not take place in the experiment itself; it happens in the head of the native experimenter, who comes to *believe* that the experiment works. We, the anthropological interpreters, know better, of course. By means of the hermeneutic intervention, we are able to see what they do not: that the natives are representing.

But let us turn to consider the tenor of experiment in Mahikari, as well as Mahikari experimental practices themselves, in order to provide a rather different perspective on them.

Trying things out

Once I had become a member of Mahikari – equipped with an *omitama*, and thus capable of radiating divine light – I was urged, many times, to 'try out' (*yatte miru* やってみる) *okiyome*, to put it to the test. In an interview with the newspaper *Le Monde*, Okada Kōtama, the founder of Mahikari, was asked, 'Do miracles really occur just by attending the training course?' (*kenshū dake de, hontō ni kiseki ga*

okimasu ka 研修だけで、本当に奇跡がおきますか). His reply to the journalist: See for yourself. 'There is no other way but to see. If you see the Paris dojo, you will understand' (*Mite itadaku yori shiyō ga nai. Pari no dōjō wo goran ni nareba, owakari ni naru* みていただくよりしょうがない。パリの道場をご覧になれば、おわかりになる) (Sūkyō Mahikari 1983: 212).[47] As Davis (1980: 212) writes of Mahikari members, '"Just try it and see!" is a phrase constantly on the lips of the zealous. Not once', he continues, 'did I hear anyone say, "Believe it!" or "Have faith in it!"' He accredits this tendency to the 'typically unrestrained experiential outlook of Japanese folk religion' (Davis 1980: 113). Equally, Tebêcis states repeatedly that the only way to understand Mahikari is to try it out (see Tebêcis 1988: 16-17, 64-65, 162, 188, passim). As Tebêcis enthuses, 'Mahikari enabled me to discover truth by *doing* things instead of reading or talking about them. Here was a path that could be tested by experience and experiment!' (Tebêcis 1988: 51; original emphasis).

Be that as it may, this exploratory or experimental emphasis is by no means unique to Mahikari, for it is indeed a frequent theme in Japanese new religions (Shimazono 2004: 61; Stein 2012: 116). Köpping memorably reports that Kitamura Sayo, the founder of *Tenshō kōtai jingū kyō* (天照皇大神宮教) – otherwise known as the 'dancing religion', since one of its central practices was the 'dance of the non-self' (*muga no mai*) – once told him rather testily, 'Don't be silly, don't ask any questions, dance with them then you will get a feeling for the truth' (see Köpping 2002: 158).[48]

The praxical and empirical address to 'try out' *okiyome* can be understood as a particular inflection, and intensification, of a key concept of Japanese religiosity more generally, which is its thorough-going pragmatism (see Reader 1991: 15-20; 1996: 268-26). As Kawano (2005: 1) remarks of this general tendency, the 'attitude of "do it and see if it works" is widespread.' This experimental propensity is also explored, to fine comic effect, in the film *Trick* (2002), starring Nakama Yukie, in which a troupe of self-proclaimed gods descend on a mountain village, and are made to submit to various verification procedures, in order to establish the validity – or not – of their divinity.

But if this inclination towards the exploratory is a common theme in Japanese religions, there is also, in the particular case of Mahikari, a more proximate context, which is that of the occult milieu of the late Meiji period, most notably, the 'spirit science' (*reigaku*) of Honda Chikaatsu, which formed the background to the foundation of Omoto, as well as other new religions founded on the magico-empirical principle of *rei* – 'spirit' – as Nishiyama has identified (Nishiyama 1988; cf. Tsushiro

[47] Okada's exchange with the journalist was tape-recorded by other *kamikumite*; it did not appear in the newspaper. The *Le Monde* article (15 September 1973) is reproduced, in full, in Bernard-Mirtil (1998: 109-110).

[48] A marked example of this experimental-technical emphasis is the Pana-Wave Laboratory (*pana-wēbu kenkyūjo*), the mobile research facility of the new religion Chino Shōhō. Believing that their leader had been covertly targeted for assassination by electromagnetic weapons, the lab facility consisted of a convoy of white vans, never stationary for long in order to avoid the possibility of electromagnetic attack. Dressed all in white – lab coats, breath masks and boots – the group became the focus of much mass-media attention during the time of my fieldwork. One Mahikari member I knew (Mariko), simply referred to them as a 'cult' (*karuto*). On Pana-Wave, see Jimenez-Murguia (2011).

1990: 34). As with the practical and experimental attempts to contact spirit beings which characterised the spiritualist boom in Europe and America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, so too in Japanese religious groups like Mahikari do we see a concern with establishing what Warner calls 'empirical warranties of presence' (Warner 2006: 288). And equally, just as spiritualist practice was often articulated in terms of emerging technologies of communication – the telegraph and the telephone (see Warner 2006) – so too, Mahikari sometimes draws on technical imagery and deploys technological metaphors in order to portray a variety of mediations. Thus, the *omitama* is like an antenna, a conductor of divine light (see McVeigh 1997: 52, 83-84); a Mahikari manual describes it as 'like an antenna for receiving power and light from the *kami*' (神の光と力を受信するアンテナのようなもの) (Sūkyō Mahikari 2002a: 57). The palm of the hand, in assessing the effects of divine light, is a thermometer (*ondokei*, *taionkei*).[49] The body of Okada Kōtama was a 'broadcasting station' (*nakatsugi hōsōkyoku* 中継ぎ放送局), between the *kumite* and the *kami* (see Shodai Oshienushisama 2003: 42).

Again, one can find associated imagery in play in other religious groups in Japan. In her capacity as communications channel for the *kami*, the aforementioned Kitamura Sayo, of the 'dancing religion', portrayed herself as a 'divine wireless' (*kami no mudenki*). Similarly, the spirit medium Nakai Shigeno explained to Anne Bouchy that she functioned as a 'switchboard operator' between the *kami* and human beings (Bouchy 2005: 163). What emerges from all this is the conjugation between the experimental-technical and ritual in Japanese new religions (see Picone 1998), in particular; or what Josephson has referred to in general as, 'the fusion between the technological and the ritual in contemporary Japanese religious praxis' (Josephson 2013: 118).

Experimenting with purification

Okiyome, as we have seen in Chapter 2, is typically given to human bodies, but divine light can be radiated at almost anything: to watches, bento boxes, plants, pets – even to atmospheres and places.

In order to test its potential, Mahikari members conduct 'experiments' (*jikken*) from time to time. A typical trial involves jam jars (and it is common to see these jam-jar experiments on display in Mahikari practice-halls; see McVeigh 1997: 108). For the experiment, the Mahikari practitioner takes two jam jars, and puts a sample of foodstuff into each of them (typically tofu, boiled rice, bread or raw eggs). The jars are then sealed. After this, *okiyome* – the purifying, divine light, radiated from the hand – is repeatedly given to one of the jars only, with a time-sheet sometimes being used to indicate how much light was given and for how long. Andris Tebêcis – a Latvian neurophysiologist and high-ranking Mahikari member – states that: 'As time passes, very obvious differences can usually be seen between the control jar and the one that received True Light' (Tebêcis 1988: 305). Usually, the difference that

[49] A Mahikari member at the small dojo in Benin told Louveau that a divine altar (*goshintai*) is like a 'string of electric lights' (*guirlande électrique*). 'For it to function,' he explained, 'there is a generator [the dojo] and the bulbs which are all connected to each other, which light up everywhere. The goal [of Mahikari] is to construct an immense garland with which to light up the entire world'. See Louveau (2012: 230-231).

becomes apparent is that the food given light remains pure and intact, since *okiyome* has the capacity to block the action of decomposition.

Mari-san, a Mahikari practitioner, told me about her own experiments with tofu. Unexpectedly, she found that the tofu she had not purified (the 'control jar') still seemed fresh, while the purified stuff had spoiled. Initially, Mari-san thought she had somehow made a 'mistake' (*shippai*). But then she heard that divine light cleanses chemical preservatives: the tofu had decayed quickly, she concluded, *because* it had become pure. Mari-san cheerfully urged me to try it out for myself. She recommended *anpan*, a sort of cake containing red-bean paste, as well as *Yamasaki*-brand white bread. It's 'most easy to see' (*ichiban wakaru*) the effects of purification if you experiment with these, she said. On the other hand, the president of the dojo recommended that I experiment by giving *okiyome* to raw eggs, since they 'spoil quickly' (*sugu kusaru*); the implication being that the divine light would make them last longer. 'Please test it out' (*jikken shite kudasai*), he encouraged me.

A more immediate and empirical means of assessing the efficacy of the light is to give it to food that one intends to eat. Food so purified will take on a different flavour, which is easily ascertained simply by tasting it – testing by tasting, as it were. I was once offered two identical rice-crackers, one of which had been given light, the other not, and asked my opinion of which one was tastier. And these kinds of alimentary experiments are common in Mahikari dojos outside Japan as well. Louveau reports that an informant of hers in Abidjan told her that he never gives divine light to his beer, because it takes away its flavour (see Louveau 2012: 214). The practical purification of food and drink serves an additional purpose to that of the experimental, which is that it removes any toxins and chemical additives (Louveau 2012: 353-57), an essential function in a world in which toxins are absorbed on a daily basis.

But other kinds of trials are also possible, beyond those designed to verify the efficacy of *okiyome*. In the practice-hall I visited most regularly, I once saw two jam jars on display that contained cooked rice. One jar bore a label upon which were written the words, 'Thank you' (*arigatō*), while the label on the other jar simply stated, 'You idiot!' (*baka yarō*). The rice in the first jar was relatively fresh-looking; that in the second was a green, fetid mess. The words on the labels were directed at the rice itself, and the experiment was designed to prove the Mahikari doctrine of 'word-spirits' (*kotodama*), a kind of occult speech-act theory in which words are understood to be invested with divine performative powers. The same principles are put to work on farms maintained by Mahikari, which are run according to a system that the organisation calls 'Yang-light agriculture' (*Yōkō nōen*). In addition to using organic methods, Mahikari members address the crops themselves with words of encouragement, as well as radiating them with divine light, to purify them and to promote their growth. Small-scale versions of such gardening methods can be seen in local dojos, where tomato plants, for example, are often lined up along the veranda, each one affixed with a name tag of the member tending to it with Mahikari methods (see also Louveau 2012: 216).

An associated, and entirely typical instance of the adaptability of *okiyome* practice, as well as its almost limitless technical extensions, was given by the *anime* scriptwriter Koyama Takao, who said that, after attending a study session at a Yang-light farm, during which the participants affirmatively addressed the farm itself, he came to the realization that objects too, react to the way in which we treat them. And so he began to treat the device that was crucial to his work in similar terms, addressing his word-

processor with words of 'gratitude' (*kansha*), as well as radiating it with divine light (Hatanaka 1987: 59).[50]

Beyond these practical experiments, some members also collect evidence of the miraculous in the form of photographs (cf McVeigh 1997: 115). Some of these images are widely shared amongst *kumite*; a ball of light, like a phantom flash-bulb, suspended in space, outside the gates of Oshienushisama's residence; a portrait photo of an elderly Mahikari member, a strange black block appearing just below her neck, as if her divine amulet, her *omitama*, has blazed its traces onto the negative itself. As with the Polaroids of Marian apparitions which Claverie (1990) considered in her study of Christian pilgrims at Medjugorje and San Damiano, these pictures, as so many attempts to capture and image the invisible, may, under certain conditions, come to enter a 'regime of proof', the realm of calculable, tangible facts. But, as Claverie also intimates, certain forms of evidence may be deemed to exceed what science is currently capable of knowing. Yoshizawa, a professor of biochemistry, as well as a Mahikari member, puts the point in the following way: 'These actualities, based on the purifying action of body, mind and spirit, by the light of a high-dimensional *kami*, simply cannot be understood or explained by a contemporary science based on three dimensions' (*korera no jisshō wa, kōjigen no kami no mi-hikari ni yoru rei, kokoro, karada no jōka sayō ni motozuku tame, sanjigen ni kiban wo oku gendai kagaku dewa tōtei setsumei mo rikai mo dekinai jishō de aru*) (Yoshizawa 1987: 75).

On the other hand, let us recognize that the outcome of experiments in Mahikari is neither precisely fixed nor foreseeable – as Mari-san discovered with her tofu-test, the result ran contrary to her expectation. Still, she seemed to say, *something happened*. As Tebêcis remarks: 'even though these tests do not show exactly *what* Okiyome does… they clearly demonstrate that Okiyome *does do* something' (1988: 305; author's emphasis).

But if the efficacy of *okiyome* is understood to be something that can be established, experimentally, through its applications in practice, then *okiyome* has a further, critical function as a verification procedure in its own right, namely, as a means of verifying the existence of spirits. Or, as Mahikari teaching has it: one purpose of *okiyome* is 'to make known to everyone the existence of spirits' (*rei no sonzai wo bannin ni shirashimeru*) (cited in Shimizu 1987: 66). That is to say, it is in the practice of *okiyome* that spirits may actualise their presence, and thus verify themselves as entities, existing through their effects. I will return to this point in Chapter 4.

For now, let us observe that, in Mahikari, there is an incessant double-barrelled emphasis on the importance of 'experiment' (*jikken*) and 'experience' (*taiken*), which is summed up in a phrase one hears again and again: 'If you don't experience, you won't understand' (*taiken shinai to wakaranai*) – an insistent appeal to the empirical. Indeed, John Dewey's appraisal of the Alexander Technique would work just as well as a description of Mahikari's pragmatist ethos: its 'principle is experimental,' wrote Dewey, the 'proof lies in *doing* it' (cited in Armstrong 1998: 108; italics as in

[50] For further instances of Mahikari members giving divine light to objects, see Davis (1980: 202-206); McVeigh (1997: 91-93). Louveau describes the giving of *okiyome* to public and private spaces (the home, the street, former abattoirs, morgues – the latter two being especially polluted places), in her various fieldwork sites (2012: 218-222).

original). Just so, the leader of Mahikari, Oshienushisama (the Master of Teachings), speaks of the movement as 'a new beginning in supra-religious pragmatism' (*sūkyō puragumachizumu no atarashii makuake*) (Okada Keishu 2000a: 9; cf. Davis 1980: 213).

Jam-jar conversions

Let us take up the question of the jam-jar experiments again, this time by means of a method that is itself experimental. The approach I have in mind here is along the lines of what Latour (2004: 61) has called 'experimental metaphysics', meaning only that the methodology makes no prior assumptions about what kinds of agencies, entities and relations are in play in any particular ethnographic case. Although, to be sure, Latour does not exactly practice what he preaches, since he refuses to extend his experimental approach to certain kinds of actors. This is a consequence of his criticism (e.g., Latour 2009: 468-469) of those – such as Creationists – who, in his eyes, illegitimately mix up two distinct 'regimes of enunciation', namely those of science and religion (or the modes of REF and REL, in Latour 2013). To extend an argument advanced by Terence Blake, such an injunction against 'illegitimate crossings' may well be an acceptable line to take in apologetics, but it is hardly a defensible strategy in anthropology, where the inquiry should always be guided by empirical imperatives (see Blake 2013). That is to say, the shape of anthropological analysis is formed by what one's informants find interesting – it takes seriously what they take seriously (Viveiros de Castro 2015: Ch. 4). And if they seriously mix up science and religion in their talk, then that just *is* the ethnographic fact of the matter. Likewise, if Mahikari members talk about their practices in terms of experiments, and if they, indeed, also engage in experimental practices, then I suggest that it is incumbent on the anthropologist to give due consideration to these matters.

Hence, I suggest that from a more expansive, experimental metaphysical perspective, the Mahikari jam jars show up as very different kinds of artefacts to the transparent ideological props they are figured to be in interpretative accounts.[51]

Recall from chapter 2 that the central Mahikari practice of *okiyome* – the radiating of light – is understood to effect transformation through purification. The action of purification is deemed to produce what Mahikari members regularly call '*henka*' ('changes'), sensuous transformations in both bodies and things. Thus, following a session of *okiyome* given to the body, it is not uncommon to be asked afterwards, 'Did

[51] In so far as Mahikari jam jars constellate forces and interests, it is tempting to compare the work they achieve to the functions of the jug in Heidegger's famous essay on the 'thing' (Heidegger 1971: 167). But Heidegger's almost oracular pronouncements on the essence of things were intended to circumvent the voracious and all-encompassing ('en-framing') cosmology of techno-science. He is emphatic on this point. Science annihilates things, transforming them into so many representations and resources. Thus, while Heidegger's anti-representationalism is very welcome, it is clear that his jug is very different from our jam jars. I want to stress that the latter, to the extent that they are (very simple) instruments involved in experiments, are technical, as well as transformative, objects.

you have any *henka*?' Mahikari members typically report that some part of their body had grown warm while they received the light, or that the texture of some area of their body has softened. More serious evidence of *henka* could include coughing, crying, sensations of unblocking, feelings of flow inside the body, feelings of healing.

Similarly, in *okiyome* experiments, the question is often asked whether any *henka*, any changes, have occurred. To give an instance, in a monograph published by Mahikari, Professor Yoshizawa documented the 'changes in temperature' (*ondo henka*) registered by a thermograph in an experiment to measure the surface heat of the hand of a subject during the giving of *okiyome* for ten minutes. Prior to *okiyome*, no significant changes were seen, but during the timed period of radiating divine light, although the palm of the hand itself did not increase in heat, the thermograph recorded a 7.5°C increase in the ring finger, and an overall increase in the heat distribution of the hand itself (Yoshizawa 2001: 55-56).

Now, the same question of change – of *henka* – is posed by the substances in the jam-jar experiments: did any changes occur? If so, when? Where? To what extent? The substances in the jam-jar trials do not, I suggest, represent, signify or stand in for change somehow happening somewhere else. They do not represent change – they actualise it. The jam jars actualise a concept of transformation that has little to do with epistemic change or interpretative drifts or intellectual switch-overs. Rather, the concept of transformation being articulated here has to do with the conversion of substances. That is to say, the changing substances in the jam jars instantiate conversions analogous to those that take place in the bodies of Mahikari members. But bottled, made visible, the conversions happening in the jam jars make it possible to *see* the light, to see the special effects of divine light at work on substances. As one member put it to me, while you can tell others about the effectiveness of *okiyome*, it is much better if you can demonstrate it: 'They won't believe through words alone, but they'll believe if you show them' (*kuchi dake de shinjinai, misete agetara shinjiru*). Here, it is in this experimental immediacy of proof that seeing is understood to be more effective than saying.

I am suggesting, then, that the *henka*-effects made visible in the jam jars provide a model of what conversion 'looks like' in Mahikari. But it is not the only model, of course. In addition to the changes that *henka* describes, there are a number of other ways of conceptualising transformation in Mahikari; terms such as *shinseika* ('becoming divine'), or *sōnen tenkan* ('conversion of the innermost attitude') which, taken all together, constitute a vital programme of spiritual and ethical formation and purification which all Mahikari members are expected to follow. It is important to stress, however, that ideas of transformation in Mahikari are not easily equated with a concept of conversion which, in its routine usage, is often taken to refer to affiliation or adherence to a religious group. On the contrary, when Mahikari members spoke to me about transformation, they referred to a wide range of changes of various intensities, taking place inside persons, in things, in places and relations. More often than not, such transformations were described as effects of *okiyome* interventions. The jam-jar experiments are anthropologically interesting for precisely this reason: because, understood as miniature exhibitions of the transformative effects of purification, they dramatise a concept of conversion that takes place outside the heads of so-called converts. As with the experimental oblations which characterised the

Hindu 'Milk Miracle' – but on a much more modest scale – the effects of Mahikari experiments are not contingent on 'faith'.

According to Collingwood's inverted method of inquiry, the interrogation of problems proceeds by asking, 'What sort of question is this an answer to?'[52] For Lienhardt, the answer of Dinka divinity was actuated by the question of experience; in Mahikari, I have argued, divinity is a question of experiment. But to continue with Collingwood, 'A logic in which', he says 'the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic' (Collingwood 2002: 31). I would argue that scholarly accounts of Mahikari which explain experiments in terms of ideological legitimation have presupposed the question that such experimental practices pose. That is to say, 'ideology' is the answer to a question that had already been asked before the inquiry was set in motion. If the answer is ideology, then the correlative question concerns persuasion; a rhetorical, propositional operation, that takes place within the inner epistemological space of beliefs.

Whatever changes may actually be occurring in jam jar experiments – the boiled rice going bad in one jar; but staying moist, intact, in the other – are therefore not sufficiently interesting from an analytical point of view because they are taken, literally, to be 'unbelievable'. Thus, the jars themselves, as material artefacts, are only of interest insofar as they are taken to be evidence of something else quite obvious beyond them: the beliefs (representations) of the Mahikari members who think that they are experimenting. In coming to these conclusions about the jam jar experiments – to recall Feyerabend's point once again – anthropologists have disregarded their ontological implications.

Experiments in Mahikari are questions with ontological implications; questions which, I submit, are concerned with a concept of conversion that is anything but subjective, since it is material and potentially visible as well.

But, as I have already attempted to demonstrate in the previous chapter, this way of talking about conversion is more or less alien to the idiom established in the sociology of religion, for the premise of much of this sociological literature is that conversion is fundamentally epistemic, a change that is often understood to take place at the level of 'worldviews' (e.g., Bruce 2006: 1, 10; Buckser and Glazier 2003: xi; Gooren 2007: 350). In other words, once again, converting is equated with 'representing'; what changes is the way the world looks, and little else. But this is surely an impoverished conception, for conversion *qua* change may entail many things.

In a compelling study of medieval Christian practices, for instance, Philippe Buc (1997) demonstrates that certain precious objects donated to the church were understood to undergo conversions, and they sometimes underwent them in an absolutely material manner, the items being melted down and refashioned into objects more suitable to Christian liturgy. Hence, even such a cursory comparative example suggests that there might be more to the concept of conversion – both historically and ethnographically – than a switching of subjectivities.

I maintain that something more is exactly what is going on in Mahikari, for my argument, in a nutshell – in a jam jar, in fact – is that the jam jars are capsular conversions, small-scale transformations that demonstrate that conversion in Mahikari is much less epistemic than it is moral and material. Conversion entails the

[52] I am grateful to Keith Hart for apprising me of Collingwood's logic of question and answer.

transformation of substances – of human bodies and bean curd alike. Such conversions are ontological operations, transformations that vary in intensity, and take place at different speeds and scales. Thus, while we might be disposed to imagine that conversion describes an undifferentiated process, delineating changes which take place at the level of discrete, or otherwise relatively well-defined, units – whether it is a question of the transformation of persons, selves, or, more commonly in the literature, of minds – the concept of *henka* invites us to conceive of conversion as a molecular process. These kinds of molecular transformations – micro-conversions – are subtle, partial, local, but nevertheless tangible; a tingling on the back of the neck; a warmth in the small of one's back; a slight difference in the taste of a radiated rice-cracker. But since changes at any scale are deemed to be the articulations of the cosmic principles, the most minor sensations on the surface of the skin may be taken as tangible evidence of wider cosmic processes (McVeigh 1997: 44).

In the chapter that follows, I want to remain at the scale of the practice of *okiyome*, and give further consideration to conversions in their physical and metaphysical dimensions. As a flexible practice of purification, *okiyome* is not only understood to be capable of producing transmutational effects in human bodies, in persons, objects and places; it is also a means for the purification and conversion of possessing spirits. In particular, I will examine the extent to which the tangibility of spirits and the transformative sensations which *okiyome* brings forth are a function of form.

Chapter Four:

The Physics of Ritual: Spirit Meditation and Sensational Form

> 'Any visible transformation has to do only with the method one chooses…That is to say, the *form* one employs'
>
> – Victor Segalen (2002: 15)

Of what is a body capable in ritual? How is it affected, and what are its effects? Something like this question was a puzzle to Augustine. In his treatise, 'On the care to be taken for the dead', the bishop of Hippo considered why it is that Christians, in praying to God, should make gestures and adopt postures with their bodies, when all along, God has no need of such outward 'signs' (*indices*) since he already knows the secret 'intention of their heart' (*cordis intentio*). Augustine's answer was uncertain: 'I don't know how it is' (*nescio quomodo*), he admitted, but the external motions of the body in prayer, he surmised, work somehow to strengthen the 'invisible, inner' movement of devotion.[53] Augustine offered this hesitant explanation in the course of addressing another question: whether the dead received any spiritual benefit from being buried near the tombs of saints. In short, his answer was, 'No'. Burial was important as a Christian convention, but the physical location of the grave had no special, spiritual effects on the dead, as such. Whatever effect the placing of a grave might have for the dead was secondary, since in the first instance it acted as an incentive to pious practice on the part of the living. It is at this point that Augustine gestured hesitantly towards the problem of prayer and bodily form by drawing an analogy between physicalities and their potential effects; for, just as the material existence of a grave may serve as a focus and stimulus for ritual acts of remembering the dead, so too, in some uncertain way or other, may the physical gestures of prayer have a strengthening effect on spiritual dispositions. But as with burial-places so too with bodies: in neither case is location or form of especial importance.

That is to say, for Augustine, bodily form, ritual place and position are disposable props, incidental affordances for the more properly spiritual action of the invisible soul.[54] To this extent, what Webb Keane has said of Calvin's conception of ritual is

[53] Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 5.7 (see Augustine 1900). For Augustine's views on the relation between gesture and efficacy, see Schmitt (1990: 289-92).

[54] For a further instance of the contingency of bodily form and position in ritual action, Augustine, in providing a justification for the practice of facing the east to pray, explains that

equally applicable to its ancestral Augustinian incarnation: that it is understood as 'a form of expression whose basis is fully distinct from its material embodiment' (Keane 2007: 60). On the contrary, as we shall see, in the technique of *okiyome* and its antecedents, the forces invoked in ritual are intrinsic to the material forms through which they are actualized. Given these differences, Mahikari practice is more Maussian, than it is Augustinian, in its principles. Mauss, with his keen eye for styles, for tangible forms and formats – ritual, technical and aesthetic configurations – declared that prayer was the paradigm of social form itself, for 'nowhere', he said, 'is the efficacious power of form more evident' (Mauss 1968: 383). In this chapter, I will try to show the efficacious power of Mauss's own formula for elucidating the sensuous effects of form in Mahikari ritual. More specifically, I shall consider the extent to which such effects are products of what Meyer (2006; 2015) has styled as 'sensational form'.

But there is a further important difference between the dynamics and effects of ritual as pictured by Augustine and these processes as they are configured in Mahikari practice. Put simply, germinal in Augustine's argument is a nascent picture of ritual which, by a long historical process of formatting, elaboration and change, via the Prostestant polemics against ritual formalism, would receive its fullest expression in modern sociology. This development, as Buc, among others, has documented, concerns the 'explanation of ritual potency in terms of iconicity' (Buc 2001: 170; cf. Burke 1987). In other words, the elaboration of a ritual picture which, to misparaphrase Heidegger, is a conception of ritual *as* picture, of ritual action as a means of representing social or cultural orders. This idea, that rituals are primarily mechanisms for the projection of social or ideological imagery in the service of social solidarity, enters anthropology primarily via Durkheim (Buc 2001: 224-226), and although a number of important anthropological arguments have been advanced in order to push back against this notion of ritual as representational (e.g., Kapferer 1997; Handelman 1998; Handelman and Linquist 2004), the idea remains tenacious in the anthropology of Japan. Different influences and emphases aside, the conception of Japanese ritual practice as expressive of socio-cultural order is widespread (e.g., Fitzgerald 2000: 181-198; Martinez 2004: 197; Kawano 2005).[55] Martinez rightly diagnosed this tendency when she observed that, 'what all current anthropological approaches to ritual in Japan convey is that ritual's structure and purpose…is always a Durkheimian one: ritual both expresses and upholds the structure of the community' (1995: 186). But having identified this interpretative inclination, she then goes on to affirm it nevertheless, suggesting that, 'this basically functional approach is correct' (1995: 186; cf. 2004: 197). The grip of the Durkheimian model holds fast. Indeed, Schnell (1999), in his analysis of shrine festivals (*matsuri* 祭り) criticizes the idea, à la Durkheim, that such events must always exercise a social integrative function. But in arguing that *matsuri* are just as much a means of manifesting social oppositions, he remains wedded to the idea that rituals are a means of social expression.

Given the prevalence of this assumption – of ritual as an apparatus of expression, the reverential as referential – it is, then, perhaps unsurprising to find that Mahikari

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Christians turn to the east, not because God is somehow 'there' – he does not occupy space – but because to turn is to remind the soul to turn to God (see Rose 2013: 212).

[55] The work of Köpping (2002), and Padoan (2016) are two important exceptions to this representational tendency. Ben-Ari (1991) is an excellent study of exactly how a local ritual of transformation in rural Kyoto is transfigured into an event of representation through the intervention of outside parties – tourists, etc.

practice has been treated in the same way. McVeigh maintains that *okiyome* functions as a form of ideological reinforcement; his intention, he states plainly, being to 'demonstrate the Durkheimian…premise of how the performance of and participation in rituals are a form of placing oneself under legitimized lines of control' (McVeigh 1997: 158). The argument that *okiyome* is a mechanism for the enforcement of conformity to an ideological order is simply a rerun of the conception of ritual as reflective: a means of projecting and maintaining the structure of community.

Now, it is perfectly possible that rituals might indeed function as reflectors or upholders of order. In his typology of public events, Handelman (1998) defines a category of rituals that does exactly that: events which operate by expressing ideal or imagined configurations of a particular collective – events such as processions, parades, and so on; ritual spectacles of order and power – which he calls 'events-that-present'. But he also outlines a further class of rituals – 'events-that-model' – which are organized for the purpose, not of presentation, but of transformation – e.g., rituals of initiation, healing, exorcism, etc. Whether rituals can be said to fall under one or the other category is, as he remarks incisively, 'something to be determined, not assumed' (1998: 46). Handelman's categories may be usefully reimagined in terms of Hacking's (1983) contrast (which I introduced in Chapter 3) between practices of representation and practices of intervention. Put like this, I want to underline, once again, that, in so far as *okiyome* is understood as a means of intervening in vital life processes, to assume that its function is to represent or reinforce ideological order is to seriously *misrepresent* it.

In this chapter, I want to expand on this argument by examining the practice of *okiyome* in terms of the particular ritual physics it articulates. What I mean by 'ritual physics' is the manner in which, in any given ritual operation, forces and materials are distributed and deployed – in short, of what they are considered to be capable of doing.[56] But as Michel Serres intimates, physics always implicates a metaphysics: 'Metaphysics is a metaphoric physics', as he puts it (Serres 2000: 43). By this he means that any metaphysics articulates and expresses a particular metaphorics of matter and energy – their relations and operations, as Connor glosses, 'between different states, solid, liquid, and volatile' (Connor 2002). I have already considered (in Chapter 1) the metaphorics of saturation, luminosity and proximity in play in dojo space. Here, I want to turn my attention to the dynamics of *okiyome*, which is characterized by a metaphorics of unblocking, melting and softening. Equally, however, since the appearance of spiritual entities is always an incipient possibility in *okiyome* practice, I wish to give some consideration to the modalities of their emergence. Spirits announce themselves in the surfaces of the body, in the trembling of the hands, in swaying and rocking bodies, and they sometimes even spill out into speech. But since the majority of such spirit mediations in Mahikari are manifested in a minor key – in small-scale variations, superficial movements and peripheral sensations – they take on analytical importance as evidence, in spite of their apparently shallow or cosmetic character. This is especially so, since ethnographic accounts of *okiyome* have almost without exception focused on the more dramatic and extreme instances of the practice. But, as Piette argues, in chasing after the sensational and exceptional, studies of religion all too often forget the small

[56] In parallel fashion, Kevin Schilbrack has usefully called attention to what he calls a 'ritual metaphysics', that is to say, the recognition of 'ritual activities as forms of thinking' (2004: 142). But this formulation, I think, risks the overemphasis of knowing over doing, or of representing over intervening.

operations which constitute its object (Piette 1999: 32). 'Sensational form', as a frame for making sense of Mahikari practice, is not an appeal towards the dramatic or the spectacular. It directs attention, instead, towards the tangible formats for the organization of affect and perception by means of which the spiritual is rendered sensibly present (Meyer 2015: 22).

Ritual Antecedents

Mahikari's practice of *okiyome* has been identified as belonging to a genre of ritual practices in Japan known as *chinkon kishin* (鎮魂帰神), which we might loosely translate as 'spirit mediation'. In the wake of the groundbreaking work of Tsushiro Hirofumi (1990) on *chinkon kishin* ritual, a number of studies in English have investigated the derivation and development of *okiyome* and its cognates (Staemmler 2009; Broder 2008; Stein 2012).[57] Briefly put, *okiyome* owes its origins to the late nineteenth century; it is a descendant of the flourishing culture of spiritualism, or (to borrow a term coined by Christopher Partridge 2013) the 'occulture' prevalent in the late Meiji period. Originating in the 'spirit science' (*reigaku* 霊学) of the Shinto occultist and spiritual researcher, Honda Chikaatsu (本田親徳), the technique for mediating spirits was taken up, and further expanded and experimented with, by Deguchi Onisaburō (出口王仁三郎), the pioneering promoter and leader of the new religion Ōmoto. The practice was then borrowed and further modified by Okada Mokichi (岡田茂吉), the founder of Sekai Kyūsei Kyō (世界救世教; the 'Church of World Messianity'), and adopted and adapted again by Okada Kōtama, when he established Mahikari.

The nineteenth century ferment saw the emergence of new types of religious community and the establishment of radical ethical and spiritual programmes as means to resolve the pressing contemporary problems of existence. New religions such as Konkokyō (金光教) and Tenrikyō (天理教) advocated practices of social and spiritual reform based on the 'heart' (*kokoro* 心) as both the agency and target of transformation (Yumiyama 1999: 94-98). But, according to Nishiyama (1988), a rather different conceptual trend developed, along with an associated assemblage of practices, centred on 'spirit' (*rei* 霊), in which the spirit world assumed importance as the source of existential problems and their putative solutions. The appeal of such procedures was that they were practical, experimental, and their efficacy could also often be visibly validated (Yumiyama 1999: 124; cf. Tsushiro 1990: 34). I have already remarked on the experimental aspect of *okiyome* in Chapter 3. What I want to foreground here is the marked concern with the importance of form in these practices of spirit mediation. These procedures aim at the achievement of what Honda Chikaatsu called 'unity with the *kami* world' (*shinkai ni kangō suru* 神界ニ感合スル ; cited in Inoue et al. 1994: 336; see also Staemmler 2009: 162, 344). But such an enterprise is inherently dangerous, since to open oneself up to the intervention of the divine world is to be at risk of infiltration by lower level entities, such as malicious spirits. Regarding such risks, Honda's student, Nagasawa Katsutate (長沢雄楯) –

[57] In fairness to Davis, he did importantly determine the precursors of Mahikari's *okiyome* in the Sekai Kyūsei Kyō's practice of *jōrei* 浄霊 and the purification procedure of *miteshiro* み手代 in Ōmoto (1980: 73-79, 86-88). Tsushiro's work is groundbreaking in terms of its comprehensiveness.

who taught esoteric techniques of spiritual communication and contact to Deguchi Onisaburō (see Stalker 2008: 91; Staemmler 2009: 219-221) – stated that 'in spirit possession (*shinpyō* 神憑), false spirits (*jarei* 邪霊) will take possession if it is not done according to form (*hōshiki* 方式)' (quoted in Suzuki 1977: 519; cf. Staemmler 2009: 191). And again, in expressing admiration for the ancients and their intimate relations with the otherworld (*shitashiku yūmei ni tsūji* 親シク幽冥ニ通ジ), Nagasawa praises the accurate method (*hōhō no seimitsu* 方法ノ精密) and exacting style (*soreshiki no gensei* 其式ノ厳正) of their spirit possession procedures (in Suzuki 1977: 489-491; see Staemmler 2009: 187). The main point I wish to underline here is the explicit connection made between the forces mobilized in ritual and the material forms employed in enacting it. A comparison, in terms of the design of form and the forces it invokes, suggests itself in Pedersen's argument concerning the gowns of Darhad shamans in northern Mongolia. The rumpled and irregular texture of such costumes constitutes 'a sort of hyper-surface,' Pedersen suggests, 'which, far from patrolling the shaman's bodily and existential boundaries, invites maximum intervention' from the spirit world (Pedersen 2011: 163). In the case of Mahikari, by contrast, since the only essential equipment is the *omitama*, it is posture which acts as the operator, allowing simultaneously for the possibility of spirit manifestation, as well as its controlled containment.

Shinkumite (新組み手), beginners in Mahikari, are not supposed to ask too many questions about spirits (see Miyanaga 1983: 265). Yoshino-san's concise reply to a question of mine was that the emergence of spirits is simply proof of the existence of the *kami* and of the efficacy of divine light; for now, she advised, that's all you need to know (*sore dake wakareba ii* それだけ分かればいい).

All I did know, or could guess at, is that spirits are slippery presences and that our bodies are wide-open to their infiltration. Ike-san, a regular presence in the Akashi dojo, illustrated the matter by means of the following elliptical, but no less illuminating, figure: If our spiritual body (*reitai* 霊体) were a swimming-pool, then the insinuation of spirits would be like the pouring of a cup of tea (*ocha* お茶) into it; they 'slip inside silently' (*suutto haitte kuru* すーっと入って来る) a slick and subtle ingress, an imperceptible infusion. And the inference, I guess, is that they get into you but you wouldn't know it unless they came to the surface in *okiyome*.[58] Given this risk, Mahikari members are sometimes urged not to engage in unsanctioned spiritual practices. During the primary course, for example, the dojo president warned the audience off trying out certain ascetic activities (including *zazen* meditation, cold-water austerities, Buddhist rites of exorcism, etc.) because of the possible hazard of attracting spirits (cf. Davis 1980: 85, 180). But such caveats do not mean that the spirits are altogether untouchable subjects – far from it. Attempts to dissuade new members from becoming overly interested in spirits or from participating in (what are, from the point of view of Mahikari) hazardous practices are intended to ensure, not that spirits should never be encountered, but that in the eventuality that they are, that this should take place in the most controlled and appropriate context. This context is of course *okiyome*. It is through the practice of *okiyome* that the reality of spirits is to

[58] The emergence of spirits is often couched in terms of metaphors of liquidity. Spirits that appear as a consequence of *okiyome* are called *furei* 浮霊, literally 'floating spirits'. Divine light has the effect of making them 'float up', *ukidasu* 浮き出す. It is by this action of surfacing that spirit movements, *reidō*, are said to occur.

be realized. In this, as in everything else in Mahikari, personal experience is paramount. It is only through the committed repetition of practice that one may better understand the tangible influences of unseen realities. If Yoshino-san's reticence in the face of my questions was related to this, as I think it was, then she would not say more because I was – as the badge that I wore in the dojo showed – only a seedling, a beginner, absolutely.

Spirits are the major cause of human complications and afflictions; over eighty percent of our problems have a spiritual source, as Sukuinushisama taught (Sūkyō Mahikari 1983: 148). The agencies of human suffering may be the spirits of animals, or ancestors, or acquaintances, indeed almost anyone we may have met with before they died or before *we* did, for the succession of our past lives has also to be factored into the karmic equation. *Reishō* (霊障 spirit disturbance) is the collective name given to these forces of disorder, and the practice of *okiyome* is the vital means of undoing them and of erasing the karmic impurities (*zaie* 罪穢 or *gō* 業) that human beings are continually amassing over time. What is it, however, that moves spirits to do harm? What – to revert to Ike-san's imagery – causes the spirits to spill themselves into us? The spirits may be driven by bitterness, or want revenge, or feel resentment, pain, hate; they might be jilted or jealous lovers, or hungry, neglected ancestors. For whatever reason, such spirits are tied to this world by desire. In the normal order of things, the spirits of the newly dead transmigrate to the astral realm (*yūkai* 幽界) where they are tasked with performing various kinds of purifying exercise, on the way to earning their eventual reincarnation in this physical world (the *genkai* 現界).[59]

Problems stem from those spirits who refuse this process and remain here, fixed and fixated. They are either itinerant, or are bound to particular places – places where accidents have happened, for example – but should they find us, or we run across them, you can be sure that *reishō* will be the result. At any rate, once they affix themselves on us, they will attempt to exert their influence, towards future illness, or failure, or addiction, or collision with others, and we won't even know it. (I recall the comic strip image that I saw at the Mahikari open-day at the Akashi dojo, of the little boy playing innocently, while that inky shade of an old man loomed behind him. And I wonder at my own smoking and my occasionally drinking too much; what are those strange energies that incline us sometimes, and why do our lives have the shapes that they do?) Spirits harry us because we have crossed them in our lives, either present or past, and since we cannot know for certain that we have *not* crossed them at some time or other, the chances are that everyone is possessed by them (see Miyanaga 1983: 259; Tebêcis 1988: 250; McVeigh 1997a: 44). 'Possession', Tebêcis remarks, 'is more or less a continuous condition in people' (2006: 145).

In the description of our all too close encounters with spirits, the language used is not that of ownership, exactly, but of attachment. Spirits do not 'possess' people so much as 'stick' to them. Spirits 'append' themselves to people (*tsuku* 憑く), they 'attach' or 'hang on' (*kakaru* かかる). This is why the term used in Mahikari, *hyōirei* 憑依霊, is typically rendered as 'attaching spirit' in English translations of Mahikari literature. These attaching spirits are, for the most part, given to emerge only in *okiyome*. During the first phase of the practice, as I have described in Chapter 2,

[59] Many of these ideas concerning spirits – their types and motivations and their possible progressions and regressions – are adapted from the more established and popular imagination of spiritual forces and entities in Japan. See, e.g., Smith (1974: 39-50).

purification is given to the 'main soul' situated about ten centimetres behind the forehead. This is the most intense period of radiation, in which the heat and light of *okiyome* is thought to have the capability to smoke out, as it were, any hidden spirits. So exposed, attaching spirits register their presence in movements of the body, movements of different tempos and intensities, from trembling, swaying, or rocking, to more elaborately expressive gestures. The more expressive end of the continuum concerns a spirit's attempts to communicate its desires. It is known, for example, that the body of the light-receiver may participate in a sort of automatic writing, tracing out figures on the *tatami* mat with their fingers (see Davis 1980: 28, 117; Koyama 1986: 43).[60] Spirits may also broadcast their intentions via speech, in varying degrees of intelligibility, the style and tone of their enunciations sometimes giving intimations of their identities. The forms of these utterances, as they issue from the mouth of the light-receiver, are also taken to underwrite the authenticity of the spirit's emergence into presence. Hence, Koyama writes that someone in whom the attaching spirit of a *bushi* (武士 a samurai) is manifesting itself will start speaking like a character in a historical TV drama, before correcting himself: they are not expressing themselves in the packaged language of the costume drama, but in the *actual* language of bygone samurai (Koyama 1986: 44). The speech is authentic because the spirits are. Similarly, it is alleged that children, writing automatically, are able to spell out complex *kanji* that they could not possibly know otherwise (see Davis 1980: 28), or that people will speak in German, or Latin, or in some language they could not be conversant with by any means other than that spirits are speaking through them (see Tebêcis 1988: 101-105, 253-254).

Be that as it may, people who speak while receiving light during *okiyome* are understood to be giving voice to the language of their appendant spirits. Indeed, phase 1 of *okiyome* is the only phase in which the possibility of locution is restricted in important ways. During the second and third phases, it is quite common for the partners to engage in quiet conversation (see Davis 1980: 118-119; Pierre-Louis 1997: 28). Such is not the case for the first phase. Unless she is qualified to do so, the light-giver is not supposed to speak at all. For the light-receiver, the situation is more ambivalent. Miyanaga states that it is 'prohibited' (*kinjirarete iru* 禁じられている) for the light-receiver to consciously give utterance (Miyanaga 1980: 123). But this is, I think, to put the matter too strongly. The restriction on intentional vocalization is less a prohibition than an unspoken contract, since it is tacitly understood that for the light-receiver to give any sort of utterance during this phase would be to expose her speech act to the most reasonable inference that could be made of it, given the circumstances: that it is not 'her' act at all, but a spirit who is speaking. In other words, the position of the light-receiver is one in which to give utterance would be to speak *in other words*, to give voice to a ghostly language that is not one's own.

How are such words or movements interpreted, and by whom? It is the intervention of a member of the dojo staff qualified to carry out a 'spirit investigation' (*reisa* 霊査) during *okiyome* that marks the inception of interpretation. (For an ordinary member of Mahikari giving *okiyome* and suddenly faced with *reidō* in one's partner, the only thing that one can do is to sit tight, give light – saying nothing – and, at the end of the ten minute phase, to administer the *chinkon no waza* (鎮魂の業), the technique of

[60] Earhart describes his witnessing an instance of this during a performance of the *gohō shugyō* (五法修行) rite of the Gedatsukai, a practice that bears certain similarities to *okiyome* in Mahikari. See Earhart 1989: 183-184.

spirit pacification, calling out '*Oshizumari!*' three times. If one's partner is not calmed, one must repeat the technique until they are. The essential point is that, in the event of *reidō*, the unqualified light-giver should attempt no verbal intervention.)[61] *Reisa* may either be requested or it may occur spontaneously. In the former instance, that is, a *kumite* will ask a member of staff (either the dojo president or a *dōshi*, a minister) for *okiyome* and for them to conduct a spirit investigation; the latter happens during *okiyome*, when a staff member decides to institute *reisa* then and there.[62]

The format for the enactment of *reisa* is in all respects the same as that for the first phase of *okiyome* except that the staff member asks questions while they give light to the other's forehead. The questions are, of course, directed to the attaching spirit and the body of the light-receiver is, naturally, the medium of any message that the spirit might give in reply. Such responses might be verbal, or gestural (a nod or shake of the head, for example, or a finger tracing out *kanji* on the floor); equally, there might be no response in either mode. The aim of *reisa* is to determine the identity of the attaching spirit and its reasons for attaching to the body of its host. Earnest appeals will then be made to the spirit to apologise for its actions and to recognize the reality of the *kami*'s plan for the cosmos (the *gokeirin* 御経綸) – such persuasions and petitions are called *reidan* 霊談, spirit discourses. As Mori-san, a *kumite* at the Akashi dojo, explained, one 'persuades' (*satoshite ageru* 諭してあげる) in order to 'awaken' it (*satori wo hiraite* 悟りを開いて). As with the technique of *chinkon kishin* as it was once practiced in the religion Ōmoto, the objective of these exchanges is the conversion of the attaching spirit (See Staemmler 2009: 127, 251; Stalker 2008: 94).

The intended outcome is that the spirit should quit its attachments to its host and to the world and go back, chastened and with a new awareness of the divine order of things, to the astral realm – a result known as 'departure', *ridatsu* 離脱. Given that this departure is no forcible expulsion, but is, on the contrary, effected by means of patient persuasion, it would be inaccurate, as McVeigh points out, to label this act as 'exorcism' (McVeigh 1997a: 44, 185; see also Introvigne 1999: 73-74; Miyanaga 1983: 268-269).[63]

The sequence, from initial investigation to subsequent departure, may be brief. Mori-san explained that a spirit movement could occur and then be over in a single session (*ikkai dake de owaru* 一回だけで終わる) of *reisa*, never to re-emerge because the spirit has been 'saved' (*sukuwareta* 救われた). Equally, she said that a 'light' or 'easy' (*karui* 軽い) spirit might simply 'disappear' (*kierareru* 消えられる) of its own accord, without any recourse to *reidan*, the censorious words of a staff member. The sequence may, on the other hand, be long and winding. This is especially so in the case of a resentful and bitter spirit (*urande'ru gorei-san* 恨んでるご霊さん). The more drawn-out modes of the process have been emphasized and analysed in depth by Miyanaga (1983: Chaps. 4 and 5, esp. 215-223, 268-274). But,

[61] Maki-san told me of an incident she had once seen, in which a new member, giving *okiyome*, began asking questions of the spirit manifesting in his partner's body. He was quickly told to desist. Cf. Staemmler (2009: 272): the light-giver 'may neither address the manifesting spirit, nor reply if addressed by the spirit'.

[62] There would appear to be some confusion about this. Maki-san was certain that *reisa* only begins 'spontaneously' (*totsuzen ni* 突然に), but other members have assured me that one may request it.

[63] Both Young (1990) and Davis (1980) do so refer to *okiyome* as an exorcistic practice.

to cut a long story short, what is at stake in these exchanges, long or short, could be understood in terms of what de Certeau and Good, in their separate ways, define as the work of nomination: the effort to give a name to, and so bestow meaning on, the spiritual forces disordering a person's world (see de Certeau 1988: 244-268; Good 1994: Chaps. 5 and 6). The work would proceed by the honing and closing in of definitions: first, a movement made or thrown out in the middle of *okiyome* will be identified as an instance of *reidō*, a spirit movement, then *reisa* will be instigated, and the attempt made to name the spirit and to get a fix on its predicament. With this diagnosis, the circumstances that led the spirit to affix to its host will be established in storified form and the spirit will, with luck and by virtue of the great compassion of the *kami*, be prevailed upon to leave; order restored.

The whole unfolding process could be seen as one of discursification, the progressive movement towards meaning, in which, as Lévi-Strauss long ago observed, the sufferer (here, the spirit and its host) is provided with a language (Lévi-Strauss 1977: 198).[64] Accordingly, what a *kumite* will learn in *reisa* exchanges is that she is to blame for the suffering which the spirit is inflicting upon her. Or, more precisely, she will learn these things through the language of the spirit, since *reisa* are addresses made to the spirit and not to the person they are sticking to (though they are, in a sense, curiously coherent or transfused, like tea poured into a pool). What the *kumite* will learn is that at some point in her past, or in a past life, she wronged the being that is now a spirit – insulted him (if a him it is), murdered him, loved him and left him, or did any of the other senseless and terrible things, great and small, of which people are capable. Thus, by means of an ethical about-turn that Lebra has described as 'the repercussion postulate' (Lebra 1986: 358-359; cf. Hardacre 1986: 22), the *kumite* learns that she who is now the victim, was once the aggressor (cf. Miyanaga 1983: 222). She, too, will then atone and realise the depth of her faults, just as the spirit does.

This, at least, is how the story is supposed to go, the episodic sequence of spiritual problem-solving: investigation, discovery, and then departure. But the scenario is perhaps rather too certain, the sequence too neat, from beginning to end. The plot, as it was played out, has all the surety of theodicy and it lacks those ambiguities and aporias that one finds in the real play of practice.

I do believe that it makes sense to say that in the questioning progress of *reisa*, the spirit (and the person through whom it articulates its protests) is provided with a language, to borrow Lévi-Strauss' words. In *reisa*, that is to say, a certain space of expression is opened out within which the sufferer's experience may be made meaningful. But this requires qualification. In Lévi-Strauss' original account (an analysis of a Cuna cure for obstructed childbirth), from which I take my reference, the hermeneutic circle he delineates is, so to speak, too certain and circular.[65] The

[64] In an account of the spiritual experiences, and the discoveries made through *reisa*, of one young woman in Mahikari, Davis remarks that 'her own lacklustre experience has acquired a "plot." She has found a new persona, as well as the reason (or etiology) for her unhappiness.' See Davis (1980: 179).

[65] Lévi-Strauss argued that the Cuna shaman, in singing his complex cure to the sick woman in labour, supplies her with a language through which the chaos of her pain is given meaningful organisation; with the re-establishment of psychological order, the physiological follows, and a cure is effected (Lévi-Strauss 1977: 186-205). The precision systematism of Lévi-Strauss' analysis begins to look a little less secure when one discovers that the shaman's song is sung in an esoteric language which the woman does not, in fact, comprehend (see

interpretative space of *reisa*, on the other hand, may be rather turbulent and uncertain, a space of discord, as well as understanding. If the Mahikari staff member, in his questioning, provides a language, then the spirit may not, in every case, willingly accept it. I know this much because, on some occasions when a spirit investigation was in progress in the dojo, I was able to hear a spirit raise its voice to its investigator. *Reisa* are, in my experience, rather muffled affairs and, as a consequence, frustratingly inaudible. But there was an instance in the Akashi dojo when this was fleetingly not the case. Takahashi-san, the dojo president, was giving *okiyome* to a middle-aged woman. The light was making her body sway until she bent right over, her head nearly touching the *tatami.* The dojo president, who kept his radiating hand between her forehead and the floor, leant close to her, asking questions in a low voice. I could hear a sort of growling sound coming out of the woman and then, louder now, she demanded several times: '*D'ya understand?*' (*wakaru ka?* 分かるか). A blunt and threatening intonation, sounding like a masculine character from a historical TV drama, in fact. (Much of my knowledge of *reisa* is disappointingly of this sort: fragments of speech, partial soundings that I struggled to take in while I was engaged in *okiyome* in some other part of the dojo.)

Fortunately, we can get a sense of the sort of process that *reisa* can be – the sort of expressive space that it lays out – from a more extensive ethnographic instance documented by Okada Hiroki (1993: 130-131).

The scene is as follows. In an unspecified dojo, Okada is giving *okiyome* to a sixteen year-old girl, a high-school student. (Okada explains that the girl suffers from atopic dermatitis, and both this and her relationships at school have been causing her anxiety. She began attending the dojo through a school friend and, three weeks before, she took the Mahikari training course.) About five minutes into phase 1, the girl's body starts to rock back and forth. A minister (*dōshi*) comes over.

'This is the phenomenon of spirit movement,' (*kore ga reishō genshō desu* これが霊動現象です) he points out to other members in the dojo.

At the end of ten minutes – when phase 1 is supposed to finish – Okada tries to apply the technique of spirit pacification (*chinkon no waza*), but the girl's body continues to sway, and so the minister switches places with Okada, administers the technique, and the swaying stops. When Okada asks her if she could recall what her body was doing, she says that she cannot.

In the dojo again on the following day, the minister decides to begin a spirit investigation. In the selfsame manner as phase 1, the girl shuts her eyes while the minister gives light to her forehead. Okada documents the following exchange:

Minister:	Who are you?
Girl:	(No response. Her body begins to sway fiercely).
Minister:	Receiving the *kamisama*'s light is distressing for you, I suppose.
Girl:	(No response. She begins to shed tears).
Minister:	Don't you feel sorry for attaching to the flesh of a stranger? You will have to apologise to the *kami*.

Taussig 1992: 177-178). *Reisa*, to be sure, is not equivalent to this, as it is conducted in ordinary Japanese (with the exception of any strange vocalizations on the spirit's part). But the general caveat holds: that the making of meaning is not a seamless or certain process.

Girl: (No response. Her sobbing steadily gets louder).
Several questions later, and with the girl continuing to give no response, the minister, exasperated, asks again in a loud voice.
Minister: [He switches to a familiar, almost disrespectful register.] Why won't you answer? Are you a vulgar animal spirit, since you can't answer? What are you? A fox? A cat? A snake?
With this mention of 'snake', the girl's body moves violently.
Minister: Right. So you're a snake, eh? You're not supposed to be here. Get purified by the light and then leave, please.
(The girl shakes her head as if to show reluctance).
Following this, the minister repeatedly prevails upon the 'snake' to quit the girl's body as soon as possible, for attaching to human beings is foolish and goes against the *kami*'s teachings. Presently, the minister dispenses the *chinkon no waza*, and the spirit investigation comes to an end, about twenty minutes after it began.

導士　「あなたは誰ですか。」
少女　「……」（体の揺れが激しくなる）
導士　「神様の御光をいただくと苦しいでしょう。」
少女　「……」（涙がこぼれはじめる）
導士　「他人の肉体にとり憑いて申し訳ないと思いませんか。あなたは神におわびしなければなりません。」
少女　「……」（すすり泣く声が段々と大きくなる）
この後いくつかの質問がなされた後で少女が答えないので導士はいらただしげに大声で質問を重ねる。
導士　「なぜ答えない。答えられないということは、お前は低級な動物霊なのか。」
導士　「お前は狐か、猫か、蛇か。」
（少女は蛇のところで激しく体を動かす）
導士　「そうか。お前は蛇だな。ここはお前のいるところではない。御光で浄められて去りなさい」
（少女、いやいやをするように首を振る）
この後に導士は少女にとり憑いた「蛇」に向かい、人間にとり憑くことは神の教えに逆らう愚かなことであり、少女の体から一刻も早く出てゆくように説得を続けた。やがて始まってから約２０分が経過し、鎮魂の業がかけられて霊査は終了した。

(Okada 1993: 131).

Okada states that *reisa* was carried out again three days later, with similar results; except that this time, midway through the process, the girl sticks her tongue out and licks her lips, causing the minister to exclaim 'At last! The snake has shown its true character' (*tsui ni hebi no honshō o arawashita na* ついに蛇の本性を現したな). About a week after this, Okada observed the girl during *reisa* now miming the snake, crawling about on the *tatami* and flicking out her tongue (ibid.: 131-132).

In a compact analysis of these unfolding encounters, Okada rightly seizes on the significance of the minister's intervention. His appearance on the scene transforms it; the agitated body of the girl in *okiyome* is identified as a body under the influence of a 'spirit movement' (*reidō*), and, Okada contends that as the girl hears this initial

definition reiterated by other members in the dojo, her body becomes what it was repeatedly said to be (ibid.: 132). Now, in my view this interpretation rings true in many respects but I am not certain that this increasing definition-in-action of the snake in the girl is, as Okada has it, 'a passive process of self-transformation' (*judô-teki na jiko henkaku no purosesu* 受動的な自己変革のプロセス; ibid,: 132). It might seem that way. It might appear, in a Lévi-Straussian manner of speaking, that the minister supplies the girl with a language which she takes up and expresses with her body. But I do not believe that the girl is merely a passive party in this exchange; that she *merely* surrenders to the minister's interpretations. Neither purely passive, nor exactly active either, it is as if the body of the light-receiver in *okiyome* practice is a body that may be carried away by the movements it initiates; a strange circuitry running between the intentional and the involuntary that Taussig terms 'active yielding' (Taussig 1993: 46, 61). Undoubtedly, the minister's involvement is crucial; he seems to take the lead, he explores and interrogates, and the spirit's answers, given in the agitations of the girl's body, appear to conform to the questions he asks. After all, 'Entities need audiences, languages of deduction by which to be discerned' (Espírito Santo and Blanes 2014: 17). Perhaps we could say of the girl's part in the exchange, that she lends her body to his language, but this loaning is an active yielding, in which her body is not so much passively assimilated into his words, as it is a body that temporarily and tentatively lets itself be carried along by them, towards the realization of the spirit that is within it. Neither the minister's language, nor the spirit that surfaces in the girl's spasmodic responses are ready-made or somehow existent in advance; rather, they are – as Schieffelin would say, emergent in the dialogic relation between the participants (see Schieffelin 1985: 717). This elusive quality of the emergent, of the virtual, that I am trying to portray in the *reisa* exchange is well described in May's paraphrase of Wittgenstein: 'that it is in speaking that we discover what it is that we want to say' (May 2005: 161). So, similarly, it is in responding that the girl discovers *what* it is that is inside her.

She could, on the other hand, have refused to give any response. One of the most tricky and interesting things that I ever heard about *reisa* was told to me by Maki-san. Chatting in a café, as we regularly did, she said that one time, when she was receiving light from a staff member in the dojo, he began, quite unprompted, to ask questions (she did not say what they were). He was, in effect, starting an impromptu spirit investigation. Maki-san told me that she wasn't sure what to do – she had not, as far as she could know, given out any sign that could be taken as a spirit movement. In the face of his questions, though, she felt that she 'had to answer' (*kotaenai to ikenai* 答えないといけない), but she didn't, and just sat there uncertainly, with her eyes shut and her hands together. I am intrigued by this admission, by her saying that she gave no response but nonetheless felt that she had to. Maki-san did not supply any reason for her decision to remain silent, but we may readily guess at one: that to have responded would have been to have given voice to words that *could not have been her own at that moment*. The staff member's questions were not directed to Maki-san but to a presence that she did not feel was there. Since she had no obvious intimation of any spiritual presence within her, she felt, I think, that to answer would have been incongruous, untimely, perhaps, even unreal. To have had answered – whether in words or gestures – would have been to have embarked on an uncertain exchange between 'her' interlocutor, the staff member, and an as yet unknown and unfelt spiritual presence within her.

And – or least, so it seems to me – it is as if in this fleetingly strange failure of the *okiyome* exchange to have become transposed into the interrogative context of *reisa*,

the performative conditions for the making possible of this context were momentarily disclosed. If, that is, *reisa* – as indeed all of *okiyome* practice more generally, is concerned with what Schieffelin calls 'the creation of presence', then Maki-san's refusal to respond reveals, in reverse, her own participation – intentional, and yet not quite, active yet yielding – in this creative and performative enactment (see Schieffelin 1996: 59).

But the girl responds. Quite quickly, the snake spirit finds increasing expression within her – increasing audacity, even, if its lip-licking and tongue stuck out at the minister is any indication – during the *reisa* sessions. Over the course of these sessions, the snake is actualised in the girl's body with increasing fluency, until that day, a week or so later, when Okada sees 'her' slithering around on the floor. In this progress of escalating snakiness, the new movements that she lets her body try out, the girl is neither a snake nor is she any longer, of course, a girl, but a becoming-snake – if I may employ an expression of Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 258). To say, as one might do so easily, that she is just 'playing' at being a snake, that the snake is just a role for her, would be to make too simple a split between the girl and the snake, and to suggest, moreover, that the latter is a representation, a fiction or a temporary distraction she entertains because she wants to take the place of some Other, when the whole question, from Mahikari's point of view, is why some Other has taken the place of *her*.[66] By the same token, the temptation to reduce the spirit to a 'role' that a person plays will tend to minimise – because roles and representations and characters are seen to be substitutes for something else – the actual presence and significance that a spirit may come to have in person's life at large (See Espírito Santo and Blanes 2014: 22). I must confess my ignorance of these matters, but I have reason to suspect that spirits may bring with them such significance.

Mori-san, my spiritual guide of sorts, told me of the spirit that had appeared in her for the first time that February – the latest of several spirits that had attached to her in her history. It was, she alleged, the spirit of a *kakure kirishitan* 隠れキリシタン, one of the so-called 'hidden Christians', those Christian communities which went underground following the persecutions instituted by Toyotomi Hideyoshi at the end of the 16th century. She knew that this 'spirit' (*gorei-san*, ご霊さん she said, as many others do, using a term that is polite but also intimate; more intimate, anyhow, than the more impersonal *hyōirei*, 'attaching spirit') was that of a Christian who had been crucified (*jūjika ni kakerareta* 十字架にかけられた) and pierced with a spear. I asked if this was connected to these past persecutions. Yes, she replied, but then more hesitantly, she said that she wasn't sure whether she had been persecuted or had done the persecuting (*hakugai ga sareta ka, shita ka wakarahen* 迫害がされたか、したか分からへん). During *okiyome*, whenever the spirit emerges in the movements of her body, Mori-san said that she finds herself crossing herself, or holding up her hands, as if she is reading the bible, and I realised then, that I had seen her once in the dojo doing this, her hand swishing through the air as it flipped through invisible pages. Since the appearance of this spirit in her, Mori-san had begun to read a good

[66] The argument that spirit possession in Japan is a form of role-playing or acting out, where the spirit is understood as a medium for the fulfilment of a need, or as the outlet for the discharge of emotions, was prosecuted, with much success, by Lebra 1976. (Her thesis, or something like it, has found support in Davis 1980: 154, 200; Yoshida 1984: 99-100; Reader 1991: 207; and McVeigh 1996: 285; Pfeiffer 2000: 160, rehashing Reader's remarks). The view is more generally associated in anthropology with I. M. Lewis (1971). As Lambek counters, however, this theory reduces spirits to devices for the expression of personal issues, and in doing so, looses what is specific about spirits as such. See Lambek 1993: 322-323.

deal about the hidden Christians. Although her family are Buddhist, Mori-san had attended a Lutheran school, and as a child, she used to cross herself and say 'Amen'. Given the spirit movements she was having recently, she wondered whether this prayerful behaviour of her childhood 'was not a coincidence' (*gūzen ja nakatta* 偶然じゃなかった).

Think back to the scene on the Mahikari poster of the boy with the ghost looming up behind him. It announces that the spirits are always behind the scenes, always behind our backs, operating without our knowledge. Mori-san's remarks paint a similar picture, but they also suggest a relationship with the spirits that is a closer, less threatening association. We get an inkling of the significance this spirit seemed to have for her, of how certain aspects of her past had taken on a new sense. There was still much that she remained uncertain of. What was her involvement in the death of this Christian character? She could not say. But she appeared to identify with this past presence, even if this identification remained hazy.[67] Further uncertainty: When Mori-san expressed doubt as to whether she had been the agency of persecution, or its object, I could not be sure whether she was referring to herself in a past life or to the past life of the spirit. I am not sure that she was sure, either. In any case, she also said, the spirits sometimes tell lies. But if there was much that was still obscure about this history, Mori-san was, I think, aiming to reconstruct it; a history that would, in our terms, be as much made as discovered, reconstructed in an involuntary, and yet active, fashion. But here I reach the very limits of my knowledge.

In sharp contrast to my own superficial sense of the spiritual, other authors on Mahikari have dug much deeper. Indeed, to read these works, one might think that the full-blown exposure of spirits is the sole concern of Mahikari practice. Thus, for Miyanaga, a belief in spirit possession is the necessary price of admission into the Mahikari organisation, and *okiyome* is the means by which this belief is brought about. Possession, she says – sounding a Weberian note, is a 'calling', a vocational programme around which the whole of Mahikari practice is organised and to which the believer must respond if she is to participate properly in it (see Miyanaga 1983: 254-274). It is only through total devotion to the practice of *okiyome*, that Mahikari members can, like Weber's edgy Calvinists, work off the anxiety that the doctrine of possession produces. In the most well-known study of Mahikari, Winston Davis (1980) identifies *okiyome* so exclusively with spirit possession that he simply refers to *okiyome* as 'exorcism' and to its practitioners as 'exorcists' throughout the book. Similarly, for McVeigh (1997), spirit possession that takes priority over any other function that *okiyome* may have.

Now, there may be historical and institutional reasons that could account for this disparity in data, between the mass of material on spirits in the earlier monographs (Davis 1980 and Miyanaga 1983) and the relative shortage of it in mine. It is, for

[67] On the identification of Mahikari members with the spirits that possess them, Reader (1991: 206-207) gives a short account of a young man's connections to a samurai spirit. While I am not convinced by his interpretation that this expression of the spirit is, for the man, a device for the acting out of suppressed emotional contents, he does raise an intriguing point: that the frequent manifestations of this spirit would seem to indicate that the man 'had no immediate and vested interest in the "solution" to his problem (that is, in the final exorcism of the troublesome spirit)' (ibid.: 207). If certain Mahikari members come to strongly identify with their spirits – become attached to these attaching presences – then this would appear to be at odds with one of the therapeutic objectives of *okiyome*. Regrettably, I am unable to throw any light on this question.

example, conceivable that the institutional focus on attaching spirits and the frequency of their turbulent emergence in *okiyome* was once much greater, and that, over the intervening years, these wilder behaviours have become pacified and routinized; a process parallel to the 'domestication' of demonic manifestations in the practice of deliverance among Catholic Charismatic groups in America, as documented by Csordas (1994: 166-168). Certainly, very early on in my time in Mahikari, Maki-san told me that she had heard that spirit movements are less common now than they were 'long ago' (*mukashi* 昔).[68]

But there is, I believe, a more telling explanation for this discrepancy. Put simply, the great stress on spirits and, especially, on *okiyome* as a form of possession practice results, in my view, from an anthropological fascination with the fantastic, with what Malinowski, in his remarkable *Confessions of Ignorance and Failure*, admitted is the come-on for every ethnographer: the lure of 'the dramatic, exceptional, and sensational' (Malinowski 1978: 462). Thus, consider that, in fact, the rowdier *reidō* are not now, nor were they in the past, a very common occurrence. Both Davis and McVeigh admit this, in semi-confessions of their own, and given the frequency of these acknowledgements on the infrequency of turbulent spirit movements (Davis 1980: 116, 121, 157, 159; McVeigh 1997: 187, 187, 207), it is difficult to see what else could have motivated their focus on the more moving episodes other than an analytical preference for spectacular ethnographic data. Davis even supplies statistical evidence for the frequency of *reidō* among Mahikari members, and this shows that just '21 percent could say that they had had "quite a few" spirit movements, and only 15 percent, that they had had "a lot"' (Davis 1980: 121).[69] In a survey carried out by Tani seven years later, the number of those who could say that they experienced 'recurrent' *reidō* (*hinpan ni aru* 頻繁にある) stood at 19.1%; those who experienced *reidô* 'sometimes' (*tokidoki aru* ときどきある) at 44.2%; while 25.6% said that spirit movements happened 'hardly ever' (*amari nai* あまりない) for them (cited in Okada 1993: 129). Of course, as Okada perceptively remarks in his review of this data, much turns on how one defines *reidō* in the first place. And, in noting this scholarly overemphasis on the more dramatic outcomes in *okiyome*, Okada goes on to observe that researchers have tended to relate spirit movements in Mahikari to a standard model of spirit possession (*tenkei-tekina hyōi* 典型的な憑依), so that their ensuing analysis comes to be framed in terms of this identification (Okada 1993: 129). Just so, McVeigh (1997: 206, 211) measures spirit movements in Mahikari against an analytical standard which he christens 'classic spirit possession'. But rather than appealing to such an ideal-typical fiction, and then judging Mahikari practices in the light of it, we would do better, I suggest, to consider the spectrum of effects produced during *okiyome*, and analyze what it is that actually happens.

I have already (in Chapter 2) described in some detail the range of sensations experienced during *okiyome*. In particular, I focused on the effects of light given to the body, and how the light-giver orients their practice according to the constellation of *kyūsho* (vital points). It is significant, then, that this aspect of *okiyome* has received such summary treatment in studies of Mahikari, but this relative absence of attention

[68] Compare the comments of a member of the administrative staff of Gedatsukai (as reported by Earhart): 'There used to be a lot of possession (kamigakari) in Gedatsu-kai…There are rather few now…' See Earhart 1989: 166.

[69] Of the dojo in Kansai in which he worked, Davis offers this observation: 'On the whole, there are violent spirit seizures in the Nakayama dojo only a few times a month' (Davis 1980: 116).

becomes comprehensible when one realizes that it is only during the first (roughly ten-minute) phase of *okiyome*, when light is directed at the front of the head (to point number 8), that *reidō* are given to occur. But even when nothing seemingly takes place, the second and third phases of *okiyome* are, by comparison, more relaxed affairs, concerned with the purification of the body, and, to the extent that they are undramatic, they have largely been passed over in academic accounts.

Thus, Davis dispatches them in four paragraphs (Davis 1980: 118-119, 138), spending the rest of his long chapter savouring the drama and exotica of possession states, hypnosis and hyperarousal dissociation. Miyanaga's treatment is more measured (see, e.g., 1983: 85-95), although the balance of the analysis is still very much in favour of the first phase. McVeigh (1997: 53) offers half a page. In a journal article, Young is at least candid in his avowal that 'the exorcistic phase' of *okiyome* is the one that holds the most interest (1990: 36). But a statement of McVeigh's perhaps best sums up the general position. In presenting two case histories of *kumite* and their *okiyome* experiences, he remarks that he will pass over any discussion of those who have never experienced *reidō*, 'since it is not very relevant for my treatment of the socio-psychological aspects of possession' (McVeigh 1997: 212). The impression given is that *okiyome* is only worth studying in so far as it conforms to certain preconceptions about excessive and sensational forms of religiosity. This is not to say, however, that spirits are of little significance in Mahikari practice – quite the contrary. Spirits form something like an abiding virtual background to the lives of Mahikari members, and there is an ever-present potential for their becoming actual in the practice of *okiyome*. But we should not assume that the only analytically interesting manner of their manifestation is the full-blown expression of presence. It would be better to recognize shades of emergence; that is, gradations of presence, from trembling hands all the way to shaking, speaking spirits in bodies. What this means is that we try to 'understand entities in their incipient and imminent dimensions, as movement and events' (Espírito Santo and Blanes 2014: 16). In other words, spirit movements are just as likely to be detected in emergent effects and minor sensations. Such effects, I will argue, are intimately connected the postures adopted during *okiyome*, conceived as a procedure which engages a sensational form.

Let us recapitulate the formal sequence of *okiyome*. Plotting its course by way of the twenty-seven vital points, the practice consists of three phases of purification – three periods of light, given to the forehead, the back of the head, and then to the back of the body, around the region of the kidneys, after which *okiyome* may be given to any other points or places (with the exception of the forehead, no. 8). The logic of *okiyome* articulates a metaphorics of unblocking, a dynamic of purification which, as in other new religions, aims at 'reversing a condition of clogging, retention, or bottling up' (Hardacre 1986: 92; see also Lebra 1986: 365-366). I have already noted that this concern with regulated circulation suggests certain similarities with acupuncture. In the latter, at least in its classical formulation, the body is striated by twelve meridians (*keiraku* 経絡) channelling vital flows of *ki* energy and blood (*kiketsu* 気血). Disturbances to these flows, complexly affected by time and the environment, occasion affliction and disorder, and thus the intention of therapy is to reactivate circulation through the stimulation of various pressure points (*tsubo* つぼ; *keiketsu* 経穴) across the body (Lock 1980: 36-43; Porkert 1974: Chap. 4). *Okiyome* is, to be sure, a good deal less elaborate than this; its conception of the body's internal dynamics is more basic, and it recognizes only twenty-seven vital points, where

acupuncture counts in almost eight hundred (Lock 1980: 36). But then it should be understood that *okiyome* is not imagined as a practice requiring extensive technical expertise, accessible only to a few, but as a popular technique of salvation open to everyone – children under the age of ten excepted (Davis 1980: 88; Okada 1993: 101, 123-124). In addition, it is worth observing that, in comparison with other analogous techniques of purification ultimately derived from Ōmoto, the recognition of specific points punctuating the body is a particular innovation of Mahikari. In Sekai Kyūsei Kyō's practice of *jōrei* (浄霊), which is extremely similar to *okiyome* in many respects, there are no *kyūsho* (see Davis 1980: 76; Shimizu 1994: 253). This seems to suggest that Mahikari's practice is more precisely directed; with the *kyūsho* acting as keyholes or pinpoints, *okiyome* aims to get a more methodical grip on, a more systematic apprehension of, the problem of pollution and its unblocking.[70]

Taken all together, one might say that *okiyome* is a programme of practice by numbers. It has this digital mediacy, of fingers probing the body in search of the numbered vital points, of the time in minutes given to the purification of different places, counted out by the clocks on dojo walls. But within the performance of the practice, amid the precision, the calculation of time and the charting of the vital points, there is, all the same, a certain uncertainty and ambiguity. One cannot say in advance what kinds of *henka* ('changes') might occur, nor can accurately anticipate the possibility of *reidō*. But there is, nevertheless, an array of possible sensations and experiences, many on a minor scale. As Tebêcis says: 'Most people experience nothing unusual or just mild feelings of warmth, relaxation, tingling, gentle rocking or swaying of the body and so on' (1988: 62). This, certainly, fits with my own experiences. In receiving light to my forehead (in the first phase), I would often have a growing sense of heat in my hands, and a tightening of the muscle tension, so that, at times, my hands would start to tremble. A fairly moderate sensation, then, this tense, hot tingling in the hands. A fairly superficial ritual experience, one might think, merely skin-deep, mediocre and hardly worth mentioning. But these mild, digital sensations – to speak only of the hands, for a moment – are common enough to merit attention.

In a vivid narrative of his beginnings in Mahikari, the *anime* scriptwriter Koyama Takao (among whose works include the highly popular *Dragonball* series of cartoons) recollects his first experience of *okiyome*. Told to sit in *seiza* posture, to shut his eyes and put his hands together, Koyama sardonically describes his sense of resignation to whatever was about to happen, feeling 'like a carp on a chopping board', (*manaita no ue no koi* マナ板の上の鯉). With *okiyome* well underway, he found that his fingers were warming up, but, full of distrust, he tells us that he firmly refused to read any special significance into this: 'Of course,' he thought to himself, 'if you put your hands together, you'd expect them to warm up naturally' (*kore dake te o awasete ireba shizen ni atsuku naru-hazu sa* これだけ手を合わせていれば自然に熱くなるはずさ, Koyama 1986: 34). But then, as Koyama's account plays out, the wisecracking, irreverent scepticism of the narrator gradually gives way to a faith in the realities of the spirit world.

Next, consider what Winston Davis, in his ethnographic account of Mahikari, has to say about *his* hands. Receiving light on a certain occasion, Davis remarks that 'Yoshida Sensei noticed that my hands were shaking slightly when he gave me

[70] Unusually, given the meticulous nature of her documentation, Staemmler does not mention this absence of vital points in her account of the similarities and differences between *jōrei* and *okiyome* (2009: 269-274).

okiyome. He immediately suggested that an evil spirit had possessed me while I was visiting Shinto shrines in connection with my other research' (1980: 138-139). But Davis dismisses this interpretation: 'I found it nearly impossible,' he states, 'to press palm against palm and hold my hands perfectly still for a full ten minutes, especially while being watched by such attentive eyes' (1980: 139). This is less an admission than a justification, a rationalisation of the same order as Koyama's dismissal: *of course, if you hold your hands tightly together, they'll tremble – especially if you're tense*. Davis' larger argument is that conviction in the credibility of *okiyome* is brought about by means of hypnotic suggestion, a sleight of hand by which one will be persuaded that one's own quivering hands are a sign of spirit possession, and thus a clear proof of the truth-claims of Mahikari (1980: 115-160). Naturally, Davis himself is not swayed, since he presents himself as *untouched* by Mahikari practice.[71] But the point is that his hands shook in spite of himself, and that this was enough for the dojo president to discern and nominate *reidō*. Davis, in other words, disassociates his own moment of trembling – that most minor, digital drama – from all those examples of more major 'dramatic outbursts' of Mahikari members during *okiyome*, those falling, crying and shaking fits which populate his account (1980: 137). In place of this, I propose that we envisage these minor corporeal sensations, such as quivering or heated hands, as on a continuum with those more sensational stirrings of the body in *okiyome*. We should include, incorporate, these lesser sensations, not least because (as I have pointed out above) experiences such as these – increases in temperature, tingling, trembling – are far more common than the more turbulent responses to *okiyome* In addition, it is important to stress that quivering hands are indicative of the presence of spirits in a wide range of Japanese practices of spirit mediation.[72]

Equally, what can be said about the hands holds, I think, for the whole range of corporeal motions and reactions, for all such tangible and routinely visible movements – even those most seemingly superficial – are sensuous effects of the sensational form of *okiyome* itself, even if, in the most minute and molecular instances, such movements can only be sensed in one's fingertips.

In order to see more clearly how these movements might come about, I would like to turn to an illuminating argument of Alfred Gell's. In a remarkable paper on trance practices among the Muria of Central India – an enquiry conceived in a Maussian mode, as a study of body techniques – Gell argued, among other things, that these diverse practices are directed towards the disruption of the body's awareness of balance and it is this 'assault on the equilibrium sense' occasioned by swaying, swinging and shaking that itself constitutes the sense of the presence of divinities (Gell 1980). In particular, he suggested that the bearing of the body in practice, in its

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[71] To sound somewhat like Bourdieu, I note that, because its parameters are psychological, the model of hypnotic suggestion – like a certain view of conversion as cognitive event – makes too big a division between outsides and insides, between the sociologist and others, forgetting, along the way, the practices in which *both* are intersubjectively engaged (see Bourdieu 2000: 54-55).

The writing that results comes to look distinctly uncharitable, *pace* Davis 1980: viii. Thus, he says at one point: 'When [*okiyome*] was over, the lady next to me asked whether I had felt anything. I ruefully admitted that I had not. She, however, had felt the toxins in her head melting and running down her neck.' The very next line begins thus: 'Hypnotic states are known to be related to infantile regression, in which many ego functions are abdicated…' (Davis 1980: 141). So much for all the others – the sociologist himself remains resolutely unmoved.

[72] For examples, see Staemmler (2009: 45, 71, 76, 82, 244, 249, 259, 347, 387).

motive, axial and tensile forces, generates this sense of presence, the 'result of the maintenance of a certain rigid posture…which, because of the increased muscle tonus, gives rise to trembling of the extremities and later shuddering affecting the whole body' (1980: 236-237). Gell was keen to stress that, for the Muria in these moments, the divine is present in a sense much less conceptual and symbolic than it is haptic and corporeal, emerging 'as a tangible physical quality perceived somesthetically rather than intellectually constructed' (1980: 225). 'For,' he asked afterwards, 'what else *is* the divinity but a certain trembling, a certain vertiginous intoxication?' (1980: 238; original italics).

The significance of these remarks for understanding the sensations initiated in the practice of *okiyome* should be readily apparent.[73] To be sure, the Muria practitioners are, in many cases, highly animated in their motility, whereas the recipient of *okiyome* adopts a fixed posture, sitting *seiza* on the floor. But, as Gell shows, the moving and shaking of Muria bodies is intimately associated with the 'maintenance of an unnaturally rigid posture' which both precedes and produces this corporeal turbulence (1980: 236). In the first phase of *okiyome*, the posture taken up by the light-receiver (*jukōsha* 受光者) is both firm and fixed, with eyes shut, hands held up close together and legs bent double; a formation of significant potential tension, in marked contrast to the loose and relaxed positions one adopts for the other two phases. (Recall that it is only during phase 1, when divine light is directed at the 'primary soul' situated in the forehead, that so-called 'spirit movements' (*reidō*) may appear; such occurrences as trembling, crying, swaying, speaking, shaking, etc.) In this position, the body is turned in on itself – true, the acoustic sense opens out, but in a general postural and perceptual sense the body is inclined and folded inwards: the eyes are closed, the hands self-touching, the legs folded over, and I believe that it is within this restricted corporeal currency that the potential for tension arises, a tension which finds its easiest increase and investment in the hands raised up together.

It is as if, in this position, the body is bound – tightened, restricted; an interpretation that is confirmed, I think, by what I was told about the finer points of posture. In adopting the *seiza* position in the dojo, and especially during the practice of *okiyome*, one is enjoined to sit with the back of one's left toe overlapping the right. Additionally, the person receiving light during the first phase places their hands together, with the left thumb hooked over the right thumb. This particular orientation owes, in part, to the pre-eminence given, in Mahikari, to the left side as the side of 'spirit' (*rei*).[74] But why this curious crossing of thumbs and toes? Once, following a study session in the dojo, I asked this question of Yoshino-san. She repeated to me what we had just learned, viz., that the *okiyome* postures were divinely revealed to Sukuinushisama, founder of Mahikari. The placing of the left thumb and big toe over

[73] Their relevance reaches further. It is somewhat beyond the bounds of the present enquiry, but I suggest that Gell's observations (esp. 1980: 224-226) would be pertinent to the study of the phenomenological aspects of *matsuri*, in particular to the raising up and rocking of the *omikoshi* (御神輿), in whose hazardous and heavy presence the invested *kami* makes itself violently and viscerally sensible. Yanagawa (1988), in fact, makes some compelling suggestions along these lines without, however, citing Gell's work.

[74] See Miyanaga 1983: 289-290; Davis 1980: 3; Okada 1993: 145, n.19. As McVeigh explains of Mahikari teaching, the Japanese word for 'left', *hidari* 左, is taken, by way of a spiritual pun, to mean *hidari* 霊垂 – 'where the spirit hangs' (see McVeigh 1997: 39). For the posture required for the practice of *chinkon kishin* in Ōmoto (which is similar in important respects) see Staemmler (2009: 257).

the right is a part of the 'secret technique' (*hijutsu* 秘術) that *okiyome* is. Specifying further, Yoshino-san said that the overlapping of thumbs and toes is 'a secret technique of suppression', a 'secret art of arrest' (*osaeru hijutsu* 抑える秘術). She did not elaborate, letting me know, more generally, that spirits can be highly manipulative, and that you ought to avoid becoming too interested in them, implying, as it were, that to do so would be to risk their becoming interested in *you*.

What I draw from this is that *okiyome*, in its first phase at least, is a fundamentally risky and uncertain enterprise. This essential tenor of touch-and-go owes much to the transformative capacity of the practice and it finds one of its expressions in the influence and possible exposure of possessing spirits.[75] It was this specific risk – the touchy subject of spirits surfacing – that Yoshino-san was alluding to, and attempting to warn me off. Now, since the emergence of spirits is a possible consequence of receiving light, I would infer that the 'technique of suppression', this interdigitation of thumbs and toes, is intended as a method, not of preventing any such emergence, but of controlling it, containing it safely should it occur. For, just as the giver of light applies the 'technique of spirit pacification' (*chinkon no waza*) – the three loud calls of '*Oshizumari!*' (Be still!) – irrespective of whether or not any spirit has made its presence felt, so too, I deduce, the light's recipient adopts this posture of 'suppression' as a sort of security precaution, a miniature means of tethering the body in the event of any trembling or otherwise turbulent *reidō*. The crossing of thumbs and toes is the metonymic expression of a condition that the body itself, in fact, actualizes, in the assumption of a locked-down posture, locked-in for the duration of that potentially risky phase of *okiyome*.[76]

Tsushiro (1990: 367-392) has remarked on the conception of body boundaries in spirit meditation rituals, especially the notion of the potential vulnerability of the body's surfaces. Accordingly, we might speculate, following Gell, that, within the first phase of *okiyome* practice, the postural configuration adopted by the light-receiver forms a certain charged and tensile field, a certain restricted circuitry of intentionality which, to a significant degree, creates the conditions for the emergence, as well as the control, of *reidō*, the sensuous presence of spirits. One of the merits of this position is that it takes leave of 'belief' as a necessary structural precondition for sensations to take place or to be recognised as having happened.[77] Take Davis' hands, again. They tremble – unquestionably, and yet Davis, like Koyama, is incredulous. He believes neither in attaching spirits, nor in the efficacy of the technique. But it is the form of the ritual which mobilizes certain materials and forces – embodying a particular ritual physics – in order to produce effects. As Kapferer (2013: 32) argues

[75] That is to say, the risk that spirits might be exposed by *okiyome* is only one of its possible transformative consequences. Many more things may, or may not, occur: melting, heating, healing, or none of the above. The practice is marked by a more generalized uncertainty that does not necessarily require the emergence of spirits for transformation to be actualized. Miyanaga (1983), on the other hand, insists that the transformative capacity of *okiyome* is absolutely conditional upon belief in the certainty of spirits. The riskiness of ritual is emphasized by Schieffelin (1996). On uncertainty as an essential ingredient of transformative practices, see Handelman 1998: 31, 63-81.

[76] Shimizu comments that the *chinkon no waza* has the purpose of 'suppressing' (*osaeru* 抑える) the spiritual body. See Shimizu 1987: 70.

[77] It does not follow from this that belief forever absents itself from *okiyome* practice or that it is always inconsequential for it. But it is not, I suggest, intrinsic to the structure of practice as such.

regarding the capacity of ritual form to affect its participants, 'belief – or not… is secondary to the images of cosmic force, whose vibrant potency are the key instruments in the technology of ritual practice'. It is through the force and form of the body in practice – through posture and practice intentionally adopted and engaged in – that, as Köpping proposes, 'expected' yet otherwise 'unpredictable' effects are generated (Köpping 2002: 145). Such effects are unpredictable because they are not wholly voluntary, not altogether the products of an autonomous subject. It is as if, in *okiyome*, I take up the postures of this practice, and am *taken over* by them.

Nor is this, perhaps, the end of the matter, for so far in our discussion of the ritual physics of posture in *okiyome* practice, we have been dealing mainly with its first phase, that risky period in which light is given to the forehead. What of its other two phases? Here too we may be able to delineate a certain structure of sensational form. Now, while the phasic organisation of *okiyome* is modular – that is, the three phases may be performed in any order, it is most common to proceed in sequence, beginning with the first and ending with the third. Let us remind ourselves that in phase 1, the light-receiver sits in a *seiza* position, eyes closed and hands together. With the transition to phase 2 – in which *okiyome* is given to the back of the head and neck – the recipient turns around, eyes open now, and adopts a more relaxed posture (either cross-legged or sitting knees together with the lower legs sticking out sideways). Finally, in phase 3 (light to the back of the kidneys, and elsewhere if necessary), the light-receiver lies down on her front, with a blanket drawn across her body and her head resting on a little cushion. The positions and dispositions of these latter two phases are often contrasted to the severity and intensity of phase 1, the only period in which spirit movements are given to occur. It is both on account of this risk of their emergence and, at the same time, owing to the tautened form of the body taken up by the light-receiver (the formality of the *seiza* posture is notoriously uncomfortable) that this phase is characterised by a tension of situation and position that is entirely absent in the other two phases. Moving on from the first phase to the second, the light-giver will often instruct her partner to 'relax' (*raku ni shite* 楽にして) or to 'please sit comfortably' (*raku ni suwatte kudasai* 楽に座って下さい), and it is this shift to a looser, easier state that often comes to define the *okiyome* experience for recipients, as when one says, for example, at the end of *okiyome*: 'I feel relaxed,' or: 'That was comfortable' (*raku ni natta* 楽になった). During phase 3, it is by no means uncommon to find that the light-receiver, recumbent on the *tatami*, has fallen asleep. I found myself in both positions – either falling asleep or discovering that my partner had fallen asleep – on a number of occasions. In essence, then, *okiyome* practice, when performed in sequence, enacts a transition from a body bound up, sitting tight and tense to a body becoming slack, relaxed, becoming *raku*. Is this not the actualisation, in performance, of the ideal transformation which *okiyome* is said to effect? Recall that in the Mahikari imagining, pollutants which constantly enter the body solidify over the course of time, sedimenting to form toxic blocks of which it is the objective of *okiyome* to melt and disperse, and that *kumite* often report sensations of softening when they receive light. Just so, in taking up a succession of positions, then, the light-receiver's body mimes the process of its own liquefaction, its own hot, melting progression towards purity.

Where Augustine seemed to be suspicious of the idea of an intrinsic relation between bodily form and spiritual expression, Mahikari, as with other Japanese new religions, is more forthright. It places explicit emphasis on the affinity between corporeal and

spiritual rectitude, the refinement of posture being conformable to the purity of the self. A revelation delivered to Okada Kōtama makes this clear: 'first correct your posture' (*shisei wo tadashi* 姿勢を正し) commands the *kami*, before going on to expand on the associations of the homophone *sei* (which began with *shisei* 姿勢 – posture): 'Serenity [*sei* 静] leads to purity [*sei* 清], righteousness [*sei* 正], and holiness [*sei* 聖]' (Okada n.d.: 205).[78] That is, a strongly isomorphic relation is established between physical positions and spiritual dispositions.[79] But perhaps the relation is even closer than one of correspondence. One afternoon, I asked Ike-san about the distinction between the physical body (*nikutai* 肉体), the astral (*yūtai* 幽体) and spiritual body (*reitai* 霊体) in Mahikari. By way of exposition, she pointed to a cardboard box, half-filled with Mahikari leaflets. 'You see this,' she said, indicating its lidless edge, 'you wouldn't know where its outside becomes its inside' (*omote wa doko kara ura ni naru ka wakaranai deshō* 表はどこから裏になるか分からないでしょう). The three bodies are so connected, she went on, and she clasped her hands tightly together, with fingers linked: an object demonstration of chiasmic corporeity,[80] and a graphic intimation of a particular ritual physics.

[78] This divine instruction to 'correct one's posture' (*shisei o tadasu* 姿勢を正す) has been the focus of further revelations and reflections, more recently. See, e.g., Oshienushisama Odairi (2003: 24).

[79] In so far as this is true of Mahikari, Hardacre (1986: 28) is surely incorrect in asserting that such spiritual-material isomorphisms are 'a minor theme' in Japanese new religions.

[80] Louveau (2012: 327) refers to the conception of the 'self' in Mahikari as an 'intertwining' (*entrelacs*).

Chapter Five:

Prosthetic Revelations: Sticking *mioshie* to the body.

Purification, as we have come to see in previous chapters, is an absolutely essential, cosmological function in Mahikari, and *okiyome* is the principal, and much repeated means of actively intervening in a world of perpetually accumulating pollutions. I have observed, equally, that almost all kinds of institutional doing in Mahikari are cleansing, and hence, transformative. Specifically, any devoted action performed in the dojo will have this effect – even, as we have seen, the act of just *being there*, in the presence of the *goshintai*, the great, divine-light-emitting panel of paper, inscribed with the name of the *kami* Su, that always hangs in the purest part of the room. But I could illustrate the importance of the dojo as the centre of purifying action by an occasion when I *didn't* go there. It was about ten o'clock at night and I was in my room in Akashi, when Shōji-san, my neighbour and persistent companion in Mahikari, phoned up, urging that I should receive *okiyome* – if only to my forehead. I attempted to put him off, but he was quite insistent, and so, with some reluctance, I met him at the front gate, and we went up into the old office building in which I was living. In my room now, sitting on the carpet, we prayed together as one would in the dojo, and he gave light to my forehead while I sat still with my eyes shut.[81] After a time, Shōji-san called out '*Oshizumari*!' We prayed again, and he made ready to leave. Just then, however, he asked me for something to write on; I offered him an exercise book. He began to write the words, 'The true law…' (*seihō* 正法) and I immediately guessed that he was giving me a lesson. 'These are the *fundamentals* of Mahikari,' (*Mahikari no konpon* 真光の根本) he said with some emphasis. I looked at the text he had handed me. It read: '"Practicing the true law is indeed a treasure." Through the practice of giving and receiving light, and the incorporation of the teachings, the soul will be able to come closer to God.' ('*seihō jissen koso takara*

[81] I should say that this was not the first time that I had avoided the dojo. Neither was it, consequently, the first time that Shōji-san had thought it necessary to come to my place in order to purify me. (*Okiyome*, as I have already mentioned, may be performed anywhere, but its practice outside the dojo is seen very much as second-best.) In making the minimal arrangements for *okiyome* on a previous occasion, I had taken a pair of thin cushions (*zabuton*), that I happened to have in my room, and placed them side-by-side on the carpet. But Shōji-san picked them up and, after some hesitation, realigned them according to what he deemed was a north-east/south-west axis. The function of such an orientation was much less metaphorical or symbolical (as McVeigh might say) than it was technical, since, as Shōji-san explained Suza, the Main World Shrine (in Gifu Prefecture) was to the north-east. As the light-giver, he would thus be sitting with Suza – operating as a distant but colossal *goshintai* – behind him, just as one would sit with one's back towards the *goshintai* when performing *okiyome* in the dojo.

nari' *sejukō wo jissen shite, oshie wo mi ni tsukete ikeba, tamashii wo kami ni chikazukeru koto ga dekiru*「正法実践こそ宝なり」施受光を実践して、教えを身に付けていけば、魂を神に近づけることができる).

'Practise these things,' Shôji-san explained, and your spirit 'will move upwards' (*agatte iku* 上がって行く). 'It's not difficult to grasp. Is it?' (*muzukashikunai* 難しくない) he added, with a certain impatience in his voice. Then he left.

From time to time, after this, whenever he thought that I was falling back in my practice, Shōji-san would repeat this maxim to me. I later learned from him that this citation comes from the last sentence of the last divine teaching of Oshienushisama (Okada Keishu), before she handed over the responsibility of leading Mahikari to her successor, Okada Kōshi (see Okada Keishu 2002a: 19).[82]

The sense of this final, divine directive is uncomplicated, as Shōji-san emphasized, but it has exacting implications. It sums up the aims of Mahikari as a way of life, a life of right practice centred on the dojo. Let us parse the grammar of this revelation. The subject is, patently, *practice* (*jissen* 実践), but practice performed according to a particular mode, the mode of *seihō* 正法. This *seihō* is Mahikari's own particular variation on the Buddhist expression *shōbō* 正法, 'the true Dharma'.[83] In Mahikari, *seihō* means the divine law; the right way, as opposed to the wrong way, 'the contrary law' (*gyakuhō* 逆法), the manner of most people's lives, lived out in ignorance of the *kami*'s great design. 'Practice of the true law' (*seihō jissen* 正法実践), then, comprises two vital requirements: the performance of *okiyome* (both given and received), and the learning of divine teachings (*oshie* 教え), a process of learning that is, as the Japanese phrase says so suggestively, as much material as it is spiritual (*oshie wo mi ni tsukeru* 教えを身に付ける; literally, 'to stick the teachings to the body') Indeed, Shōji-san's own conduct was consummately modelled on the doctrine, since he had incorporated this very teaching – that is, attached it to his body – by committing it to memory.

These paired praxical imperatives (the practice of *okiyome* and the acquisition of the teachings) are to be carried out conjointly, as another Mahikari maxim makes clear. This is the axiom of 'both wheels' (*ryōrin* 両輪): the idea being that a vehicle of which only one wheel turns will just go round in circles; it is only by the power of both wheels turning together that forward movement becomes possible.[84] Likewise, in the absence of the acquisition of the teachings, practice goes nowhere. But practiced in tandem, the twin sides of *seihō* will bring the practitioner closer to the divine. Finally, implicit in the prescription, but the context that shows up its imperative sense, is the dojo, the unstated, yet no less unmistakable location for the twin faces of practice.

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[82] The succession took place while I was in Japan, on the 5th of October 2002. It was announced at Suza during the October *gesshisai* (monthly ceremony). See Oshienushisama Odairi 2002.

[83] Okada, Mahikari's founder, himself made this clear: 'We learn *seihō* (called by the Buddha *shōbō*)' (正法（釈尊のいわれた正法)). Cited in Sūkyō Mahikari (1983: 147). *Shōbō*, 'the true Dharma' (Skt., *saddharma*) – that is, the essential path of the Buddha – is a term associated with Dōgen, the founder of the Sōtō Zen sect (see Dumoulin 1990: 73).

[84] This formulation, also, has Buddhist antecedents. The doctrines of Kūkai, as Hakeda observes, have 'been traditionally divided into two categories: the theoretical aspect (*kyōsō*) [教相] and the practical aspect (*jisō*) [実相]. These have been compared to the two wheels of a cart or the two wings of a bird.' See Hakeda (1972: 76).

In the present chapter, I wish to consider this second side of practice, the incorporation of teachings. But we should, nevertheless, not overlook *okiyome*, which forms a constant accompaniment to this other programme of practice, which – as I will describe – is often centred on the study of written revelations. I want to round out the sense of the rhythm of dojo life, the exacting tempo of *jissen*, and the often hard work of being in Mahikari. For *seihō*, the true law, does not *simply* refer to a modality of practice, it defines a whole way of existing; it designates a contingent and difficult project of daily transformations, of purifications and conversions that is, potentially, without end. To put the teachings into practice demands a way of engaging with others and with the world which is not really adequately described in terms of the actualization of a 'worldview', which is how Earhart defines the nexus of practices in the Japanese new religion, Gedatsukai 解脱会 (Earhart 1989: 170-171). This is so in so far as 'worldview' carries an implication of an internal or intellectual relation to the world (*pace* Pina-Cabral 2017), as well as an implied bias towards seeing as a mode of engagement. But to put the teachings into practice in Mahikari (and, I would hazard, in Japanese new religions more generally) is more a matter of *hexis* (of position and disposition) than of *opsis* (of vision and viewing) – if I may deploy Bourdieuan terminology (see e.g., Bourdieu 2000). In other words, to the extent that sociocosmic relations are realized through the cultivation of correct comportment, it is not analytically fruitful to characterize them in terms of conformity to a particular *vision* of the world. At stake, as I will try to argue, is the concept of a corporeal relation to revelation, such that the truth is something to be bonded to a body, in such a way that it becomes an extension of the person.

In his ethnography of the Japanese religion Gedatsukai, just referred to, Earhart describes the brimming ritual calendar of the movement (Earhart 1989: Chap. 7). Mahikari, too, maintains a hectic schedule. Each dojo produces a full programme of events, some of which will be particular to that dojo, while many others – such as the timing and staging of training courses (*kenshūkai*), follow a fixed and corporate pattern across the organisation. On almost any given day, some event or other will be timetabled (see Okada 1993: 124).[85] Thus, there are study sessions (*benkyōkai* 勉強会) for beginner, intermediate, and advanced members, meetings for the Mahikari Youth movement, special sessions for men, for women, for staff members; dojo cleaning days (*bikabi* 美化日), open days, *okiyome* days, and days for the writing down of revelations (*gokyōji kakitori* 御教示書き取り) – of which, more later. Of particular importance is the dojo Monthly Ceremony (*tsukinamisai* 月並祭), held around the middle of every month, and the Primary Training Course (*shokyū kenshūkai*) held near the end. The space of the day itself has its own particular ritual rhythm in the dojo, marked by Morning Prayer (*asa omairi* 朝お参り) at 9am, and Evening Prayer (*yūbe omairi* 夕べお参り) at 7pm. *Okiyome*, on the other hand, may be done at any time, and a place is always made available for its practice, even when the main space of the dojo is given over to a meeting.[86] While none of these

[85] For a reproduction of a dojo's calendar of events (*gyōji yotei hyō* 行事予定表) with a brief commentary, see Okada (1993: 124-125); cf. McVeigh (1997: 237). McVeigh (1997: 159-160) provides a general rundown of Mahikari happenings across the year.

[86] In the Main Dojo at Osaka, on occasions when the main dojo area on the third floor was closed for some event or other, a small *tatami*-matted room on the second floor was used for *okiyome* practice. If this became full, people just sat down in the wide, carpeted corridor and

scheduled events are compulsory, there is a general expectation, at least, that one should attend the relevant study sessions – in my case, the beginner's classes. The monthly ceremonies are the largest events in the life of the dojo, and are, by and large, very well attended. But the main event of every month is one which takes place at Takayama in Gifu Prefecture: the impressive Monthly Ceremony (*gesshisai* 月始祭) held, near the start of each month, at Suza, the Main World Shrine, the sacred centre of Mahikari.

In addition to these collective occasions, there are a number of more personal observances performed in the dojo: donations, inscribed with the name of the donor, given for '*okiyome* appreciation' (*okiyome onrei* お浄め御礼), *otamagushi* 御玉串 offerings, made in gratitude for the fulfilment of some divine arrangement, or for some hoped-for outcome, contributions towards the upkeep of the dojo and contributions towards the upkeep of Suza. All of these are optional, but the one necessary oblation is the all-important offering for 'spiritual line maintenance' (*goreisen hoji* 御霊線保持 or *reisen hoji onrei* 霊線保持御礼), a fixed sum of ¥500 a month, given in order to maintain the divine connection that links the Mahikari member to the *kami* via the sacred device of the *omitama.*[87] This offering could be understood as the very minimum requirement for being in Mahikari, for to fail to make this donation is to become cut off from the *kami*, and thus to be rendered incapable of giving *okiyome.*[88] From the viewpoint of Mahikari, members who end up in this position are known as 'hibernating' (*tōmin* 冬眠) or 'latent' (*senzai* 潜在) *kamikumite*, and there are a lot of them out there – myself included. But as the dormant nature of their status implies, their situation is not irreversible; it is more a temporary disconnection than a final excommunication, for in Mahikari, as in Japanese new religions more generally, no relation is seen as beyond hope of repair. Staying connected, on the other hand, by the making of these regular monthly offerings, an active member participates in the cosmic currency of sustaining relations, the circuitry of a hierarchical community, in which the vertical relation between every *kumite* and the *kami* is mediated 'through the body' (*Oshienushisama no karada wo tōshite* 教え主様の体を通して) of Oshienushisama, the spiritual leader of Mahikari.[89]

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performed *okiyome* there. Akashi dojo was a much, much smaller place, but even here, one could usually find some space in one of the two cramped rooms at the back to practice *okiyome* whenever the main dojo area (the *goshinzen*, the area in front of the *goshintai*) was occupied.

[87] The sum of my offering for spiritual line maintenance was only ¥200, as I received a student discount. Okada (1993: 115) registers this monthly offering fee as being ¥1000 for adults, and ¥500 for students and children. It is difficult to say why our figures differ, unless the offering has decreased since the time of his fieldwork. There are, incidentally, a number of other voluntary oblations that I have not mentioned. Those who are interested may consult the inventory in Okada (1993: 116) (although he himself includes neither the dojo, nor the Suza, maintenance offering); see also Louveau (2012: 188-189).

[88] In the handbook for the Primary Training Course, the spiritual line maintenance appreciation is momentarily compared to a 'membership fee' (*kaihi* 会費).

[89] For the notion that the flow of gifts in Japan participate in a cosmic hierarchy, see Rupp (2003: 52-53, 68-69, 197). I should add that these ideas in Mahikari of obligation and connection (*tsunagi*) to visible and invisible forces might just as much come to be seen as coercive and restrictive. Depending on one's point of view, a tie may be perceived as a restraint, just as much as the source of liberation. For this argument, see Kashio (2004: 74-75).

The dojo is thus a place of various orbiting transactions, both visible and invisible: the circulation of money offerings, currencies of prayers and politeness, exchanges of divine light, and the traffic of gratitude and obligation. And, at the centre is the intricate input-output system of the self, and its surrounding macrocosmic connections. Equally, however, the spiritual and material infrastructure of Mahikari is based on the maintenance of orderly flows, so that currents should ideally run uninterrupted, according to proper order. As Maki-san once explained to me, the hierarchical, corporate structure of Mahikari is set up so as to ensure that 'communication can run smoothly' (*komyunikēshon ga sumūzu ni hakoberu* コミュニケーションがスムーズに運べる). The reach, efficiency, and – I would suggest – tangibility, of the system is perhaps best exemplified by a *kamikumite* at a small Mahikari centre in the south of France, who remarked to Frédérique Louveau that, when she wrote her name on the offering, 'it goes to Japan, and you are represented over there, next to Oshienushisama' (Louveau 2012: 234). In making her oblation, a Mahikari member in Aix-en-Provence is engaging in a tangible 'cosmoeconomics' (as Da Col calls it; Da Col 2012) able to establish contact at a distance: implicitly with the divinity, concretely with the proxy of divinity, the leader of Mahikari; what we might characterise (to borrow a phrase of Sarah Jackson) as a relation of 'tele-tact' (see Jackson 2015: 70).

I will come back to this point. For now, let us consider in a little more detail some of the actions and events which constitute the major and minor turns of the ritual round in Mahikari.

The Basic Study Meeting

The Osaka Main Dojo runs a Basic Study Meeting at the end of almost every month. In the preceding chapter, I made a report of this event, but I only told of its first half, the section of the seminar that was concerned with *okiyome*. Here I will treat of its other half, in which we learned about the teachings; the second wheel on the axle of practice.

Following the *okiyome* exchange (*okiyome kōkan* お浄め交換), the *dōshi*, Fukuyama-san, who had been giving instruction throughout, led us all in prayer again. We bowed and clapped in sync with him. A large blackboard had been rolled out at the dojo's far end. The minister moved towards this and began reading from a slim green volume, 'The Humility of the Heart' (*Kokoro no geza* 心の下座), a collection of divine teachings delivered by Oshienushisama. The revelation he was reading out was entitled, 'The Original Principle of the Return to Origin and the Spirit of the Word "*Su*"' (*Su no kotodama to motogaeri no hongi* スの言霊と元帰りの本義). This lecture dwelt on the divine significance of the number five. (Yoshino-san, sitting next to me, explained that this teaching was originally given back in 1989, in May – that is, the fifth month.)[90] The 'number spirit' (*kazotama* 数霊) of the number five connects it to spirit, to fire, to yang energy, and to the creative operations of Su *kami*. God created the 'peoples of five colours' (*goshikijin* 五色人), five continents, and

[90] The study session was held on the 30th of April, hence the minister's choice of that specific teaching. The minister was reading from Okada Keishu (2000b: 63-74).

five Japanese islands.[91] The centre of all phenomena is expressed in the spirit of the number five and the spirit of the sound '*su*,' the same '*su*' of Su no Kami. *Su* is the unifying force of all things; it has the function of consolidation and completion. Accordingly, this determining function can be seen to work in words, where the addition of the syllable '*su*' (す) completes the meaning of it. In Japanese, to answer in the affirmative, to approve something and move on, one says '*sō de arimasu*,' (そうであります) 'That is the case'. To answer negatively, on the other hand, to deny a thing, one says '*sō de wa arimasen*,' (そうではありません) 'That is not the case.' Were one to remove the '*su*' from the first instance, to say '*sō de arima–*,' one would not know whether the statement was a confirmation or a denial. Any enterprise or further action forward would be halted by this uncertainty. Such is the function of '*su*': to give a positive determination to things.[92]

The recitation continued, for a short time, in this fashion; a sort of esoteric Austin: *How to do things with Divine Words.* The teaching ended with this exhortation: 'Recognize that the fifth month is a season of hope, a good time for a renewal of practice of the true law [*seihō jissen*]. We must return to the origin, the centre of the righteous way [*seihō*], and strive to make a spiritual leap, with our innermost attitudes clear, pure, bright, right, and straight [*sei, mei, sei, choku* 清·明·正·直]. As Yang Light Children, let us make a good start towards all sorts of sincere, divine becomings [*makoto no shinseika* 真の神性化], because it is May, the fifth month of the spirit of the sound *su*.'[93]

Now Fukuyama-san, the minister, placed emphasis on the importance of putting the teachings into practice (*jissen*). He began drawing on the blackboard: the bell-curve line of a hill, and at the very bottom, a stick figure. At the hill's summit he wrote the word 'happiness' (*kōfuku* 幸福). We all wish for happiness, he observed, pointing to the picture. We are all looking towards it, from below. We are, however, heavily burdened with impurities. To illustrate, he drew a looping, blue cloud around the stick figure. But, he went on, by following the 'teachings of the true law' (*seihō mioshie* 正法み教え) we can try and make our way towards happiness. We try to climb the hill. We might loose sight of the top, but the *kami* will give us guidance (*omichibiki* お導き). We might be tempted to give up, but if we come to the dojo, give and receive *okiyome*, and tell others about the divine teachings, we will discover that our burdens gradually lessen. The steep way towards happiness becomes easier to climb. The three essential virtues, the minister explained, are gratitude (*kansha* 感謝), obedience

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[91] The 'people of five colours' are the five original races: the yellow, red, white, blue-green, and black-purple peoples. These colours, as Davis notes, are featured on the banners carried in Mahikari festivals. See Davis (1980: 68); see also Knecht (1995: 333).

[92] In his significant paper on the thought of Okada Kōtama, Köpping refers to this particular teaching on the determining function of the syllable '*su*': 'The idea of completion in the Japanese language is indicated by the sound *su*. In verb forms like *gozaimasu*, the word has no meaning without the *su*. The *su* is essential for the complete meaning of the word.' See Köpping (1967: 109); also Davis (1980: 216).

[93] I supply the Japanese text (Okada Keishu 2000b: 74):
五月の希望の季節を「新正法実践の好季」と位置づけ、正法の中心に元帰りして、清·明·正·直、澄みきった想念で霊的飛躍を期していかなくてはなりません。陽光子の友は、スの言霊の五月にあたり、愈々「真の神性化」へ向かって好スタートを切ってまいりましょう。

(*sunaosa* ス直さ), and humility of heart (*kokoro no geza* 心の下座). We should be grateful for all things, he said. Even if someone stands on your foot, for example, be grateful, and understand that the *kami* is using that person to rid you of impurities. The minister emphasized, again, that we should put what we learn into practice (*jissen shite ikō* 実践して行こう).

He turned to the blackboard once more. Only by means of giving light (*tekazashi* 手かざし), performing divine service (*gohōshi* 御奉仕) and saving people (*hito sukui* 人救い), he stated, gesturing at the words he had written up, can we dissolve spirit-blocks and clouds of spiritual impurities. It is insufficient merely to study the teachings, one can only discover these things through experience (*taiken o tōshite* 体験を通して).

The study session ended as it began, with prayers.

Despite the difficult sections in the text read out by the minister, which dealt with the more Delphic aspects of Mahikari's elaborate cosmology, the overall message was delivered loud and clear: *practice is paramount*. Appeals were made again and again for us to apply ourselves to practice, the 'practice of the true law' (*seihō jissen*). The teachings themselves are not seen as an intellectual programme but as vital principles that can only be discovered in action. Hence the stress on personal experience, *taiken* 体験 – by way of being a sort of buzz-word in Mahikari. As I have noted in previous chapters, one commonly hears this emphasis in some variation on the phrase, 'If you don't experience it, you won't understand…' (*taiken shinai to wakaranai* 体験しないと分からない). Here, comprehension is corporeal, a hands-on affair. I remember once complaining about the insoluble texture of the teachings to Honda-san, a young trainee minister at the Osaka dojo. He agreed. Even Japanese don't understand them, he cheerily admitted. It's a funny thing, though, (*fushigi desu kedo* 不思議ですけど) he said thoughtfully, but if you can't grasp some teaching or other, when you give light, you come to understand it (*tekazashi shitara, wakaru yō ni naru* 手かざしたら、分かるように). And Yoshino-san said, similarly, that to continue doing *okiyome* is to 'understand, little by little' (*dan dan wakatte iku* 段々分かって行く). We might emphasize once more that this is a discourse framed more in terms of comprehension than credit: the verb 'to understand' (*wakaru* 分かる) is a routine usage, 'to believe' (*shinjiru* 信じる), much less so (cf. Davis 1980: 212). That Mahikari doctrine accentuates the experiential might be understood as the articulation of a prevalent conceptual trend in Japanese culture, which as Berque observes, gives 'preference to the particular experience of the concrete over general and abstract conceptualizations' (Berque 1993: 142).[94]

[94] There may be a rather wonderful irony, here, however – to delight anyone with an anthropological eye for the alchemy of culture – for, as Sharf argues, the Japanese term for 'experience', *taiken* 体験, is a word with no precedent before the late 19th century. Both *taiken* and its counterpart *keiken* 経験 were first established during the Meiji period 'by translators of Western philosophical works', including those of William James, for whom the word 'experience' looms large (Sharf 1998: 102). Thus, to evoke James in order to make analytical sense of Mahikari's empirical disposition is to establish a relation that was perhaps already there. Thus, consider a Mahikari text which refers to the 'pragmatism' of the movement. See Okada Keishu (2000a: 9), quoted previously in my Chapter 3.

The message of the lesson, then, was in large part an appeal to the concrete, to the sensuous comprehension of the teachings, and to what Reader calls, 'the importance of personal verification' – a key theme, as I have already remarked, in Japanese religiosity more widely (see Reader 1996: 268; cf. Pye 1997: 260; Köpping 2002: 158). Indeed, we would do well to characterise Mahikari practice in terms of what William James (2000: 88; original emphasis) called 'veri-*fication*', in so far as truth is conceived as a matter of *doing*; truth is a dynamic property, as James says, which is 'realized *in rebus*'; that is, it is actualised in experience (James 2000: 96). This praxical emphasis can be seen in that section of the lesson that was less easy to follow: the recitation of revelation. For, whatever else the *dōshi*'s reading aloud from the green book was about, its concern with *kotodama*, 'word-spirits', expressed, once again, the importance of the performative. *Kotodama* entail a concept of language as a spiritually animated and animating medium, in which words do not merely stand for things, but make them happen.[95] Words are the carriers of particular forces, and they produce different spiritual 'vibrations' (*hadō* 波動) depending on how they are expressed. As Harootunian suggests (1988: 44), what the notion of *kotodama* plays up is the association of language with 'presence and doing'; a doing, I would add, that is understood to produce sensuous effects. To this extent, to read aloud a revelation *about* the spirit of words is, naturally, to actualize their force.

If almost everything in the study session concerned the importance of doing and experiencing, then these imperatives were not said to be easy. As the minister's allegory of the hill made clear, Mahikari practice can be arduous, the way to salvation difficult. What is also evident from this analogy of ascent is the association between elevation and the state of purity, which I mentioned in Chapter 1. Vertical movement in Mahikari is consonant with what Lobetti, in identifying the dynamic of diverse ascetic practices in Japan, has called 'ontological progression' (Lobetti 2014: 118-120).

But the purport of the minister's words was that the attempt to embody the truth of the teachings might well be experienced as an uphill struggle. Now, there is a certain tension between this vision of precipitous practice and the image of easy salvation that Mahikari sometimes presents (see, e.g., Sūkyō Mahikari 2002a: 16; Yasaka 1997: 50; cf. Davis 1980: 212). I have already touched upon this, in my discussion of the Primary Course: the difference Mahikari posits between *okiyome* as an easily accessible ability versus the arduous ritual exercises associated with more traditional means of attaining magical powers. This distinction is, I suggest, the product of a well-marked inside/outside contrast that Mahikari draws with respect to members, and those who have yet to join. That is to say, practice, and the production of miracles, is presented as easy to those who are new to Mahikari, whereas, once inside the movement, the language of practice as an urgent task, a devotional and repetitive

[95] An apt comparison may be made between this understanding of language in Mahikari and the force of Scriptural discourse in the Charismatic Word of Life movement in Sweden, as interpreted by Coleman. See Coleman 2000: Chap. 5, esp. 131-133. Although *kotodama* are given especial emphasis in Mahikari (see Davis 1980: 47, 216; McVeigh 1997: 94-95), the idea is important in other Japanese religious groups. Thus, the leader of Seichō no Ie has produced a book entitled *Words are Alive* (*kotoba wa ikite iru* コトバは生きている; see Taniguchi 2002).

effort, comes closer to the reality of what practice is in Mahikari.[96] At least, such a divergence in the way practice is packaged might account, in no small part, I think, for the reason why so many of those who take the training course subsequently leave Mahikari.

In any case, the exacting path of practice is also recognised in the written teachings, which are constantly spurring the practitioners on to renew, to redo and to redouble their efforts. It as if these divine pronouncements are forever making moves against inertia. That is to say, the teachings are characterised by a language of animation, a moving rhetoric that counsels a course of perpetual motion in the Mahikari life of practice. The revelation read out by the minister ended with a timely insistence on the month of May as an opportunity for the 'renewal of the practice of the true law' (*shinseihō jissen* 新正法実践). There is a concern, then, *not only* for the performance of practice in the right way, but also for its *restoration*, the periodic recharge of righteous practice, returning to its origin (*motogaeri* 元帰り), even as it prepares to launch itself forward towards the future objective of further divine transformations (*shinseika* 神性化). We see once again this essential notion of practice as transformative, but the capacity to transform will only be activated if practice is repeated, renewed at every instant. Just as the practice of *okiyome* only creates lasting effects when it is performed progressively through repetition, so too the general imperative of Mahikari teaching is for members to engage in a perpetual practice. The teachings ask of their adherents that they should, as Foucault says, 'transform their existence into a kind of permanent exercise' (Foucault 1990: 49). As such, this perpetual exercise that the teachings aim to foster discloses a strongly ascetic dynamic.

This is obvious from even the most cursory scanning of the vocabulary of Mahikari directives and revelations. To consider only the three major compilations of Oshienushisama's teachings, known collectively as *The Three Virtues* (*Sandai tokumoku* 三大徳目), from which the minister's reading came, a dynamic of asceticism is everywhere apparent. Naturally, practice (*jissen*) and practice in the right way (*seihō jissen*) are many times reiterated. But other terms circulate with almost equal frequency. One such is *gyō* 行 (ascetic practice), often appearing in various compounds and combinations. Thus, *magyō* 真行 (true austerities); *kansha no gyō* 感謝の行 (the ascetic practice of gratitude); *sunao no gyō* ス直の行 (the practice of meekness towards Su *kami*); and, *kokoro no geza no gyō* 心の下座の行 (the austerity of humility).[97] Related to this is the notion of practice as a 'polishing' of the self, or a 'polishing of the soul' (*mitama-migaki* み魂磨き), a refinement of the spirit through repeated ascetic practice.[98] A further aim of practice is the effort to 'raise the level of the spirit' (*reisō o shōge suru* 霊層を昇華する) and to 'tune in with the *kami*' (*kamisama to hachō o awaseru* 神様と波調を合わせる), that is, to harmonise with

[96] That a system of soteriological practices can, at different moments, be presented either as easy or difficult has been explored by Faure in his analysis of the sudden/gradual dichotomy in Chan/Zen Buddhist rhetorics. See Faure (1991).

[97] The following is by no means an exhaustive concordance. For uses of *gyō* □, see Okada Keishu (2000a: 19, 23, 50, 70-71, 73-79); (2000b: 16-17, 20, 21, 53, 104); (2000c: 11, 113). See also Davis (1980: 86); McVeigh (1997: 146). On *gyō* as *askēsis* in Japanese religious practice, see Blacker (1999: 85, and Chap. 5, passim); Lobetti (2014).

[98] References to *migaku*, polishing, see Okada Keishu (2000a: 13, 25, 50, 133); (2000b: 25; 2000c: 21). See, also, Reader (1995: esp. 233-236).

the *kami*'s will.[99] In addition, all such practices of elevation, tuning, and polishing are to be accomplished with sincerity, involving the very core of the self, or one's 'innermost attitude' (*sōnen* 想念) as Mahikari teachings put it. The transformation that one attempts to bring about in oneself through these various exercises is often referred to as *sōnen tenkan* 想念転換, or a 'conversion of the innermost attitude'.[100]

There is, besides such terms as these, a whole battery of other watchwords and denominations, but mention of one final phrase should be enough to get the point across. It is the oft-mentioned exhortation to live 'a spirit-first way of life', *reishu no ikikata* 霊主の生き方.[101] In other words, to give precedence to the spiritual in everything that one does. Mahikari members are encouraged to 'attach' this 'spiritual way of life' to their bodies (*reiteki ikikata wo mi ni tsukeru* 霊的生き方を身につける; Oshienushisama 2002: 11). To stick something – a principle, a lesson, a lifestyle – to the body in this way means to embody it, to intensively in-corporate it so that it becomes 'a palpable part of the self', as Kondo observes (Kondo 1990: 238). Here, the idea of learning as somatic attachment comprises a body technique, in the classic Maussian sense (Mauss 1950): a palpable operation of adhesion to the body – a prosthetic project. This is a mode of learning more concerned with the apprenticeship of the body than with the apprehension of ideas, and, as with apprenticeship in general, such learnings laid down in the body are open-ended in their potential for development. A technique once learned, is not learned absolutely, but is always capable of further elaboration. As Mauss says, 'the technique of swimming perfects itself day by day' (2002: 51). The Acting Oshienushi of Mahikari, indeed, comes close to this Maussian conception when he states that, to learn (*manabu* 学ぶ) is more about 'praxical, bodily acquisition' (*jissen-teki ni taitoku suru* 実践的に体得する) than it is about acquiring 'knowledge' (*chishiki* 知識). Therefore, to learn in Mahikari is akin to learning to swim: 'No matter how much one knows about the theory of swimming, one just won't be able to swim when one gets in the water' (*oyogi-kata no riron wo ikura shitte ite mo, jissai ni mizu no naka de oyogu koto wa dekimasen* 泳ぎ方の理論をいくら知っていても、実際に水の中で泳ぐことはできません). The skill of swimming can only be 'learned through experience' (*taiken-teki ni manabu* 体験的に学ぶ; Oshienushisama Odairi 2003: 20).

But this programme of bodily adaption and attachment is also an explicitly ascetic project – we might even speak of a prosthetic ascetics – since, as Yuasa points out of Japanese practices of self-cultivation (*shugyō* 修行), an accomplishment is attached *to* the body (*gei ga mi ni tsuku* 芸が身につく) through constantly accumulated exercises *of* the body (Yuasa 1990: 133).

At the same time, the Mahikari battery of body techniques corresponds with 'techniques of the self', in Foucault's usage: that is, projects of ethical and spiritual self-formation. My point is thus that the whole series of practices that come under the rubric of *seihō jissen* are a physical expedient – to be perpetually exercised – for

[99] *Reisō o shōge suru*, and related phrases: Okada Keishu (2000b: 26); (2000c: 42, 59, 63, 135). *Hachō awase*, and related expressions: Okada Keishu (2000a: 99); (2000c: 41-42, 47, 54, 57, 59, 73, 87).

[100] For references to *sōnen tenkan*, see Okada Keishu (2000a: 95, 133); (2000b: 23, 41-42, 47, 57, 61, 75); (2000c: 16, 36, 59, 135). Cf. McVeigh (1997: 125, 145).

[101] For examples, see Okada Keishu (2000b: 18); (2000c: 20, 38, 48, 53-54, 55, 60, 146).

converting the self, but are equally a means of generating a spectrum of other transformations, in relations, places and materials.

Practices of the 'true law' are so many ways of veri-*fication*, so many physical means of doing the truth. These ways and means constitute a certain disciplinary regime or ascetic order, that turn on the dojo and its calendar. In the next section, I wish to consider some of the procedures by which these ways and means are measured and achieved.

Perpetual Exercises

In his account of practices of self-cultivation in the Graeco-Roman world, of certain regimens of reading, of diet, and of other spiritual exercises, Foucault remarks on what he calls the 'testing procedures' (*procédures d'épreuve*) by which such exercises could be measured, having 'the dual role,' as he says, 'of moving one forward in the acquisition of a virtue and of marking the point one has reached' (Foucault 1990: 58). Although it is a world away, we might note that Mahikari practice, too, is replete with such procedures. The great interest that Mahikari has in testing – investing in experimental experiences – goes well beyond the jam jars. There are numerous means in Mahikari of marking the progress of practice and of moving it forward, challenges and objectives that are set at every level, from the transnational and organisational to the level of the local dojo and down to the personal – which is what really matters, in so far as the personal is conceived as the fractal and partible aspect of the cosmos at large.

A good illustration of a testing procedure at the local level is a particular form of truth-doing known as *makubari* (真配り lit., 'truth-distribution'). *Makubari* is the practice of handing out promotional literature in order to spread the word about Mahikari. A pamphlet, *Yōkō Raifu* 陽光ライフ, meaning *Yang-Light Life*, is produced by Mahikari and delivered to each dojo expressly for this purpose.[102] Members themselves buy the pamphlets from the dojo (a bundle of twenty costing ¥100); how they are given out is generally an individual affair.[103] I once spent a couple of hours doing *makubari* at the behest of Shōji-san. We handed out leaflets in the hot streets around the entrance to Akashi West train-station; an awkward afternoon, to find myself, as ethnographer, temporarily turned promoter. There were,

[102] The leaflet consists of a general message on one side – such as, *Are You Aware of the Mahikari Technique?* (*anata wa Mahikari no waza wo gozonji desu ka* あなたは真光の業をご存じですか) – and a number of short testimonials on the other. Though the contents would appear to be the same nationwide, each dojo has its own details – address, phone number, and a map of how to get there – printed on the reverse.

[103] Some members elect to simply post leaflets into the letterboxes of private residences, rather than giving them out in the street. Maki-san admitted to me that she preferred posting them to handing them out, as she found the latter somewhat difficult. In terms of promotion, Mahikari is, of course, already operating in a crowded marketplace. Consider the typical contents of the letterbox in my Osaka house: alongside a copy of *Yōkō Raifu* (announcing *The Real Reasons for Young People's Problems*), there was a flyer for Diet Counselling (*Let's Build Up Muscles and Burn off that Fat!*), a booklet from the local estate-agent, and an issue of *Lively News for Lively People* (*ningen iki iki tsūshin* 人間いきいき通信) – *Towards a New Year of Deeper Relationships*, from the new religion Tenrikyō. No one in the house was interested in any of these despatches.

naturally, *kumite* who were much better at this practice than I was. In order to measure its success and to give it an extra incentive, the Akashi dojo had launched its own initiative. On the wall in the dojo was a poster that announced *The Hundred Thousand-Copy Hand-Out of Truth* (*jūman-mai makubari* 十万枚真配り). On the poster was printed a grid and this had been half filled with stickers of various shapes and colours. Each square on the grid represented a hundred copies of *Yōkō Life* handed out. For every time, then, that a member achieved this target they were entitled to fill one square with a sticker. Certain *kumite* appeared to be trying to differentiate their efforts by their choice of sticker, creating the impression that a certain one-upmanship was at work. (One member was using cute little stickers of dogs, for example, and their spread across the grid spoke eloquently of their individual exertions.) Other dojos had different schemes. Thus, dojos in the Osaka region were pursuing a less ambitious programme that encouraged members to hand out 'one copy a day' (*ichi-nichi ichi-mai* 一日一枚). Evidently, the practice of *makubari* serves not only as a means of spreading the Mahikari message, it also benefits the person doing it. In the same way that the giving of *okiyome* also purifies the giver, the performance of divine services like *makubari* is seen as a form of purification. Equally though, the leaflets *themselves* are often purified before they are handed out, with the bundles of *Yōkō Life* being placed in front of the *goshintai* and left there for a while, in order to irradiate them with the *kami*'s light. Here, purification serves the purpose of increasing their effectiveness, as material mediators of truth.

There are other ways of calculating devotion, and of showing it. Around the *Makubari* poster on the wall of the Akashi dojo were further forms and notices, whose purpose was not simply administrative, but devotional as well. One such was a register for the monthly bus trip to the grand ceremony at Suza, the Main World Shrine in Takayama. Another was a roster for the 'One Day *tekazashi*', a special event at the dojo when members may commit themselves to giving *okiyome* for the whole day.

Perhaps the most important form on display is the record of enrolment for the upcoming Primary *kenshū*, the training course held at the end of each month. The person who has pledged to take the training course, and thus, effectively, to join Mahikari, will have their name written up on this form, alongside the name of the member who acquainted them with Mahikari – known as the 'introducer' (*shōkaisha* 紹介者). To have one's name on the register is just as meaningful for the introducer as it may be for the prospective member, since the only way to progress to a higher level of *kenshū* is to bring new people into the movement. But to have all such documents displayed in this prominent manner suggests that they serve less of a bureaucratic function, than an ostensive one.[104] For to put one's name to these forms is also to publicly sign one's commitment to Mahikari activities. Equally, all monetary offerings made at the dojo are inscribed with the donor's name, as well as the sum of money given, information which, when collated, offer a further means of calculating the devotion of individual *kumite* (see Louveau 2012: 234). As Holden has

[104] The first time that I attempted to register for the Primary Course, with Shōji-san as my introducer, he made a point of insisting that I write my name up on the register in big letters. It struck me that this was more for his benefit than for mine. I do not suggest, incidentally, that there is little bureaucracy in Mahikari. As with many, if not all, religious organisations grown large from humble beginnings, Mahikari has evolved into a bureaucratic system (see Okada 1993: 110).

remarked with regards to the arguably more stringent audit culture enacted by Jehovah's Witnesses, in which the time spent proselytising is subject to continual assessment, these ways of gauging and displaying devotion encourage members to 'think quantitatively about their salvation' (Holden 2002: 72).[105]

Targets and objectives for the Mahikari organisation as a whole – the global community of *kumite* working together – also issue forth from the Main World Shrine, where the monthly revelations attempt to set the pace of practice. A broadcast made way back at the beginning of the year in 1987 is typical in this respect. I will cite a section from this text because it expresses a standard sentiment, but does so with especial emphasis. Oshienushisama announced that

> In order to accomplish anything, we are granted the assistance and protection of the *kami*, but our attitude (lit., 'posture' *shisei* 姿勢) of accumulating devoted efforts (*shōjin doryoku* 精進努力) is important. If we are to achieve our goal for this year (*kono ichinen no mokuhyō* この一年の目標), we will not be able to accomplish this initial goal unless we burn [ourselves] out (*nenshō sasete yukanakute* 燃焼させてゆかなくて), without regard to spirit, mind and body…
>
> Last year, *Yōkōshi* were given the goal (*mokuhyō*) to 'turn earnestly to the *kami*' (*kamimuki ichiro* 神向き一路). This year, I would like to suggest to everyone a more physical index for practice (*gutaiteki-na jissen no shihyō* 具体的な実践の指標). It is the first section of 'The Innermost Attitudes of *Kamikumite*' [from the *Norigotoshū*, the Mahikari Prayer Book]: 'Have deep gratitude (*kansha* 感謝) to Su *kami* for everything, day and night.' It cannot be denied that it is extremely rare to see people thoroughly performing the ascetic practice (*gyō* 行) of this precious verse from these *kami* revelations (*kami shimeshi* 神示し). The greatest objective for the whole organisation this year, for all staff and *kumite* working together, will be to practice (*jissen* 実践) gratitude for everything. (Okada Keishu 2000a: 14-15).

In this divine directive, Oshienushisama is arranging the general plan of practice for the rest of the year. Note the shift from a past target (*mokuhyō* 目標) to the setting of a new, 'maximum objective' (*saidai no ganmoku* 最大の眼目). To be sure, there is no mention made as to whether the goal assigned for the previous year was reached. But note the emphasis on the 'concrete' (*gutaiteki* 具体的) or tangible standard set for practice; the establishment of both an index and an objective for collective efforts in the coming year, as the corporate body of *kumite* are urged to adopt a particular 'posture' – in the double-barrelled sense of both position and disposition.

Almost every year Mahikari sets some new organisational objective. During my time in Mahikari, the newly appointed Acting Oshienushi, Okada Kōshi, disclosed that the next target towards which all *kumite* should work would be the 'Training of

[105] It should be stated, however, that quite *unlike* Jehovah's Witnesses, those in Mahikari who fail to show sufficient progress do not risk being expelled from the organisation.

Ten Thousand People for the Spiritual Civilisation' to come (*ichiman-nin no reibunmeijin no yōsei* 一万人の霊文明人養成).

As with other Japanese new religions, it is the leader, however, who is the paradigmatic *embodiment* of practice (see Harootunian 1995: 105; Pye 1997: 260; Köpping 2002: 107-108). Oshienushisama herself is said to be perpetually at work in a small room, without air-conditioning in summer or heating in winter (Louveau 2012: 342). No one ever sees her sleep because she begins her work before others awake and finishes only after they go to bed. Among her ascetic engagements, she is said to undertake the 'modulation' (*chōsei* 調整) of every *omitama* that anyone will receive after taking a training course. But in addition to all this, she has also accomplished the 'four sacred tasks' (*yondai seigyō* 四大聖業), that is, the completion of four colossal building projects: most importantly Suza, the Main World Shrine, but also the Hikaru Shinden (光神殿) – the shrine to Sukuinushisama, the founder of Mahikari; the Hikaru Memorial Museum (*Hikaru kinenkan* 光記念館), and the Centre for the Sūkyō Mahikari Youth Corps (*Mahikari seinen kaikan* 真光青年会館). But it is the divinities who are the ultimate orchestrators of testing procedures. The challenges and adversities that all Mahikari members may face are sometimes referred to as 'the testing of the *kami*' (*kamidameshi* 神試し) and 'training by the *kami*' (*kamikitae* 神鍛え).

I have no doubt that many Mahikari members are energised by these challenges, these targets both local and global. There is reason to think, though, that others might feel oppressed by these apparently endless ascetic directives. Though I did not hear any open criticism of this sort during my fieldwork, a quick look on the Internet, that often pseudonymous space for the expression of dissent, shows that such criticisms exist. On a bulletin board dedicated to a discussion of Mahikari, one apparent member, going by the name of Aru Gakusei, complained of the ascetic pressure of what Goffman (2005) would call 'face-work': 'You get really tired of having to smile all the time – all day, everyday' (*mainichi, mainichi, niko niko shite iru no wa hontō ni tsukareru* 毎日、毎日、にこにこしているのは本当に疲れる). I am reminded of the sign in the men's toilets in the Osaka dojo: *Take today, too, with a smile* (*kyō mo egao de* 今日も笑顔で). The sign was positioned above the sinks, between two mirrors, so that you could not but, *really*, reflect on its message.[106] In a self-published work, part-memoir, part-sensational polemic – also available online, Garry Greenwood, an ex-staff member of Mahikari, is much more vociferous in making his objections. He describes the despair he felt when, following years of donations and devotions towards the construction of Suza (at long last realized and dedicated in 1984), he heard Oshienushisama announce a new project, the raising of a shrine to the founder of Mahikari. '"Another urgent construction!"…were about the only words I could focus on…"You mean we all have to totally sacrifice ourselves again? When will it ever stop?"' (Greenwood 2005: 95).

I might note that a project similarly without end – a project less, however, to do with messianic architectural visions, although these are not entirely unconnected – is a

[106] McVeigh (1997: 141) makes a similar observation. As he points out, the 'importance of a cheerful disposition…is a theme found in Japanese society at large, especially in the service industry'. An advert for the loans company Acom, that received a lot of air-time on TV when I was in Japan, always ended with the sunny female staff proclaiming, 'Everyday with a smile!' (*mainichi egao de!* □□□□□) – a happy corporate battle-cry indeed. The cultivation of such a disposition, then, forms part of the disciplinary practice of large corporations in general.

more personal one: the work of the self and its purifications. The practice of *okiyome*, Mahikari's most essential activity, never stops – or, at least, it should not do so, because purity is only ever a provisional physical and sociocosmic condition. One has to keep on keeping oneself pure. Here, Mahikari is articulating a dynamic that is much older and broader than itself, for it is an especially prevalent notion in much Japanese ascetic practice. As Blacker notes, the continual traffic with pollution is just one of those 'unavoidable concomitants of the human cycle of life' (Blacker 1999: 42). As such, purity is never final. 'Always present,' as Raveri says, 'is the idea that a state of perfect purity is an ideal condition at which one can aim but in reality never achieve' (Raveri 1990: 259).[107] There are parallels here with the Christian model of conversion, particularly in its Augustinian incarnation, in which conversion is configured 'as a long pedagogical process lasting until death, full of pitfalls and reversals, and by no means assured of attaining its goal, no matter what its beginning' (Morrison 1992a: 24).

Parallels, but also significant differences, since in Mahikari, this pedagogical process does not merely last until death, but carries on beyond it, for the spirits of the dead, also, are subject to a programme of ascetic practices (*gyō* 行), having to undergo training in the astral world (*yūkai* 幽界) (see Miyanaga 1983: 207; Tebêcis 1988: 180, 188). The arduousness of that training to a large extent depends on the degree of ascetic effort made by the living in the present world (*genkai* 現界), before they die. But this totalizing and stringent vision of the cosmos as a deep space of perpetual exercise is perhaps best exemplified in Okada Kōtama's own revision, made with an extra, ascetic inflection, of the familiar metaphor of human life as a theatre. 'Life', he countered, 'is not a stage, but a dojo, where one engages in a serious game until one dies' (*jinsei to iu mono wa gekijō de wa nai. Shinu made ga shinken shōbu no dōjō de aru* 人生というものは劇場ではない．死ぬまでが真剣勝負の道場である; Okada 1999: 69). This notion that the dojo is coextensive with the totality of life amounts to an equation of the dojo with the world, or a dojo-*fication* of the space of existence; in other words, a transposition of dojo space onto what Schattschneider (after Munn) calls the 'bodily spacetime' of ascetic practice (Schattschneider 2003: 149), the cultivation of an ascetic perspective – a dojo disposition – in the everyday lives of Mahikari members.

Perhaps the most vivid instance of the acetic imperative of 'attaching teachings to the body' is the monthly event known as the *gokyōji kakitori* (御教示書き取り lit., 'writing down the teachings', but it could be better understood to mean, the 'taking dictation of revelations'). The revelations (*gokyōji* 御教示) in this case are teachings which were revealed by Oshienushisama – and subsequently, by her surrogate, the Acting Oshienushi – at a ceremony held each month at Suza. These revelations are published later in the monthly Mahikari journal (*Mahikari-shi* 真光誌), and *kamikumite* are urged to read and reread them. But prior to their publication, a meeting is held at which *kumite* are given the opportunity to copy down the content of the relevant revelation from a text which is dictated to them.

[107] Miyanaga makes a comparable point in arguing of Mahikari practice that, 'realistically, tuning the whole of the self to God's will is almost impossible'
[自分の全てが神の意図と調和することは、現実的にはほとんど不可能に近いほど難しい]. Miyanaga 1980: 135.

The manner in which this pre-published text is produced is rather remarkable. Mahikari members and staff who have attended the *gesshisai* at Suza in person, who have copied down what they heard at that event, will compare notes (*yomiawase* 読み合わせ) with others who were there, in order to produce a document which is as faithful as possible to the given revelation. It is this collated, provisional text which is then dictated at local dojos, where the *kumite* – the majority of whom will not have attended the ceremony – are then able to make copies, by hand, of the revelation for themselves.

Turning up at such an evening meeting at Akashi dojo, I asked the *dōshi* if I might make a recording of it, for research purposes. It's not possible, she said, since the version of the revelation to be read out, based as it was on the accumulated notes of a number of *kumite*, might not be completely 'correct' – having served at a Mahikari centre in Los Angeles for some years, she spoke to me in English. However, she would allow me to make a copy of her copy, so long as you do it 'with your own hand', as she put it. The minister's stipulation in favour of manual, against mechanical, copying, is a telling instance of the importance of tangibly engaging with the text.

The event itself was like many other sorts of study meeting held at Mahikari dojos – with the attendant *kumite* sat on the *tatami* mats, at rows of tables facing the *goshintai*. The *dōshi*, wired with a microphone, stood at the far end, reading out the text, while we all attempted to transcribe it. On a large blackboard, some forty Chinese characters had been chalked up, and each given a number. This was intended as an aid to transcription, in cases where the terms appearing in the text were difficult or otherwise ambiguous. At certain points, the *dōshi* would stop and read certain passages out again, or someone would interrupt her, to ask about a particular *kanji*. Overall, the atmosphere was earnest, industrious, with the *kumite* bent over their note-books; although some were drooping at their desks by the end. One woman, I noticed, was tracing her finger over a handwritten text before her, as the *dōshi* dictated, while at the same time writing in a notebook with her other hand. Evidently, she had attended the earlier *kakitori* session at 1pm, and was going over her own text again, at the evening meeting. I saw her the next day in the small back room of the dojo, quietly checking her text once more. In the days that followed these writing sessions, a hand-written copy of the complete revelation would be pinned up on a noticeboard in the dojo (this was still, however, a draft text, since the Mahikari magazine had yet to appear), and members would occasionally come by, to compare their own copies with this one.

But the transcription of relevation is not confined to *kakitori* meetings. Mahikari members also make individual efforts to copy (*kaki-utsusu* 書き写す) the teachings. A sign on the wall in Osaka Dai-dojo carried the motivational slogan: 'Let's copy the received, reverent teachings' (*tamawatta gokyōji wo kaki-utsushimashō* 賜った御教示を書き写しましょう). To be sure, at this dojo, members were allowed to use a photocopier to copy the teachings (at ¥10 per sheet), but this was very much regarded as inferior to copying by hand. The latter 'takes a long time' (*sugoi jikan ga kakaru* すごい時間がかかる), about two to three hours, Maki-san said, even though she tried to do it when she could. Indeed, Shōji-san made it into a regular practice, explaining to me that he learned the teachings by 'reading them and writing them, reading, writing, reading, writing' (*yonde, kaite, yonde, kaite, yonde, kaite* 読んで、書いて、読んで、書いて、読んで、書いて); a repetitive expression that mirrored the repetitions of his method.

It appears that, in recent years, efforts have been made within Mahikari to reinforce the importance of devotional copying as a means of incorporating revelation. In previous ethnographic accounts of Mahikari, mention is made of the practice of listening to recordings of the teachings delivered at the monthly ceremony at Suza, from tapes which were distributed to local dojos (Okada 1993: 125; McVeigh 1997: 162). But during my time in Mahikari, no such taped revelations were played at any of the dojos I attended.[108] Equally, Mori-san, a *kumite* at the dojo in Akashi, told me that a transcript of these teachings used to be sent to each dojo by fax from the headquarters (*honbu* 本部) at Takayama, but that this had since come to an end. When I asked why, she explained that Mahikari is 'strict' (*kibishii* 厳しい). Reading between the lines, it seems that it was the act of reading itself that was regarded as problematic, since it might lead to too shallow an engagement with revelation; and the same reason might account for the discontinuation of the tapes. A divine teaching by Oshienushisama lends support to this ascetic explanation: commenting on the ending of the practice of playing tape-recordings of Mahikari revelations (*mikoe no tēpu* み声のテープ lit., 'tape of the honourable voice'), Oshienushisama states that listening to a tape encourages the development of a 'casual attitude' (*ani na sōnen* 安易な想念). If the teachings only 'go in one hear and out the other' (*kikinagasu* 聞き流す) then they will not become 'attached to the body' (*mi ni tsuku mono de wa arimasen* 身につくものではありません) (see Okada Keishu 2000: 102).

This does not mean, of course, that reading is discouraged in general. On the contrary, much emphasis is placed on the importance of the practice of reading what are called 'divine writings' (*goshinsho* 御神書) – namely, any publication produced by Mahikari. It may well be the case, as both Louveau and Matsunaga have separately asserted (Louveau 2012: 17; Matsunaga 2011: 246), that, as a religious organisation, Mahikari produces few publications by comparison with such groups as Kōfuku no Kagaku and Seichō no Ie (生長の家, 'House of Growth'), whose voluminous output is such that they have been referred to as 'publication religions' (*shuppan shūkyō* 出版宗教) (see Winter 2012: 144). Be that as it may, it does not follow from this difference that one can go on to establish a contrast, as Matsunaga (2011: 246) does, between Japanese new religions which 'encourage or even require members to study' their publications, and Mahikari, which does not, since to do so is to crucially overlook the energy and attention which Mahikari members invest in practices of reading and writing.[109]

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[108] There is an exception here, which is that tape recordings of teachings by Sukuinushisama (Okada Kōtama) were sometimes played at the monthly ceremonies at Suza. The fact remains, however, that the revelations delivered each month at Suza were transmitted at local dojos by means of the dictation of texts which had been put together by the *kumite* themselves. I should add that the dissemination of recorded teachings is by no means new; Stalker remarks that Ōmoto would distribute recorded recitals of Onisaburō Deguchi's *Reikai monogatari* in the 1920s (2008: 101).

[109] There is a possibility that the apparent lack of emphasis on writing, and its production and consumption, which both Louveau and Matsunaga attribute to Mahikari, is an artifact of their own field-sites: London in Matsunaga's case, and France and Francophone Africa in Louveau's. Nevertheless this does not entitle Matsunaga to conclude that engagement with texts is of little importance in Mahikari in general. This is certainly not true of Mahikari in Japan.

The reading of sacred texts in Mahikari is referred to as *haidoku* 拝読 ('reverential reading'). Naturally, such reading is something which *kumite* will engage in privately, and in their own time. But there are also means by which the activity of reading is formalized, and a 'testing procedure' introduced. At the Akashi dojo, for instance, the requirement for attendance at an event called the *Jibun wo kaeyō-kai* (自分を変えよう会, lit., '"Let's change ourselves" meeting'), was that one should practice *okiyome* for three days, read the current issue of the Mahikari magazine thirty times, as well as copy out (*kaki-utsusu*) that month's divine revelation, again to be read thirty times. At the meeting itself – which I was able to overhear, since I was receiving *okiyome* on the other side of the dojo – the attendees each gave short presentations about their experiences of engaging in the intensive programme of practices preparatory for the meeting; how, as one woman said, after such repeated readings, the 'divine writings had become enjoyable' (*goshinsho ga tanoshiku natte kita* 御神書が楽しくなって来た); another observed how she had become progressively 'more bright and cheerful' (*dan dan akaruku narimashita* 段々明るくなりました). These short speeches were frequently concluded with variations on the theme of ascetic betterment: of achieving more, or doing better (*ganbaru* 頑張る), in future.

Now, the Mahikari knowledge-practice of transcription invites comparison with the longstanding practice of sutra copying (*shakyō* 写経). The copying of sutras – the Heart Sutra (*hannya shingyō* 般若心経) in particular, since it is so short – is a practice of devotion and merit generation (*kudoku* 功徳) which is an abiding form of ritual action in Japan, associated, for example, with the making of pilgrimages (See Reader 2006: 67; Borup 2008: 201-204). And, as with *shakyō*, there is more to the manual copying of the texts in Mahikari than the mere dissemination or inculcation of information, for this action produces effects in its own right. As Reader and Tanabe note of the practices of transcribing and reciting sutras in general, 'The value of the sutra is not just in the discursive meaning of the text, but in the ritual invocation which activates its mysterious powers' (Reader and Tanabe 1998: 76). A Mahikari member at the Akashi dojo suggested to me that the text of the teachings would work their effects even if I could only read *hiragana* characters. She recalled reading a story in a Mahikari magazine about a boy who tried to read *gokyōji* even though he did not know many *kanji*; still, 'somehow, it [the teachings] went into his spirit' (*nantoka, tamashii ni haitte kita* 何とか、魂に入って来た). Thus, as we have already seen elsewhere, comprehension is not a necessary condition for transformation. In fact, in their capacity as *goshinsho* – divine writings – Mahikari publications are *themselves* deemed to be capable of producing effects, whether one engages with them or not. For example, it is regarded as inadvisable to leave Mahikari publications anywhere near *butsudan* (仏壇 ancestor altars) for any length of time, since *goshinsho* give off divine light, which might temporarily blind the ancestors enshrined in the altar. Similarly, to read from a divine book can sometimes be to feel its effects. Attempting the thirty-times trial of reading the Mahikari magazine, in preparation for the *Jibun wo kaeyō-kai*, Mori-san told me that she 'became hot' (*atsuku narimasu* 暑くなります) from the light emanating from its pages.

In sum, this intensive engagement with texts is indicative of the efforts which *kumite* make in order to absorb the truth of Mahikari teachings, to fuse the teachings together with their own bodies. That the activity of learning is understood as a prosthetic process, a procedure of adhesion, was spelled out to me by Shōji-san, on

another occasion when he was trying to drive home to me, once again, the urgency of Oshienushisama's final revelation on the practice of the true law (*seihō jissen*). To attach something to the body is like this, he explained, taking off his glasses to illustrate. Thus, 'I put my glasses on my body' (*megane wo mi ni tsukeru* メガネを身につける) he said, putting his glasses back on. Clothes, also, are stuck on the body; and so too with the teachings. To stick the teachings on the body is to ensure that they will 'emerge spontaneously' (*shizen ni deru* 自然に) in daily life. What this admirable exposition makes clear is that the means of engagement with the teachings is explicitly physical; a sensuous attempt to establish an intimate relation with revelation. Another way of imaging this haptic modality of relation to the teachings would be that *kumite* make efforts to achieve a *skinship* with revelation (see Gregory 2011). As Taussig (in touch with Walter Benjamin) has argued with regards to the haptic aspects of reproduction – the elemental contact with the aura of the original which the act of copying entails – so too in engaging in *kakitori*, what Mahikari members are attempting to do is to graphically 'get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction' (Benjamin, cited in Taussig 1993: 32). Both in copying out and repeatedly reading the *gokyōji*, and in giving and receiving *okiyome*, *kumite* aim to achieve a haptic access to the teachings, which in turn makes these teachings palpably validated in experience. And for a final instance of contact, of the significance of sensuous attachment and tangible transfer: attending the monthly ceremony (*gesshisai*) at Suza, Yoshino-san appeared, seeming excited, and grabbed my hand, shaking it, saying, with a certain thrill in her voice, that she had just shaken hands with someone who had just shaken hands with Odairisama. '*Utsushita*' (移した), 'I've transferred it', she declared, satisfied. Tele-tact in action.

In the next chapter, the scene will move to Suza itself, the divine centre and point of origin of Mahikari revelations.

Chapter Six:

Cosmic Choreography: Prayer in Motion

The *Sekai Sōhonzan* (世界総本山, 'Main World Shrine'), more commonly known as Suza (主座, lit., the 'seat of Su'), is the cosmic centre of Mahikari, which, because it enshrines the supreme divinity Shushin, is conceived as a beacon for the entire earth, the new 'Noah's Ark' (*noa no hakobune* ノアの箱船) for the human race. The choice of site for the shrine itself – in Takayama, Gifu Prefecture – was no accident, since the location deemed within Mahikari to be an ultra-ancient landing site for the *kami*[110]

Completed in 1984, after much effort, Suza is the point of destination for many *kumite* each month, when the grand monthly ceremony (*gesshisai* 月始祭) is held. Those *kumite* who are able to do so, travel to Suza from their local dojos by hired bus, an activity known as *basu sanpai* (バス参拝, which we might gloss as 'worship by bus'). These monthly ceremonies at Suza are the source of the revelations which Mahikari members make efforts to memorise or otherwise reflect on in the study meetings I considered in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I want to give consideration to these excursions of devotion to Suza – which, in my experience, was a pretty testing affair. Part of my argument is to suggest that the World Shrine is a kind of experiential excess, it almost gives off too much energy and information, in terms of the light it radiates, as well as the revelations which issue from it every month. In addition, however, I shall examine how 'worship by bus' might relate to existing theories of pilgrimage.

I had received *okiyome* to my forehead but there was no more time, my partner said, for any further purifications. 'You're doing the pilgrimage by bus?' he asked. 'Congratulations!' (*omedetô gozaimasu!*), he shook my hand happily. It was nearly 9 o'clock in the evening; time to wind up all proper *okiyome*. A gauze curtain came

[110] As Oshienushisama explained, Suza was built in an area where a divinity – called Amahajime amahashiranushi ōkami mihikari no kamisama (天一天柱主大神身光神様) descended (see Shimizu 1994: 233).

streaming out, a great mechanical veil, to enclose the *goshintai*. Sitting still, we all bowed our heads. Then the *zabuton* and blankets were cleared away quickly and we sat down in long lines for prayer. It was now 9 o'clock. A second curtain whirred across to wrap around the first, screening the *goshintai* completely. We bowed our heads again. We prayed, bowing, clapping, and thanking God. The vice-president of the dojo turned to thank us, bowing, and bowing, we all said the same back (*arigatô gozaimasu, dôzô yoroshiku onegai itashimasu*). Then I went out to have a coffee at a coffee shop close by.

I returned to the dojo at ten to ten. On the first floor, *kumite* were sitting in the wide, carpeted corridor, exchanging light. On the top floor, many more *kumite* were sitting in rows on the *tatami* mats. The rows were divided up into several blocks of bodies, and before each block, at the far end of the dojo, five men stood up holding sign-boards marked 'Osaka – 01', 'Osaka – 02', and so on. The sitters, I realised, were arranged according to the bus they were to take. Each block corresponded to a bus. They sat, in fact, in exactly the order they would be sitting in on the bus itself: precision organisation. Yoshino-san appeared and led me over to my designated place, on bus number one. The seating arrangements for the buses were further organised according to *han* (班), the area groupings that all *kumite* are divided up into. Members of the same *han* were to sit together. Accordingly, I sat down with the other members of Toyonô 2, my group. Everyone, I could see, was smartly dressed – skirts and jackets, suits and ties. Some wore green or blue blazers: the uniform of the Mahikari Youth Corps. Just then, Siva, in a Youth Corps uniform, came over to say hello. He was a *kumite* from Sri Lanka who I knew, though not so well. We talked about our imminent pilgrimage. He has been going to Takayama, to the World Shrine, almost every month since he came to Japan, he told me. In seven years, he estimated, he has been perhaps seventy times. 'It's a spiritual place', he went on, 'the capital of the ancient, divine era.'

It was now 10 o'clock. We made prayers for our departure (*shuppatsu omairi* 出発お参り), bowing and clapping, all in a body, and followed this with a calling out of the Prayer of Heaven. We were now ready to leave. Outside, as we walked to the buses parked waiting, I spoke briefly with Mariko, Siva's wife. We talked about the so-called 'white-robe group' (*shiro shôzoku shûdan*) who were then on the television news often – indeed, 'everyday' (*mainichi*) as Mariko remarked. The group had blocked off a mountain road not far from Takayama and our bus drivers were considering taking an alternative route. This group – more properly called the Panawave Laboratory (パナウェーブ研究所) – had gained notoriety for only wearing white: white shower caps, gowns, gloves, boots. Apparently itinerant, they drove about in white vans and, when stationary on some remote road, would whiten all surrounding space – the guardrail, the ground, trees and bushes; almost everything would be wrapped in white cloth. When I first saw them on television, I thought that they were performance artists. They claimed to be engaging in some high science, shielding their leader from electromagnetic waves. Mariko, on the other hand, called them a cult. *Karuto da yo*, they're a cult, she said matter-of-factly, using the English loan-word.

We boarded the buses. Yoshino-san took her seat behind me at the back of the bus. 'If you feel sick,' she said (I had not been feeling well at that time) 'give light to your stomach. We all give light on the bus, if we need to.' A man got up at the front and announced that we would make prayers. Sitting in the aisle, facing the other way, he led us in prayer. We bowed and clapped and bowed and clapped. (Given the restrictions of the coach seat, the bowing was no more than a quick lean forwards.)

Then we called out the Prayer of Heaven, a slow invocation three times in succession, raising our hands to give light. I asked Isowa-san, the man sitting next to me who I had just met that evening, what are we purifying? 'Inside and outside, of course' (*naigai desu ne*), he responded. So we chanted, holding up our hands as the bus cruised along the expressway.

A little later, ribbons were passed around – pilgrim ribbons (*sanpai ribon* 参拝リボン) – shiny red tongues of cloth that said 'Osaka Main Dojo' in little white print. I was told to pin one of these onto the left side of my shirt, just underneath my *goshinmon* (御神紋), the divine emblem, a Star of David shaped badge, the ensign of Mahikari, that all of us wore. With the important bits of business now finished, everyone sat back and tried to get some rest. There was an eight-hour journey ahead of us. Before the overhead lights went out, I caught sight of the man next to Yoshino-san, his hand held lightly over his leg, giving light.

Around 12 am, the bus pulled into a service area. Most of us got out to stretch our legs. In front of a run-down cafeteria, people milled about in the neon glare of a bank of vending machines. Men in suits, identifiable as *kumite* by their little badges and ribbons, sat on a bench, smoking cigarettes and drinking canned coffee. It was a strange, cold space, a non-place at midnight. I smoked a cigarette. An old woman walked past – a Mahikari member I recognised from the Osaka dojo. 'I'm tired', I heard her say to a friend. 'But I mustn't sleep', she sighed with resignation (*nemutai kedo, neta'akan*). Back on the bus, Yoshino-san looked tired. She leant forward in her seat while a woman next to her gave *okiyome* to her back. We moved off once more. People tried to sleep; I could not. At about half past two in the morning, the bus stopped again. A few of us disembarked. Standing by the bus, a woman told me that she couldn't sleep either – *neraremasen*. We are already in Gifu Prefecture, where the World Shrine is, she pointed out. I remarked that it was a tiring journey. Well, yes, she agreed, '*this* is practice' (*kore wa gyô desu*), by which she meant training, ascetic practice.

I went away to investigate where we were – another service station. In the car park, row upon row of buses, parked in ascending numerical order by the signs in their windows (Osaka – 01, Osaka – 02, etc.) Walking along, I counted twenty-two buses from the Osaka district alone, and another eleven or so from Hyôgo Prefecture. And there will be buses coming from lots of other places too, I thought, *lots of buses*. Somewhere beyond the lights of the car park was a roar of engines, motorbikes going berserk: *bôsôzoku*, a biker gang, tearing up the night highway.

Outside the cafeteria and gift shop, a signboard had been put out: 'Welcome to the party from Sûkyô Mahikari' (歓迎崇教真光御一行様). Slowly, the place began to fill up with *kumite*. While having a cigarette outside, I spotted Siva talking to a pretty, young woman and a man who was perhaps her husband. I went over. Siva was giving an animated account of various Mahikari miracles; the young woman was listening intently. The man looked slightly cross. Siva was speaking of a *taikendan*, an experience-story that he had heard from a Belgian *kumite* who was originally from some African country – Siva could not remember where – caught up in civil war. In the middle of a firefight someone shot at the *kumite* with a machine gun. In a panic, he called out the Prayer of Heaven and the bullets froze in the air right in front of him. The young woman seemed impressed; the man said nothing. Another wonder, also from Africa: Siva told us of a Mahikari member who had been imprisoned. In desperation, the man looked up to a high window in the roof, the only way of escape, and prayed to Sukuinushisama, the founder of Mahikari. Amazingly, Siva continued in his excellent Japanese, the Lord Saviour descended (*oroshite*), lifting the man up

and carrying him to freedom. Wow, I said, that's weird. Now he moved on to speak of his own experience. It's possible to aim divine light with the eyes, Siva proposed. He explained further. If you experiment, for example, by looking at your right leg while holding your hand over it, giving *okiyome*, and then, with the hand in the same position, switch your gaze to your left leg, you can, just for a moment, see the stream of light jump across to the left, 'from there to here' (*achi kara kochi ni*). As he spoke, Siva raised his hand over his leg in demonstration.[111] He concluded by saying that all this was *his* opinion and not *mioshie*, divine teaching (a disclaimer that I have heard Mahikari members make so often). Staying with the same theme, the movement of divine light, Siva remarked that, should you fall asleep while listening to the divine teachings at the World Shrine, the 'power' (*pawa*) of the words would stream over your head. If, however, you pay attention, the teachings will go right into you. And, with his hand, he described a movement in the air, a flowing line of power, passing into his forehead. (The forehead, as I have previously explained, is the place where the primary soul, the *shukon* 主魂, is located, and it is, of course, this critical spot that is purified in the most important phase of *okiyome*. It is perhaps interesting that Siva actually spoke in terms of 'people who listen…' and 'people who don't listen…' (*kiku hito wa*, *kikanai hito wa*) but the power he was speaking about was not imagined as acoustic, apparently.) At this point, the young woman chimed in enthusiastically. Yes, she agreed, if you look at Oshienushisama or Odairisama (the leader of Mahikari and the acting leader, respectively), something 'passes out of their eyes' (*me kara kubatte'ru* 目から配ってる). She did not specify what that something was, but I understood her to mean something like power/truth/teaching.

Siva carried on with a further observation. If you hold up your hand, he suggested, you can actually feel (*kanjiru*) the light coming out of it. He lifted up one hand, turning it sideways, and began to lightly bounce his other hand up and down in empty space, as if he was strumming some invisible chord. It's preferable to try this somewhere quiet, Siva advised. We all tried it anyway for a moment. I was uncertain. The man in a mood was more sure: 'I can't feel it' (*kanjite'nai* 感じてない), he said abruptly.

Back on the bus again, a man with a microphone woke everyone up, greeting us good morning. It was quarter past five. Some women, still sleepy, began to put make-up on. I looked out the window; we were moving through mountains. It was not far, now, to Takayama. At 6 o'clock, we performed a morning prayer (*asa omairi*), bowing and clapping as the bus looped along the mountain road. An extra prayer, a further, single bow was made to Sukuinushisama, the Lord Saviour. Yoshino-san informed me that this was always done on the way to the Takayama, and again inside the *honzan*, the shrine itself. A short time later, and the bus pulled into the car park at Suza, the World Shrine. As we were disembarking, Yoshino-san asked me if I had brought my prayer book – the *norigotoshu*. Yes, I said. Have you brought the *otamagushi* offering? A small pause. Oh – no I didn't. She looked disappointed. She reminded me that she had instructed me to bring it. Fortunately, she had brought along a spare offering envelope. 'Sorry', I said, 'thanks'. I was carrying my camera, but Yoshino-san explained that no photography was allowed inside the *honzan*. Staying together as a group, we walked briskly through a large, nondescript hall,

[111] One could say that he *mimed* the action, but what does it mean to say that one mimes holding up one's hand? That is to say: to make the gesture *for* giving light is to *do it*. For a Mahikari member, endowed with the divine amulet, a raised hand both means *okiyome* and is *okiyome*.

hurrying after a man holding up a placard marked 'Osaka – 01'. At the top of a stairway, we came out onto a wide, open space. On the left, a line of white marquees, with various things for sale; on the right, the massive *honzan*, undergoing renovation, its giant golden roof obscured by scaffolding wrapped in grey sheeting. Before the *honzan* was a monumental stairway, rising up in flights like the single-side of a ziggurat. Busloads of *kumite* were emerging from the exits and going up after their guides. Our man with the placard led us on quickly, while Yoshino-san gave me a running commentary. The architecture of Suza was revealed by the *kamisama*, she explained. Sukuinushisama, the Master of Salvation (Okada Kōtama), saw the plan himself in the divine world. There is a pipe organ inside the *honzan* – the largest pipe organ in Japan, she said – that attempts to give an interpretation of the music that is played in heaven.[112] And, she added, Mount Kurai, not far south of Suza, is a place upon *kami* descended.

We entered the *honzan* – there was, incidentally, no removing of shoes, as one might expect. Inside, the grand interior was all marble and golden lights. Down a corridor we went, past a long, fretted metal window of repeated Star of David motifs. Then we turned left, into the great hall, the *daihaiden* (大拝殿). The hall was vast and grand, putting me in mind of some cavernous Las Vegas concert-hall. Great banks of red-plush seating swept back from a massive stage. Higher up, at the far end there was a wide balcony and above this, running up below the double recurve of the roof, were the flues and cylinders of the pipe organ. The stage area itself was on two levels. The lower level comprised a self-contained stage that jutted out into the hall. Above and beyond this, the proscenium arch was screened off by four gargantuan shutters, like super-sized *shōji*, the wood and paper partitions found in traditional Japanese houses.

Our guide directed us to our seats, to the far right of the hall, beneath the royal box. Tired and excited, I sat down, to marvel some more at the interior. Yoshino-san mentioned how lucky we were to be able to sit in the hall itself. Next to me, Isowa-san – who had sat next to me on the bus as well – concurred, remarking that, in some seven years of coming to Suza, he had only sat inside the hall twice. Indeed, I learned later that, despite the expansive seating – enough for almost eight thousand people – so many *kumite* come to the monthly ceremony that provisions are made for them to sit in the hallways and corridors, to participate in the ceremony via TV screens. Since the seating arrangements are all made in advance, where one ends up is apparently a matter of accident only.[113] In fact, Yoshino-san related to me, with some excitement, that, of the five buses that had come from the Osaka main dojo, only the passengers from three of them had been able to get into the hall; even Kimura-san, the dojo president, ended up outside, in a corridor.

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[112] Indeed, a glossy guide to Suza, the World Shrine, says as much: '[the organ] was made for the purpose of expressing the music of heaven' (天の音楽を表現するために作られました). See Sūkyō Mahikari (2001: 14).

[113] I say this with an important qualification. Both McVeigh (1997: 78) and Smith (2002: 171) rightly remark that non-Japanese members of Mahikari often receive a sort of VIP treatment at large-scale events: special seating – often in the front row, gifts from Oshienushisama, the head of Mahikari, and so on. Sometimes, they are even extended the privilege of meeting the leader herself, as McVeigh was – fortunate fellow (1997: 165-66). On one occasion, Michael (the Australian *kumite*) just returned from a pilgrimage to Suza, had a cake, which he kindly showed and shared, that he said he had received from Oshienushisama – though whether *in person*, I do not know. Wendy Smith was also given a nice cake at Suza (Smith 2002: 171). As for me, however, though I was lucky enough to sit in the main hall, I was certainly not sitting at the front, and I certainly didn't receive any cake. Thus, I think that my presence in the hall, along with everyone else from that Osaka bus, was just as Yoshino-san said: good fortune.

Yoshino-san said that it would be two and a half hours before the ceremony began – it was then still 7 o'clock in the morning. With much time to spare, she suggested that we make prayers (*omairi*). She bowed in the seat and clapped silently, so I followed her lead. 'We don't have to do it together', she said then, in English. Amid the low chatter in the hall, I could hear the occasional noisy handclap of others doing *omairi* as well. Yoshino-san instructed me to make a prayer – with a single bow only – for Sukuinushisama, the Lord Saviour. 'His photograph is up there on the right', she said, indicating in which direction I should bow. She gestured towards the stage, adding that the photo could not be seen yet as it was hidden behind the giant screens. Then, she produced a spare *hanshi*, an envelope for me to make the *otamagushi* offering that I had forgotten about. I wrote down the word 御玉串, *otamagushi*, along with the name of my dojo, Osaka, and my own name, all the usual procedure. On the slip inside, I put down a request for health – I think; I can't recall. Yoshino-san suggested that I put in a ¥1000 note (about £5) as this is the amount she usually gives. She went on to say that this offering is for the 'cleaning away of spiritual impurities', and that it has more force when given here, at Suza. At that moment, our guide appeared and began to read out a few regulations to the group. These stated that one should keep one's prayer to a single bow when giving offerings, since many people may be waiting in line. Furthermore, we were not supposed to give *okiyome* in the main hall. Though this did not bar all purification, for, as Yoshino-san pointed out, one could certainly give light quietly to someone, say, who had a bad back. We went over to make our *otamagushi* dedications, slipping the envelopes into a great, bronze-coloured box marked *gohōnō* (御奉納, offerings). Yoshino-san had a bundle of envelopes, five or six, that she put in with a single, brief bow. She told me that she was making prayers on behalf on relatives in Tokyo who could not attend the ceremony.

Suggesting that I go off and get a radio transmitter, so that I would be able to hear the divine teachings in English, Yoshino-san sent me away to a room down on the first floor. Here, by a sign that said 'Translation Room' (*honyaku shitsu*), I received a radio and was introduced to Tanaka-san, a middle-aged woman, whom, I am told, is a very senior member of the International Section of Mahikari (the *kokusaibu* 国際部), who will be translating the revelations. On my way out, I saw a row of cubicles where the interpreters worked; each booth labelled with a different language: English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Portuguese. Wishing to go outside, I passed by an escalator in a bright hallway. A crowd of *kumite* were gathered round a display of carp streamers (*koinobori*), little dolls and origami helmets (*kabuto*), objects associated with Children's Day, the Japanese national holiday held on May 5th, which would fall in two days time. I left the *honzan*. The day was turning out nicely outside, a warm, clear morning. I trotted down the great stairway towards the white marquees. One side was devoted to a sale of Mahikari literature, the other to various sorts of equipment more or less essential to the correct observance of practice in Mahikari. There were gold or stainless steel chainlets for wearing the divine amulet, the *omitama*, around the neck, and for those (very occasional) moments when the *omitama* has to be taken off, there were portable *omitama* boxes and long wooden containers – to be fixed high up on a wall – inside which one could safely hang up the amulet. Also seen on sale: brocade cases for keeping *hanshi* (offering envelopes) crisp and clean; prayer book covers, covers for the Mahikari magazine; and, for those few (the high-achievers) who have a *goshintai* at home, the divine, high-dimensional light-emitting hanging scroll, there were little shrines of cypress wood – small-scale versions of the structures in Mahikari dojos. *Butsudan* (ancestor altars), far more

common in Mahikari households, were also on display, including all the miniature china and tableware required for making offerings (of food, drink, or cigarettes, etc.) to the ancestors. Finally, there were assorted paraphernalia for keeping all this equipment clean: cloths and dusters for the *butsudan*, especially, but also for wiping wherever the *omitama* is put down whenever it is taken off the body.

I turned back, towards the stairway. At the end of a wide paved area away to the right was a great wall of stone blocks spewing out water. The wall rose up in three tiers, like a ziggurat, and along each tier a row of dragon-heads jetted water into a pool foaming below. The whole structure was done in ancient Mesoamerican style – in fact, it was called the 'Waterfall of Quetzalcoatl' (ケツアルコアトルの滝). Other *kumite*, like myself, stood about, admiring it; a few of them, camera-phones unfolded, surreptitiously took pictures.

On my way up the steps, I chanced upon Yoshino-san. Once inside the *honzan*, she said that she had to leave for a meeting that was to begin soon, at 8am. But before going off, she introduced me to a middle-aged woman – Hatada-san, also from Osaka main dojo – who offered to show me round an exhibition about the building of Suza. We made for a room at the far end of the *honzan*, to join a long line of people queuing. Happily, however, the wait was fairly short. The exhibition itself was not large. All along one wall were a series of blown-up photographs of the World Shrine under construction during different phases. Above these, smaller photos showed *Oshienushisama* purifying various moments and things. In one picture, she was holding up both hands before a large machine – a generator, perhaps – giving *okiyome*. Accompanying captions said that, despite the bad weather in the area at that time, during construction days the skies were blue over Suza. Hatada-san warranted this account, telling me likewise that, throughout the building work, 'there were no accidents at all' (*jiko' zen zen okoranakatta* 事故ぜんぜん起こらなかった).[114] We filed past the photo display, towards locked double doors with windows to the left and to the right. Hatada-san suggested that I take a look through. Beyond the glass, I could see a cream coloured corridor; a giant photograph was spread across the wall: a prospect of the *honzan*, massive stairs marching up to a golden roof. Now, said Hatada-san, if you look at the photo from the window on the left side, the angle of the stairs seems different, like 3-D (*rittaiteki* 立体的). She was certainly right: the perspective had altered noticeably. 'It's strange' (*fushigi* 不思議), she remarked. We moved on. A selection of decorative fittings was exhibited; design elements that were used throughout the shrine: metal fretwork and stained glass featuring the Star of David motif, mosaic tiles and samples of carpet – made in Italy, the captions read. Next to this was a big image on black, perhaps computer-generated; geometric shapes in red, blue and green swirling with white circles. Hatada-san was not sure what this was, but 'there are people', she went on, 'who sense a power' when they see this (*pawa ga kanjiru hito imasu* パワーが感じる人います). Last on display was a metal plaque, a declaration by Oshienushisama announcing completion of the building of the World Shrine in 1984 and with it, the fulfilment of the contract (*gokeiyaku* 御契) that her father, the divine founder, had made with God. Some of the *kumite* who passed in front of this would stop and bow their heads, praying.

[114] Tebêcis tells the same story. Though 300 construction workers were all over the site, no mishaps occurred. Interestingly, he states that a third of the workers were Mahikari members, including 'all the foremen and supervisors'. In addition, the directors of the two construction firms (Ôbayashigumi and Kaneko Kôgyô) commissioned for the build, were both given *okiyome* by *Oshienushisama* herself (see Tebêcis 1988: 420-21, 433).

I thanked Hatada-san for her tour, and stepped outside, thinking to have a cigarette before the ceremony began. Down the stairway again, across a broad plaza and in an open space to the side of the white marquees I found the smoking area. *Kumite*, mostly men, were standing around – suits and cigarettes – flicking ash into a large can. Others held *Smokin' Clean* portable ashtrays, foil-lined vinyl pouches: necessary gear for the Japanese smoker. Some were checking their email on their mobile phones, some were chatting together. A woman phoned her friend, asking her to buy her an embroidered cover for her prayer book. Feeling one cigarette better, I walked back to the plaza where a performance was in progress. There was a large crowd, with hundreds stood watching from the stairs. The focus of attention was on a troupe of children in shiny outfits performing a drumming routine. It was well rehearsed, the children striking stylised poses as they beat the big drums, the *wadaiko*, two-handed in time. A member of the Mahikari Youth Corps looked on, next to me, and spoke approvingly to his companion: 'you see, Japanese traditional instruments, eh?' (*yappari, nihon no dentō gakki ya wa*). It was indeed a good show. This was followed by another group of youngsters, twirling coloured flags; stirring marching music blared out from loudspeakers. Then, more children appeared, and performed a dance to an insipid, instrumental version of James Brown's *I Feel Good*. Truth be told, this wasn't so good, I felt. An announcer thanked the performers, all from a dojo in Wakayama Prefecture. I left quickly and went back towards the *honzan*. Yoshino-san had instructed me to be back in my seat in the main hall by 10:05, and it was nearly time.

The hall was filling up. Many *kumite* were talking quietly, and quite a few were asleep, slumped forward in their seats. Then the lights dimmed and the pipe organ started up, lit up by the beam of a spotlight from somewhere. Yoshino-san, next to me, told me in a low voice that the organ was 'one of the biggest in the world', well, 'certainly the biggest in Japan'. She gestured to the far corner where the organ player was sat, adding, now in Japanese, 'he's a Mahikari member, you know'. After a time, the pipe organ performance came to an end; low synthesizer music began to flow out from the sound-system, a mysterious Yamaha ambience. Up on the stage, the four massive screens rolled back slowly to reveal a giant stage-curtain depicting Mount Fuji and the morning sun rising up from a glowing cloud ocean. Then the curtain rose and we could see the stage for the first time; it was a dazzling spectacle. The stage itself was very high up and, running horizontally from end to end of the proscenium arch, there was a fat bar of brilliant, electric blue that I first took to be a digital display. It was, in fact, a fish tank, elongated across the stage space. Inside this vivid strip, orange, red and white koi carp languidly swam about. (An aside concerning theatrical aquaria: in certain Japanese banks, branches of Mitsui Sumitomo, for example, one can often see fish tanks in the customer waiting areas that are actually simulations: TV sets streaming video of an aquarium. The reality effect is heightened by the addition of an extra layer of glass, water-filled, with air bubbles jetting up in front of the TV screen behind. Since I had been initially taken in by these displays, it is perhaps not surprising that, in the grand hall of the World Shrine, I should confuse the real for the simulated.) Leaning close to me, Yoshino-san whispered that there were eighteen carp in the fish tank, and, with her finger, she traced out the *kanji* for eighteen in the air: 十八. Eighteen (*jūhachi*), she said cryptically, means *kami*. Above the line of the aquarium, centre-stage, was a radiant, golden shrine; the wings, left and right, were filled with mountain scenery: walls of stagy, grey rock and tall, plastic trees. To the right of the shrine was a framed photograph of Sukuinushisama, just as Yoshino-san had indicated earlier. Also on the right, with the back of his kimono

towards us, stood the acting leader of Mahikari, Oshienushi Odairisama. Below, on the lower stage, a Youth Corps member stepped up to a microphone and grandly announced the start of the ceremony. Everybody bowed, staying in position; I did likewise. Odairisama was offering the opening prayers. A contracted rumble came out over the speakers, as of something sliding back on rollers – I guessed that Odairisama had opened the doors of the golden shrine. Then the sound like three pistol cracks: handclaps echoing around the hall. We heard the prayer and more resounding claps. We sat up. Odairisama had taken up the same position as before, almost as if he hadn't moved. A woman, in a white, sleeved apron, walked out onto the lower stage, gave a bow to Odairisama above, and then, facing away from us, she raised her hands high up. There was a moment's pause, as the whole hall readied itself to clap in time with her. Then eight thousand people clapped their hands together. With the room still ringing, the woman on the stage began to call out the *amatsunorigoto*, the Prayer of Heaven, and we all joined in. Being in the midst of this massive chorus was quite powerful; there was a sort of booming energy in the invocation.

Following this, another prayer leader (*sendatsu*) came out, and we all clapped and prayed again, this time to Izonomesama, the creator of the material world (more correctly addressed as Izonome Ôkunitama Ôkuninushi no Ôkami). Finally, a further *sendatsu* emerged, and led us in the singing of a divine song, a *miuta* 神歌. Everybody had their prayer books out, open at page 117. The song was entitled *Good/Bad* (*yoshiashi* 善し悪し), and it followed the same melody that all *miuta* share – sung with no musical accompaniment, somewhat solemn, somewhat melancholy. Later, Yoshino-san told me proudly that, four years before, she herself had taken on the role of *miuta sendatsu* at the World Shrine, coming out onto the stage and leading everyone in singing the divine song. She had practiced repeatedly in Osaka main dojo, with a final rehearsal in the *honzan* itself. But doing the real thing, before an audience, she was a bundle of nerves, she confessed. Perfectly understandable, I said to her.

The ceremony was almost over. We bowed our heads again, as Odairisama offered the closing prayers; more amplified sounds out of sight: claps, some formal words of thanks, and that wooden rumble again. We raised our heads. A Youth Corps member appeared on stage and proclaimed the ceremony to be over. But there was a little more to come, in fact. A young man with a high school haircut, closely cropped, walked out, and, after acknowledging God, the Divine Saviour, Oshienushisama, and Odairisama – in that order – proceeded to relate to us a *taikendan*, a heartfelt story of his experiences.

A *kumite* from a small dojo in Nagoya, his parents both *kumite*, he received the divine amulet at the age of ten, he said. At first, he had felt a deep emotion in giving *okiyome*, but, as time passed, he began to become alienated from dojo activities. Why, he began to ask himself, do I have to go to the dojo when my friends all go out and have fun with their families? (*yûjin wa kazoku de asobi ni itte iru no ni dôshite dôjô ni ikanakereba naranain darô*). He rebelled against his parents, he admitted with regret. But, near the time of his graduation from junior high school, things began to turn around. He was asked to participate in a monthly ceremony at the dojo, and, when he visited, members of the Mahikari Youth Corps were very kind to him. He started to think that, if he tried hard, he could apply for the Youth Corps himself. He strongly felt how important it was to go to the dojo daily, feeling gratitude for God's light (*kamisama no mihikari no arigatasa to hibi no dôjô sanpai no taisetsusa o shimijimi to kanjimashita*). He became a Youth Corps member, and, after high school, he won a place at a vocational college, taking him one step nearer his dream of becoming a

chef. This remark was received with a polite round of applause from the audience. The young man continued, telling how he had thrown himself into trying to follow the divine teachings, especially the exhortation to lead a 'spiritual life' (*reiteki ikikata*), but he could not understand the true meaning of this. The dojo staff gave him advice, but yet, he could not put the teachings into practice properly. With more help from the dojo staff, he made efforts to practice diligently, trying to incorporate (*mi ni tsukete*) the teachings, and he found, in fact, that his way of thinking came to change. Since, he asked himself, he had been able to experience the wonder of correct practice in such a short time, what divine mysteries would he be permitted to see if he continued training in the dojo? He strived to transform his lifestyle definitively into the spiritual way. And then, one day, he received an award from local Prefectural association of colleges. He continues to repeat (*kurikaesu*) the practices, he announced, and he has come, little by little, to incorporate rightness, the right way (*seihô*), into his everyday life. His big ambition is to become an outstanding, truly great official for the Youth Corps, and, to this end, he wants to accumulate, to pile up (*tsumiageru*) practice of the Mahikari technique with devotion (*shôjin*). Then, he ended his story, thanking God, the Divine Saviour, Oshienushisama, and Odairisama. Everybody clapped again. Odairisama, high above, left the stage. The event was now over.

I got up to leave, with Yoshino-san calling after me, instructing me to return by ten to twelve. Outside in the halls and corridors, large numbers of people were seated in front of TV screens, sitting in orderly rows on mats that were laid out on the marble floor. There was a mother and baby area, and a special space for people in wheelchairs; all of them, because they could not get into the main hall, doing *terebi sanpai* テレビ参拝, TV worship. The day had turned bright and hot, and the smoking area was very busy; the metal drums that served as ashtrays almost full to the brim with smoked out cigarettes. Feeling somewhat smoked out myself, I went back into the hall. The Mount Fuji stage-curtain had been brought down, and on the lower stage, a whiteboard had been set up, with a Mahikari Youth member standing by it. Yoshino-san appeared, seeming excited. She sat down next to me and grabbed my hand, shaking it, saying, with a certain thrill in her voice, that she had just shaken hands with someone who had just shaken hands with Odairisama. Still clutching my hand, "I've transferred [it]' (*utsushita*), she declared, not specifying what that 'it' was; something like power/truth/teaching, I suppose.

Yoshino-san explained that Odairisama would shortly be delivering a divine teaching, and Tanaka-san, the senior translator from the International Section, would attempt to translate it simultaneously. I got my little radio ready, putting in the earpiece. And now, Odairisama made his appearance on the lower stage, rising up out of the floor on some sort of lift. He was stood behind a lectern, in a plainer kimono than before. The audience gave him a standing ovation. Then the hall quietened down, and the hard study began. TV monitors were scattered around the room, and these were useful, as Yoshino pointed out, since they would show in close-up whatever Odairisama was to write on the whiteboard. Once more, as the leader delivered his lecture, I found myself in the tricky situation of trying to hear Japanese and English simultaneously. The translator, Tanaka-san, found herself in the tricky situation of trying to translate, on the spot, what Odairisama said – though she made a heroic go at it – and, to cap it all, the radio reception was poor, sometimes cutting off completely. Most *kumite*, myself included, had pens and notebooks out, trying to transcribe the contents of the teaching.

Odairisama began by welcoming the spring, but he urged us that *kamikumite* would have to give a high-priority to purification, to the expulsion of toxins everyday (*hibi*

no dokuso haisetsu). As with the month before, Odairisama announced that the divine teaching for May would again be an explanation (*kaisetsu*) of the prayer book, the *Yôkôshi norigotoshû* 陽光子祈言集, the Prayer Book for Yang Light Children. What followed was mostly a lesson in divine etymology, into the god-given origins and meanings of the six *kanji*[115] that constitute the full title of the prayer book: *YÔ* 陽, *KÔ* 光, *SHI* 子, *NORI* 祈, *KOTO* 言, and *SHÛ* 集. And so, Odairisama moved to the whiteboard, writing up 陽, or rather, something that looked like it; the left side, the radical, the element that looks like a 'B' was drawn with more loops down its horizontal line. This provoked a certain buzz of interest in the audience. The original meaning of this character is 'sun', 'fire', he explained. It is 'fire', 'sunshine'; it is 'warmth'. The radical, the defining element on the left, signifies the 'staircase of God', the 'divine ladder down which God descends' (*kami no orirareru shintei*). He said a whole lot more, but it was all very difficult, technical, mystical. When we write *kanji*, Odairisama said, for example, when we write the B-like radical that means the ladder of God, there is a link to the will (*mikokoro*) of God. In this way, we are able to sense meaning in such 'hieroglyphs' (*shôkei moji*), a meaning or design (*ishô*) that we can feel really and truly concretely and directly (*taihen gutaiteki ni, chokusetsuteki ni*). He went on to elucidate the original significations of the other *kanji* and their spiritual word-force, their *kotodama*, the power of these words in spirit-speak. By way of illustration: of the character *ko* 子, child, we were told that this has the spirit meaning, the *kotodama*, that is 'to make or become stiff or hard' (*korikori nasu*). Fire or spirit becomes hard, so that, to become a child (*ko*) is the hardening of the spiritual pattern of a child of God (*kami no ko no higata o katamete ikimasu*). We are the children of Yang light, Odairisama told us, which is to say 'the children of the sun' (*taiyô no ko*), which is to say 'the children of the God of the sun' (*hi no kami no ko*). We, the people who practise (*jissensha*) the 'faith of facing God correctly' (*seihô kamimuki shinkô*), we are able to receive the light of Yang light, the light of truth, the light of God (*kami no hikari, ma no hikari, yôkô no hikari*). Aim, said Odairisama, to become a shining Yang-light-child, the sort of person of whom people will say that 'when she turns up, somehow everyone begins to feel cheerful' (*ano hito ga kuru to naze daka minna akarui kimochi ni nareru*). He expanded on this theme of brightness. To enter a Buddhist temple, he said, is to enter a dark and gloomy (*inki*) place; but the special thing about Mahikari is that it is cheerful and bright (*akarui*). Some people even say, in fact, that Mahikari 'is too cheerful, too bright' (*akarusugiru*). But even so, he said, we keep our brightness turned down; we restrain our cheerfulness (*akarusa o yokusei shite iru*) and people *still* say that we are too cheerful. This got a laugh from the audience.

Odairisama went to the whiteboard and drew up the kanji for 'prayer', *inori* 祈.The k-shaped element on the right signifies 'axe' (*ono*), he spelled out, quite correctly. This indicates a 'tension filled, keen-edged directedness', for the direction and the way in which one prays is of supreme importance. Whether one makes a prayer to Su God, to a god of luck (*fukushin*) or to a false god (*jashin*) all depends on the direction one is in. To pray to Su God is to pray in real earnest (*shinken*). The true essence of prayer, Odairisama explained, in one of those puns – seriously intended – that Mahikari didactics loves so much, is 'to ride the will of God'. Proper prayer, *inori*, means to ride, to be carried by (*nori*) the will (*i*) of God.

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[115] *Kanji*: that is to say, Chinese characters, of course; except that this is precisely unsayable within a theory of language that finds in such characters the traces of a writing system that is original, aboriginal, underived and divine, and unquestionably stamped with 'made in Japan' on the back.

Further revelations were communicated, but energy levels were running rather low for some in the hall. A few people seemed to be dozing. Yoshino-san's note-taking pace had slowed. She wasn't able to see the whiteboard clearly, and so she switched her gaze from the stage to the TV screen nearest us. The leader was speaking now of the final *kanji* character, the *shû* 集 of *norigotoshû* 祈言集, the 'book' in 'prayer book'. This character, he announced, has the same root as the verb *tsumu*, to accumulate. Thus, *shû* is also 'to pile up' (*taiseki suru*). It means 'to gather together' (*atsumaru*), 'to assemble' (*yoriau*), and so on. This signifies beyond question that the Prayer Book for Yang Light Children is the fulfilled scripture (*seiten*). And the big meaning that follows from all this, he said, moving towards a conclusion, is that the Prayer Book is scripture; the accumulated jewels of *kotodama*, spirit words, and the light of God (*kami no hikari to kotodama no shûseki shita shugyoku no seiten*). The gifted *omitama*, the prayer book, and the radiant *goshinmon*, the divine badge upon your breast, Odairisama announced, these are the three treasures (*sanshu no mitakara*) of Sûkyô Mahikari. Listening to this, I looked across at Yoshino-san; she had drifted off, asleep in the chair.

Odairisama carried on. We say, he observed, that someone is 'devoted to their job' or that someone 'throws themselves into their work' (*shigoto ni netchû*). Such expressions mean that someone gets stuck firmly into whatever they are doing. Accordingly, serious prayer to Su God is 'true practice', 'true training' (*magyô*), which, when accumulated, brings along with it powers of world-salvation (*tsumi kasanatte kyûsei no chikara ga tsuite kuru*). It is important that we blaze up, fire up (*moeagatte iku*) with passion for saving people, for saving the world. The true practices (*magyô*) of Yang Light Children are the practice of the Mahikari technique and the raising up of one's innermost attitude (*sônen*). These two practices are the two wheels (*ryôrin*) which we must attune and push forward (*suishin*). This is the basic, god-facing posture (*kihonteki kamimuki shisei*) that we must adopt, Odairisama said, wrapping up the revelation. In this month of May, when all things are sprouting up (*moeagari*), the month when the power of fire is blazing up (*moeagaru*), receive the gift of divine light and push forward (*suishin*) with high spirits.

The lesson had come to an end. Yoshino-san had woken up. 'I'm really tired today,' (*sugoi nemutai kyô*) she admitted to me wearily. The people around us had their prayer books out and open, as Odairisama informed us that we would recite aloud the first five pages, a section simply called *kyôji*, teachings. This we all did together. I was beginning to feel rather drained myself. But, at last, the lesson ended. Odairisama gave a bow, three times, to all in the hall, before walking slowly stage-right. He ascended a flight of stairs and we all stood up, clapping enthusiastically. Then suddenly, he waved to us; we all waved back, and then he was gone.

A man came up onto the stage and led us in the singing of a hymn (*sanka*), though I did not know the words. Still standing, everyone linking arms, swaying from side to side as they sang. The TV monitors, I noticed, were now showing the audience. The incidental thought crossed my mind that no one seemed to acknowledge the fact when the cameras were turned on them; no waving when they saw themselves on the screens, that register of embarrassment and delight that I had seen so often at baseball matches. The final image transmitted on the monitors was a shot of Sukuinushisama's photograph, wreathed in flowers.

For the last stage in the proceedings, the man on the stage instructed us to give light all together. For this mass *tekazashi*, we called out the Prayer of Heaven three times. I could feel that rolling, welling energy again, just as before, when we had recited the *amatsunorigoto*. This time, with everyone now holding their hands up, giving

okiyome, they all turned slightly in their seats, facing right, in an easterly direction, but I do not know why. There was one final phase of prayers, again done all together, to Su God, to Izonome, and a bow to Sukuinushisama, the Divine Saviour, and then the event was over. All that remained now was to wait until we were called for our bus. Isowa-san, next to me, stayed seated, trying to get some sleep, as did many others. I had to return my radio to the translation room. On the way, I went outside, thinking to have a last cigarette. The smoking area had an easy atmosphere now; the men had mostly taken their jackets off, chatting, smoking and mobile phoning in the hot sunshine. Returning to the hall, I encountered Siva, the Sri Lankan *kumite* from the Osaka main dojo. He explained to me that next year would mark the twentieth anniversary of the building of the World Shrine, hence the towers of scaffolding that shrouded the outside: restoration work-in-progress. Yet, he said, inspectors recently visited the site and declared that they had never before seen a twenty-year-old building in such sound condition. It's because the shrine is so much loved; 'it's like it's alive', he observed with a certain awe in English.

We all waited in the main hall until around 2pm, when our guide came and led us out, away from the shrine complex and up a hill towards a car park. *Kumite* waited in queues, some with parasols held up against the burning sunlight. At last, we boarded our bus and were on the move, back to Osaka. Everyone received a *bentô* box for lunch and a carton of cold tea. I was tired and very hungry but, before we could eat, our guide at the front of the bus directed us to make prayers once again, recite the *amatsunorigoto* once again, and give light, just as we had done at our departure, the night before. Then, we all said a prayer of thanks to God for our food (the *shokuzen kansha no kotoba*, words of gratitude before a meal, the actual words of which I could never remember). For most of the journey, I was asleep. It was dark by the time we reached Osaka. Disembarking, we filed across the street and entered the Osaka main dojo. Upstairs, the left side of the room had been left a free space for us – people sitting on the right were engaged in *okiyome* as usual. We duly entered and sat down on the clear *tatami* in rows. A man sitting before us briefly announced that we would make 'prayers of arrival' (*tôchaku omairi* 到着お参り). We prayed, bowing and clapping, according to the regular protocol. I was starting to feel, I must confess, a certain irritation with these repetitions. Had it not been almost 24 hours before, I mused, that we were sat in the dojo praying and preparing to go? Now, here we were again, and all I wanted to do was to get away, get out and drink a cold beer. With the prayers over, I rose and told Mariko, Siva's wife, that I was leaving. Going down the stairs I met Siva coming up. He seemed surprised that I was off so soon. 'At least stay and receive light to your forehead', to number 8, he insisted, and so saying, with mock seriousness, he took me by the arm and led me back into the dojo. Mariko laughed when she saw me there again. Siva and I sat down in *seiza* fashion, and he gave me the ten-minute purification to my forehead. When we had finished, he asked, without much hope, if I would give *okiyome* to him. Sorry, I said, I *have* to go. I left the dojo to go drinking with friends in an *izakaya* – a pub – in *Namba*, near the centre of town. I was still wearing the special undershirt with the *omitama*, the divine amulet, tucked into a pocket against my chest. Of course, one is almost always supposed to wear the *omitama*, to keep it close to the body. But there, in that *izakaya*, the *omitama* felt strange to me, with it stuck to me, an alien intrusion.

Discussion: Pilgrimage and Sacred Space.

How to think about this dense event; how to round up this long run of ethnographic description? I have attempted above to give as comprehensive a reckoning as I can of a rather hard night and day's journey to Takayama, to the World Shrine and back – by bus, to be sure, but still taxing, still a kind of training, a hard religious round of practice (*gyô*), as the woman said to me, still awake in that car park somewhere at two thirty in the morning. But, to think of this 24 hour round, we could observe, firstly, that, barring extra-curricular activities – those ventures outside the circuit of our corporate practice as *kumite* (going home, going drinking, etc.) – the event ended as it began, with prayers. Indeed, the event was interposed with prayers all along its course. There were stationary prayers, before and after, mobile prayers on the bus, posted rogations on paper and mass invocations at the World Shrine, and the most high-level prayer of all: the solo devotions of Odairisama before the golden shrine, when we all bowed our heads in silence. But given this, how, pray, to go about thinking of this event? I have said that the event was interposed, cut up, by prayers, but this is not quite right because it implies that the flow of this episode was stopped, or punctuated by prayer. More precisely: the event itself was a motion of prayer, a circulation of prayers; the event was carried forwards by prayer, indeed, it *was* prayer, prayer as motility. For this is exactly what *omairi* お参り – prayer – means in Japanese: it means going (from *mairu* 参る, to go). As Mauss said so insightfully – though he was not thinking of Japan – prayer is 'a movement' (*un mouvement*, see Mauss 1968: 409). Even when it is done inaudibly in thought, sitting still and saying nothing, according to that model of Christian piety that sees inwardness as all important, *even then*, Mauss argued, prayer is still a movement, an effort that involves an 'expense of physical and moral energy' (ibid). There is, however, a further term for religious movement that includes the sense of *omairi* as going-praying. In Mahikari, the regulated journey to Suza, the World Shrine, is generally referred to as *sampai*. When done, as it most often is, by hired bus, it is called 'bus *sampai*' (バス参拝).[116] As a term, *sampai* 参拝 is easily glossed as 'worship', but it literally has the meaning of 'going-worshipping', a kind of devoted going that we could place under the more expansive concept of pilgrimage, as Reader and Swanson observe (Reader and Swanson 1997: 235).[117] And, indeed, pilgrimage, I will say, is evidently what the bus *sampai* is about, though the question of what pilgrimage is *about* in this case will also have to be thought. Because of this, I want to keep open the idea of prayer as movement, to keep it in motion and not to shut it down by limiting it strictly to the notion of pilgrimage. This is so because, in the first place, the conception of *omairi* as going-praying, together with the additional Maussian interpretation of prayer as a directed action involving energy expenditure, have important praxical and corporeal implications that work nicely against those approaches to religious practice that are excessively focused on cognition, mental representations, and all round inwardness. Furthermore, I shall try to suggest that prayer as movement gives us a way in to understanding the temporal imaginary of Mahikari, the conception of a life that is lived forwards, committed to futurity, but a life and a commitment that must always be confirmed in the present time of practice.

[116] Journeys to Suza that are organised independently, by car or by train, are usually known as *kojin sampai* 個人参拝, or 'individual *sampai*'.

[117] Reader and Swanson's glossary of Japanese terms that can be placed under the name of 'pilgrimage' is very helpful (see Reader and Swanson 1997: 232-37). But, to make a rather pernickety emendation, the authors state that *sampai* refers to 'more ordinary', local goings to religious places and the praying done there, rather than to a more general sense of long-distance journeys. In Mahikari, *sampai*, as I heard it, commonly refers to the whole round trip to Suza as such.

But, to come back to pilgrimage: how can the event, the bus *sampai*, be figured out as a kind of pilgrimage? Certainly, in terms of academic conjectures, there are plenty of theories of pilgrimage doing the rounds and it would be easy enough to hitch my description above to one of these and to say that the journey to Suza is an instance of it, that it demonstrates it, fits with it, proving such and such. The tour of Mahikari members to Suza could be seen, for example, as a sacred journey to the world-centre *à la* Eliade, an exemplary repetition in which profane space-time is momentarily annulled in the return to the eternal, cosmic H.Q., the *axis* and *imago* of the world (see, e.g., Eliade 1989). Or, to consider a broadly equivalent argument, in so far as it too invests in a phenomenology of mystical perceptions, there is the theory of Victor Turner that at certain times, and under certain conditions, the act of pilgrimage sets loose a sense of communitas, in which the pilgrims are set free from the demands and divisions of the social order to be united in identity, becoming a whole and holy community of equals (see Turner 1974). But perhaps this is just a case of too much wishful thinking; a number of scholars assuredly think so. On the contrary, social hierarchies are not levelled down in pilgrimage, they remain in place, business as usual, continuing to generate rupture and dissent as ever they did. This, at least, is the gist of the argument advanced by Michael Sallnow (Sallnow 1981).

Now, to turn to work that is specifically concerned with Mahikari, the line of reasoning put forward by McVeigh goes the same way as that of Sallnow, to the extent that, in pilgrimage, the social order stays in place and is even reasserted. In truth, McVeigh does not talk about pilgrimage at all, but since he is writing about Suza, the World Shrine, and what goes on there, it would be reasonable, I think, to count in what he has to say here. What goes on at Suza, McVeigh is convinced, is more of the same as that which happens everywhere else in Mahikari, viz., the reaffirmation of ideology through multiple channels of persuasion (see McVeigh 1997: chap. 8). The only difference that obtains at Suza is a difference in scale, in that the media of indoctrination put into effect are more massive and better stage-managed, and all of them set working at once 'to reinforce notions of authorization in the minds of participants' (McVeigh 1997: 162). To speak theatrically, it is as if the *dojo* around Japan are so many local playhouses running the same shows everyday – though to good effect and doing good box-office – but for the big showbiz experience, Mahikari members make for the brighter lights of Suza where the main spectacle, the real ideological razzle-dazzle, plays once a month before a packed house. Actually, to tell it straight, McVeigh's argument is much less dramaturgical than my send-up suggests, but it is, for all that, no less dramatic. His theory is Durkheimian, in that participants at public events are thoroughly impressed and made subject to a big idea, but more edgy and oppressive; there are no moments of elation or electric sentiments – no communitas either for that matter, only the mechanical submission to the ordering power of ideology. This is like a kind of Durkheimian explanation with an extra dark dose of Althusser – although McVeigh nowhere refers to the latter in his work (he does, however, cite the former, see McVeigh 1997: 158). But, moving on to review Winston Davis' treatment of Mahikari, though he too says nothing about pilgrimage *per se*, he does discuss the mass gatherings held by the organisation.[118] Like McVeigh, Davis also thinks that Mahikari is so much ideology. Unlike McVeigh, however, he does not identify any people in high places who are pulling the strings or the wool over the eyes of Mahikari members. No wool-pullers, perhaps, but

[118] In fact, Davis' fieldwork was carried out in the late 1970s, before the construction of Suza, the World Shrine, had begun (the building work was completed in 1984).

plenty of 'lost sheep', says Davis biblically, the baa-baa believers who are herded into the religion to be force-fed on 'collective illusions' (Davis 1980: 14).
In the same way, Davis believes that Mahikari public events are pervaded by a sort of hot, narcotic atmosphere, an 'affective climate' that he christens 'the hothouse of emotion' (Davis 1980: 97). He believes, furthermore, that something happens to people inside the hothouse – where the temperature of affectivity is always turned up high. What happens is *not* communitas, a word that at least has lofty aspirations and an agreeable Catholic, Christian ring to it. Rather, Davis describes what happens as 'hypnosis', a term that freely associates with the clinic and the stage-show, and the way the word is used in Davis' account strongly suggests that Mahikari events are a bit of both. Mahikari public events, then, are high-pitched performances, where everyone is high, dizzy with expectation, and where the leader's pronouncements, delivered from the stage, are so many hypnotic suggestions slipped across to a deluded audience (see Davis 1980: chap. 8 passim, esp. 139-141). Where McVeigh concentrates on the organisation of the event as a well-coordinated spectacle that aims to maximise its ideological message by broadcasting it simultaneously through multiple media (linguistic, symbolic, architectonic, etc.), Davis is apt to stress the emotional, psychological ambience, an atmosphere of intoxication and hypnotic special effects.

What, I think, comes out of the rundown above, of various attempts to reckon with pilgrimage and with public events held at sacred sites, is that these things are much bigger than exclusive interpretations allow for. This, of course, is not particularly profound. It is, however, of interest that studies of pilgrimage only hit upon this, the plurality of meaning of the pilgrimage site and the event, in recent times. Thus, in a well-known volume, Eade and Sallnow pointed to the intromissive powers of the pilgrimage site, a territory wide-open to the traffic of different discourses. 'The power of a shrine', they wrote, 'derives in large part from its character almost as a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices – though of course the shrine staff might attempt, with varying degrees of success, to impose a single, official discourse' (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 15). Not long afterwards, Ian Reader reached the same conclusions, in a summary of his co-edited collection of studies on pilgrimage (see Reader and Walter 1993). Recognising the empty capacity of pilgrimage places, as singled out by Eade and Sallnow, Reader agreed that such sites 'provide a *tabula rasa* upon which the visitor can decipher or inscribe his or her own perceptions' (Reader and Walter 1993: 241). Here, though, I am not quite sure how one could *decipher* a blank slate. That is to say, this reading renders unequivocal what was originally an argument to the effect that pilgrimage sites are *almost*, but not quite, vacant space. More recently, however, Coleman and Elsner have aptly observed that pilgrimage sites are places that are not noticeably empty, in fact, but rather full to overflowing: full of people going around, full of happenings and things, and filled out with memories of previous happenings and rounds of going. They maintained that the brimming space of pilgrimage is a performance space, well-stocked with props, that allows for a range of worshipful interactions, from the serious to the self-consciously ironic (Coleman and Elsner 1998: 49). Indeed, taking my cue from this, though staging it a little differently, I would say that the monthly ceremonies held at by Mahikari at Suza, like the World Shrine itself, radiate excessively, giving too much to experience. I have in mind something like the 'saturated phenomenon' of which Jean-Luc Marion speaks. (Marion 2002). For Marion, saturated phenomena are moments or events that abound in experiential content, giving off too much intuition, too much light so that we stand

blinking our eyes, dazzled by the light, by the excess of the event. As an instance of this, Marion suggests that historical happenings, like Waterloo, are so saturated. Amidst the detonating death, lights, sound and sheer scale of the event, no single viewpoint could sum up the event as a whole; even some general stood surveying the battle from a hilltop would not have any more privileged access to the meanings of the scene. Any totalizing take on the event, any move to decide it conceptually and categorically, once and for all, cannot do so. This idea, I think, is suggestive from a phenomenological standpoint, because it evokes something of the wonder of the light and the sights that Mahikari members say they feel at the World Shrine. Aesthetically, Suza is an excess, a sensory surfeit, from the Mayan fountain to the massive stairway, to the divine theatre of the great hall to the 'strange' – *fushigi* – pictures in the exhibition. There is an overabundance of sights and of radiating light, *kumite* would say; it is exhilarating, but exhausting too, which maybe why, after all-night coach journeys, some Mahikari members fell asleep in their seats.

I have said, though, that saturated phenomena do not allow for any Archimedean point from which to scan the spectacle with absolute authority, or to fix the meaning of it for good. Importantly, this too would hold for the Mahikari authorities themselves. Now, it is assuredly the case that the powers that be in Mahikari work hard to ensure that doctrine is correctly received, keeping the praxis and the *doxa* as *ortho*-, as straight and true, as possible. Just the same, I would say that this work can never be completely overseen and has no certain end in sight, no foreseeable full stop. So, at the mass events held at Suza, efforts to disseminate the truth are never wholly fulfilled and always remain, to some degree, unfinished. Yet McVeigh believes otherwise. He believes that what Lyotard would call *les grands récits*, those grand narratives that Mahikari believes in, are received loud and clear and all together at public events. Mahikari ideology is 'self-contained', he is certain (McVeigh 1997: 113; Davis says the same, see Davis 1980: 132); it forms, in effect, a package deal of ideas – a 'packaging process', as he puts it. The total arrangement is then put on show at the World Shrine, with believers buying cognitively into the whole thing (see McVeigh 1997: 147). But all this is quite uncritical; it places too much faith in the instantaneous effectiveness of ideological spectacle. If, one would have to ask again, this total message is so sweeping, so undeniably and easily effective, why was the ethnographer, sitting there in the great hall at Suza, not taken in by it himself? Naturally, it is *all those others*, the Mahikari members, who are taken by the message, who are plugged into the ideological switchboard, as it were, when they take their seats inside the World Shrine. It is *for them*, 'sitting in the hall', that 'supercharged, multivocal symbols are taken in with one sight' (McVeigh 1997: 162). As McVeigh sees the scheme of things, both the Mahikari shrine and the practices of members there are equally and straightforwardly expressive in function. The claim, as is that ritual is the re-inscription of a religious idea; ritual is representation: doctrine in action (see McVeigh 1997: 157). Doctrine – or ideology, or cosmology, or however it is figured – unites both place and practice in that both are made to express it. The site and the event are thus geared into each other, routinely producing and expressing the doctrine through their integrated action, and Mahikari members, as both spectators and practitioners, are caught in the middle, in the interlock of doctrine. Locked into the vision, McVeigh appears to be saying, the *kumite* take it all in at once, lock, stock and barrel. But this scheme seems too complete, it fits together too nicely – actually, 'neatly put together', is how he puts it (1997: 104). It fits, in fact, all too well with the sort of story that Mahikari itself might tell: that it possesses the supreme revelation of truth, that Suza is the realisation of that truth, and that to go there and worship is to

take part in that truth. (The only difference being whether the point of the story is edification and salvation or ideological control). In practice, however – and it is always in practice that stories try to prove themselves, amidst a field that is always already congested and contested by lots of other stories – I am not sure that Mahikari doctrine is such a tidy totality, a system of ideas that is delivered with such expedition that everyone, all the members gathered together, gets the message. The view that the doctrine is a clear-cut, singular truth, and, importantly, that it is assimilated easily, is the view of McVeigh – and, as a matter of fact, Winston Davis too. But it just so happens that Mahikari often makes known the same message. Yet, to go beyond such official pronouncements with their tendency to amplify and abstract, actual practice intimates, not the enactment of some closed system of certainties, but the commitment to a project that is always unfinished.

Consider, though, what Eade and Sallnow have to say of sacred centres, as destinations for pilgimage. They consider that these sites, and the authorities that manage them, often attempt to set limits on the range of religious meanings and experiences of the pilgrimage and of the place itself, but this is never the whole story. Such places, as sacred centres, are auto-authorising, as Derrida might say. They are spaces of a self-generating authority that underwrites their own claims to be in possession of religious truth. Eade and Sallnow question this official line, pointing out that the self-definition of the sacred centre commonly contends with the interpretations that are laid down on the place by those who go there (see Eade and Sallnow 1991: 6-16). The Mahikari shrine is an interesting, contradictory place in this respect. Suza is, by turns, universal and exclusive: *the* shrine the seat – *za* 座 – of God, for the whole world and the world-centre, but only if you are a member of Mahikari. It is the new Eden, the new Ark for the 20th century and an eyesore, a building in 'bad taste' (*shumi warui*), as someone – *not* a *kumite* – once told me. To be sure, its authority holds up highly among Mahikari members. But as a massively conspicuous structure in a fairly small mountain town, for those who live nearby it may be the object of curiosity, mistrust, even fear perhaps, or just plain old indifference. Writing of monumentality, Lefebvre remarks that 'The use of the cathedral's monumental space necessarily entails its supplying answers to all the questions that assail anyone who crosses the threshold.' (Lefebvre 1991: 220-221). But some do not wait long enough to hear the answer; they turn around and make a run for it. A resident of Takayama told the author Yamaguchi Fuminori that he had once crossed the threshold to look inside the World Shrine: 'One time, I went in to take a peek. It was amazing, but then one of them [a Mahikari member] came over and started to talk to me, so I ran away double-quick' (see Yamaguchi 1991: 182).[119]

What kind of answers does the space of Suza give up to the *kumite*, those who love it most? What dialogue takes place between the place and those who go there every

[119] 一度 (神殿の) なかを覗きにいったんだけど、すごかったですねえ。向こうのひとが声をかけてきたんで、あわてて逃げてきました. Yamaguchi's entertaining book concerns a tour he took around Japan, taking in the centres of various new religions. Visiting Takayama, the author tried to gauge local sentiments towards the Mahikari shrine. He comments: 'Though there are still some who are curious [about the shrine], one the whole, I think that the townspeople look on it with benign indifference.' Another local suggests a reason for this: 'Takayama is a fairly closed [community], but it's generous to religions. At any rate, there are 400 registered religious groups in a town with a population of about 60,000 people.' The author is doubtful that the number of religions in Takayama is quite as high as this. See Yamaguchi (2002: 182).

month? To talk of dialogue, though, implies that the relationships between people and spaces are a matter of discourse, a verbal matter – hence, by further implication: that they are somehow conceptual, representational or textual relations. On the contrary, space is wide-open: it cannot be confined either to signs or to representations, and this because it is lived. Here is the insistence of Merleau-Ponty, that the relations between person and place are corporeal and intimate before they are intellectual (Merleau-Ponty 1962: chap. 3).[120] Eade and Sallnow's reappraisal of pilgrimage is very fine, very well-considered, but it holds to a view of pilgrimage as something that is for the most part discursive, where the relations between pilgrimage and place are seen as an intercourse of discourses, circulating, competing and contrasting. When the body enters the frame – the sick, suffering body of the pilgrim – this too shows up as a discursive body, a body discussed or represented (see Eade and Sallnow 1991: 16-24). I mean no disrespect to discourse, by the way. I just want to make space for the body in pilgrimage, for the *lived* body that inhabits the spaces of pilgrimage. For the body is always in space – or better – the body is *of* space, as Merleau-Ponty says (1962: 148); it is the spatial body, as Lefebvre terms it (1991: 195), that, in taking up the movement of pilgrimage, moves along with the bodies of other pilgrims, joining the pilgrim body with its corporate commitments. The body moving in pilgrimage becomes habituated; it becomes absorbed, fatigued, elated, etc. In pilgrimage, there are many ways for a body to be a body (another line from Merleau-Ponty: *il y a plusieurs manières pour le corps d'être corps*; 1945: 144; 1962: 124). In the movement of pilgrimage, the itinerary may be well planned and predictable, but the trajectory of the body's becoming is not. Pilgrimage is a moving experience, certainly, but we may not know exactly *how*, in which precise way, it will move us. The body does not just become in any which way, however. As a kind of practiced movement, pilgrimage – and there are many kinds of these, too – like other journeys to and fro, has its own 'mode of spatialization', as Edward S. Casey explains, citing Deleuze and Guattari (see Casey 1993: 307). As the latter themselves explain, this mode is the 'manner of being in space, of being for space' (I'm surprised they didn't say 'becoming'. See Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 482). In the space of a particular pilgrimage, then, the body becomes according to certain tendencies, certain trajectories. The person engaging place in pilgrimage is practically involved in space, she uses space, to worship, for example. Whereas the spectator, for example, simply stands and stares, the participant, committed to practice, is committed to a future enterprise. The future project in this case is the striving to understand the world through the divine principles of Mahikari practice. It is not simply the case that *kumite* commune effortlessly with fixed meanings that await them in the space of the World Shrine. Rather, *kumite* engage with this space in intimate, but at the same time, indeterminate way, which the way the body mediates any space, according to the ideas I have looked at above. The Mahikari member is certainly told that nothing is without meaning, that God created a world full of significance, but this is not a given that is immediately understood at a glance, as it were. Instead, Mahikari members make efforts to understand the divine meanings in the world. That is to say, one has to work at seeing the meaning, even in a place like Suza. This may be why *kumite* repeat

[120] This is an argument made by many, and not all of them phenomenologists. See, for example, Lefebvre (1991: esp. 194-207); Bourdieu (1977: 89-91, 116-19); Casey (1996: 13-52; 1997: 202-42). Casey (1997) observes a distinction between space and place. Giving pride of place to place, he champions the cause of place, a cause that had greatly diminished in support throughout the history of Western thought, as place (seen as local, particular) gradually gave way to infinitely extended and universal space. I am very much on the side of this argument, but have chosen to ignore the distinction.

their visits so often. Many of the members I spoke to said that they visited Suza on pilgrimages once a month, and if they were not able to, then they wished to do so. It is this regular repetition of pilgrimage in Mahikari that interests me here. It indicates, I suggest, a wider significance for a practice in life that is open-ended, a reaching out towards understanding of the world through repeated practice.

Conclusion

> 'This conversion is not a rhetorical operation; it is a conversion of the body, its becoming-flesh'
>
> – Jacques Derrida (2005: 247)

Conversion is not merely a discursive construct; it is enacted and becomes sensuous in material practices. Conversion is a palpable phenomenon, although its operations are not inaccessible, since one may palpate its process in the bodies of others – a haptic diagnostic technique employed in the giving of *okiyome*. Or, at least, this is the version of conversion that I have tried to get a feeling for in Mahikari practice. There may well be other versions – other configurations of conversion. Writing of the revelatory truth-event that caught hold of Paul on the road to Damascus – arguably the most powerful template for the determination of the conversion experience in Christian traditions – Badiou suggests that, 'In a certain sense, this conversion isn't carried out by anyone: Paul has not been converted by representatives of "the Church"; he has not been won over' (Badiou 2003: 17). That is, his conversion is not a rhetorical operation; taking place in the absence of an institutional context, as an event, it authorises itself. And yet, what Badiou forgets is that Paul, struck blind for three days, only regains his sight after a disciple named Ananias 'laid his hands on him' (*epitheis ep' auton tas cheiras*) (Acts 9:8-18). Badiou is thus right in emphasizing that this event is not an effect of persuasion, but he fails to see the extent to which conversion can only be constituted as a meaningful event as such in so far as it is socially and sensuously mediated. In a certain sense, then, Badiou perpetuates what we might call the sociological 'black-box' model of conversion as an eneffable event, blocked off from analytical inspection.

In his book, *The Skin Ego*, Didier Anzieu gives consideration to that palpable, pivotal moment of haptic affirmation when the apostle Thomas establishes for himself the reality of the risen Christ by touching his body. Anzieu goes on to remark that 'The underlying epistemological problem could be posed in these terms: Is the truth visible, tangible, or audible?' (Anzieu 1995: 169). The foregoing analysis I have offered could be organized according to these three registers. I attempted to demonstrate how the reality of *henka*-effects – the actuality of *okiyome* operations – is enacted as evidence and made visible in jam jar experiments, it becomes tangible in the exercise of the practice itself, and the truth of Mahikari teachings is audibly incorporated in study sessions. But there is always an essential element of *contact* close at hand in all these

operations. Such practices are so many ways in which *kamikumite*(神組み手) 'those holding hands with the *kami*', make efforts to achieve a kind of skinship with divinity, the repeated material enactment of intimate spiritual relations.

In a recent assessment of the state-of the-art in the sociology of conversion, Bromley declares that the:

> multi-dimensional conception of conversion moves theorizing away from traditional religious/spiritual interpretations and toward a socio-political process of shifting individual alliances and social network identification. (Bromley 2009: 733).

The argument Bromley is making is the reaffirmation of the conversion-affiliation equivalence. Now, I do not want to imply that an attention to affiliation is unable to produce valuable insights about recruitment to religious groups. My issue with the analytic of affiliation is that it is taken to be synonymous with conversion as a means of explaining change. But sociology shifts the locus of change away from the 'spiritual' towards the 'socio-political' space of relation-making, as if the two can be cleanly and clearly separated. In the process, sociology establishes a model of change that is completely unmoored from the discourse of the actors that it claims to explain.

For the same reasons, what is striking about Bromley's formulation is that the sociology of religion's trajectory of theory – conceived as an advance – has turned away from religion. In other words, conversion, if it is to be theorized at all, should be disassociated from the spiritual. As such, Bromley's statement merely marks the consummation of a project that the sociology of religion undertook long ago, equivalent to that programme in philosophy that A.J. Ayer (1971) once imperiously entitled, "the elimination of metaphysics." As Latour sarcastically remarks, "it became obvious for most sociologists of religion, that God cannot have any role in the behavior of any believer who says things like 'God makes me do this,' 'God revealed this to me' or 'inspired me' or 'saved me'" (Latour 2001: 229). In spite of what the natives may say, conversion is a hard-nosed "socio-political process," easily bracketed from any traffic with divine agencies or entities.[121] And yet, there is a suspicion that the sociological disavowal of metaphysics has not been entirely successful. For, having, as it were, been served with the disciplinary equivalent of an ASBO (in this case, less an Anti-Social, than an Anti-*Sociological* Behaviour Order), it is perhaps no surprise to find that metaphysics remains on the loose, making mischief with the method. For I suggest that sociology of conversion's analytical meta-language is animated by the all too familiar metaphysics of Christian theology. It constitutes a Protestant etic, if you will. For what, in the end, justifies the methodological distinction between the interior and exterior of conversion, with a privileging of the former, and consequent de-emphasis on practice and corporeality, if it is not a metaphysics of a particular kind? This is, I think, clearly

[121] In his excellent historical study of conversion in 12th century Europe – which I have already considered in my introduction – Morrison chides the social sciences for passing over questions of God, grace, etc. "Metaphysics," he remarks, is not a subject "much cherished by sociologists, anthropologists or historians" (Morrison 1992a: xvi). Without speaking for the other two professions, I would suggest that, on the contrary, anthropology has specialised in this area since its professional inception. For what else are our founding accounts of divine kings, collapsing granaries, and *kula* rings, if not exercises in alternative metaphysics?

seen in the sociological notion of 'empirical indicators' – those visible indexes of conversion that gesture towards a more authentic interior process. Such a notion simply repeats, in a more secular, scientific register, the Calvinist doctrine of the *signum visibile*, the 'visible sign,' according to which devotional practices cannot be constitutive of transformation, but are merely indicative of changes taking place within the person.

But let us consider again this sociological notion that conversion and affiliation are equivalent, or *convertible* concepts. Such an assumption implicates a particular strategy of translation which requires a little examination. I have already devoted pages to the exploration of conversion in terms of its effects in Mahikari practice. Here, in the conclusion, I want to end by briefly considering, as a provocation to further thought, what the consequences – indeed, *effects* – might be of this Mahikari concept of conversion on our analytical discourse *itself*. Or, as Viveiros de Castro has elegantly posed the question: 'What happens when the native's discourse functions within the anthropologist's discourse in such a way that it produces a reciprocal "knowledge-effect" on the latter?' (Viveiros de Castro 2015: 44).

Sociology proceeds by assuming a synonymy between concepts – conversion equals affiliation. But, as Feyerabend suggests (1987: 267), good anthropological translations are not based on synonymy – the establishing of equivalences; rather, they often proceed by employing familiar terms, which are then bent in unfamiliar directions, during the course of the inquiry. That is to say, translation in this case is not transposition, but transformation, not *in* our terms, but *of* our terms. In encountering a system of foreign concepts, we do not come away with all our terms intact (Feyerabend, again: 'the English with which we start is not the English with which we conclude our explanation'; 1987: 268). Or if we do, we have gone nowhere – 'without moving, without *leaving*: you have stayed within your initial categories – you discover nothing' (Jullien 2015: 4; original emphasis).

This is effectively the position which the sociology of conversion has adopted; the position that, as a concept, conversion must be convertible into something that is readily comprehensible. What this means in principle is that we cannot understand other than in the analytical terms we already have. We are bound by our particular epistemological traditions. As Rorty says in defence of such a stance 'We cannot leap outside our Western social democratic skins when we encounter another culture, and we should not try' (1991: 212). Put differently, such a conceptually conservative position amounts to something like the following admission: These are the terms we have to work with; this is our history; these are the conditions of our diction. These are the skins we're in, so we might as well get used to it.

This is also what Vattimo is getting at, although he maintains, in a Rortyean manner of speaking, that the conventional envelopes we inhabit are less social democratic, than biblical skins. It is scripture which imparts to us our particular historicity and patterns of thought. Without it, argues Vattimo,

> I wouldn't be what I am; perhaps I'd be something else, but it's no use trying to imagine what it would be like to be, let's say, a native of Amazonia. If I reflect on my existence, I am forced to acknowledge that without biblical textuality I wouldn't possess instruments for thinking and speaking (2014: 71).

The example of the Amazonian Other – the illustrative native – serves the purpose, I presume, of establishing an extreme, existential contrast. Cocooned within our biblical categories, Vattimo is saying that we have no choice but to think in these ways. There is certainly no question of our becoming Amazonian. But, presumably, the flip side to this

position – that we can only converse in the terms we already have – is that, if we are to constructively engage with all those Others, then they are going to have to learn to start talking like us. Conversation, that is to say, presupposes conversion – so 'they' are going to have to convert, if they want to converse.

As Gellner remarks of anthropological understanding, 'inconvertible currencies are not suitable for trade' (1982: 189). The metaphor may be different (monetary rather than spiritual or moral) but the sense is the same because the currency is cognition. Foreign concepts must be convertible into our terms (as they are already constituted), but the inverse option is not contemplated. It is worth recalling Husserl's remark to this effect: The Indians will have to 'Europeanize themselves, whereas we, if we understand ourselves properly, will never, for example, Indianize ourselves' (Husserl 1965: 157).

But there is surely something suspect about the idea that we can understand others only if we are all on the same page in the first place. Certainly, we cannot swap bodies or slip free of our skins, but we can switch our position by altering our terms. Thus, we *can* in fact understand in terms other to ours, so long as we also understand that in order to do that, our terms must become *other* to themselves. The question, therefore, is not one of converting others, but of *converting our terms*. What happens, then, when the term to be converted is 'conversion' itself?

We might say that conversion demands a strategy of translation that is equivalent to *itself*, so that the arrow of transformation goes in this other direction – not that of 'their' terms transposed into 'ours', which is the standard sociological manoeuvre. The project of anthropology is, I think, capable of doing things differently. For if it is true to say that anthropology is a kind of Deleuzian endeavour, concerned with the creation of new concepts (see Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007), then what the theory of conversion requires is not further refinement, redefinition or synthesis (*pace* Gooren 2007), but ontological transformation. In a word: conversion.

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