

Ritual as Enunciative Praxis: Some Reflections from Katsuragi, Japan

Tatsuma Padoan

tatsuma.padoan@ucc.ie

Abstract: This article uses the concept of *enunciative praxis* from Paris School semiotics, showing its possible intersections with Michael Silverstein’s idea of ritualization as “dynamic figuration,” and with other anthropological theories of ritual. I explore these intersections through an analysis of ritual action in a community of ascetic practice involved in the revival of the pilgrimage to the “Sutra Mounds of the Twenty-Eight Lodges of Katsuragi” (*Katsuragi no nijūhasshuku kyōzuka*), a mountain area in central Japan. Following these pilgrims, we ‘walk’ through different forms of ritualization, from an informal “interaction ritual” to a highly metricalized “full-tilt ritual,” passing through examples of ritual apprenticeship involving missteps and adjustment. I argue that the concepts of enunciation and enunciative praxis offer an accurate framework to describe the metapragmatic dynamics through which social roles are performatively redefined via verbal and nonverbal semiotic acts. Finally, by looking at the way notions of personhood, subjectivity, sacred language, and the cosmos are conceptualized by members of this ascetic group, I show how an impersonal and diagrammatic conception of enunciation—what I would like to call, after Marshall Sahlins, *metapersonal enunciation*—best fits the world-remaking rituals enacted by these ascetic practitioners.

Keywords: enunciative praxis; ritual; Paris School semiotics; linguistic anthropology; Katsuragi Shugen; Japan

Introduction

There is a stone sculpture in the Samuel Eilenberg Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, coming from Cambodia and dated from the tenth century AD, which portrays the Hindu god Viṣṇu, resting on the cosmic serpent Śeṣa (or *Ananta*, “Infinite”), while floating on the primordial waters (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Viṣṇu Resting on the Serpent Śeṣa (Viṣṇu Anantaśayana)*, Cambodia, ca. 921–945 AD, Angkor period, stone sculpture, H. 12.4cm, W. 21.7cm. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Samuel Eilenberg Collection

The goddess Lakṣmī crouches down on the right side of the image, massaging her consort's feet, while a lotus flower departs from Viṣṇu's navel, generating the figure in seated meditation of the creator god Brahmā. This scene, narrated in several prominent Hindu texts—including the *Māhābhārata*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the *Kūrma Purāṇa* (Biardeau 1981:51–52; Filippini-Ronconi 1992:93–94; Young 1999:132)—is a cosmogonic myth: Viṣṇu is portrayed while dreaming the universe into existence, and we and the world are nothing but the characters and settings of his dream. To put it in Goffmanian terms, you, who are now reading this article, and I, the empirical “author” (or its textual simulacrum), are actually “figures” (Goffman 1981:147), characters embedded and generated by a divine, oneiric discourse. According to this Hindu myth, *I* and *you* are not the starting point for the production of discourse, but rather the *product* of a process of “shifting out” from an original source, the resting place of Viṣṇu, constituted by the primordial waters. What might our role be then, in the reality of such a dream? How do our

agency and subjectivity come to be defined? And what would the status of our author and “principal,”¹ the dreaming god, be in such an oneiric discourse?

This myth has also been included, in a modified version, into one of the most sacred scriptures cherished by a community of ascetic practitioners on Mount Kongō (金剛山) in the Katsuragi (葛城) mountain range, central Japan, associated with the Shugendō (修験道) Shinto-Buddhist ascetic tradition. Shugendō is a Japanese form of mountain asceticism which, according to current views, started around the late thirteenth century AD (Blair 2015:272), combining together worship of *kami* local deities, Daoist and shamanic trends, with a strong Buddhist esoteric base.² This scripture, called *Yamato Katsuragi Hōzanki* (大和葛城宝山記; Abe 2005:617–25; Padoan 2008) combines mytho-historical narratives from the eighth-century Japanese chronicle *Nihonshoki* (日本書紀) with excerpts from Chinese Buddhist canon texts like the *Dazhidulun* (大智度論; T XXV 1509:116a, ll. 6–11). It narrates the opening of Heaven and Earth (*tenchi kaibyaku* 天地開闢), and the creation of the universe from an Eternal and Compassionate Divine King (*Jōjū Jihi Shinnō*, 常住慈悲神王). After the emergence of this deity from the great water, and his transformation into Viṣṇu, the generation of the world proceeds along similar lines as the Hindu myth, following the projection from his navel of a golden lotus, on which the god Brahmā sits in meditation, and produces all the sentient beings through his mind, including the primordial gods of Japan, Izanami (伊弉冉) and Izanagi (伊弉諾).

The process of the creation of the universe continues, from one meditation and projection to another, in a creative chain of “shifting out” or “disengagement” (in French *débrayage*—Greimas and Courtés 1982:87–91) from the here-and-now of Viṣṇu’s dreaming situation, in which different actors, spaces and times are installed into the world. This proceeds until the primordial deities created therein decide to reside on the most sacred of all mountains, the jeweled peak of Katsuragi in Yamato region, namely, Mount Kongō. This is when the generative movement of enunciation inverts its course in the Shinto-Buddhist version of the myth. In this version, the narrative starts focusing and recentering on Mount Kongō as a “we-here-now” of the narrative. Significantly, Mount Kongō, the peak at the very center of the Katsuragi mountain chain, is also the seat of the Shugen (修験) tradition, where the legendary founder of the movement En no Gyōja (役行者) first practiced asceticism in the seventh century. The thirteenth-century scripture *Yamato Katsuragi Hōzanki* achieves this sacralization of Mount Kongō and its surroundings through a complex interplay of shifting out and its converse process of “shifting in” (an “engagement” and anchoring back in some here-and-now of narrating). In the present article I characterize *shifting in* and *shifting out* as the two opposite mechanisms of *enunciation*.³ Originally defined by Émile Benveniste (2014[1974]) as the conversion of *langue* into *parole*, “enunciation” is instead described here as the *metacommunicative level* (Bateson 1987) *through which subjectivities are shaped, inscribed, and renegotiated in verbal and nonverbal semiotic*

discourses.⁴ Enunciation does this by rearranging the relations between the human and nonhuman actors involved in communicative interaction and by positioning them in some social field.

The scriptural example of the *Yamato Katsuragi Hōzanki* introduced us to this complex problem. In this Shugen ascetic tradition, however, these dynamics far exceed the complex semiotics of written narrative texts. Mount Kongō and the Katsuragi mountains mentioned by the myth are in fact also the place where contemporary practitioners *ritually enact* a shifting in, deictically anchoring themselves in particular spots of this sacred landscape. This happens when myth turns into history, when the powers of innumerable deities, the body and speech of the Buddha, and the figure of the founder En no Gyōja are made present in (that is, are shifted into) the *we-here-now* of ritual interaction. This paper explores this ritual dimension by drawing a connection between Michael Silverstein's (2004, 2014, 2023) theory of ritual as indexical iconicity, played out through a "dynamic figuration" in the here-and-now of the discursive event in interaction, and Paris School's theory of *enunciative praxis* (Greimas and Fontanille 1993; Bertrand 2000; Floch 2000; Fontanille 2007).⁵

As we will see, ritual always includes an enunciative level which is both metacommunicative and metapragmatic (Silverstein 1976), in which action reflexively describes and acts upon itself by showing its own organization, its architecture, and mode of production (Stasch 2011). Ritual is about making present a cosmology of actors, spaces, and times—"cultural concepts," in Silverstein's (2004) terms—through an operation of shifting *in* and embodiment. This is possible because ritual's densely *semi-symbolic* (or *diagrammatic* to use Peirce's term)⁶ poetic structure, in Michel de Certeau's (1990:27) apt words, "'precipitate[s]' a process in which positions are staked out."

Ritual is therefore able to enact positions of authority and create collective relational bodies at once, by virtue of its constant oscillation between tradition and revolution, impersonal/institutional and personal/charismatic power. This oscillation is expressed in enunciative praxis by a mediation between sedimented forms of discourse "invoked" in the here-and-now of ritual interaction (Silverstein 2004:622), and novel significations that are able to reshape subjectivities and relations, pragmatically attempting to *remake worlds* by mapping and *figuring the ritual's intended effects* (Silverstein 2023:58–59). For *enunciative praxis* precisely "can be defined as an instance of mediation between set canonical forms of discourse on the one hand and, on the other, the original meanings [*significations*] that can be produced by an enunciator and that can constitute them as a unique [individual or collective] subject" (Floch 2000:32).⁷

In what follows, I investigate these themes through an ethnography of a community of ascetic practice in Katsuragi: the Tsukasakō (司講) lay group. This group is affiliated to the Tenpōrinji (転法輪寺) temple on Mount Kongō and is connected to the revival of the pilgrimage to the “Sutra Mounds of the Twenty-Eight Lodges of Katsuragi” (*Katsuragi no nijūhasshuku kyōzuka*, 葛城の二十八宿経塚), which I have been working on since 2008 (Padoan 2008, 2021b, 2024; Padoan and Sedda 2018).⁸ The ritual cosmology of this Shugen ascetic community is strongly rooted in Shingon (真言) esoteric Buddhist discourse, which conceptualizes the universe as body, speech, and mind of the immanent cosmic Buddha Dainichi (Dainichi Nyorai, 大日如来). Part of the ritual work carried out by these practitioners consists in performing hand gestures (in, 印), mantric formulas (*shingon*), and contemplation (*kansō*, 観想) in order to become one with Dainichi, by attuning to his secret body, speech, and mind—or to those of one of the innumerable deities who are his manifestations. Shugen practitioners who have undergone initiation thus perform gestures, mantras, and contemplation, while aiming at empowerment (*kaji*, 加持), protection, devotional practice, invocation and manipulation of deities and forces—as well as acquisition of ascetic powers (*genriki*, 験力) linked to salvation and practical, worldly benefits.⁹

In order to understand the relation between enunciative praxis and indexical iconicity (or diagrammaticity) in ritual, I follow these pilgrims, ‘walking’ through different forms of ritualization, from informal “interaction ritual” to highly metricalized “full-tilt ritual” (Silverstein 2023), passing through examples of ritual apprenticeship involving both miscalculations and adjustment. The main argument of this paper is that we can describe and understand all these instances of ritualization through the frame of enunciation and enunciative praxis, which allows us to trace down in a precise way how dynamic figuration, as analyzed by Silverstein, constantly produces and reshapes human and nonhuman subjectivities in discourse. We will see how this operation is made possible by the processes of shifting-out and shifting-in between the two levels of “enunciation” and “utterance”—that is, between the level of discursive production and the level in which different actors, spaces, and times are embedded in discourse and figured through ritual action. In order to see ritual through the lens of enunciation, we need to rethink signification not as denotational meaning, but as patterned action distributed through *actantial networks*, thus questioning a post-Enlightenment divide between meaning and material reality, language and the world, society and nature, humans and nonhumans (Latour 1993; Bauman and Briggs 2003). Following this ‘enunciative’ reframing of Silverstein’s ritual theory, I consider enunciation as a “praxis,” based on a taking position in the social field through human and nonhuman (visible and invisible) bodies. With the idea of enunciative praxis—which describes the emergence of subjectivities and the invention of cultural forms from a bottom-up perspective—, semiosis exceeds the single *parole* produced by a human individual, to join a collective assemblage where every new

act, while invoking cultural schematizations previously sedimented in social memory, performatively reshapes the world. This particular dialectic, described by Silverstein (2004) as an interplay between invoking cultural concepts and transforming interactional contexts, manifests a constant tension between repetition and difference, tradition and revolution, from which subjectivities emerge and are redistributed.

In other words, I argue that the two concepts of enunciation—based on the processes of shifting in and out of discourse—and enunciative praxis—based on the mediation between cultural sedimentation and cultural invention—offer an accurate framework to describe the metapragmatic dynamics through which social roles are performatively redefined via verbal and nonverbal semiotic acts. By looking in particular at how notions of personhood, subjectivity, sacred language, and the cosmos are conceptualized by members of the Tsukusakō ascetic group, I further use Deleuze’s idea of the *semiotic machine*, where (*contra* Benveniste) “collective assemblages of enunciation” effectuate diagrammatic virtualities starting *not* from an intersubjective frame but from impersonal free indirect speech (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

This discussion reveals that such an impersonal and diagrammatic conception of enunciation—which following Marshall Sahlins’s (2022) last book, we should actually call *metapersonal enunciation*—better fits with how ascetic practitioners themselves understand and experience the ritual remakings of the world they enact (namely, as constantly emanating from the speech—the sermon of the Dharma body *hosshin seppō*, 法身説法—of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi). This diagrammatic notion of ritual as enunciative praxis not only helps us understand the construction of hierarchies and authority within ascetics’ communities of practice, but also to move from a conception of how ritual action mobilizes nonhuman actors to how we, as human subjects, are ultimately shifted out and made by those nonhuman actors, as in Viṣṇu’s generative dreams.

The Theory of Enunciation and Its Reception

The semiotic theory of enunciation is not very well known in Anglo-American scholarship, despite the huge influence that this notion had well beyond semiotics among French philosophers and social theorists like Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze, Bruno Latour, and many others.¹⁰ Foucault (1972) dedicated the central sections of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* to the concepts of enunciation, enunciative functions, and enunciative modalities. He also laid out the difference between *énonciation* and *énoncé*—very problematically translated into English as “statement” (instead of “utterance”), a term that does not reflect at all the dynamic dimension of *énoncé* as an utterance in which the act of enunciation is still embedded through its discursive marks. De Certeau (1984[1980]) in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, by quoting extensively Benveniste and Greimas, based the idea of practice as tactical invention on the notion of enunciation. He also highlighted

how this notion was developing at the time through a combination of different theoretical approaches focusing on the social and performative dimension of language. For example, he writes:

This approach to popular culture takes its inspiration from a problematics of enunciation, in the triple sense due to Austin's analysis of performative utterances, to A. J. Greimas' semiotics of manipulation, and to the semiology of the Prague School. [...] this problematics can be extended to culture as a whole on the basis of the resemblance between the ('enunciative') procedures which articulate actions in both the field of language and the network of social practices. (de Certeau 1984[1980]:19)

Although de Certeau does not mention Benveniste in this specific passage—as he does in others throughout the book—we should not forget that Benveniste's essay "Analytical Philosophy and Language" (1971[1966]) was credited for having already introduced and adapted Austin's notion of performativity into the theory of enunciation. The second author mentioned here, Algirdas J. Greimas, was at the time turning Benveniste's linguistic theory of enunciation into a *semiotic* theory, by integrating the third trend quoted by de Certeau in this passage, the semiology of the Prague School, namely the work of Roman Jakobson. Jakobson (1981[1957]) had already published his famous essay on "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb"—which then became very influential in linguistic anthropology through its reinterpretation by Michael Silverstein (1976) in the volume *Meaning in Anthropology*—and had already acknowledged Benveniste's work on pronouns published in the previous year (1956) (see Nakassis 2025, in this issue).

What Greimas did was to include Jakobson's concept of shifter into Benveniste's theory of enunciation, further articulating this concept into two interrelated processes: "shifting out" (in French, *débrayage*)—as the projection of actors/spaces/times into a narrated discourse—and the inverse movement of "shifting in" (in French, *embrayage*)—the opposite movement of identification with the actors/spaces/times previously projected onto discourse, namely an identification between the narrated characters and situations embedded in discourse, and the model of speaker/discursive producer called "enunciator."

Greimas and his students and colleagues (the so-called Paris School) further developed and expanded this theory of enunciation (e.g., Greimas and Courtés 1982; Greimas and Fontanille 1993; Fontanille 1989, 2007; Hammad 2006; Bertrand 2000; Fabbri 2005, 2008, 2020; Claude Coquet 2007).¹¹ Sometimes combined with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, enunciation became a central tenet of Paris School semiotics from the 1990s on, and was used as a tool for the analysis of body, subjectivity,

and intersubjectivity in verbal, visual, sound, gestural, and even gastronomic discourse (Floch 2000; Marrone 2016).

But why such a gap in the reception of the notion of enunciation in Anglo-American scholarship, despite the fact that many (but not all) of these authors (Foucault, de Certeau, Deleuze, Latour) have been widely read and translated in English? One problem lies in the fact that many of these authors have been taken up in different disciplinary domains. Further, their own understanding of the theory of enunciation does not come from a single source (e.g., Benveniste) but from a constellation of different authors who engaged with the concept by expanding it in multiple directions. But there are also several issues with translations of Benveniste's work, who seminally theorized this notion before its subsequent developments and transformations.

Benveniste's second volume of the *Problèmes de linguistique Générale* (1974), in which he laid out the main theoretical tenets of the concept of enunciation and its formal apparatus, was never translated into English (although a good translation of the seminal article "The Formal Apparatus of Enunciation" was published in a 2014 edited volume; see Benveniste 2014[1974]). But even worse, in the English translation of the first volume (Benveniste 1971[1966]), both the terms *énonciation* and *énoncé*—"enunciation" and "utterance," i.e., the process of discursive *production* and its *product* (the narrated text/utterance)—are translated with the same word: "utterance," making it impossible to understand the basic dynamics of enunciation, namely the interplay between the two levels of communicative process and product.

Effacing this distinction rendered difficult to draw potential links between developments in semiotics in North America and Europe, such as, for example, the productive connection of the notions of utterance (*énoncé*, the discursive product) and enunciation (*énonciation*, the mechanism of discursive production) to Bateson's (1987:183–85) distinction between *communicative* and *metacommunicative levels* and Silverstein's (2004, 2023) distinction between *denotational* and *interactional text*.

I am particularly interested in such connections; that is, exploring how the theory of enunciation describes a metacommunicative level through which subjectivities and intersubjectivities are embedded and renegotiated in semiotic discourses, verbal and nonverbal, by rearranging the relations between, and positioning of, actors (human and nonhuman) involved in communication. According to Benveniste (1974), this positioning is realized in verbal language through pronouns, deictics, temporal forms, linguistic modalities, and what he defines as the great syntactic functions: assertion, injunction, interrogation, and so on.

However, research on visual and nonverbal communication has shown how forms of positioning through enunciation may be achieved through filming and shooting techniques (the point of view in cinema and photography; see Nakassis 2025, in this issue), painting techniques (linear perspective, paint brush traces, framing, gaze, and mirroring devices in visual arts—think about *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, famously analyzed by Foucault; see Donzelli 2025 and Dondero 2025 in this issue), and other modes of signaling the presence of producers and receivers in music, food, ritual, video games (D’Armenio 2025, in this issue), et cetera, inviting them to take position in certain ways during the process of communication.¹² This is why enunciation—initially defined as conversion of *langue* into *parole*—started to be increasingly considered in Paris School semiotics as a praxis, as the way semiotic configurations are played out and realized in discourse, by a “taking position” of body in the world, through deictics, postures, and other mechanisms of construction of times, spaces, and subjectivities.

Rituals of Interaction in Katsuragi

In order to discuss more in detail the idea of enunciative praxis and its relation to ritual, I now present an example of ethnographic text as discursively co-produced by participants in my fieldwork, in real-time interaction with me and other interested parties. In line with Goffman (1967) and Silverstein (2004), I consider daily interaction as one of the instances across a wide range of *strategies of ritualization*. For Silverstein, rituals of all kind “work in a kind of pictorial or iconic (specifically, diagrammatic) mode” (2004:626), in the sense that “Ritual as enacted traces a moving structure of indexical gestures toward the knowledge presupposed to be necessary to its own effectiveness in accomplishing something” (ibid.). Here, Silverstein uses the Peircean notions of *iconicity* (sign relations based on the likeness, similitude, resemblance of the qualities of a sign and its object) and *indexicality* (sign relations based on the existential contiguity and contingent connection between a token-instance of the sign and its object). Ritual, on this view, is thus a Peircean icon (a likeness) of what it indexically enacts in the here-and-now of its happening (Silverstein 2023:56).¹³

But rather than trying to strictly define ritual in a univocal way, it is much more fruitful to talk about a multiplicity of strategies of ritualization. Such a range of strategies of ritualization goes from the less structured and less poetically dense “everyday discourse in social context”—an *iconic indexicality* where the iconic and patterned metricalization of action is acknowledged as more fluid and open to indexical contingency—to the more structured and poetically dense “full-blown culturally recognized ritual”—an *indexical iconicity* where, on the opposite, semi-symbolic patterns of diagrammatic iconicity prominently shape the ritual event and its semiotic co(n)text (Silverstein 2023:66).¹⁴ As I analyze later in the article, full-tilt rituals operate through indexically “making present”

iconic cosmic values, while metasemiotically concealing moments of contingency through the process of what Silverstein calls “dynamic figuration.”

The specific interactional event analyzed below took place in a busy restaurant in Kitanoda (北野田), southern Osaka, in July 2014. It involved two members of the ascetic community I was researching with: the head of the temple, Reverend Katsuragi Kōryū (葛城光龍) and an elder ascetic called Shinryū (真龍), who was an assistant of the abbot despite being twenty-four years older than him.¹⁵ On that occasion, they had asked me to participate in a meeting with three representatives of the Nankai private transport company, which runs trains and buses in southern Osaka prefecture. The purpose of the meeting was to ask the representatives to launch a new special coach service for pilgrims who wanted to visit the temple on top of Mount Kongō. The transport service would, if all went successfully, provide discounted rates for pilgrims, the playing of sutra chanting on board, as well as provide its riders with information about the temple and the mountain ascetic tradition surrounding those places. The agreement was eventually not reached by the parties as the company never accepted their proposal, but an interesting aspect of that meeting was that my role was framed as a sort of ‘academic authority’ in support of the religious group: someone who had come all the way from the University of London to study their tradition, which thus deserved to be taken into consideration for its cultural, historical, and religious value.

As argued by Bauman and Briggs (1990:71–72), such a situation of ethnographic encounter “invites the display of communicative competence, a touchstone of performance, just as the inequality that often characterizes the relationship between native ‘informant’ and ethnographer may invite joking, leg pulling, or playing to stereotypes.” This conversational event thus became an opportunity to understand how ritual enacts “cultural concepts” (Silverstein 2004) related to identities and hierarchies through *metapragmatic redefinitions of roles* (or *actants*, as they are called in Greimassian semiotics) *that are at play in the dynamics of enunciation* (including the relation between ethnographers and those they study). More specifically, we now look at how social personae emerge from interaction rituals as forms of subjectivity, produced by the operations of shifting in and shifting out characterizing the apparatus of enunciation, and performed through speech, gazes and bodily postures, spatial positions, exchange of business cards, and consumption of food and beverage. In the following example we can thus see how people during a dinner at a restaurant renegotiate their identities and mutual relations through enunciation and iconic indexicality. They lay out diagrammatic structures of iconic analogies by referring to shifted-out cultural concepts, and they indexically embody such concepts by shifting them in to the we-here-now of interaction, thus participating in the dynamic figuration of ritual.

Both religious practitioners and transport company representatives agreed to record the session through camera and audio recording. On my side of the table (on the right side of Figure 2), starting from the far end next to the wall, was seated the older ascetic Shinryū. The temple abbot, Reverend Katsuragi was sitting next to him in the middle, and I was seated on the seat closest to the camera. On the opposite side (on the left of Figure 2) was the most important (and the elder) of the transport company representatives (Mr A), seated on the inner place in front of Shinryū. The second ranking among the delegates (Mr B), who also had some familiarity with the religious tradition and had been in touch with the abbot, was sitting in front of Reverend Katsuragi. Finally, right in front of me was the youngest person (Mr C), who rarely spoke during the meeting and apparently was just there to take notes as Mr A's secretary.



Figure 2. Rituals of interaction. From the wall back on the right: Shinryū, the temple abbot Katsuragi, and the author; from the wall back on the left: Mr A, Mr B, and Mr C from Nankai transport company management. Kitanoda, Osaka, July 2014. Still from video recording by the author

The whole meal was sponsored by the abbot of the temple. During the initial phase, as it usually happens in Japan, the “Getting to Know You” part of the interactive ritual (Silverstein 2014) was sorted out through the exchange of *meishi* (名刺, business cards). These objects play the fundamental role of informing the interlocutors about their respective affiliations and social standing. Given that in Japanese different linguistic registers are used in relation to the interlocutors’ gender, age, as well as higher or lower social position (*mibun*, 身分) (Sturtz Sreetharan 2004; Inoue 2006; Pizziconi 2020), these

cards helped interactants determine the best linguistic registers (and levels of honorification) to use with them.

More important, business cards help *shape the personhood* of those who exchange them not as individuals, but as part of an organization (work, kinship, etc.) and, what in Japan is conceptualized as, a collective inside (*uchi*, 内) in relation to some outside (*soto* 外). As well explained by Bachnik and Quinn (1994), between the positions of *uchi* and *soto* (inside and outside) a whole indexical cline of enunciation is articulated and played out in the construction and negotiation of subjectivities, to which shifts in how speech registers are deployed greatly contribute (Silverstein 2023:115–53; Agha 2005; see Figure 3).¹⁶

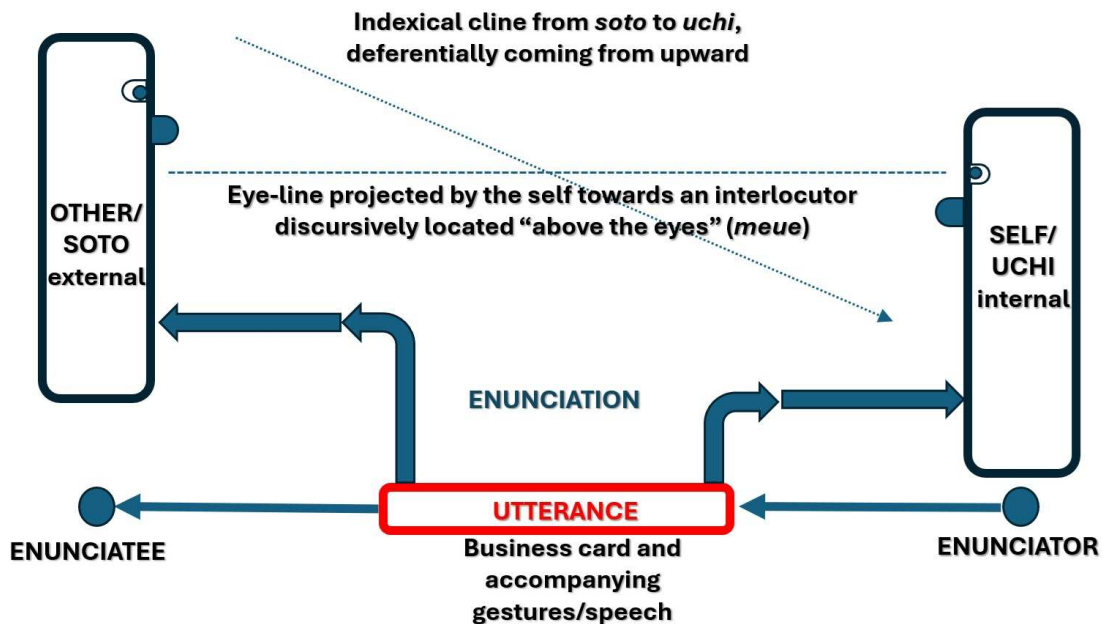


Figure 3. Act of handing a *meishi* (business card) from an Enunciator to an Enunciatee, as a reciprocally reversible semiotic Utterance (*énoncé*) that projects the social personae of Self and Other, mutually and temporarily articulated along an indexical cline from an external (and deferentially superior) to an internal social space through the work of Enunciation (*énonciation*)

In this specific case, at the beginning of the interaction, the participants used a mix of standard Japanese (*hyōjungo*, 標準語) and Osaka dialect (*ōsakaben*, 大阪弁). This blend of standard and regional Japanese resulted in a more informal atmosphere that still maintained a degree of politeness (*teineigo*, 丁寧語) through the use of honorific verbal endings (in particular, *-masu*, ます and *-desu*, です). As the conversation unfolded over the next two and a half hours—and the beer and alcoholic beverage flowed—the register

progressively became more informal and was increasingly marked by more usage of Osaka dialect.¹⁷

However, linguistic registers and social rank were not the only semiotic frameworks for the enactment of relations and identities in this interaction ritual. An important part was also played by spatial semiotics. Indeed, when taking a seat in a semi-informal business meeting, even the positions at the table might work at the enunciative level to play out or rearrange social relationships. Typically, the innermost place (*ichiban oku no seki*, 一番奥の席) —for such a reason also called the “upper seat” or *kamiza* (上座)—is taken by the most important person (Bachnik 1995). The fact, thus, that when we arrived Mr A had initially asked to sit there in front of Shinryū, the eldest person in our party, but *not* in front of the abbot, immediately created some problems. At the beginning of the meal, Mr A kept on talking straight to Shinryū, leaving Mr B, who was doing most of the talking to the abbot in front of him, the task of acting as spokesperson for the transport company. In the videotape, it is apparent that the abbot is frustrated by this situation created by the spatial arrangement, which somehow seems to undermine his position as head of the temple. The abbot repeatedly tries to attract Mr A’s attention, speaking straight to him by directing his gaze transversally across the table, towards the inner seat (*oku* 奥) on the other side. But Mr A seems uninterested, as he keeps talking to the elder member in front of him, despite him only being a ritual assistant of the abbot. Space thus turns out to be organized through a progressive modulation according to a cline of axiological values, from the inner upper seats to the external “lower seats” (or *shimoza*, 下座), where it was not by chance that both I and Mr C were sitting as the lowest ranking people at the table.

However, after one hour and twenty minutes Shinryū starts evoking with more insistence my role as an academic, investing me with an (undeserved) aura of authority by provisionally making me play a communicative role, or *actant*, placed in a hierarchically superior position, and in charge of warranting a certain universe of values, in this case academic ‘truth.’¹⁸ This, however, did not prove to be very effective. The situation goes on for a while, until after two hours, Mr A finally decides to exchange seats with Mr B, and to sit in front of the abbot. But this happens only after the conversation had been considerably derailed from the topic of the deal, despite the many efforts of the two ascetic practitioners to call their interlocutors’ attention to the venerable history of the sacred mountain and its religious tradition, and to the many possible benefits the company could achieve by arranging the special transport service for the pilgrims. To make things worse, once seated in the middle, Mr A starts making fun of the two ascetics, teasing them ironically by suggesting creating a replica of Kansai Airport on top of Mount Kongō, named Kongōsan airport, where children and adults alike can imagine flying to different destinations across the globe. Reverend Katsuragi does not look very convinced, to say the least.¹⁹

But in order to show how the ritual reconfiguration of the semiotic co(n)text is enacted through the apparatus of enunciation, consider an example of an excerpt from the beginning of the discursive interaction (Figure 4), after twenty minutes from the start, when use of Osaka dialect was still limited to certain forms (*yakara*, やから for the standard form *dakara*, だから [“therefore”]; *nanya* なんや for the exclamative suffix *desu yo*, ですよ; *shite mote* してもうて for *shite moratte*, してもらって [“being done for me” in standard Japanese]).

Shinryū (S): だけどやっぱり日本人というのは、もう一回そういう自然、自然と人間が一体やとか、僕らはね、外国は自然を支配する... キリスト教はそういうこと。

Dakedo yappari nihonjin to iu no wa, mō ikkai sō iu shizen, shizen to ningen ga ittai ya to ka, bokura wa ne, gaikoku wa shizen o shihai suru... kirisuto kyō wa sō iu koto.

However as expected concerning Japanese people, [I’ll say] one more time, things like nature, nature and humankind are one, [this is what] we [have] you know, [while] foreign countries exert control over nature... So does Christianity.

キリスト教は生まれた時から動物の上に人間がいるっていう教えやからね。

Kirisuto kyō wa umareta toki kara dōbutsu no ue ni ningen ga iru tte iu oshie yakara ne.

It’s because Christianity teaches that humans, from the moment they are born, are above the animals.

だから人間のために動物がいて自然があるっていう考え。

Dakara ningen no tame ni dōbutsu ga ite shizen ga aru tte iu kangae.

So it’s the idea according to which for the [benefit of] humans there are animals and there is nature.

だから僕ら仏教とか修験の考え方と全然違う。

Dakara bokura bukkyō to ka shugen no kangaekata to zenzen chigau.

Therefore it’s completely different from our Buddhism and from the Shugen way of thinking.

僕らも自然の中の一つ...そういう考え方とは真っ向なんや。

Bokura mo shizen no naka no hitotsu... sō iu kangaekata to wa makkō nanya.

We too are one [thing] inside nature... such a way of thinking is its complete opposite!

やからヨーロッパっていうのは、森がね、森には熊が住んでいるとかね。だから焼き払っていく...。

Yakara yoroppa tte iu no wa, mori ga ne, mori ni wa kuma ga sunde iru to ka ne. Dakara yakiharatte iku...

Therefore in Europe, the forests, you know, in the forests bears live, and so on. Therefore they burn them down.

Mr B: ああ、そう。

A—, sō.

Oh, I see.

Figure 4. Shinryū’s discourse on nature, Christian beliefs, and Shugen way of thinking

In this excerpt, Shinryū talks about the fact that for Japanese people humans and nature are one, thanks to the teachings propagated by Buddhism and Shugendō mountain religion. He discusses what he thinks are different ideologies in Buddhism and Christianity. While the latter would predicate the dominion of humans over animal and nature, leading to the destruction of forests, the former argues for a union between the two. In doing so, Shinryū outlines different *narrative frames*, projecting or shifting out to a scenario of death and destruction in Europe due to Christians' antithetical universe of values and ideology (pursuing the human domination of nature). In this shifted-out narrative frame, Christianity and Buddhism become two forms of authority presiding over different collective subjects, Europeans and Japanese, who are deictically marked as *Them* and (a shifted-in) *Us*. The latter are instantiated through the repetition of the personal pronoun *bokura*, 僕ら ("we") which is repeated three times, once at the beginning and twice at the end of the turn. This produces an oscillation between the different *enunciative frames* anchored by *Us* and *Them*: first through a shifting in or identification with the cosmic values and the model of identity presented for the Japanese, then through a shifting out of the European opposite scenario from which the speaker invites Mr A to take distance; this is then followed by the double repetition of *bokura* which reinforces a new shifting-in to here-now-us, concluded by a last shifting out which portrays Christians burning bears in the forests *there* in Europe. The parallelistic structure of this small narrative, achieved through the mechanism of enunciation, thus tries to reconfigure the cosmic values and identities of the audience, by diagrammatically mapping them in the following semi-symbolic terms:

Europeans : Japanese :: Christianity : Buddhism :: human domination : coexistence with
nature

Yet this semi-symbolism is also deictically collapsed, or shifted in, back to the event of enunciation/narrating itself. Therefore, *Europeans* are conflated with Christianity (*Them*) and with human domination and presented in *dysphoric*, negative terms while, in opposition, *Japanese* people are conflated with Buddhism, Shugendō, and a *euphoric*, positive coexistence with nature, with which the listeners are invited to identify through the performative use of *bokura* or "we."

However, despite the initial provisional alignment of Mr B with Shinryū's narrative scenario, in the sequence that follows things do not seem to go as planned (Figure 5).

S: だけど日本ていうのは逆です。
Dakedo Nihon te iu no wa gyaku desu.
However for Japan it is the opposite.

森の中には神がいてっていう考え方なんやね。

{ **Mr A:** お姉さん！ [interruption]

Mori no naka ni wa kami ga ite tte iu kangaekata nanya ne.

{ **Mr A:** *Onēsan!* [interruption]

It's the way of thinking according to which there are gods inside the forests, you see.

{ **Mr A:** Hey sister! [interruption]

S: やっぱ一番こう...

Yappari ichiban kō...

As expected this is the most...

修験ていう自然と人間が一体であるという一番正しい考え方の中にある...

{ **Mr A:** [ordering food]

Shugen te iu shizen to ningen ga ittai de aru to iu ichiban tadashii kangaekata no naka ni aru

{ **Mr A:** [ordering food]

What is called Shugen is in the most correct way of thinking according to which nature

{ **Mr A:** [ordering food]

and humankind are one...

S: だからそういう意味で... 南海バスさんにも協力してもうて...

Dakara sō iu imi de... Nankai basu san ni mo kyōryoku shite mōte...

Therefore, in this sense... Cooperation from the people of Nankai Bus would also be most appreciated...

Mr B: ええ...

E—...

Aha...

Mr A: 協力ですか。

Kyōryoku desu ka.

Cooperation?

Figure 5. Shinryū on Japanese people and Shugen conception of nature, interrupted by Mr A who orders food.²⁰

Here, Shinryū moves from the definition of Japan as opposite of Europe, to the fact that Japanese local gods (*kami*, 神) are said to inhabit the forests. But when he mentions the gods, Mr A, the most important representative of the Nankai group who was supposed to evaluate and positively sanction this narrative (aligning with an *Us* whose axial center was the mountain and temple), unceremoniously interrupts by loudly calling the waitress to order food.²¹ While Shinryū tries to actively *manipulate* (to use the term from Greimassian

semiotics) or shape the reception of the listening subjects by inscribing truth values from the Shugen tradition, Mr A is totally absorbed in ordering from the menu. Finally, when Shinryū comes to the conclusion of his narrative, “Therefore, ... receiving cooperation from the people of Nankai Bus” (i.e., *You*), Mr B replies with a non-committal “Eeeh” and Mr A just repeats the word “cooperation” (*kyōryoku*, 協力) with an interrogative clause (*desu ka*, ですか), as if to elicit further clarifications; or, in the instance, to cast doubt on the very idea. We can see in this section how the dynamic figuration, so carefully built up by Shinryū, suddenly fell flat, or we might say, competed with another figuration (that of a raucous drinking session) that, ultimately, undid it.

Enunciative Praxis, or Taking Position

As we have seen, the whole sequence above may be described through the two interrelated processes of shifting out and shifting in, which characterize the apparatus of enunciation. While we may define shifting out as a process of projection, shifting in is about identification and embodiment. According to Greimas and Courtés (1982:87), shifting out is “the operation by which the domain of enunciation disjuncts and projects forth from itself, at the moment of the language act and in view of manifestation, certain terms bound to its base structure, so as thereby to constitute the foundational elements of the discourse-utterance.” As also noted before, shifting out concerns more specifically the projection of *actors*, *spaces*, and *times* into discourse (the foundational elements mentioned above), through embedded frames that depart from an implied frame $n-1$, populated by enunciators and enunciatees. As I showed in the example of the business card exchange (Figure 6), enunciator and enunciatee are just interchangeable communicative roles or *actants*, which mutually acquire the status of social personae only through the work of enunciation, as emerging from the interaction ritual. In other words, subjectivity is always the product of semiosis, and not the other way round, and thus rather than being assumed as a human psychological substratum that preexists communication, it can only be analyzed in concrete interactions and forms of textuality.

Whenever we start talking (or painting, writing, gesturing etc.) about other actors, spaces, and times different from the *we*, *here*, and *now* of the situation of speaking—for example by saying: “Hercule Poirot arrived at Paddington Station at 9 o’clock on Christmas Eve”—we are shifting out another enunciative frame (let us call it frame 1)—where a character called Poirot visits a place called Paddington Station, during a period known as Christmas Eve (Latour 1988:5). Now, imagine that in our story Poirot meets another character called Hastings, and they start talking about a different event, when a Duchess was murdered in Paris during a poker game, three days before Christmas. While projecting this other event, the characters in our story are shifting out a different enunciative frame (frame 2). And the story could go on from one projection to the other, if Hastings recalled that, as reported by one of the witnesses, the last conversation the Duchess had was about the way people

celebrate New Year's Eve in Japan (frame 3), thus embedding one frame inside the other within discourse.

Now, imagine that Poirot, all of a sudden, reveals that he was one of the players at the poker game. At that point, we would follow a different operation, shifting in, which produces an identification between one of the actors in frame 2—the one projected by Poirot and Hastings in their conversation—and one of the speakers embedded in frame 1, Poirot himself.²² Shifting in is thus the opposite operation, when we return, even partially, to a previous frame—in our example, from frame 2 which portrays the events surrounding the murder of the Duchess as shifted out from frame 1, to frame 1 where Poirot and Hastings meet at Paddington Station.²³

We are now able to appreciate more the dynamics of enunciation outlined in our semiotic analysis of the conversation at the restaurant in Kitanoda. When Shinryū started his sequence of speech in fact (Figure 4), he laid out two series of cultural concepts in opposition one to the other (Japanese, Buddhism, and coexistence with nature vs. Europeans, Christianity, and human domination), mapping them into discourse in a diagrammatic way, but also placing them into different enunciative frames: *here* (into frame 0) and *there* (into frame 1). A new frame 1 was in fact projected *there*, by shifting out the second series of cultural concepts (Europeans, Christianity, and human domination) and anchoring them in Europe. Such anchoring was made possible by an implicit reference to Them as a topologically defined 'empty' contrastive position, implied by the explicit use of the first-person plural pronoun "we" (*bokura*). The work of enunciation thus allowed these concepts to be anchored into discourse, by weaving simulacra of identity through a performative use of this "we." As we have seen, this pronoun was repeated three times across the sequence, the first time shifting in the concepts of the first series (Japanese, Buddhism, and coexistence with nature), and aligning them with the listeners within a frame 0 (*here* in Japan), the other two times to reinforce such alignment, producing a conflation between these concepts and the listeners through another shifting in. Such an alternation of shifting out to frame 1 and shifting back in to frame 0 was what produced the forms of subjectivity in discourse, which, far from being crystallized once and for all, were instead challenged and downplayed in the next sequence (Figure 5) by the dismissive attitude of Mr A. Nevertheless, what the apparatus of enunciation did was to first lay out the diagrammatic structure of cultural concepts through shifting out, and then to indexically conflate and collapse together the iconic analogies between the different couples of contrasting elements by shifting them in, thus realizing an overlapping and identification between the two series of concepts and "We vs. Them" as contrastively set apart—conflating the first series into We and the second one into Them.

This is precisely what ritual does, *indexically* making present series of cultural concepts previously arranged according to a diagrammatic structure of *iconic* analogies, thus dissolving these analogies by shifting in what was formerly shifted out. In other words, shifting in and shifting out are the enunciative operations through which cultural concepts are first diagrammatically laid out (via shifting out) and then made present and embodied (via shifting in) by participants in real-time ritual interaction—provided that these two operations often happen at the same time, and that participants (as I examine below in the example of full-tilt ritual) may also include nonhuman actors. By deploying the two operations of shifting in and out, the apparatus of enunciation plays a central role in the dynamic figuration of ritual, reshaping the interactants' subjectivities and their mutual relations, and transforming the ritual setting itself, the semiotic context and, especially in full-tilt rituals, the way people conceptualize their worlds.

But in order to delve more into the dynamics of ritual, moving slowly across the spectrum from the “iconic indexicality” pole of daily interactions towards the “indexical iconicity” of full-blown rituals, we now need to expand the theory of enunciation, as defined by the two shifting operations, connecting it to the concept of enunciative praxis. By introducing the idea of enunciation as praxis, we can connect our discussion of the metacommunicative and metapragmatic reconfiguration of social relations and identities through the enunciative operations of shifting in and shifting out, to three important elements for the analysis of ritual. These three elements, at the core of our definition of ritual as enunciative praxis, are: (1) the mediation of human and nonhuman *bodies* in “taking position” during the process of enunciation; (2) the idea of enunciation as a *collective assemblage* that invokes previous semiotic acts while performatively relaunching them; and (3) the enunciative *invention* of cultural forms set by the interplay between *revolution* and *tradition*, difference and repetition. Augmenting the shifting operations of enunciation with the concept of enunciative praxis, we are thus able to appreciate how these three elements—body, assemblage, and invention—may play a central role into our understanding of ritual.

We can describe enunciative praxis as an instance of somatic mediation between socially stipulated discursive formations on the one hand—a concept far more dynamic than the idea of a paradigmatic *langue*—and, on the other, novel significations produced by enunciators that constitute them as unique subjects, at the collective or individual level (Floch 2000:32). I use the word “somatic” because, as Fontanille (2007:56, 184–85) explains, every enunciation—including speaking, walking, performing a ritual or producing an object—always involves using a body, and therefore also implies *taking position with one's body in a field of possible interactions*. Because we always use our body when we communicate, move, eat, or create an artefact, every verbal and nonverbal action is performed not only in relation to an object (speech, place, food, or thing) but also in

relation to other subjects surrounding us, towards which we take bodily stance, positioning ourselves in an intersubjective field. As these subjects may be either human or nonhuman (gods, demons, natural agents, the fates, etc.), their significance lies in the models of audience we postulate and project onto them, made up of expectations about how our interlocutors will respond to us at cognitive, affective, and pragmatic levels, by interpreting, feeling, and reacting in specific ways.²⁴ Such models are reconstructed and continuously reshaped through interaction, and inscribed into discourse as forms of subjectivity that also imply mutual bodily stances (Landowski 1989, 2005).

However, every time we take position in interactional fields, we also invoke and take up previous enunciations produced by others, while simultaneously reconfiguring and recasting them into discourse. Every enunciation is part of a collective assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that exceeds the single individual, and that often includes what has been done, triggered, or declared by institutions, companies, groups, traditional customs, elders, media, technological devices, artefacts, and particularly in ritual discourse, spirits, gods, ancestors, demons, and other more-than-human forces. Sahlins (2022) has insightfully defined these nonhuman actors as “metapersons,” to indicate a source of agency located beyond the human and yet immanent into the world, constituting the conditions of possibility for every social activity. While modern Western people tend to dismiss such metapersonal forces to embrace a transcendentalist ideology—only to surreptitiously rely on them in daily practice, as Latour (1993) has also argued—most of humanity around the world has always acknowledged their immanent role in every domain of cultural production, from politics to economic activities, from religion to art and technology, without even the need to differentiate between these domains (Sahlins 2022:5, 72). By expanding the theory of enunciation to also embrace the notion of enunciative praxis, we must acknowledge the fact that such praxis is enacted by a collective assemblage of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:80), populated by a multiplicity of metapersons who speak and act through us—whether the voices we invoke are those of the ancestors, the gods we pray, the institutions we belong to, or the media we follow—from which we emerge as subjects. At the same time, we are also able to twist and transform these voices and forms of action—these *metapersonal enunciations*—by producing new significations in our daily interactions.

In other words, what we call “enunciative praxis” is a semiotic activity which mediates between pre-existing conventions circulating in verbal and nonverbal “texts,” and the new meanings produced by the enunciator, who positions him/herself with respect to the other through the construction of new discourses.²⁵ Such a way of positioning the self, which we will see as particularly relevant for redefining the notion of ritual, becomes thus associated at once with the emergence of subjectivities, and with the invention of cultural forms (see Wagner 1981).²⁶ What is most interesting in the idea of enunciative praxis is

that such cultural forms may also be reabsorbed into social discourse, thus possibly modifying in turn the conventions through a speech act, an act of bodily enunciation (Fontanille 2007:195–202; Bertrand 2000).

As pointed out by de Certeau (1984[1980]), enunciation is in fact a speech act that is simultaneously “a use of language and an operation performed *on* it” (ibid.:33; italics in original). Religious, political, economic, and artistic languages can thus be changed by enunciative praxes, through bodily acts of appropriation that produce new ways of experiencing cultural life, by using and subverting previous rules, stereotypes, and schematizations. Religious discourses, like any other social discourse, are produced by the historical accumulation, socially negotiated and schematized, of previous enunciative praxes inscribed and circulating through semiotic texts (Fontanille 2007:197)—but they are also, at the same time, played out and readjusted through the body in complex dynamics of ritual apprenticeship.

Learning Ritual

Back in July 2022, after more than two years of pandemic that had prevented me from returning to Japan for my fieldwork, the intense training with the group of ascetic pilgrims over the past weeks was giving good results. Once I reached the Tenpōrinji temple on top of Mount Kongō, I started providing help for the preparation of the Big Lotus Festival (*Renge Taisai*, 蓮華大祭), which on that day attracted more than two-hundred pilgrims coming from different regions of Japan, including sixty mountain ascetics belonging to the Shingon Daigoji Sanbōin Tōzan Shugen Shinto-Buddhist tradition. We were very lucky that the summer typhoon, which was supposed to hit the local area in those days, had already gone two days earlier, leaving a clear sky for what was supposed to be a scorching sunny day. And, indeed, the temperature was rising, since when we started the procession, led by the sixty ascetics from the various branches, it was already noon. By the time we finished praying at the main Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines on top of the mountain, and had lit the large sacrificial fire (*saitō goma*, 柴燈護摩) in the middle of an open space in front of the main temple compound, it was getting fairly hot.

During the procession, I took mental note of a few things. The new ascetic apprentice in front of me, a woman in her late twenties, was advised by a senior member to adjust her *kesa* (袈裟), a votive strip of decorated cloth worn around the neck. The tree seal symbolizing the Daigoji (醍醐寺) main temple, sewn behind the neck, was in fact standing upside down—a detail that had not escaped the attention of the more expert ascetic pilgrims, but that the new apprentice soon learnt to recognize. But even a more senior member who was following the *zasu* (座主), the great reverend of Daigoji temple coming from Kyoto, holding the parasol over the reverend’s head as a sign of distinction, was ordered to stop on the side of the procession and adjust his own ascetic dress, as an old-

time member spotted that his boots (*jikatabi*, 地下足袋) were unfastened. As the ascetic, quite embarrassed, temporarily left the procession and his important position right behind the great reverend, he surely learnt the significance of meticulously preparing his attire before the ritual. Even I, right at the beginning of the procession, was scolded by senior ascetics to wait my turn before joining the line of pilgrims, as the upper ranks of the main temple and the different branches, including the Tenpōrinji temple there on Mount Kongō, had not all joined yet. Once more I was reminded that the procession is a remarkable display of hierarchies and authority, shifted out and figured as a diagram of positions. Through this I learnt about the spatial arrangement of power relations, expressed through the bodily orientation of pilgrims and the precise order they follow, indexically shifted in the we-here-now of the ritual performance.

Similar occasions of learning, but in a much more informal and easier environment, had occurred the day before the Big Lotus Festival. This happened when I was spending the whole day in that same temple compound, arranging decorations, preparing the sacred ritual ground (*kekkaï*, 結界) for the sacrificial fire, and cleaning the outdoor and indoor sections of the temple precincts, together with the members of the Tsukasakō. Here, I learnt that all items in the temple have a front and back side that need to be arranged properly; I learnt that yew branches might be more aesthetically suitable than *asunaro* (翠桧)—*hiba arborvitae*, a variety of Japanese cypress—to prepare the *ikebana* (生け花) flower arrangements for the temple; and I learnt that in preparing the long sacred cord that delimits the ritual ground, approximations and adjustments are required, when the distance between one paper streamer (*gohei*, 御幣) and another—arranged in different colors according to cardinal points and deities they metapersonally embody²⁷—is decided by roughly dividing the space two by two, even adding thick string extensions when the total length of the cord is not enough. All these practical, yet very important, aspects of ritual preparation were *learnt* in the interaction between newcomers and old-timers sometimes through a trial-and-error process, which required new solutions when things were not fitting.²⁸

Through this range of ethnographic examples, I wish to outline how *learning processes* in ritual apprenticeship and religion more generally, often connect to very practical dimensions of experience, in which actions are carried over into a collective assemblage of enunciation, iconically shifted out as protocols devised by metapersons (deities, institutions, traditions, etc.) and indexically shifted in and adapted to the contingencies of the actual situation. From accurately following ritual procedure (*sahō*, 作法) to the correct way of wearing equipment and displaying paraphernalia, from respecting hierarchical relations by placing yourself into a spatial ordering to the proper way of arranging objects and places which will be welcoming the arrival of gods, there is much in religious experience that deals with learning how to do things in the right way.

According to Silverstein (2023:14), this is because ritual already depicts (“figures,” a process of shifting out) its effects by manifesting and presenting to participants (a process of shifting in) its own outcome through gestures, speech, objects, and spatial arrangements. This would be part of the efficacy of ritual itself, precisely showing to audience and performers what they are trying to accomplish; as this happens in the “dynamic” real-time of semiosis, this “dynamic figuration” provides “a *diagram of the transformative power of what thus actually happens*” (Silverstein 2023:59, emphasis in original), a way of mapping metapersonal cosmic knowledge into the *enunciative frame of its performance* through the poetic metricalization of action. By following this *diagram of action*, participants are indexically instantiating cultural concepts in the form of some metapersonal cosmic order by making it present to themselves, and thus transforming themselves and their surroundings (ibid.:63–67).

But in order to accomplish such a result, they need to do it right (enough). As Silverstein (ibid.:59) argued: “Performance of figuration traces the diagrammatic figuration of transformation that is the essence of ritual, so that, poorly or questionably accomplished, it calls into question the outcome (even legally, one might point out for the case of weddings and other identity-transforming rituals).”

These considerations about ritual action well apply to the concerns of most of the people involved in the pilgrimage activities outlined above—including the preparation for such activities. It is thus part of the ritual training to be able to do things in a proper way, following a *diagrammatic structure of action* which enables participants to mobilize metapersonal cosmic powers and produce the desired effects by figuring/showing them. Therefore, the procession of the Big Lotus Festival, by paying homage through prayers and lotus flower offerings to the metapersonal founder of the Shugendō movement En no Gyōja (seventh century) on the day of his death (July 7th), realizes its devotional effect by enacting the exchange of gifts and bestowal of blessings in return to the ascetics and the community at large—in the form of food, sweets, and mochi rice cakes—but also by enacting through the procession the hierarchical relations of power between different temples and ascetics which the event is supposed to renew and consolidate.

In other words, by showing and presenting these (shifted-out) ranking power relations through a rearrangement of (shifted-in) bodies across space, this particular ritual procession is reconstituting and re-founding such relations every year, establishing the prominence of the Shingon Tōzan Shugen main temple Daigoji Sanbōin, its head and monks over all the other branches. However, the ritual procession also acknowledges the special place within its structure given to the Tenpōrinji temple hosting the event on Mount Kongō, considering in particular the role of main officiant performed by the abbot of

Tenpōrinji during the fire ritual. This special iconic place occupied by the Tenpōrinji mountain temple compound within the Tōzan Shugen organization has to be indexically reinstated, and ascetics are reminded of it every year through the Big Lotus Festival, precisely because of its otherwise marginal position nowadays in the overall religious landscape of this sect (this, despite the strong claims, never questioned by other temples, linking this mountain to the life and early activities of the metapersonal founder En no Gyōja).

By learning how to behave during the procession, how to wear the equipment, which order to follow, when and how to step into the sacred ground for the fire ritual, ascetics are *learning through their bodies* how to enact an enunciative praxis, and thus realize the desired effect of the ritual performance, becoming part of a larger community of pilgrims. Following a characteristically “chiastic” dynamic of ritual (Silverstein 2023:65; Tomlinson 2014), pilgrims *incorporate* the ritual gestures in order *to be incorporated* in turn by a collective assemblage of humans and deities. And yet, such a double incorporation does not proceed always smoothly. As the examples above suggest, ritual apprenticeship is often carried out through trials, errors, progressive adjustments to situations, and rewards bestowed by divine actors endowed with metapersonal non-human agency—like Fudō Myōō and Hōki Bosatsu (法起菩薩). Most of the time, the poetic metricalization of the event is bent and modified through the indexicality of contingent action, ultimately *trying to get the ritual done*.

Between Tradition and Revolution

Viewing ritual from the perspective of learning, mistakes, improvisation, and contingency, we encounter a problem which has preoccupied anthropologists working on religion for many years: the tension between tradition and revolution, between the necessity of fixing and transmitting symbols into stipulated and intelligible meanings, and the unlimited power of interpretive experience. On the one hand, scholars such as Maurice Bloch (1989) and Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994) have emphasized the aspect of archetypal repetition of ritual tradition, which we could say produces *quasi-subjects* (Coquet 2007) who would be driven by the ritual sequence, in an abstraction from the flow of history. On the other hand, we have another group of anthropologists, including Gregory Bateson (1936), Victor Turner (1967), and the aforementioned Roy Wagner (1981), who instead look at ritual as a radical reinvention of daily life, which on the contrary modifies our expectations, our perception of the world and of ourselves.²⁹

The difference between these two approaches to the anthropological study of ritual might be seen as actually expressing a tension within ritual discourse itself between the two poles of tradition and revolution. We thus wonder whether, instead of considering in a separate way these two approaches, we should analyze them as two aspects that are co-

present in the ritual apparatus and its mechanisms of signification. These two aspects might manifest themselves as opposite trends in mutual competition, in which one side may prevail on the other without completely obliterating it. Such a tension may be linked to a dialectic relationship and a constant oscillation between two forms of power, one more impersonal and institutional, the Law or the Church, and the other more personal and charismatic, the authority of a leader. It is not by chance that these two forms of authority have been stressed at different times by anthropologists working on ritual.³⁰

Silverstein's (2004, 2014, 2023) notion of ritual is able to capture precisely this tension internal to ritual action, between tradition and revolution, institutional and charismatic power, by theorizing the interplay between the iconic and indexical aspects of ritual.³¹ The notion of enunciative praxis offers a further articulation of these dynamics, precisely by accounting for the process of mediation between *continuity and discontinuity, repetition and difference*. Enunciative praxis denotes a process through which previous cultural and stereotyped schematizations can be evoked but also modified in the performance of the ritual event, while being sent back to the virtuality of a semiosphere according to a dynamic oscillation between generation and genesis of meaning (Greimas and Fontanille 1993:xx; Fontanille 2007:199–200).

In order to account for the process through which this internal dialectic between tradition and revolution is generated in ritual in the Tsukusakō community of ascetic practice, we now move to the last leg of our journey, the last part of our 'walk' through different forms of ritualization, which started from informal interaction rituals in a restaurant, and continued through various examples of ritual apprenticeship. By approaching the end of this 'metapilgrimage' on the Katsuragi mountains—an imaginary pilgrimage exploring how ritualization and enunciative praxis intertwine in pilgrimage practice—we turn to the analysis of the full-tilt ritual performed at the "Sutra Mounds of the Twenty-Eight Lodges of Katsuragi." The example below further illustrates how ritual works as enunciative praxis, by invoking cultural concepts in the we-here-now of the bodily performance—where human and nonhuman bodies are taking position in a social and perceptual field (a process of generation)—while at the same time reinventing the 'ordinary' relation between texts and landscape, ascetics and gods, human and nonhuman worlds (a process of genesis).

Ritual Enunciations

Nowadays, pilgrims often mention narratives discussing the origin of the pilgrimage on the Katsuragi mountains. One of these narratives is the *Shozan engi* (諸山縁起; late twelfth century), which connects the number of steps taken by the archetypal ascetic En no Gyōja to walk the pilgrimage to the number of Chinese characters contained in the *Lotus Sutra* (69,384) (NST 20:117). The passage of the *Shozan Engi* says:

宿の次第。行者の歩み歩みたまふ御足の下に、六万九千三百八十四字あり。散じて余念乱心なし。五種の法師行じて十願を立て、発行し給ふ所の峯なり。

Shuku no shidai. Gyōja no ayumi ayumi tamau oashi no shita ni, rokuman kyūsen sanbyaku hachijūyon ji ari. Sanjite yonen ranshin nashi. Goshu no hōshi gyōjite jūgan o tate, hotsugyō shitamau tokoro no mine nari.

Ritual procedure of the lodges: under the steps walked by En no Gyōja there are 69,384 characters. Walking without distracting thoughts, following the five sutra practices, and raising the ten vows, these are the mountains where he practiced asceticism with single-minded determination. (NST 20:117, my translation)³²

Such a correspondence reinforces the idea that the mountain landscape is the *Lotus Sutra*, namely a ‘walkable’ version of this famous Mahāyāna Buddhist scripture (Padoan 2024). This identification between places and scripture might be considered as an instance of *semiotic translation*, defined by Jakobson (1959) as transmutation from one semiotic system to another, which in the case of Katsuragi pilgrimage would be precisely “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (ibid.:233). Based on Jakobson’s idea, we could say that the written text of the *Lotus Sutra* is thus semiotically translated into a spatial text. This text is not to be read but *walked* by the ascetic practitioners, following the metapersonal steps of En no Gyōja across twenty-eight sutra mounds that are visited during the pilgrimage, and which correspond to the places where the twenty-eight chapters of this scripture were buried in ancient times.

The *Shozan engi* narrative above also presents the metapersonal figure of En no Gyōja as a “simulacrum” of identification, namely a workable model of identity offered to the ascetic pilgrims (Landowski 1989; Deleuze 1990). It is important to notice that the concept of simulacrum used in Paris School semiotics is strikingly different from the classic Platonic idea of “copy of a copy.” Quite the opposite. Following Deleuze (1990:262), *simulacrum* indicates here a transformable and interactionally adjustable model of identification which, besides producing real effects on real bodies, is also part of the same reality and not just a representation of it—a remarkable example of semiotic realism, so to speak. This simulacrum is defined in the *Shozan engi* according to three interrelated dimensions of meaning, which we can classify according to Fontanille’s (2007:131–32) terms: as *cognitive* (“without distracting thoughts,” “raising the ten vows”), *pragmatic* (“walking,” “following the five sutra practices,” while practicing “asceticism”), and *affective* (“single minded determination”). The figure of En no Gyōja—constantly mentioned by ascetics in Katsuragi—is thus evoked by the pilgrims as a metapersonal model of identification at the

cognitive, pragmatic, and affective level. During the pilgrimage, this simulacrum of identity mediates and informs their experience of the mountain landscape, where the teachings of the Buddha are materially inscribed word by word, character by character.

The whole pilgrimage is about 120km, starting from a group of islands called Tomogashima (友が島), where the first sutra mound is located off the Wakayama (和歌山) coast.³³ Once back to Kada (加太) port in Wakayama, unfolding through innumerable paths connecting one peak to the other across the Katsuragi mountain chain, and touching all the twenty-eight sutra mounds, the pilgrimage ends up north at Kame no se (亀の瀬), a turtle-shaped rock in the middle of River Yamato (Yamatogawa, 大和川), flowing between the prefectures of Nara and Osaka. Within the Tsukasakō community I have been researching, the pilgrimage is made by a group of 15–20 participants—usually a mix of ascetics and lay people led by the abbot of Tenpōrinji temple—who visit two or three sutra mounds once a month, until they have covered the entire course over a year.³⁴ The ascetic community engages in other ritual activities over the rest of the month, but certainly the pilgrimage is the most prominent one, when the steps of En no Gyōja are followed throughout the mountains of Katsuragi. Covering the monthly section of the pilgrimage requires the entire day, and considerable strength and resistance, although during the pilgrimage the group welcomes people from every age, the oldest pilgrim currently being a woman in her eighties.³⁵ Pilgrims visit several sacred places during the pilgrimage, including Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, votive niches, statues, and other landscape marks scattered throughout the mountains, all of which are linked to the Katsuragi Shugen tradition. These spots are attached to narratives told by the abbot and more expert members of the group to newcomers, which include foundational myths of places, miraculous stories, ritual procedures, and information about deities inhabiting the landscape. Interaction with hikers and tourists sometimes visiting these places is kept to a minimum. However, the presence of locals is felt and gratefully acknowledged by pilgrims closer to mountain villages, when offerings to deities are spotted in small votive niches which are taken care by their inhabitants—and vice versa villagers and monks at the temples visited during the walk often thank the ascetics for their devotion and prayers.

When making the pilgrimage, the ascetics stop at the twenty-eight sutra mounds, performing ritual actions consisting in chanting mantras and sutras, blowing *horagai* (法螺貝) conch shells, and rhythmically shaking the *shakujō* (錫杖), a short Buddhist staff with metal rings used to keep the tempo during the session. Key elements of the ritual are thus rhythmic intensification, use of tools, and positions in space occupied by human and nonhuman bodies. The *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* (*Hannya shingyō*, 般若心經) is the main prayer performed in front of the mound where the chapter of the Lotus Sutra is worshipped (see the Appendix for a full translation of this text). But sutra mounds are not considered inert things; they are metapersonal bodies of the Buddha, according to a long-

standing tradition in Japan which identifies the sacred material scriptures containing the Word of the Buddha with bodily relics and icons of worship (Moerman 2007:252).

The *Lotus Sutra* itself explains this practice to its receivers at the level of enunciation, by saying: “Whatever place a roll of this scripture may occupy, in all those places one is to erect a stupa of seven jewels [...] There is no need to even lodge a śarīra [corporeal relic of the Buddha] in it. What is the reason? Within it there is already a whole body of the Thus Come One [i.e., the Buddha himself]” (T 9.262.31b; Hurvitz 1976:178).³⁶ By performatively addressing the audience and metapragmatically framing how the text should be used, the *Lotus Sutra* constructs at the same time a position of sacred enunciator for itself, as corporeal relic of the Buddha. A fluid metapersonal chain of identifications and substitutions is thus set between the *Lotus Sutra*, the Word of the Buddha, the Body of the Buddha, and the sutra mounds—conflating as immanent traces in the landscape and worshipped as living bodies of the Buddha, rather than symbols or mere representations of the sacred (Faure 1998; Sharf 1999; Sharf and Sharf 2001).³⁷

The whole pilgrimage might be considered a “collective assemblage of enunciation,” a *semiotic machine* that connects sacred language, written texts, bodily relics, places, the steps of a pilgrimage, and the ritual invocations understood as illocutionary semiotic acts with effects on human and nonhuman bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:78–80).³⁸ Starting from this collective assemblage of enunciation, various “folds of subjectivity” (Deleuze 1988) emerge through ritual action. The sutra mounds (*kyōzuka*, 経塚), folds of metapersonal subjectivity activated by the powerful mantric invocations of the ascetics, become *plateaus of intensity*, where action is intensified and then shifts to another level or plane, the next place to be visited during the pilgrimage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:21–22). But we now need to see in detail how enunciative praxis works in the mechanics of the “full-tilt” ritual, and how human and nonhuman bodies take position in a social field of interactions through the deixis of discourse (Hanks 2005; Fontanille 2007:56–57).

A relation of co-presence between practitioners and the sutra mound is established in the “semiotic context” of the ritual situation (Landowski 1989) (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Practitioners facing the sutra mound during the ritual performance; photo by the author

We could describe this situation of co-presence as an intersection between perceptual topological schemes. Manar Hammad (2006:75–115) coined the term “immanent referential” (*référentiel immanent*) to describe centers of reference inscribed in humans, things, places, and architectural elements which spatially orient directions around them according to topological schemata and axial systems (e.g., front/back, up/down, right/left, etc.).³⁹ Depending on the form of interaction prescribed, or the kind of actions performed, people and things are constantly rearranged in space by taking into account the mutual intersection of their immanent referential (ibid.:82–83).⁴⁰ In the ritual stage performed in Katsuragi, practitioners, religious icons, and mounds also have their centers of reference in space. Places inscribed with the *Lotus Sutra* must be oriented towards the Shugen ascetics and are therefore worshipped from a particular spatial position (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Immanent referential embedded in the sutra mound as *topos*

Thanks to their immanent referential, the sutra mounds become the “zero point” *topos* around which space and ritual action are deictically structured, as an immanent “I” according to which a co-present “you” (the ascetics) and a lateral “them” (human bystanders or deities evoked through mantras) are spatially rearranged (Hanks 1996).⁴¹ This is how human and nonhuman bodies participate in the dynamics of enunciative praxis, by perceptually taking position in a field of mutual interaction. We might argue that ritual works here as a *concerted conversation*, in which different nonhuman actors are *brought together* and *put into motion* by the enunciation of space.⁴² Space may become itself an acting subject or *topos* (a “spatial actant,” Hammad 2002[1989]) demanding a response from the practitioners, triggering their volitions and obligations to perform the ritual.⁴³

While observing the ritual scene, we can see ascetics and the sutra mound in mutual relation *actualized* in front of us, oriented according to their immanent referentials. Invisible to our eyes is instead a second *virtual* couple of elements, consisting in the figure of the founder En no Gyōja, and in the *Lotus Sutra* understood as relic and Body of the Buddha, iconically arranged in a diagrammatic relation:

But the most salient characteristic of this ritual is the act of indexically making *present* through enunciation the second couple of terms within the first one (Silverstein 2004:626).⁴⁴ Like the Cibecue Western Apache studied by Keith Basso (1996:31), who often remark how ancestors have left their “trails” and “footprints” in the landscape, ascetics in Katsuragi often point out how those mountains are immanently marked by the concrete metapersonal traces left by En no Gyōja and the Buddha. At the same time, several members of Tsukasakō not only join the ritual activities organized by this group, but also make pilgrimages linked to the figure of En no Gyōja, by visiting the places connected to his lore in different parts of Japan. En no Gyōja thus stands out as a metapersonal simulacrum of identification for these ascetics—not only as a revered figure to be worshipped, but also as an *exemplar* (Robbins 2018) to be embodied while walking and praying. Complex subjectivities are constructed in ritual discourse through the following *apparatus of enunciation* (Figure 8):



Figure 8. The apparatus of enunciation in Katsuragi pilgrimage, seen through the operation of shifting in

As we have seen, this operation is described in continental semiotics as a shifting in or engagement (Greimas and Courtés 1982:100–2), as a process of identification, on the one hand, between the ascetics and the legendary founder, and on the other hand, between the landscape and the Body of the Buddha (as *sutra mound* or *topos* to whom the prayers are offered). This operation is *realized* by ritually activating and making present the traces left by the two virtual entities.⁴⁵

In order to better understand the process through which virtual bodies are made present, carried out by this ritual performance, it is important to recall here the reflections on “religious enunciation” made by Bruno Latour (2013a). Latour characterized religious enunciation as the *instauration* of presence, enacted in the social field by use of deictics—a relation of co-presence between enunciators defined by we/here/now. According to Latour (2001), this act of deictic instauration creates a simultaneity of bodies, each time renovating the sacrality of a presence. Cosmological actors, times, and spaces are instantiated, realized, and reconfigured through patterned action, by human and nonhuman actors who play out the positions of enunciators (Padoan 2021a). All of this is highly relevant to our analysis, as during the Katsuragi pilgrimage, soteriological effects are produced by a specific mode of interaction and a process of deictic instantiation,

which sets up a relation of co-presence between humans and deities, thanks to voice, prosodic elements, tools, and rhythm, all of which are activated by the body.

Rhythm, here, is particularly important as it connects to deeply somatic, visceral sensorimotor dynamics that, as argued by Leroi-Gourhan (1993), produce a common bodily sensory field. During the ritual performed by ascetic practitioners, rhythm synchronizes a bodily presence, becoming a mechanism of interaction between practitioners and deities. In other words, ritual could also be seen as a way to mobilize space (the sutra mounds) through a particular manipulation of time (rhythm), by setting, on the one hand, an interaction between human and nonhuman bodies (practitioners and *topoi*) and, on the other hand, by bringing into the present the virtual memory embedded in these places—and transmitted through mythical narratives—during a process of indexical instauration and poetic/iconic synchronization.⁴⁶

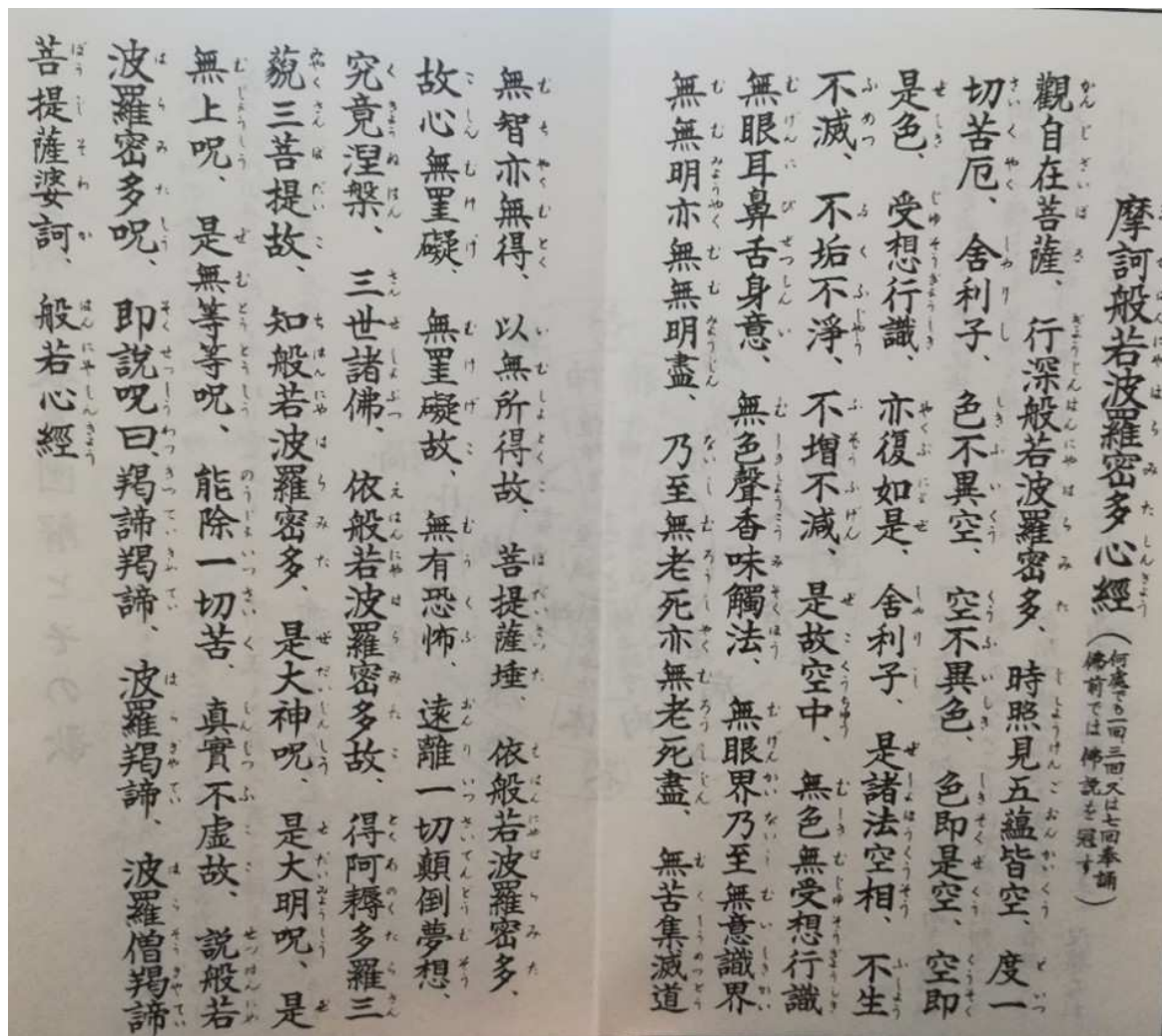


Figure 9. Text of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* (*Hannya shingyō*), from a ritual manual of the group: Katsuragi Mitsugu (葛城貢). 1990. *Kongōsan kyōten* (金剛山經典). Chihaya: Kongōsan. (See Appendix for full translation.)

However, by examining the dynamics of sound produced during the ritual invocations, we may notice one more internal pattern, recursively played out among members of the group. Figure 9 includes the text of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra*, the prayer chanted by the practitioners, taken from one of their own booklets.

Figure 10 includes a full transcription of the prayer as performed, divided by marking the ternary rhythmic groups and the strong and weak accents (respectively the horizontal wedge and the straight line).

(...)Maka Hannya Haramita Shingyō

Kan ji zai, bō sa(tsu). Gyō jin han-nya hā, rā mi tā,
ji. Shō ken, gō on kai, kū. Do is, sai ku yaku, Sha ri shi,
Shiki fu i, kū. Kū fu, i shiki. Shiki soku ze kū, Kū soku ze, shiki.
Ju sō, gyō shiki. Yaku, bū nyo ze, Shari shi,
Ze sho hō, kū sō. Fu, shō fu metsu. Fu ku(fu)jō.
Fu zō, fu gen. Ze, kō kū chū,
Mu shiki mū, jū sō gyō, shiki. Mu gen, ni bi ze, shin i.
Mū shiki shō kō, mi soku hō, Mū gen kai, nai shi mū, i shiki kai,
Mu mu myō, yaku mu mū, myō jin.
Nai shi mu rō, shi. Yaku mū, rō shi jin,
Mu ku shū, metsu dō. Mū, chi yaku mū, toku. I mū,
shō toku kō, Bodai sat, ta. E han, nya ha rā, mi ta. Kō,
shin mu kē, gē mu kē, gē ko.

Mū, ū ku fū, On ri is, sai ten dō, mū sō. Kū, kyō ne han,
San ze shō, butsu. E han, nya ha rā, mi ta
kō. Toku a noku, ta ra san, myaku san bō, dai.
Ko chi, han-nya hā, rā mi tā,
Ze dai jin, shū. Ze dai, myō shu. Ze, mū jō shū,
Ze mu tō dō shu. Nō, jō is-sai, ku.
Shin jiitsu fu kō. Kō setsu han, nya hara mi, ta
shu. Soku, setsu shu watsu. Gya tei, gya tei
hara, gya tei. Hara, sō gya tei, bō ji so(wa ka.)
Han-nya, shin gyō.

Figure 10. Left: Transcription of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* as performed, with rhythmic groups and strong and weak accents (respectively the horizontal wedge and the straight line), part I. Right: Part II. Transcribed with the assistance of Emiliano Battistini

Finally, Figures 11-15 include full musical transcription of the prayer from one of my video recordings of the performance. In this transcription, Voice 1 shows the melodic line of the conductor, the leader of the group the abbot Reverend Katsuragi, while Voice 2 shows the line of the rest of the group. The third line shows the rhythmic pattern of the percussive instrument, *shakujō* mentioned above, performed during the chanting. The accents of the

voice follow the rhythm of the *shakujō*. The tempo of this heterophonic chanting is ternary, with 12/8 patterned bars articulated in twelve syllables (3+3+3+3). An eighth-note corresponds to a single syllable.⁴⁷

Maka Hannya Haramita Shingyō (transcription)

The musical transcription is divided into four systems, each with three staves: Voice 1 (Conductor), Voice 2 (Group), and Shakujō (percussive instrument). The first system includes a 'rallentando' marking. The lyrics are in Japanese and Romanized Japanese.

System 1:

Voice 1: Conductor (12/8, *rallentando*): (...) Ma - ka Han - ny - aHa - ra - mi - ta Shin - gyō

Voice 2: Group (12/8): [Silence]

Shakujō (12/8): [Silence]

System 2:

Vo. 1 (2): Kan ji zai bo sa(tsu). Gyō jin hannya ha ra mi ta

Vo. 2 (2): Kan ji zai bo sa(tsu). Gyō jin hannya ha ra mi ta

Sh. (2): [Percussive accompaniment]

System 3:

Vo. 1 (3): ji. Shō ken go on kai kū. Do is - sai ku yaku.

Vo. 2 (3): ji. Shō ken go on kai kū. Do is - sai ku yaku.

Sh. (3): [Percussive accompaniment]

System 4:

Vo. 1 (4): Sha ri shi. Shi - ki fu i kū. Kū fu i shi - ki. Shi - ki

Vo. 2 (4): Sha ri shi. Shi - ki fu i kū. Kū fu i shi - ki. Shi - ki

Sh. (4): [Percussive accompaniment]

Figure 11. Musical transcription of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* videorecorded performance, part I. Transcribed by Emiliano Battistini; Vo. 1 = Voice 1, the melodic line of the conductor, the abbot (and occasionally some of the older members); Vo. 2= Voice 2, the singing of the rest of the group. Sh. = *shakujō* (percussive instrument)

5

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

so - ku ze kū. Kū so - ku ze shi - ki. Ju sō gyō shi - ki. Ya - ku

6

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

bu nyo ze. Sha - ri shi. Ze sho hō kū sō. Fu

7

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

shō fu met - su. Fu ku(fu) jō. Fu zō fu gen. Ze

8

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

ko kū chū. Mu shi - ki mu ju sō gyō shi - ki Mu gen

9

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

ni bi ze - shin i. Mu shi - ki shō kō mi so - ku hō.

Figure 12. Musical transcription of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* videorecorded performance, part II. Transcribed by Emiliano Battistini

10

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

Mu gen kai nai shi mu i shi - ki kai. Mu mu myō

11

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

ya - ku mu mu myō jin. Nai shi mu rō shi. Ya - ku mu

12

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

rō shi jin. Mu ku shū metsu dō. Mu chi ya - ku mu

13

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

toku. I mu sho to - ku ko. Bo - dai sat - ta. E han

14

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

nya ha ra mi ta. Ko shin mu ke ge mu ke

Figure 13. Musical transcription of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* videorecorded performance, part III. Transcribed by Emiliano Battistini

15
Vo. 1
Vo. 2
Sh.
ge ko. Mu u ku fu. On ri is - sai ten dō

16
Vo. 1
Vo. 2
Sh.
mu sō. Ku kyō ne han. San ze sho bu - tsu. E han -

17
Vo. 1
Vo. 2
Sh.
nya ha ra mi ta ko. To - ku a no - ku ta ra san

18
Vo. 1
Vo. 2
Sh.
mya - ku san bo dai. Ko chi han - nya ha ra mi ta.

19
Vo. 1
Vo. 2
Sh.
Ze dai jin shu. Ze dai myō shu. Ze mu jō shu.

Figure 14. Musical transcription of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* videorecorded performance, part IV. Transcribed by Emiliano Battistini

20

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

Ze mu tō dō shu. Nō jo is - sai ku. Shin ji -

21

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

tsu fu ko. Ko set - su han - nyaha - ra mi ta shu. Soku

22

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

setsu shu wa - tsu. Gya tei gya tei hara gya tei. Hara

23

Vo. 1

Vo. 2

Sh.

sō gya tei bo ji so(wa)(ka). Han - nya shin gyō.

Figure 15. Musical transcription of the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra* videorecorded performance, part V. Transcribed by Emiliano Battistini

From the poetic patterning of the chanting, we can actually better understand its effects on the ritual event. First of all, sound plays here an actantial role, affecting the bodies and the structure of the performance as an additional nonhuman actor, figuratively

manifested as a metapersonal deity (Hannya, 般若, evoked through the recitation) who interacts with the performers in its mantric sound-body form. And the way sound affects the ritual event is by precipitating and yet “staking out” a differentiation internal to the group, between leader (and sometimes other elder members) and the rest of the group. Besides announcing the title of the prayer at the beginning, the leader in fact chants a melodic line which slightly diverges from the rest of the group right before the pronunciation of the prayer name (*hannya haramita*, 般若波羅蜜多) is repeated again in the text, stressing that point with a descending chromatic line from an A to an F note (Figures 13 and 14: Vo. 1 in segments 13, 15, and 18; Figure 15: Vo. 1 in segments 20 and 23). In other words, the ritual shifting in of the figure of En no Gyōja embodied by practitioners does not necessarily obliterate inner hierarchies between the members, as these are effectively reinforced by the performed music line, acting back on the body of the performers and maintaining an internal differentiation between the leader and the other ascetics.

Conclusion

After this analysis of various forms of ritual action in Katsuragi, we need to understand what kind of repercussions these might have on our understanding of the phenomenon of enunciation. We analyzed three different forms of ritualization involving dynamic figuration and enunciative praxis. The first was an interactional ritual, a business meeting in a restaurant involving the managers of a transport company and members of the ascetic community. The second was a range of examples of ritual apprenticeship, involving different forms of miscalculation and adjustments, but still closer than the previous case to full-tilt ritual. The third was more structured: a highly patterned ritual, investigated both through its spatial and bodily semiotics and the dynamics of its chanting. This last part leads us to consider the particular cosmology enacted by practitioners during the ritual, entirely based on a conception of language as material sound and cosmic vibration.

According to the ascetic pilgrims from Katsuragi, language is far from being an immaterial phenomenon. In fact, the sacred language of mantras manifests the concrete presence of Buddhist esoteric deities during ritual invocations performed along the pilgrimage in the Katsuragi mountains. The *sound-body* of deities is made present and actualized through the rhythmic chanting of sacred syllables—like *baḥ* for Shaka, 釈迦 (Śākyamuni) or *śrī* for Hōki Bosatsu (Dharmodgata Bodhisattva), the tutelary deity of the main temple Tenpōrinji to which the group of pilgrims is affiliated.

Such a presence is expressed via verbal language, and perceived through both sight and hearing, but it is also mediated by religious icons, tools, and equipment worn by the ascetic pilgrims. These materials work exactly as the sacred language of mantras, as they also generate salvific effects and religious values through the bodily rhythm of ritual.

Religious values, here, are enunciated by materiality. Salvation is generated by a form of material semiotics, activated by the rhythm of walking and praying, and by the sound of musical instruments. The *token* (black cap worn on the ascetic's forehead) generates the five wisdoms of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi, the *horagai* conch shell, played before and after the ritual sessions, enunciates the preaching of Dainichi, the *shakujō* staff with rings, used to beat the time of praying, produces purification and enlightened wisdom, and the *kongōzue* walking stick manifests the five elements of existence (earth, water, fire, wind, and emptiness). In contrast to Ingold's (2007) argument that material stuff is separate from language and signification, these five elements plus consciousness form the very body of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi, who encompasses the whole reality as an *immanent presence*, manifested at the same time as sacred mantric speech. According to the ascetic pilgrims of Katsuragi, who refer to the Shingon esoteric Buddhist discourse, the whole material stuff of the natural world is, simultaneously, the speech, the body, and the mind of the cosmic Buddha. The natural world is thus a gigantic *semiotic machine* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:83) constantly generated by Dainichi, with whom practitioners attune themselves during the ritual.

This denial of an anthropocentric perspective on ritual and subjectivity, language, and the world, presented by Katsuragi ascetics, forces us to reconsider our approach to enunciation. In their reformulation of the concept of enunciation, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have argued precisely against such an anthropocentric view, as asserted by Benveniste (1974), according to whom the starting point and center of reference for enunciation would be the “figurative framework” constituted by *I* and *You*. By discussing at length the work of Oswald Ducrot (1972), the two philosophers criticized Benveniste for logically posing the explicit performative verbs (how to do things by saying it) before a more general and distributed illocutionary value of language (how to do things by speaking) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:68). According to them, the process should be the opposite: we should consider first a more general illocutionary value distributed across collective assemblages of enunciation—best expressed through free indirect speech and impersonal forms—from which the positions of subjectivity expressed through the pronouns “I” and “You” may, or may not, emerge according to the situation of speech (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:75–85). Such a critical position against the prominence of explicit performatives and personal pronouns is reflected in Silverstein's (2023:44–48) careful critique of Austin. Moreover, Constantine Nakassis (2020) has recently stressed the shifting nature of indexicals, potentially opening to a deterritorialization of deictics and their necessary possibility of losing contexts while taking up new ones across their happenings (instead of being context-dependent).

These reflections also open the possibility to think about enunciation in a diagrammatic and *metapersonal* way (Sahlins 2022), as a performative mapping of a social field in

becoming, in which effects on human and nonhuman bodies are constantly produced by semiotics acts and collective assemblages of enunciation that redistribute the processes of subjectivation. Sahlins (ibid.:70–73) describes the collective assemblage of nonhuman actors we are surrounded by—most prominently featured as spirits and gods in immanentist societies, and as institutions, media, and technology in modern Western ones—with the term *metapersons*. Metapersons, according to Sahlins (ibid.:3–5), should be considered as the “chemical” components of human action, as the “immanent infrastructure” of cultural institutions. By placing enunciation at the metapersonal level, beyond human intersubjectivity, ascetics in Katsuragi are thus relocating the source of agency to an immanent infrastructure, aptly defined by Sahlins as “the condition of the possibility of human social activities of every kind” (ibid.:20–21).

Accordingly, from the perspective of such a metapersonal enunciation, *I* and *You* and their intersubjective framework would only be a temporary shifting out (rather than a shifting in) projected by a collective assemblage. We might wonder whether these reflections on language were not only largely anticipated by Kūkai (空海, 774–835), founder of Shingon esoteric Buddhism, but also put in practice and expressed in ritual action by innumerable generations of ascetics who climbed the green mountains of Katsuragi, getting attuned to the mantras of Dainichi across the centuries. Ultimately, being all of us a shifting out of Dainichi’s speech and a manifestation of his body, a product of his dream and meditative vision, following what Shinryū aptly said during the meeting in the restaurant we could surely ask: how can we claim any human dominion over nature? Katsuragi ascetics, by thinking outside the post-Enlightenment box of the Western modern obsession with human individuals, are just showing us a path to walk towards a possible answer.

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Endnotes

1. *Principal* is Erving Goffman's (1981:144) term for the participant role whose position is staked out by the discourse and is taken as responsible for it. ↩

2. On Shugendō, see Miyake 1999a, 1999b in Japanese, as well as Miyake 2001; in English, see Faure, Moerman, and Sekimori 2009; Castiglioni, Rambelli, and Roth 2020; and Grapard 2016. ↩

3. We could characterize shifting out as a projection and displacement of actors, spaces, and times into a discourse-utterance, starting from the we-here-now of enunciation, as produced by actants, or communicative roles, called enunciators—notwithstanding whether these enunciators are human actors or, as we further explore in this paper, nonhuman metapersons. Given the nonrepresentational approach of Paris School—which tries to dissolve any separation between discourse and reality, language and the world—by using the operation of shifting out, enunciators can figure different characters, embedding them into the spatio-temporal frame of some narrative, but they may also dispatch and delegate people, things, or other entities to perform courses of action elsewhere, in a different place and time. Shifting in is instead the opposite movement of embodiment and identification between the enunciators and the actors, spaces, and times previously dispatched, making them present in the we-here-now of enunciation (Latour 1988:5–6; Marrone 2022:66–69). In line with Latour (1988) and Marrone (2022:66–69), and following an original suggestion by Greimas and Courtés (1982:ix), we use here the terms “shifting out” and “shifting in” as English translation for the French *débrayage* and *embrayage*—instead of the terms “disengagement” and “engagement,” then adopted by the translators of *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. On this choice, see the Introduction to this special issue. See below for a more detailed account of these two shifting operations characterizing the apparatus of enunciation. ↩

4. It is important to stress that, since the seminal studies of Benveniste (1971[1966]), rather than being associated with psychological ideas about human interiority, the problem of “subjectivity” in continental semiotics has concerned issues that linguistic anthropologists would quickly identify with key aspects of communicative processes—like the construction and textual projection of gaze (Nakassis 2023a), genre (Hanks 2005), register (Agha 2007), participant roles in footing (Goffman 1981), dialogism (Bakhtin 1981), voice (Hill 1995), and person (Rumsey 2010)—especially exploring their social performativity through *enunciation*. On this, see Padoan 2021a. ↩

5. While are many definitions of *enunciative praxis* provided by Paris School semioticians (including, e.g., Fontanille [2007:199–202] “modes of semiotic existence” approach mentioned below in the section “Ritual enunciations;” also see the articles in this issue by Dondero 2025; Danos 2025; and D’Armenio 2025), I use those provided by Michel de Certeau (1984[1980]) and Jean-Marie Floch (2000). In this tradition, de Certeau and Floch are the most engaged in a dialogue with anthropology, and thus developed a higher sensibility to

anthropological problems. See, for instance, Floch 2000 (pp. 1–8) for a discussion of semiotic theory as derived from cultural anthropology (and still located within it) and de Certeau 1988 (pp. 209–43) for a critical analysis of the production of anthropological knowledge through ethnography. For an inspiring analysis of healing rituals in Japanese New Religions through the lens of enunciative praxis—especially as defined in Bertrand 2000—see Frisone 2023.↵

6. *Semi-symbolism* denotes in Greimassian semiotics the correlation between differential relations (sets of oppositions called “categories”) located on the plane of expression and on the plane of content, expressed for instance by the formula $a:b::c:d$ (Greimas and Courtés 1982:290). Such correlations are subject to constant variation according to different texts and discursive organizations. Here, Greimas refers to a famous example analyzed by Jakobson (1972), according to whom, in specific cultural contexts, the couple *verticality/horizontality* on the plane of gestural expression (nodding vs. shaking the head) corresponds to affirmation/negation (yes vs. no) on the plane of signified content—namely, “verticality : horizontality :: yes : no,” which, Jakobson explains, as an iconic correspondence is far from being universal. For the notion of semi-symbolic, see below and, in English, Floch 2000 (p. 46) and Thurlemann 1989. For the idea of diagrammatic iconicity, see Nakassis 2023b (p. 78) and Mannheim 2000.↵

7. The concept of *enunciative praxis* thus concerns the very dynamics of entextualization and co(n)textualization when, as Silverstein (2004:622) puts it, “anything ‘cultural’ would seem to depend on the contingencies of eventhood that, in complex ways, cumulate as genred norms of ‘praxis’ or ‘practice.’ Yet, in the event culture is always presumed upon in the course of that very praxis, even as it is always potentially transformed by people’s very doings and sayings.”↵

8. Fieldwork with this group has been conducted for year-long periods respectively in 2009 and 2017, and over shorter periods in 2008, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, and 2024, thanks to generous funding from Toshiba International Foundation, Canon Foundation, British Academy, and Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.↵

9. These general remarks about Shingon ritual practice are corroborated by ethnographic observations I conducted in July 2024, while receiving formal ascetic initiation (*yamabushi tokudo girei*, 山伏得度儀礼) at the Tenpōrinji temple, within the Shingon Daigoji Sanbōin Tōzan Shugen (真言醍醐寺三宝院当山修験) tradition.↵

10. Further discussions of Benveniste’s theory of enunciation, among continental thinkers well known beyond semiotic circles, are found in Louis Marin’s (2001) reflections on pictorial enunciation in painting, in Christian Metz’s (2016) cinematic notion of “impersonal enunciation” (see Nakassis 2025, in this issue), in Jean-François Lyotard’s (2011) writings on aesthetics and theory of art, in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987)

thorough examination of “collective assemblages of enunciation” in *Thousand Plateaus*, and even in Lacan’s (2006) collected writings. We should also not forget Latour’s (2013a) *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (see Donzelli 2025, in this issue), which Latour, in a biographical essay on the genesis of this project (2013b), explicitly links to the notion of enunciation and to its reformulation by Greimas and the Italian semiotician Paolo Fabbri.↵

11. We should not forget the important contributions by Oswald Ducrot (1972) and Antoine Culioli (2000) in developing the linguistic theory of enunciation. Their critical appraisal of the work of Benveniste was taken on board by Deleuze and Guattari in *Thousand Plateaus*, as I discuss more below.↵

12. See Leone 2014 for a thorough analysis of enunciation in religion and visual arts.↵

13. Note that there are two senses of indexicality and iconicity here; on the one hand, there are the indexical signs and iconic signs that emerge locally in the performance of a ritual text (indexes like linguistic forms, gestures, ritually redolent signs that indexically invoke particular cosmological beliefs, etc., iconic signs such as religious images, qualisigns of particular substances, spatial arrangements); on the other hand, there is an emergent global indexical iconicity (a “dynamic figuration”) that is “entextualized” through the former, a poetic (iconic) configuration of signs, a diagram, that cumulatively indexically entails the diagram drawn through ritual semiosis.↵

14. I use here the terms *iconic indexicality* and *indexical iconicity* not as two categorically distinct states, but as the two virtual poles of a continuum, where most of the times we navigate across in-between situations in which indexical contingency and iconic patterning are alternatively more or less explicit and to the fore, or more or less implicit in the background. In order to illustrate the different degrees of ritualization enacted across this tensive scale of gradations, from the more contingent *iconic indexicality* to the more patterned *indexical iconicity*, in this article I first explore an example of interaction ritual closer to the former pole, then moving to forms of ritual apprenticeship situated in-between, and ending with an example of “full-blown ritual” closer to the latter pole.↵

15. Following a specific request of my participants in the field and in line with current anthropological concerns about giving voice to ethnographic subjects (McGranahan and Weiss 2021), I only used the Buddhist names (*hōmyō*, 法名) of practitioners not playing any public institutional role, thus refraining from using their personal names (*honmyō*, 本名) in ethnographic writing.↵

16. Note how in this diagram, focusing on the work of enunciation in the “Getting to Know You” part of the interaction ritual (as generally performed in Japan), the gesture of giving the business card, portrayed with an arrow pointing towards the Enunciatee, is counterbalanced with an arrow expected to come down in the

opposite direction from *soto* to *uchi*, signifying the continuum of indexical possibilities that situate the Self as implicated by its relation to the Other. ↩

17. My heart-felt thanks go to Sakamoto Michiyoshi for helping me with the most difficult parts of the recording, which besides the use of thick Osaka dialect were badly disturbed by the strong noise in the restaurant. ↩

18. In Paris School semiotics, these hierarchically superior actants are called Senders, and are in charge of systems of values and forms of authority (Greimas and Courtés 1982:293–95). They can play the role either of “manipulating Senders,” that is someone or something acting upon itself or upon other subjects, becoming the source of their agency, or of “sanctioning Senders,” evaluating other subjects’ deeds, or even more reflexively assessing their own courses of action. On this and other actantial roles, see Padoan 2024. ↩

19. The fact that the deal did not come through did not have any particular repercussions at the time, but later on would become an additional factor linked to an overall decline in visitors and pilgrims to Mount Kongō, due to the infrastructural and financial downfall caused by the break of the old ropeway to the top of the mountain, which happened in 2019. This event marked a sharp decrease in the number of people visiting the temple, also determining the closure of other tourist facilities on the mountain (like the old hotel and the hot water baths), and the interruption of one of the two bus lines transporting visitors from the closest railway stations (located thirty minutes away from the bottom of Mount Kongō). The ropeway closure also revealed the economic strains suffered by the nearby village of Akasaka mura, which owned the facility but does not have the financial capacity to restore the service. Nevertheless, as Shinryū told me on another occasion, the fact that the temple may only be reached by walking is not necessarily a bad thing for ascetic pilgrims, as such constraints on mobility require more commitment and resolution from visitors to get to the top of the mountain, producing spiritual benefits and a more dedicated cohort of pilgrims. ↩

20. Following Keating and Egbert (2004:180–81), in this transcript { indicates onset by a new speaker during someone else’s turn. ↩

21. Although this kind of interruption might be quite common in Japan in an already loud restaurant, the fact that after twenty minutes from the start Mr A actively disrupted Shinryū’s project ‘pitch’ for the transport idea (by way of explaining the ecological significance of Shugendō cosmology), was a bit unexpected. However, the fact that, as discussed above, Mr A asked Shinryū (rather than the abbot) to sit in front of him on the inner seat, and rarely spoke to the head of the temple, was already a clue to a possible lack of commitment on his part. In hindsight, this might have prompted Shinryū to try harder to convince Mr A about the importance of Katsuragi Shugen. ↩

22. But what if, in this turn of events, we revealed to our interlocutors that Hercule Poirot is not a fictional character projected by us or Agatha Christie (from a frame 0 populated by literary authors), but a real person, part of our own frame of reality, and that this actor may be safely identified with our own social persona? If this revelation were corroborated by legal, scientific, or even religious evidence (in the event of us ritually channeling the figure of Poirot through our body), the whole happening would certainly breach the boundaries of fictional discourse, reshuffling our interlocutors' understanding of their own frame of reality. In terms of enunciation theory, this could be described as a shifting in from frame 1—the story portraying Poirot and Hastings, which would not be fictional if everybody already knew that these two are real people—to frame 0, pertaining to our social personae, themselves the result of a shifting out (from an implied frame n-1) constantly produced and reshaped through our daily interactions. ↩

23. In this case, we may talk about an *actorial shifting in*, but such an identification could also pertain only to space—so that we might talk about a *spatial shifting in*, if they unexpectedly discovered that the Duchess in frame 2 was actually killed at Paddington Station, the same place of frame 1—or only to time—a *temporal shifting in*, if she were murdered on Christmas Eve, producing an uncanny temporal link between the event portrayed in frame 2 and the situation we describe in frame 1. But the shifting in may also involve all three dimensions—actors, spaces, and times—if in our story Poirot and Hastings saw the poker game with the Duchess suddenly materialized and reenacted in front of them at Paddington Station, either by ghosts or by impersonators. ↩

24. See Padoan 2021a for a discussion of this dialogic aspect of enunciation in relation to the work of Bakhtin (1981). ↩

25. Before Greimas and Fontanille (1993:xx) coined the term *enunciative praxis*, this idea had already been advanced by de Certeau (1984[1980]), who defines enunciation as the set of “*procedures* which articulate actions in both the field of language and the network of social practices” (ibid.:19; italics in original). Such procedures can be considered as verbal and nonverbal speech acts through which actors actualize, appropriate, and use a system of cultural values and social patterns in a particular situation of interaction. According to de Certeau (ibid.:98), cooking, reading, talking, buying, may all become *enunciative tactics* used by an urban dweller/enunciator to produce a new discourse of the city, namely different “ways of using” its *strategic* system of rules and social constraints, by *tactically* reinventing them. ↩

26. It is rather interesting to see how anthropologist Roy Wagner (1981) precisely points to ritual as a source of invention and creativity. In Wagner's analysis of *habu* ceremony among New Guinean Daribi communities—when angry spirits are impersonated and death is temporarily included into the ordinary (ibid.:88–102)—ritual becomes one of the ways through which we temporarily subvert our common truths, producing novel forms of life and new subjectivities. On the other hand, ritual may also radically transform ‘innate’

worldviews (i.e., signifying points of view that people apprehend and assume to be part of a semiotics of the natural world, see Greimas 1987; Greimas and Courtés 1982:374–5), when newly produced forms of life start being socially accepted and become “natural,” stereotyped, part of the order of things of specific socio-cultural groups (including our own). This revolutionary property of the culture/nature dialectic, when the invention of cultural forms goes back to affect our own assumptions about what is natural and innate, is strikingly similar to the way in which de Certeau (1984[1980]) described “*l’invention du quotidien*” through the mechanism of enunciation. ↩

27. Yellow (ō, 黄) for Fudō Myōō (不動明王) in the center, blue/green (*shō*, 青) for Gōsanze Myōō (降三世明王, Sanskrit: *Trailokyavijaya vidyārāja*) towards the east, red (*seki*, 赤) for Gundari Myōō (軍荼利明王, Sanskrit: *Kuṇḍali vidyārāja*) towards the south, white (*haku*, 白) for Daiitoku Myōō (大威徳明王 (Sanskrit: *Yamāntaka vidyārāja*) towards the west, black/violet (*koku*, 黒) for Kongō Yasha Myōō (金剛夜叉明王, Sanskrit: *Vajrayakṣa vidyārāja*) towards the north. ↩

28. This understanding of learning as a bodily and situated activity of social interaction and participation—as opposed to a modern Western understanding of learning as a cognitive transfer of information from one brain to another—is much indebted to the seminal work of Lave and Wenger (1991). See Swift 2022 for a discussion of learning in a Japanese New Religion. ↩

29. Clifford Geertz (1973) maintained a sort of ambiguous approach, as while his classic definition of religion as a cultural system points to an already stipulated system of symbols that provides a framework for an interpretation of experience, his essay “Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, attempts to show how religious rituals can themselves be seen as a source of social conflict and transformation. By examining the contrasts and tensions generated by a funeral in a small town on the eastern side of the Indonesian province of Central Java, Geertz precisely explains how the function of ritual is also deconstructing and remaking the social structure, by producing a discontinuity with the past not necessarily seen as cultural disintegration, but as a quest for new meaning (Geertz 1973:142–69). ↩

30. For instance, Maurice Bloch (1989:43–45) talks about ritual as a specific technology of power. Such a power is exercised by religious specialists who would be able to achieve an atemporal and absolute value, by depersonalizing themselves as a coercive and incontestable authority postulated by the illocutionary force of ritual language. Turner (1967:151–279) instead, in his long analysis of the Mukanda ritual of circumcision, marking the coming-of-age passage among the Ndembu in Zambia, demonstrates how ritual would be an arena for competing forces between old and emerging leaders. The leaders try, in fact, to establish their political authority in the village through a long negotiation, which will lead them to play the most important ceremonial role in the initiation of the young members of the community. ↩

31. Such an interplay and alternate foregrounding of iconic and indexical aspects may, thus, in turn, be recursively found at the metalinguistic level, also within the large body of scholarly theorizations of full-tilt ritual. ↩

32. The original *kanbun* text is “宿次第<行者歩々御足下、六万九千三百八十四字、散無余念乱心、五種法師行立十願發行給所之峯也>” (NST 20:353). The “five kinds of monastic practice” (*goshu hōshi gyō* 五種法師行) are five modes of ritual activity here associated with the *Lotus Sutra*, namely learning, reading, recitation, explanation and transcription. On *Shozan engi*, see Kawasaki 2005; Roth Al Eid 2014; and Grapard 1982. ↩

33. This figure follows the Tenpōrinji abbot’s estimate based on the total walking distance covered by the ascetics during the entire pilgrimage. ↩

34. Even the majority of Tsukasakō-initiated members are not fully ordained monks, but lay people with their daily jobs, families, conducting an ordinary life during the week and going to the mountains to perform ascetic practices over the weekends. Shugen initiation is in fact considered a parallel path to becoming a monk, sometimes complementary to it but which does not require standard monastic ordination—except for the fact that higher ranks are usually also part of the Buddhist clergy. ↩

35. When I first started my participant observation within this ascetic community in 2008, the son of the abbot, who was about 9 years old at the time, also used to join the pilgrimage. As far as people are fit and can walk, they are encouraged to join. But an important part of the practice is also learning to help each other during the walk. Whenever pilgrims feel sick or exhausted and need to take some rest, the abbot is happy to slow down a bit and have a short break, even arranging for a member of the ascetic community to accompany someone back to the nearest bus or train station when they are not able to continue due to injuries or extreme fatigue. ↩

36. See chapter 10, “Preachers of Dharma,” which also contains other examples of such identifications (T 9.262.30b; Hurvitz 1976:174). ↩

37. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (2007) provide other ethnographic examples of nonrepresentational approaches to materiality. ↩

38. I draw the notion of *semiotic machine* from the specific definition provided by Deleuze and Guattari (1987:63, 70) as a performative, relational and multiplying collective assemblage of enunciation, a regime of signs crossed by continuums of intensity and molecular particles in constant vibration—as we see below, the vibration of mantric sacred syllables which are the signs composing the universe according to Shingon esoteric discourse. ↩

39. This form of immanence and the one described by Sahlins (2022) belong to two different orders of immanence, the latter being cosmological, and the former being only methodological. According to Hammad (2006), culturally constructed axial systems are immanent insofar as they may be semiotically investigated by shifting the point of view of places and things into our own perspective, trying to figure out how the world looks like, and how it deictically unfolds, from their position, so to speak. However, the two orders of immanence are related, insofar as immanent ontologies ethnographically found around the world, may inspire scholars to translate the subjectivity of places and things into a methodological stance, which looks at their “immanent referential” in order to make sense of anthropological worlds in general, beyond any Nature/Society divide. ↩

40. See, for example, Bachnik’s (1995) analysis of Japanese funerals, based on the shifting deictic anchoring of *uchi/soto* (inside/outside) and *omote/ura* (front/back). ↩

41. The arrows in Figure 7 show the three main axes of the immanent referential scheme embedded in the sutra mound, pointing into the direction of the ascetics as to face them, upwardly in order to mark verticality and parallelism with them as their reciprocally standing co-participant interactant in ritual action, and laterally to mark the figured presence of other invisible deities who preside over the performance (the arrow is pointing to the right of the sutra mound, only due to the fact that the right side is more prominent than the left in Buddhist iconography, *from the perspective of the living buddhas* themselves). The intersection of the three axes marks the centre of reference for the entire ceremony, coinciding with the sutra mound as ‘zero’ point which indexically structures the ritual space around it—as practitioners need to place themselves in the correct front-standing position deictically projected by the mound in order to perform their devotions. ↩

42. Buddhist deities evoked through mantras during this ritual include Hōki Bosatsu, Zaō Gongen (蔵王権現), Fudō Myōō, the Seven Great Womb Divine Children of Katsuragi (*Katsuragi shichidai taizō dōji*, 葛城七大胎蔵童子) and the Eight Great Vajra Divine Children of Ōmine (*Ōmine hachidai kongō dōji*, 大峰八大金剛童子). ↩

43. Immanent referentials embodied by nonhuman actors do not trigger chains of actions and passions in a deterministic way. They are “virtual” schemas embedded in material-semiotic objects and situations, culturally constructed and based on expected *volitions* and *obligations* that, when “actualized” by interactants, may be met, however, with different degrees of *knowledge* and *ability*, and performed or “realized” even in unintended and unexpected ways (Hammad 2002[1989]:42–67). We might include in the latter case not only the examples of adjustment and mishaps in ritual apprenticeship explored in the previous sections, but also the experience of hikers and tourists who either lack ritual competence or visit these places with purposes different from mountain asceticism (like recreation, outings, or contact with nature). ↩

44. Christopher Ball (2014), relying on historical work conducted by Alan Grapard (1989) on Kunisaki peninsula in the medieval period—where the pilgrimage to the twenty-eight sutra mounds had spread from Katsuragi (Grapard 2016:200, 227)—analyzed the inscription of the *Lotus Sutra* in the mountain landscape through the concept of “dicentization,” or production of an indexical link between places and scripture via the practitioners’ heart/mind considered as dicent interpretant. What I would add to Ball’s discussion is the need to take into account the scriptural, historical, and ethnographic evidence that points to Japanese interpretations of the *Lotus Sutra* as the living word of the Buddha and, at the same time, as his relic and acting body. Such a fluidity and collapse between different semiotic entities does not only produce an indexical connection between places and scripture through human dicent signs, but also configures the sutra mounds as nonhuman actors in ritual interaction with practitioners. From the “sign’s-eye point of view” (Silverstein 2004:631), the semiotic entities shifting in through the indexical movement of enunciation are not a place and a scripture (sign and object) that are then unified through a dicent human heart/mind (the interpretant). Rather, they are the two couples of terms diagrammatically arranged, namely, human bodies : places :: En no Gyōja : body of the Buddha. (Here, by diagram I follow Peirce’s [1931–1935:2.277] definition of *diagram* as an iconic likeness between two configurations, an actual sign vehicle and its virtual object, whose internal components are indexically related, as in $a:b::c:d$.)↵

45. The terms *virtual*, *actualized*, and *realized*, mentioned above, refer to the semiotic theory of “modes of existence,” used in Paris School semiotics first by Greimas and then by Fontanille (Greimas and Fontanille 1993; Fontanille 2007). We can describe the modes of existence as the different degrees of presence (or “levels of reality”) through which semiotic entities are manifested in verbal and nonverbal discourses (Fontanille 2007:34–36). Such entities could be *virtualized* as immanent orientations offered to enunciators, *actualized* as concrete possibilities based on various degrees of competence acquired by the enunciators, *realized* and transformed in the “we-here-now” of their discursive performance, or *potentialized* and sent back as collective memory once modified through performance, as a cultural stock of schematizations and stereotypes ready to be virtualized again (ibid.:199–202). As explained by Fontanille (ibid.:117–18), these modes are closely linked to a narrative and discursive theory of modalities. “Virtualized” modes are associated with *obligations* (having to) and *volitions* (wanting), “actualized” modes with *ability* (being able) and *knowledge* (knowing), “realized” modes with the *performance* of semiotic acts (doing) and forms of *identity* (being), and “potentialized” modes with *epistemic stances* towards objects (believing in something) or subjects (believing in someone). The semiotic entities produced by ritual discourse in the Katsuragi pilgrimage could thus be described as *virtualized* (En no Gyōja and the Body of the Buddha, as immanent traces in the landscape), *actualized* (ascetics and the sutra mounds, with their mutual capacities and skills), and *realized* (as embodiment or “shifting in” of the two virtual terms into the actual ones, through ritual performance). Finally, although we will not deal here directly with the potential mode, we could argue that these semiotic entities were historically *potentialized* in the Meiji period (1868–1912), when Katsuragi Shugen was persecuted and the whole pilgrimage was banned due to the emergence of a “purified” State

Shinto (*kokka shintō*, 国家神道) and the “clarification of *kami* local gods from the buddhas” to support the imperialist ideology (*shinbutsu hanzen*, 神仏判然; Suzuki 2020:36). This phase of potentialization (sometimes locally challenged, Shudō 2012; cf. Sekimori 2005) lasted until the second afterwar period when such entities were *virtualized* once again, with the revival of Shugen practices on the Katsuragi mountains (on this, see Padoan 2024). ↩

46. Although a certain degree of indexicality is infused in all the Jakobsonian functions, which should be more precisely qualified as “metapragmatic,” the kind of metapragmatics found in the poetic function is “reflexively calibrated” (Silverstein 2023:43), that is, it points internally towards the message itself in a reflexive way. As Jakobson (1960:356) explains, “The set (*Einstellung*) toward the MESSAGE as such, focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language.” This happens because “*The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the [paradigmatic] axis of selection into the [syntagmatic] axis of combination*” (ibid.:358, italics in original), thus shifting the focus from the contingent processuality of the message to its internal systematic arrangement, made of parallelistic metricalization, paronomasia, etc. It is for this reason that, in the poetic function, the iconic “principle of equivalence” becomes more prominent than indexical contingency, creating a stronger link between poetics and iconicity—although indexicality still continues to work in a reflexively calibrated way. ↩

47. My sincere thanks go to Emiliano Battistini for the musical transcription and technical musicological explanation of the audio recording of this performance. ↩

Appendix: Translation of *Hannya Shingyō* (from BDK 2001:127–28)

Heart Sutra of the Great Wisdom Perfection

The Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, when practicing the profound Perfection of Wisdom, had an illuminating vision of the emptiness of all five *skandhas*, and so forth. Thus, she overcomes all suffering and ills. Śāriputra, form does not differ from emptiness, and emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form. So are feeling, perception, impulses, consciousness, and so forth. Therefore, Śāriputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness: they are not produced nor extinguished, not defiled nor immaculate, not increased nor decreased. Therefore, in emptiness there is no form, feeling, perception, impulses, nor consciousness. No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no form, sound, smell, taste, touchables, nor object of mind, no sight-organ realm, and so forth, until we come to no mind-consciousness realm. No ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, up to there being no old age and death, nor no extinction of old age and death. No suffering, no cause, no cessation, and no path. There is no knowledge and no attainment. Therefore, because of non-attainment, the bodhisattva, having relied on the Perfection of Wisdom, abides without mental obstructions. Because, of the nonexistence of mental obstructions, he has no fear, has overcome all perverted views, has left dreamlike thoughts far behind, and in the end achieves nirvana. All Buddhas of the

three periods of time, after relying on the Perfection of Wisdom, realize unsurpassed, right, complete enlightenment. Therefore, one should know the Perfection of Wisdom as the great marvellous mantra, the great illuminating mantra, the unsurpassed mantra, the unequalled mantra which eliminates all suffering. It is true. By the Perfection of Wisdom has this mantra been delivered. It goes like this: Gone, Gone Beyond, Gone Altogether Beyond, Oh! What an Awakening! All Hail! The Heart of Wisdom Sutra.

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