

NAKA-IMA 中今
Space in Japan

Paul de Leeuw

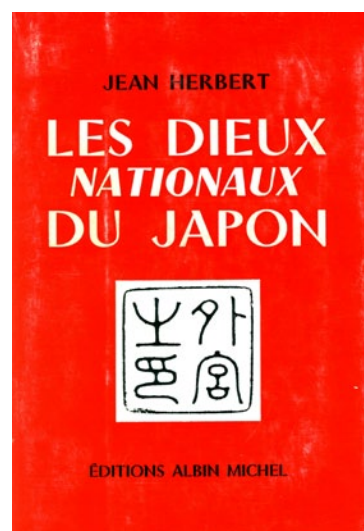
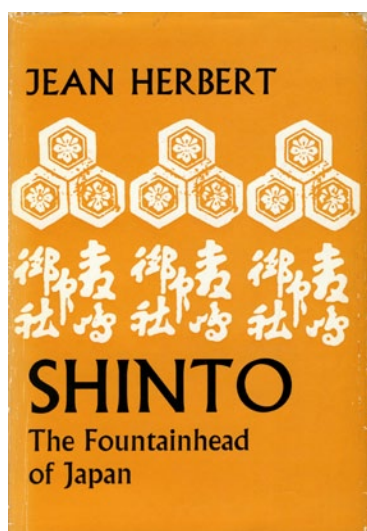
An Unorthodox Approach
In grateful memory of Jean Herbert (1897-1980)

Shintō: The Fountainhead of Japan was published in 1967 as an unorthodox approach of a relatively unknown aspect of Japanese culture. Originally it was written in French and published in two volumes. The first volume, *Aux sources du Japon: Le Shintō* (1964), was crowned by the French Academy. The French and English editions are written by one author, Jean Herbert. How fluent he was in French and English is indicated by his métier as first Chief Interpreter of the United Nations in New York after its founding in 1945. At the University of Geneva he held the chair of Eastern Mythology. As if challenging the limits of human imagination, fate saw him in the same space and time as the multicultural writer, Jorge Luis Borges, who also lived in Geneva.

The Fountainhead of Japan is an unusual book by a remarkable author, who showed the greatest sympathy instead of the usual contempt for Shintō that even the greatest Western experts had shown until then. In his introduction Jean Herbert explains his unusual approach.

The purpose of this book is to present to Western readers Shintō, the national Japanese religion, as it is understood and practiced by the Japanese in our time. My main source of information has been Shintō priests alive today, about their beliefs, teachings and practice. I also appealed to Japanese theologians and other professors of Shintō for elucidation in many cases when the statements made by the clergy were vague, confused or contradictory. I systematically abstained from consulting any person who did not profess Shintō.

The preparation of this book required many years. During my various stays in Japan between 1935 and 1964 I devoted most of my time to interviewing the high-priests of hundreds of shrines, from the North of Honshu to the South of Kyushu, including practically all the most



Books by Jean Herbert.



エルベール博士（中央）と、藤沢親雄教授（左から2人目）、佐藤定吉教授（右から2人目）。神道研究に來日されたエルベール博士を案内される諸先生。（昭和31年）



玉串奉尊中の仏人ジャン・エルベール博士（仏国国立TV撮影・撮影臨時祭・山藤神道齋宮にて）

Jean Herbert in Japan.

important, but also many unpretentious country side shrines. I usually spent with them between half a day and a whole week. The number of my informers rose to well over 300 and I built up individual files on each one of about 950 temples.

I also received the constant support of the Jinja Honcho (National Association of Shintō Shrines) and Kokugakuin University Tokyo. All my informers did all they could do to make me imbibe the spirit of Shintō. On several occasions they kindly allowed me to take part in religious services and spiritual practices exclusively reserved to Shintō priests.

The task was difficult for many reasons. One of them is that Shintō is based on concepts totally different from those found in other great religions. The most elementary and fundamental questions which in other cases can normally be answered in a couple of words, do not apply; hence the most competent and best-intentioned informers are at a total loss to give a valid and intelligible reply – it was just as if one were asking a musician whether the sonata he was playing was written in English or in French, painted in oil or in water-colours.

These difficulties may explain why Shintō, so far, has been so thoroughly misunderstood by the greatest Western experts.¹

The English version has a List of Sources, mentioning the names of 296 informants and the titles of 482 written sources. All numbered quotations in the book can be traced back to this list.

It is characteristic of his unusual approach that he avoids attempts to reconcile contradictory quotations from different informers about the same subject. He accepts the coexistence of mutually contradicting realities, since he is aware that contradiction exists only on the level of diction, or language. Beyond language he acknowledges the world of experience. The most important thing he learnt from his research of Shintō was the true understanding of the principle of here and now.² Language was the lesser part of his road to knowledge; wisdom had to be attained by the spiritual practices of Shintō. He writes about the spiritual practices of Shintō in *Chapter 3*. In this chapter we learn more about *Metaphysics, Ethics, Spiritual exercises and Aesthetics* and we learn about the existence of a mystic tradition of Shintō. He had actually joined some spiritual exercises. Thanks to his own practice he could understand that an essential idea of Shintō - *Purity and Beauty always go hand in hand* - is not just a written text, but a way of life.

1 Jean Herbert, *Shintō: The Fountainhead of Japan*, London, 1967, p. 13.

2 “Du Shintō, Jean Herbert déclare avoir tiré un grand principe ‘Ici et maintenant’.” Josette Herbert, “Un auteur et son œuvre: Jean Herbert (1897-1980),” *Les carnets du yoga* 5 (mai 1979), pp. 2-15.

Since other Western experts seem to avoid such a useful combination of research and practice, they continue to ignore the difficulties Jean Herbert mentioned in his introduction. What is worse, in a misplaced attempt to follow the footsteps of their Western examples, most Japanese intellectuals also have turned their back on native Shintō.

Shintō and Modern Japan

In order to explain the current position of Shinto I need to insert here my personal experience. Just like Jean Herbert I have had the ample opportunity to study Shintō, and I did so with great enthusiasm and respect. My teachers in Japan *did all they could do to make me imbibe the spirit of Shintō*. The words in italics are Jean Herbert's. In 1979 I entered the Shintō school whose mystic tradition Jean Herbert had described in great detail in Chapter 3 of his book. In this Yamakage Shintō School beauty and purity still lived hand in hand. It was my first stay in Japan and I experienced this place and its inhabitants as an authentic part of Japan. Later, when I had the opportunity to meet other Japanese people, it came more as a shock than as a deception that this place of beauty and purity was exceptional. Indeed, in common life the Japanese are not so eager to show interest in Shintō.

The fact that Shintō has become a thing of the past became clear to me at the moment that I listened to the words of Hamuro Yoriaki, Chief Priest of Kasuga Shrine. He gave a lecture in the Japanese Netherlands Cultural Center in Amsterdam. To my great astonishment he stated: *Japanese should be proud of Shintō*. It was a shock for me to realize that most Japanese have turned their back on Shintō. Everybody seems to have forgotten what it really is, being prejudiced and reversely brainwashed by the destructive effects of State Shintō. It took a rather long time for me to contemplate this situation from all possible points of



Master Yamakage and Student De Leeuw.

view. A crucial moment happened during an interview for a Japanese magazine. The interviewer did not try to hide her hostile attitude. She started with a rude question: “Why did you study Shintō, and not - like everybody else - Zen?” My answer was not defensive, but I started to talk about Zen as a vision of nature. Also I made it clear that Shintō is basic for the Japanese sense of nature. When she understood this, the interviewer heaved a sigh of relief, as if she finally realized how modern Japanese ideology had erased the memory of Shintō’s beauty and purity.

However, the Japanese view of modernity could not prevent the emergence of Shintō shrines outside Japan. The author of this article founded a Shintō shrine in Holland as early as 1981. In 1995 an American instructor of Aikidō built a Shintō shrine in the USA. Being an expression of universal respect for, and gratitude to nature, these non-Japanese Shintō shrines start to challenge the so-called modern Japanese ideology. However, without the seminal work of great minds like Jean Herbert, who wrote *The Fountainhead of Japan*, Shintō would never have been known outside Japan. Not only should Jean Herbert be credited, it would also be rewarding to make a study of the involvement of other writers, like Jorge Luis Borges and Claude Lévy-Strauss.

Jean Herbert and State Shintō

Having praised Jean Herbert as a true pioneer of Shintō, we should not overlook one major flaw in his definition of State Shintō.

Kokka Shintō, or what was called before the disestablishment State *Shintō*, and is now renamed *Jinja Shintō*, is accepted as evident truth by practically every Japanese, just as every Christian believes that the World has been created by God. It is the belief that the *Kami*, the Emperor, the Japanese People and the Japanese Islands have the same ancestors and are therefore of the same kin. Consequentially there are rules of behaviour that ensure the continuing benefit of this consanguinity.³

Referring to *Kokka Shintō*, State *Shintō* and *Jinja Shintō* as the same thing, Herbert regrettably followed a persistent orthodox approach of Shintō that identified the disestablished State Shintō and Jinja Shintō with the Fountainhead of Japan. I presume that his enthusiasm and sympathy for Shintō prevented him from looking directly at the historical fact that State Shintō was a political invention that postdated the Meiji Reformation (1868), and that eventually it turned into a manipulative tool that was used to herd the Japanese nation towards the Second World War. The American Headquarters in Tokyo abolished State Shintō after the war, by separating Shintō from the State and guaranteeing freedom for every religion. As a first-generation staff member of the United Nations Jean Herbert must have known these facts, but in an attempt to rehabilitate the original sense of Shintō, he may have averted his eyes deliberately from the dark site of Shintō, which was already too well known, and concentrated upon the pure and beautiful aspects, of which his 296 informers supplied him with ample information. This might have been the reason that “he systematically abstained from consulting any person who did not profess Shintō.” In hindsight it is really lucky for us that he found so many informers amongst the majority of Japanese who had turned their back on Shintō. He has collected and stored precious information from a minority still alive, information that preceded the doctrines of State Shintō by a thousand years or more. In his book he succeeds in explaining the cultural and human landscape of Japan by means of Shintō. He used the metaphor of a

3 Jean Herbert, *Shintō: The Fountainhead of Japan*, Allen and Unwin: London, 1967, p. 57.

Fountainhead: Shintō is a meandering river nourishing all levels of society. After the book had been out of print for forty years, finally a reprint became available in 2010.⁴

Privately, however, Jean Herbert did not support the orthodox idea prevailing in Western academic circles. He did not agree with the definition of Shintō as only “a religion of Japanese local communities and of the Japanese people as a national community.”⁵ Instead, he understood that Shintō is universal and valid for cultures outside of Japan.

Another unorthodox approach: Shintō is universal

This personal attitude of Jean Herbert has been seminal of the rise of universal Shintō. At the beginning of this article I already have mentioned my practical study of Shintō. Here I will elaborate my personal history, in which Jean Herbert has played such a decisive role.

My first and only meeting with Jean Herbert was in 1977 in Paris. He gave a lecture about Shintō in the *Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord*, which was the location of Peter Brook’s Institute for International Theatre Research, where I attended a master class for actors and dancers. The master class was supervised by a famous Japanese actor, who was assisted by Japanese specialists in the arts of Kendō, Aikidō, Nō, Buddhism, and Shintō. One day was scheduled for lectures about Japanese arts. Among the speakers were Michel Random, Jean Herbert, and Yamakage Motohisa. Both French speakers showed their fascination for the fire ceremony they had witnessed in the Yamakage Shintō Shrine.

After the master class I received an invitation from the Shintō Grand Master Yamakage to continue my study of Japanese arts in the Shintō school in Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan. My study was mainly non-verbal, but I was requested to keep a diary. This was eventually published and became a guidebook for the future students of the Yamakage Shintō School.⁶

In order to write I got my own desk in the office. One day I found the book of Jean Herbert on my desk. On the title page it had his signature and a dedication. I found that Grand Master Yamakage was mentioned many times as a source of information, especially for spiritual teaching. I recognized his descriptions in chapter 3 as part of my daily exercise. When I mentioned this, Yamakage told me that I was very lucky to spend a much longer time in his school than Jean Herbert. One day we got the news from Switzerland that Jean Herbert had died. Immediately we made a fire ceremony to pacify his soul. Grand Master Yamakage wrote an obituary, of which the following part is significant.

A Gift for Shintō

One day he (Jean Herbert) said to me (Yamakage Motohisa) in the train: "Please don't propagate Shintō, though I admit it is good enough to be universal. People will come to Shintō surely when necessary." I remember his words sounded to me rather shocking and I contemplated them for a long time.

Indeed, a religion is inseparable from natural features, climate, custom or language of the people. If we propagate a particular religion to foreign people, we may not avoid to neglect their native originality with insisting upon our superiority, and finally to fight. What is worse, the religion itself might be distorted.

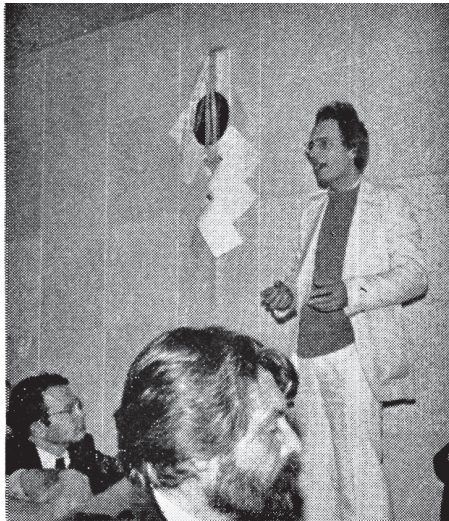
He meant to give us the most earnest warning because he was most afraid of the distortion of Shintō, for his great respect for it.

4 Jean Herbert, *Shinto: At the Fountainhead of Japan*, Routledge: London, 2010.

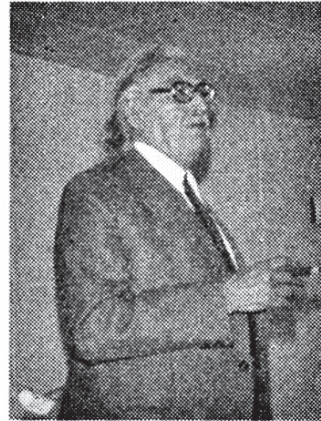
5 Colin Mackerras, *Eastern Asia: An Introductory History*, French Forest: Pearson Education Australia, 2000 [1992], p 55.

6 Paul de Leeuw, *Ware wa kagami nari, I am a Mirror*, transl. Komuro Yoshitsugu, ed. Yamakage Motohisa, Tokyo, 1980.

パリにおけるフランス政府主催の「人間性回復道場」において「映画（神道・武道）」を上映してくれた。フランス国営放送のプロデューサー「ミッシェル・ランドン」氏の講演風景。



Michel Randon in Bouffes du Nord.



ジュネーブ大学教授、ジャン・エルベール博士もわざわざスイスよりかけつけて筆者のために「神道」の讃辞を述べてくれた。

Jean Herbert in Bouffes du Nord.



Jean Herbert, Yamakage Motohisa, Michel Randon.

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHE THEATRALE

9, RUE DU CIRQUE

PARIS VIII^e

TEL. 359 13-33+

Paris, le 1er Septembre 1977

Monsieur Masando SASAKI
1-201-4 Kami fukuoka
Kami fukuoka-Shi
Saitama-Ken
Japon

Cher Monsieur Sasaki,

Nous sommes heureux de vous inviter à venir à Paris du 26 Septembre au 20 Décembre 1977 pour participer, en tant que Professeur de Shinto, à l'Atelier que Yoshi Oida dirigera au Studio des Bouffes du Nord.

Cet Atelier, qui bénéficie de l'appui du Ministère Français des Affaires Culturelles, a pour but d'enseigner les techniques du théâtre traditionnel japonais à une soixantaine de participants de nationalités diverses.

Nous vous confirmons, en outre, que vos frais de voyage et de séjour seront assurés par nos soins.

Dans l'attente du plaisir de faire votre connaissance, veuillez accepter, Cher Monsieur, l'expression de nos meilleures salutations.

Regine Guitschula

Régine GUITSCHULA
Administratrice

フランス俳優協会からの招請状

Entraînement du matin.
(ouvert à tous)

Lun Mer Sam } 10:30 - 11:30 Shintō avec M^r SASAKI

Mar }
Jeu Sam } 10:30 - 11:30 Boukkyo avec M^r NAGAOKA

Mar } supprimés à partir du 29 novembre
Jeu } 16:30 - 17:30 Shintō avec M^r SASAKI

	Lun, Mer, Sam	Mar, Jeu, Ven.
12:00	⑤ Kendo, avec M ^r YOSHI MURA	⑤ Kendo, avec M ^r YOSHIMURA et SASAKI
1:05	⑤ Les nouveaux avec M ^r NAGAOKA	Nettoyer la salle ④
2:30	④ Tous le monde, avec M ^r SASAKI	④ Tous le monde, avec M ^r SASAKI (sans les nouveaux)
4:00	⑤ Les nouveaux avec M ^r SASAKI	④ Tous le monde avec M ^r NAGAOKA (les nouveaux y compris)
4:30		5:45 - 6:45 pour les nouveaux. Mais 4:30 - !
5:45	⑤ = Salle du Théâtre.	④ Salle du Théâtre.

パリの人間性回復道場の日程表

Bouffes du Nord, Schedule.

Shinto Bouffes du Nord.

Yet I should say I may not have understood the full significance of what he said, until now when I see a Dutch young man has in fact come to Japan to learn Shintō.⁷

When I had read this part about their meeting and conversation, I understood that my being in Japan was only the tip of an iceberg. It had started long time ago, when the two of them realized that Shintō was universal. Without their meeting the door to Shintō would never have been opened to me but would have stayed locked by the phrase: Shintō is only for Japanese.

My sense of space was suddenly widened and included parts of time that I had not physically attended. Also I started wondering about two other possibilities that never had happened. First, Jean Herbert had met so many other Shintō masters, why had none of them opened his school for a foreigner? And second, Netherlands and Japan have such a long relationship, already since 1600. Why had there never been a Dutchman who made the same discovery as Jean Herbert?

Thinking about these probabilities I became aware of a universe full of “impossible” layers. Our actual world is just one layer in space, but it is as if we have no time to visit the other ones, which are located beyond our possibilities. This idea of “impossibility” belongs to an ancient philosophy, starting with the Chinese scriptures of Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), and also explored by French philosophers like Bergson and Deleuze. The latter created a special kind of film theory in order to develop his philosophy. Later in this article I will use this theory to explore the Japanese concept of *naka-ima* or “here and now.”

In my study of literature I had already met the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, who was a master in imagining impossible worlds, especially in his short stories: *The Aleph* (1949), and *The Garden of the Forking Path* (1941) and *A Survey of the Works of Herbert Quain* (1941).

The meeting and mutual understanding between Yamakage and Jean Herbert was a multicultural event that marked the beginning of a long road to the rediscovery of Shintō as a universal way of life. Shintō would say that this “coincidence” is *kami no michi* – the way of *kami*. Borges has described this already in his own words: “Any human life consists in reality of one moment – the moment when you know for all times who you are” (*Other Inquisitions*).



Yamakage Motohisa.

7 Yamakage Motohisa, “Don’t propagate Shinto,” unpublished obituary of Jean Herbert, manuscript of 1981.

Naka-ima



Borges' hand in Izumo Taisha.



Akiba Mountain.

When I returned to Europe, Grand Master Yamakage recommended me to visit Jean Herbert's house in Switzerland and see his wife, Josette Herbert. She was pleased to receive me and willing to share her husband's experiences in Japan. Most impressive had been the visits to sacred places like Ise and Izumo Shrine, but also unpretentious shrines in the countryside. I told her about my visits to the Akiba Mountain in Shizuoka-ken, the residence of the kami of fire (Ho-musubi-no-kami). At the time of my visit the wooden shrine was burnt by accident, but on the bare mountain there was still a very small wooden shrine. It was there that I experienced for the first time a strong vibration, as if I entered a magnetic field. Grand Master Yamakage, who accompanied me on this trip, was amazed that I could sense this vibration, and he explained to me that this was the energy of *kami*, for which even the majority of Japanese is insensible. It had nothing to do with extrasensory perception, because I could feel a change of intensity. The closer I came to the source, the stronger it became. Thanks to his discovery of my hidden capacity Grand Master Yamakage granted me the nearly impossible task to find in the Netherlands a similar place that had *kami* vibration. He explained to me that this would be the original location where the *kami* of the Netherlands had resided since olden times. Due to the fact that this *kami*

had been out of service for thousands of years, it would be extremely hard to discover the remaining vibration, which would be extremely faint. Besides, he warned me not to tell this story to other Dutch people, for they would think that I was out of my mind. Fortunately Mrs. Herbert acknowledged my story. Her husband had the same sensibility and was praised for it by Grand Master Yamakage. Understandably, he had decided never to write about it, but he had found a similar location in France where *kami* resides. It is a famous mountain in the Provence, which was immortalized by the Italian poet Petrarch, who had lived there in reclusion to get inspiration for his cycle of sonnets. He also wrote an essay about climbing the Mt. Ventoux, while he cherished the company of one book, St Augustine's *Confessions*. A plaque commemorating Petrarch's stay is still visible in the Fontaine de Vaucluse. Of course, the presence of this *kami*

is rather unnoticed, but might still be visible in the whirls of the fountain. Mrs. Herbert encouraged me to find the *kami*-place in Holland and after several years of roaming I finally located the spot. Of course, this kind of information will rouse the curiosity of my readers, but I prefer to state here explicitly that where it is, is of less relevance than that which exists.

The existence of such a place in Holland or France seems odd, while in Japan it is natural. In Japan there are thousands of these places, indicated by a rock, a grove or a sacred rope. They still belong to daily life, even in the age of modernity. Perhaps it is a price paid for modernity that these places disappear from our consciousness. A short story by the Chinese writer Ah Cheng illustrates a similar process, how the natural awe for sacred space is decaying.

外人、神道研究家の大権威ジュネーブ大
学教授、ジャン・エルベール博士と登拝し
た秋葉山中の記念撮影（昭和四十二年八月）



Jean Herbert, spiritual zone.

At the beginning of the so-called Cultural Revolution a group of Educated Youth is sent to the mountains, in order to clear the trees and reclaim a waste of land in order to plant useful seeds. One mountain is already cleared, but nobody dares to cut one solitary tree that is called “the King of Trees.” A wise old man, a failed hero of the revolution, stood up against the students to protect this last tree. “This tree has to be spared. Even if the rest of them fall, this one will stand as witness.” “Witness to what?” Witness to the work of the Supreme God in Heaven!” The students burst out laughing. “Man will triumph over Heaven. Did the gods bring the land under cultivation? No, man did it, to feed himself. Did the gods forge iron? No, man did, to make tools and transform nature, including your Supreme God in Heaven of course.” It took four days to fell the Giant Tree and the man who had protected the tree in vain, died of grievance. He was buried at the foot of the fallen tree. However, its extensive roots system had put forth a tangled mess of new shoots and a patch of grass with white flowers grew over the gravesite. Whenever people look up into its direction, they still see the huge trunk, scarred like a man who had fallen, and the patch of white flowers like bones exposed in dismembered limbs.⁸

In Western philosophy we are inclined to see sacred spaces in relation to time. The ultimate sacred space, Heaven, is separated from us by a gap of time. Often it is called metaphysical. Likewise, the experience of “here and now” is often compared to enlightenment that transports us to another dimension of time.

Perhaps the most important thing that Jean Herbert has learnt from his experience in Japan was the idea of *naka-ima* as a spatial concept of here and now. In the Eastern way of

8 Ah Cheng, *The King of Trees*, transl. Bonnie McDougall, New Directions, 2010.

thinking Nature is a space where present, past and future concur. *Naka-ima*, literally: the core of the present comprises Great Nature (*Dai Shizen*). Nature is not a place we can visit, but is the space where we feel home. It is the home of the present generation, but also of the past and future generations, our ancestors and descendants. Taking care of nature implies a vision of long duration, which ridicules the cheaper attempts to make short-term profits and which reveals the real meaning of sustainability.

Time exists as an experience of sharing images of *naka-ima*. The sacred space is awesome, because we feel that time stands still and we feel connected to an open universe, which we share with our ancestors and descendants. While the awareness of eternal space is present, consciously or unconsciously, in the Japanese mind, it is conspicuously absent in the Western mind.

Since this notion of space is hard to understand but, in my opinion, crucial for the understanding of Japanese culture, I will resort to one of the most recent theories in film studies, based upon the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. In his two books about images in cinema he developed the cinematic concept of *out-of-field* as a means to understand the Universe. In the next paragraph I will apply this cinematic concept to a Japanese movie in order to make clear how awareness of sacred space is present in the Japanese mind.

Out-of-field in the film Shara by Kawase Naomi, 2003

Out-of-field

Language, especially the art of literature, is the best way to tell a narrative. With the invention of film mankind developed a powerful tool to go beyond the limitations of language and narrative. However for some reason the development of film took the direction of narrative and left a much more interesting field unexplored. While the unit of language is the word, the unit of film is the frame. The frame is a composition of sound and image and may contain a fraction of language in the sound. Sound and image can be composed in such a way that they support each other, but the combination has the full potential to create a paradox, too. The playwright Mishima Yukio used this paradoxical combination in one of his modern Nō-plays. The Zen-inspired director David Lynch created confusing movies, where the narrative suddenly jumps into another world, where the same persons are no longer the same. A famous example is a scene in *Lost Highway*, where the main character is confronted in a phone call with himself in a place where he does not want to be. The combination of frames allows for simultaneity of otherwise impossible worlds. These movies might have been the dream of Jorge Luis Borges.

The apparatus of film is a metaphor of how consciousness works within our own culture. Common sense functions as a convenient frame inside which everything can be easily managed. What is outside the frame, simply does not exist, or will be managed inside another frame of common sense. Since film is a sequence of frames, the spectator is allowed to see what is within the frame and is denied to see what is outside the frame. In this theory, our knowledge becomes limited within the boundaries of space, i.e. the frame. Sometimes what is outside one frame will be revealed in the next one. Another word for what is outside the frame is: “out-of-field.” In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *2: The Time Image* the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze made a creative study of film in order to develop his philosophy of difference. He made an important distinction between two types of out-of-field: relative and absolute. Relative means that an out-of-field sooner or later can be put inside a frame. Absolute means that an out-of-field never will be framed.

Even in narrative film there is an absolute out-of-field. For most spectators it is not necessary to be conscious of it, for it does not provide relevant data for a better understanding of the film. This absolute out-of-field contains the political, economical and cultural background that is shared by the spectators and the directors. This type of out-of-field becomes significant if a spectator with another cultural background becomes involved. In such a case its absolute value should be reconsidered and in ideal circumstances the spectators might become aware that their economical or cultural backgrounds are embedded in more or less relative layers. This awareness has started with the rise of feminist and queer theories and will continue with the growing exchange in multicultural film festivals.

In Deleuze's theory the absolute out-of-field "testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to 'insist' or 'subsist', a more radical elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time."⁹ So the study of film can be seen as an analysis of a sequence of frames, which have the double quality of being singular and mutually connected. The frame itself consists of an *inside*, which is a *visible + acoustic image*, and an *outside*, which is called the *out-of-field*. The out-of-field can be relative and then its function is to connect the frames; the out-of-field can also be absolute and then its function is to connect the film experience with an experience of the Whole, which is open; an experience that transcends common sense; a metaphysical experience. In this sense the study of film becomes a philosophical tool to understand the Universe.¹⁰

Shara by Kawase Naomi, 2003

Having introduced these basic tools of film theory, we can proceed to apply them in order to understand the aforementioned difference between the Japanese and the Western mind. My aim is to demonstrate how this difference becomes visible in the out-of-field of the film *Shara* (2003) by Kawase Naomi.¹¹<<9>>

Obviously, the film is not made from a specific Shintō perspective. The title refers to the name of a special tree, the legendary Sal tree or (in Japanese) *sharasōju* 沙羅双樹 that has witnessed Buddha's birth and death. A central part of the film is attributed to a Buddhist temple. An acoustic image, the sound of bells in this temple permeates the beginning of the film. However, in the backyard of the temple is a Shintō element: an Inari Shrine. A main theme in the film is the preparation of a newly created Jizō festival, which is a mix of Shintō and Buddhist ingredients. The actual performance of this festival takes a full ten minutes. The movie apparently has not been made to please a western audience. What is worse, the film seemingly lacks a narrative. When I saw the movie in the Filmmuseum, there were only a few spectators. Besides, many left the cinema before the end. For their spectator's mind the absolute out-of-field was unintelligible, since it referred to a strange cultural background.

The film is about loss. In a family with two children suddenly the eldest son disappears. The film opens with a shot of ten minutes showing the two brothers running through a maze of streets in Nara, the old capital. The camera is also running through the streets, following the brothers. The running suddenly halts in front of the Inari Shrine, where only the youngest son appears in the frame. His elder brother has disappeared, not only from the frames but also from the known world. He seems spirited-away. Since the Inari shrine was the last place where

9 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, London: Athlone Press, 1989, p. 17.

10 Terrence Yeh, *Time and Consciousness in Film*, MA Thesis (cum laude) Film and Television Department, University of Amsterdam, 2003.

11 The film was nominated for the Golden Palm in Cannes Film festival 2003. Duration: 99 minutes.



SHARA (cover of DVD).

he had been visible, the director might have used the frame of the Inari Shrine as an opening towards the out-of-field. It means that from here the eldest son disappears from our view. Neither the spectators nor his family will see him again. But he is still present in the out-of-field, as is suggested by camera-movements that sometimes arouse the uncanny feeling that the disappeared boy is still watching us.

The family has to deal with the loss, but we never see them sharing their emotions. Western spectators may complain about this, but if they become aware of the Japanese background, they will be able to sense the presence of love and emotion in the out-of-field. This becomes evident in a “conversation” (that lacks the usual elements of spoken dialogue) between father and son in a scene that lasts more than five minutes.

FATHER:

Shun, listen... what I want... is to face things. I've thought...about a bunch of things. There are some we can forget... some we must not forget... and then there are some we must forget. I've really thought about all this. Do you see? And then... I've tried to divide things into different categories.

After thinking long and hard... I have just about... managed to sort things out. And it's almost clear now. So? What does it come to?

Nothing seems to be said in these words, but everything is clearly exposed in the next scene, where the father uses brush and ink to draw two words on the paper: SHADOW LIGHT. This calligraphy seems to refer to the Buddha tree of life and death, the title of the film. The loss of his son, the disappearance out of the frame of life, is only to be accepted by the father when it falls in place with the cycle of life and death (the alternation of light and shadow), which is always present in the Japanese mind and belongs to the Japanese out-of-field.

While death happens in the beginning of this film, a new birth heralds the end. The

film ends with the camera moving for ten minutes through the streets of Nara and beyond. This movement seems to mirror the opening scene. But while the opening scene left us with the horror and mystery of a boy who is spirited away, the final scene solves the mystery. When the credits are being shown, the camera flies away from Nara and reveals the virginal woods in the surrounding mountains. They represent the out-of-field and give a clue to the secret of the Japanese mind. As we already have noticed, the gate that gives an opening to the out-of-field is represented in the frame of the Inari Shrine. Inari is the *kami* of life and rice and in popular Shintō takes the form of a fox. Although the shrine, the residence of *kami*, is located in the city, his original abode is in distant nature, the virginal forest of the mountains surrounding Nara. In ancient times cities were established on carefully chosen locations. The presence of a sacred space, the residence of *kami* who protect the area, was crucial for this choice. This presence is still visible in Japan's landscape. The divine has a spatial dimension and is not, as in the Western concept, separated from the earth by a gap in time.

Here and Now

In the Japanese consciousness there exists an awareness of a wide space that opens up to the Whole. We refer to this as the Japanese Sense of Nature and we may see it as becoming visible in the last frames of *Sharasōju*. Nature is a circle around homesteads and fields, wild fields and natural forests. Further away is the Chinju-no-Mori, the virginal forest, the sacred grove or the mirror rock on the mountain, which are the abodes of *kami*. In this consciousness *kami*, men and nature share the same space, which is called Great Nature. Japanese Buddhism, too, considers Nature as the body of Buddha. Understanding Japan begins with a rethinking in terms of space. It is also in terms of space that the first chapter of *Kojiki* ("Records of Ancient Matters"; 712) should be understood. The first chapter gives the names of the original *kami* of creation. By interpreting them in terms of time Western scholars have concluded that the text is meaningless. However, when we focus on space, creation starts to continue in *naka-ima*, the middle of now. If we may call Shintō a philosophy, it is a philosophy of becoming, not of perfection. That is the main reason why *misogi*, the art of cleansing, is considered the alpha and omega of Shintō.

But this will be the subject of another article.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Paul de Leeuw graduated from Leiden University in 1971; major: Dutch linguistics and literature; minor: drama. After his study he went to Amsterdam, where he became one of the founders of the now legendary Dogtroep, a visual theatre company. Following his increasing interest in Japanese visual arts he moved to Paris where he attended a Master class of traditional Japanese arts. In Paris he started to understand Japanese arts as being rooted in the older tradition of Shintō. He was invited to study Shintō at the Yamakage Shinto School in Shizuoka-ken, Japan. In 1981 he became the first non-Japanese *kannushi*, or Shintō-master, and he founded a Shintō shrine in Amsterdam.