Eight Dusts: Healing Rituals and Metaphysics of Dust among Nepalese Followers of a Japanese New Religion

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Abstract. Every morning a group of Nepalese followers of the Japanese new religion called Tenrikyō ("Teachings of the Heavenly Wisdom") gathers in a small room in Kathmandu and performs rituals and prayers, hoping to be able to experience the Joyous Life in this world. One of the topics often discussed after the prayer is the doctrine of the "eight dusts" (Jp. *yattsu no hokori*). According to it human nature is not inherently evil, and the selfish or unethical behaviour that sometimes characterises human actions, can simply be understood as the result of a bit of "dust" – eight types in fact – which has settled on an otherwise originally pure "heart/mind" (Jp. *kokoro*, Np. *man*). "Dust" is here conceptualised as "mistaken thoughts – that is, states of mind that do not accord with the intention of God". From a semiotic point of view, dust thus plays here the *actantial role* of Anti-Subject, which needs to be removed through ethical practice and the ritual gestures of a sacred dance – in order to fully realise an Ethical Subject in conjunction with an Object of Value, the pure "heart/mind". Dust is to the broom of God, what selfishness is to divine will. In this complex semi-symbolic use, dust, connected with dirt, is not only conceptualised in opposition to cleanness and purity, but also as the result of a selfish behaviour which has neglected the will of God. This paper, based on fifteen months of anthropological fieldwork in Nepal, will explore the moral and metaphysical implications of the doctrine of eight dusts as discussed among Nepalese followers of Tenrikyō, trying to show how dust may connect more in general to the ethical dimension of practice.

1. Introduction

> If we accumulate dust (Np. *dhūlo*) in our mind, acting selfishly and moved by hatred, then we will not be able to enjoy the Joyous Life. And our existence will be miserable […].

This is a passage from a sermon that was given by Santosh, a Nepalese follower of Tenrikyō in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 2012, during one of the daily meetings at the local prayer centre in the area of Chettrapati where I conducted my fieldwork. Tenrikyō ("Teachings of the Heavenly Wisdom") is a Japanese new religion founded in the 19th century, and teaching that God created the humankind in order to see people living a Joyous Life and thus participate in that joy. Every morning a group of Nepalese followers of this religion gathers in a small room in Kathmandu belonging to the Mitsu-moya church, and performs rituals and prayers, hoping to be able to experience the Joyous Life in this world[1]. The Joyous Life (Jp. *yōkigurashi*, Np. *ānandī jīvan*) is conceptualised by Tenrikyō doctrines as a life of true happiness, where people who follow the teachings of God the Parent, live each day with a spirited mind, focusing on thanking God and helping others rather than accumulating wealth and behaving selfishly. According to *The Glossary of Tenrikyo* (Tenrikyō Kaigaibu 2010 [1997], p. 433): "Human beings exist in order for the Joyous Life to be realized. It is no mere chance that we exist". And the realisation of the Joyous life is in fact what constitutes salvation according to Tenrikyō.

[1] The Story of Creation, contained in *The Doctrine of Tenrikyo*, says: "In the beginning, the world was a muddy ocean. Tsukihi, God the Parent [who is the main God worshipped by followers of this religion], finding this chaos unbearably tasteless, thought of creating human beings in order to see the Joyous Life and thus share in that joy" (Tenrikyō Kaigaibu 2010 [1997], p. 179).

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During our daily meetings, after performing the morning service (Jp. *otsutome*), we would often attend a short and informal sermon given by one of the local leaders, and followers would often take this opportunity to ask questions on specific Tenrikyō doctrines or concepts. One of the topics regularly discussed after the prayer was the doctrine of the "eight dusts" (Jp. *yattsu no hokori*; Np. *āṭh prakār kā man kā dhūlāharū*). According to this principle human nature is not inherently evil, and the selfish or unethical behaviour that often characterises human actions, can simply be understood as the result of a bit of "dust" – eight types in fact – which has settled on an otherwise originally pure "heart/mind" (Jp. *kokoro*, Np. *man*). The accumulation of dust in one's "heart/mind" caused by such selfish behaviour is also understood to be the ultimate cause of illness and trouble in one's life, and it is thus only by changing one's attitude completely, attuning to the will of God, that true healing can occur. So that, even if Nepalese Tenrikyō followers do place their trust in medical treatments of illness, they still conceptualise its root as located in the process of accumulation of dust in the heart/mind.
What are the moral implications of dust outlined in this doctrine? How is illness conceptualised? How do Nepalese followers of Tenrikyō try to construct themselves as ethical subjects (Laidlaw 2014) through rituals, prayers, and daily commitment to the teachings (i.e. through enunciative practices)? And what kind of subject does it emerge from such practices and healing rituals?
These are the questions that I will try to answer in this paper, focusing on the moral and metaphysical implications of the doctrine of "eight dusts" in an attempt to show how this principle is connected with an ethical dimension of practice and with a specific healing ritual that is performed to ensure a complete treatment of illness addressing what is conceived as its deepest root[2]. Using a semiotic perspective, we will look at *semi-symbolic categories*, *actantial relations* and *enunciative praxis* (Fontanille 1998; Marrone 2011) to analyse the connection between body and God, dust and the heart/mind, illness and morality in Tenrikyō healing rituals. This will allow us to unpack the role played by dust in the construction of an ethical subject, by means of a reformulation of the concept of agency.

2. Body-Mind, Personhood, and Illness

This paper stems from a period of fifteen months of anthropological fieldwork conducted in Kathmandu, Nepal, between 2011-13, when I lived with a local family of Tenrikyō followers and attended regular meetings at local Tenrikyō churches. Tenrikyō was officially introduced in Nepal in 1966, and at the time of my fieldwork had about 600 members in the country (Horiuchi 2018). This was the first among a number of Japanese new religions that were transmitted to Nepal from those years onwards, including Ōmotokyō, Sōka Gakkai, Reiyūkai, Shishinkai, Kōfuku no Kagaku, Shinnyoen, Sūkyō Mahikari, Seimeikyō, Risshō Kōsekai, and Sekai Kyūseikyō[3].
During my fieldwork I was affiliated with a local branch of the Mitsu-moya church in Kathmandu, and with members of this group I participated in daily meetings and prayers, as well as monthly events, healing rituals, and other formal or informal gatherings where Nepalese Tenrikyō followers would not only pray, but also discuss their problems and share ideas and experiences concerning the role of God the Parent and Tenrikyō doctrines in their lives. Members of this particular church almost all belonged to a local ethnic group called Newars which refers to original inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley. Newars speak a Tibeto-Burman language called Nepal Bhasa, they practice various forms of Buddhism and Hinduism, often in combination, and they are part of an urban civilization that has authored the complex religious art and architecture characterising the valley. I also conducted an additional period

[2] Mary Douglas (1966) early outlined the connection between dirt, morality and cosmology in relation to the body, its margins and to our symbolic systems, in a way that might be relevant to both medical anthropology and our discussion of dust. Also, as argued by Douglas (*ivi*, p. 36), dirt is "matter out of place", and "where there is dirt there is system". I will later discuss the relational and bodily nature of dust, which plays an important role in the structure of ritual action and healing practice among Tenrikyō practitioners.
[3] For a critical analysis of the concept of "new religions" in Japan, also in relation to Tenrikyō, see Reader (2005), Baffelli (2017), as well as Baffelli and Reader (2019). On Tenrikyō, see also Katō (2017).

of three months of ethnographic fieldwork at the headquarters of Tenrikyō in Japan, where I went on pilgrimage with a group of Nepalese followers in 2012.
Conceptions of illness and healing practices did not constitute the initial focus of my research, as healing rituals and a search for "miracles" didn't seem to appear among the reasons motivating Nepalese followers to join this Japanese new religion[4]. Rather, they seemed to be interested in the moral values proposed by Tenrikyō doctrines, as well as the idea of becoming part of a group where they could nourish their spiritual side, cultivate an altruistic heart/mind, and learn about a new religious and philosophical conception of life, coming from a country like Japan which they considered to be a model of economic and spiritual development. However, as it became clear from my ethnographic involvement with members of Mitsu-moya church in Nepal, conceptions of personhood, and healing rituals, slowly became one of the topics regularly discussed in the group. As the followers' level of commitment continued to increase, they started expressing a desire to receive further training in the teachings, thus reaching the point of becoming *yōboku* ("useful timbers"). This term refers to devoted members who commit to spreading the teachings and who receive permission to perform a healing ritual which attacks the source of all illnesses: the dust accumulated in one's heart. Their commitment kept increasing to the point that Mitsu-moya became the church with the largest number of *yōboku* in Nepal[5].
Therefore, although people had not initially joined the group in search of healing, as they kept cultivating their subjectivity of dedicated followers, and gained the skills to perform a Tenrikyō healing ritual called *osazuke* ("Divine Grant"), their commitment to administer this service to those in need, became one of the defining aspects of their experience as believers. Of course, as often stressed in medical anthropology, social and individual conceptions of the body, personhood, and suffering, are at the basis of our understanding of any healing practice, may it be scientific, religious or secular. As stated for example by Pool and Geissler (2005, p. 117) "Different ideas of personhood and relatedness lead to different knowledges of the body and different bodily experiences and practices"[6]. Moreover:

> Culturally shaped notions of embodied personhood, through people's bodies, engage with and renegotiate social order. Personhood emerges here not only as the imprint of society on the person, but also as a resource with which people can shape their place in society. The body is both a site towards which the expectations of one's society and culture are applied, and the place from which the person engages with other people, and with culture and society. It is both structured and structuring, acting and acted upon (*ivi*, p. 128).

Followers of Tenrikyō understand the human subject to be the result of a specific karmic trajectory[7] and they conceptualise the person as made of two parts: the body (Jp. *karada*; Np. *śarīr*), and the heart/mind (Jp. *kokoro*; Np. *man*). The human body is conceptualised as something "lent by God" or "something borrowed from God" (Jp. *kashimono karimono*; Np. *sāpaṭ dieko chīj sāpaṭ lieko chīj*) and under God's control, whereas the heart/mind, which is said to act in free will, taking responsibility for its actions, is understood as belonging to the human subject. "The body is a thing borrowed from God, only the heart-mind belongs to oneself" (Jp. *karada wa Kamisama kara no "karimono", kokoro dake ga jibun no mono to iukoto*) is stated

[4] On conversion to Christianity in Nepal where healing plays a central role, see Gibson (2017).
[5] In 2012, the Mitsu group consisted of about 70 members, with a daily attendance of about 20 or 25 members, the average age of whom was around 50 years old.
[6] On the role of the body in Japanese religions, see Raveri (1992), Lobetti (2014), and Padoan (2021). On Japanese conceptions of illness from a medical anthropological perspective, see Ohnuki-Tierney (1984).
[7] According to the karmic theory of Tenrikyō, humans can only be reborn again as humans, and the conditions of their rebirth depend on two different types of causality: the "causality of origin" and the "individual causality". The first type of causality refers to the fact that God the Parent originally created humans to see them experience the Joyous Life, and thus people's existence is connected to this very first act of causality. The second type of causality refers to the effect of actions that are produced by a free, individual use of the mind. Human beings are in fact conceived as consisting of a body which has been borrowed from God, and a mind that only belongs to the person. It is the mind, also conceptualised in this context as a soul, that is reincarnated into another human being after death. The circumstances of this rebirth can vary according to one's own karmic trajectory, that is according to the effects or karmic results of past actions (Tenrikyō Kaigaibu 2010 [1997], pp. 32-43, 278-279).

in a Tenrikyō booklet (Tenrikyō Dōyūsha 1995, p. 18). A person's state of mind is what determines their behaviour and every other aspect of their life, so that, negative states of mind or attitudes that diverge from God's will, are considered to be a hindrance to the realisation of the Joyous Life, the ultimate goal of every Tenrikyō follower. As explained in the *Glossary of Tenrikyo* (Tenrikyō Kaigaibu 2010 [1997], p. 27):

> The human body is not regarded as purely physical and lifeless matter in contradistinction to the mind, consciousness, spirit, or soul; nor it is seen as a mere aggregate of physiological processes. It became a human body through being lent to and becoming bonded to the soul. […] the body […] is constantly sustained through God's providence […].

Within this framework, personhood is defined in terms of a complex relationship with God: the physical body is borrowed from God, and yet God keeps acting upon it, keeping it alive and healthy through the divine providence. Thus, continues the entry (*ibidem*):

> […] all the functions of the body are normal when the divine providence is allowed to permeate the body in a complete and unhindered manner. Disorders or failures of people's bodily functions are indications that their use of the mind is deviating from God's intention and hindering the providence […]. The mind and body are seen as inseparably joined together, mutually depending on and affecting each other. The disorders of the body can all be attributed to the mind.

From the perspective of this complex conception of personhood emerging from a karmic trajectory, body-mind is conceptualised as an inseparable unit which is in turn connected with God's will and providence: God is present in the body in the form of providence, but this presence can be hindered by a selfish mind that diverts from God's will. This conceptualisation of personhood as something generated by a karmic trajectory and inherently entangled with God, not only transcends individual boundaries spanning through different lives and thus emerging as a distributed and relational entity (see Strathern 1988), but it also seems to transcend the boundaries between human and divine.

Donna Haraway (1991), the widely renowned feminist philosopher whose work has also been in conversation with Marilyn Strathern, has notably argued in favour of an understanding of contemporary Western ontology in terms of "cyborgs". In her classical essay *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, she points out that in the twentieth centuries "we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs" (Haraway 1991, p. 150). She suggests that this is the case because three boundaries have been transgressed by the late twentieth century in North American scientific culture: the boundary between human and animal; the boundary between animal-human (organism) and machine; and the boundary between physical and nonphysical (*ivi*, pp. 151-153).

Haraway's work on biotechnology has found immediate resonance in the field of medical anthropology, as in contemporary medical practice the aforementioned boundaries are often transgressed. Animal to human transplantation has been developed and diseases have spread transmitted across species, from animals to humans. Furthermore, implants and machine-like enhancements inserted in our bodies, have made the cyborg a reality, challenging the human-machine dichotomy. Also, the ubiquity of microelectronic devices that permeate our lives, and more recently the virtual reality of the internet, have significantly questioned the limits between physical and nonphysical worlds (Singer et al. 2020, p. 214).

I am not entirely convinced that the blurredness between these categories is a twentieth century phenomenon; it might be, in the context of the scientific culture of the US, but from a broader anthropological perspective we have always had many examples of complex ways of shaping or non-shaping, setting or challenging those dichotomies. Think about the complex, intertwined relationship between humans and cattle amongst the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940), or conceptualisations of personhood as constructed through relations and exchange in pre-colonial Rwanda or in Melanesia, and thus defined as "fractal" (Taylor 1990; Wagner 1991). But we might also consider various relational understandings of the "individual", once again reciprocally constituted through the exchange of objects and substances and thus defined as "di-vidual" (Strathern 1988; Marriott 1976), or conceptions of

personhood as inherently defined in terms of their social roles and responsibilities (Read 1955; see also Mauss 1938), to mention a few.
However, Haraway's point can still be useful to analyse the case of Tenrikyō, because it highlights the fact that experiences and conceptions of personhood can take hybrid forms that transgress boundaries. So, if Haraway talks about contemporary cyborg ontologies as transcending the boundaries between human-animal, organic-mechanic, and physical-nonphysical, the case of Tenrikyō could be considered as an instance in which a further specification of the third dichotomy physical-nonphysical is crossed. The experience of personhood in Tenrikyō could in fact be explained as a case in which human-divine boundaries are transcended.
Such an understanding of the concept of self as closely interlinked to conceptions of God, or to the presence of God in one's heart/mind is not entirely new in the context of Newar culture, where similar ideas already existed. As noticed by Steven Parish (1994, pp. 190-199) who conducted anthropological fieldwork in Kathmandu valley among Newars of the Hindu city of Bhaktapur, the Newar concept of *nuga:* ("heart", "heart-self" partially overlapping with Western ideas of "mind") refers to a place located in the chest that constitutes the locus of desire, feeling, thought, intention and memory. It is also the place where God dwells – understood as a generic form called Bhagavān, or as a specific form of Viṣṇu called Narāyaṇa. In Parish's analysis, this inner deity emerges as "a sacred self" and "a sacred other" in that it is conceptualised as both "the ultimate moral judge of the person" and "the ultimate self of the person". It is God dwelling in the heart that makes perception, attention, memory, cognition and emotions possible, and that judges the person's actions. And yet, *nuga:* is also the deepest locus of emotional experience and desire, which define the self and the moral qualities of the person.
Therefore, in the context of Newar culture and Newar conceptions of personhood, this God dwelling in the heart seems to play both the role of Sender (*Destinateur*) and the role of Subject (*Sujet*) (Greimas, Courtés 1979, pp. 293-295), in that on the one hand, God is the ultimate judge of the person's actions, and on the other hand, God residing in the heart is understood to be the ultimate sacred self, the root of subjectivity. As noticed by Parish, in Newar language expressions related to *nuga:* and signifying different states of the heart/mind abound, and they can convey both emotional experiences and moral qualities of the person. As stated by Parish (1994, p. 192):

> Pain, sadness, fear, and grief are spoken of in terms of a heart in distress: a heart may sink, tremble, throb, flutter, or burn like fire. A heart can feel as if it has been pierced through, or as if it has been torn to pieces. The Newar heart can open and blossom like a flower in joy. It may fly away in fear or confusion, or burst in envy. It can feel pricks of pain or uneasiness for another person's plight. It can be bound and controlled, kept in balance, or stamped with lasting impressions. The heart can weep, and be wounded. […] The qualities of *nuga:* also express the moral qualities of the person. To say that someone has a 'smooth mouth' or a 'smooth face' but a 'blue heart' is to warn against impression management that masks malice or manipulation. A cruel person has a hard heart, and an evil person is black-hearted. There are persons with small, deceitful, stingy hearts. A person may […] lack the 'heart-blood' that animates moral commitments […] they may also be actively wrong in their inclinations, since sin (*pap*) can inhabit the heart […]. But a heart can also be generous and pure, clear and open.

A similar understanding of the heart-mind also appears in Nepali language and in the broader context of Nepali culture, a context that includes and extends beyond Newar ethnic culture and relates to other Tibeto-Burman groups as well as to Indo-Aryan Nepali speakers in Nepal. As noticed by Brandon A. Kohrt and Ian Harper (2008) in what we may call an "ethnosemiotics of passions" (cf. Greimas, Fontanille 1991) in fact, the concept of *man* ("heart-mind") in Nepali seems to concern the multiple spheres of mind, opinion, intention, will, desire, and feelings. In everyday use in Nepali language, if the heart-mind is "struck by going", it means that the person wants to go somewhere. People can also say that the heart-mind "hurts" thus expressing the idea that the person is suffering or is sad. If something is "on top of the heart-mind", it means that the person likes it, and if there is a scar/wound or joy "of the heart-mind" (Np. *manko*), it means that the person has experienced psychological trauma or happiness (Kohrt, Harper 2008, p. 469). In their medical anthropology study of mind-body relations, mental health, and stigma in Nepal, Kohrt and Harper explore the way in which the five elements that constitute the self in

Nepalese culture are variously related to each other and consequently, to different conceptualisation of illness and healing. The five elements that they discuss are: *man* ("heart-mind"), *dimāg* ("brain-mind", "social-mind"), *jiu* ("physical body"), *sāto* ("spirit"), and *ijjat* ("social status", "reputation").
Kohrt and Harper convincingly argue that in Nepalese society suffering and healing are conceptualised in relation to different domains of the body-mind relations and that they consequently pertain different specialists: some domains consider suffering and healing in terms of a relationship between the heart-mind (*man*) and society (*samāj*), and they are treated by psychosocial workers; other domains concern the relation between the spirit (*sāto*), society (*samāj*) and the physical body (*jiu*), and thus related illnesses are treated by traditional healers; another domain considers suffering and healing as a matter simply concerning the physical body (*jiu*), and as such the area of competence of physicians (other than psychiatrists); and finally, another domain looks at matters concerning exclusively the brain-mind (*dimāg*) and thus they are treated by psychiatrists (*ivi*, p. 475). According to Kohrt and Harper, it is precisely the sphere of *dimāg* and its disfunctions that are stigmatised in Nepalese society. Once again, Kohrt and Harper look at expressions which qualify the brain-mind in everyday language and notice how some of them seem to address *dimāg* as brain-mind but also as social-mind, referring to ways of functioning of the mind which are considered socially acceptable. In other words, *dimāg* seem to pertain to the spheres of rationality, logic, but also that which is reasonable, and thus socially acceptable in a certain cultural context. If someone's "brain-mind is gone", for example, it means that the person is confused or does not understand, if the "brain-mind has been eaten", it means that the person struggles to concentrate or experiences irritation, frustration. If the "brain-mind is not OK", this means that the person has an abnormal or socially unacceptable behaviour, if the "brain-mind is broken or ruined", it means that the person has a crazy, mad, or psychotic behaviour (*ivi*, p. 471). *Dimāg* is conceived as that brain-mind that controls behaviour and thinking, and it is connected to *man* ("heart-mind", locus of opinions, intentions, feelings, wants, desires, likes/dislikes) insofar as it represents the "socialised and logical decision-making mind" (*ivi*, p. 469) which acts following social rules and is somehow capable of balancing the desires generated in the heart-mind.
This idea of a tension between heart-mind and brain-mind is also present in other Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups in Nepal, such as the Yolmo wa in Helambu studied by Desjarlais (1992). For them in fact, says Desjarlais, while the "heartmind" is the source of thought and emotion – the basis of memories, dreams, desires, imagination, and volition – and it is defined as what makes us human, the brain is understood as that aspect of personhood that attempts to control the heartmind and the desires or wills that it generates. So that, in Yolmo understanding of mental illness, madness manifests itself precisely when the brain fails to control the heartmind, and it thus stems from uncontrolled emotions and desires[8]. Although Tenrikyō's understanding of the connection between body-mind and God is different from these conceptualisations of personhood in Newar, Nepali or Tibeto-Burman contexts, it is still useful to draw attention to these ideas of subjectivity because they can help us understand why, for Newar followers of Tenrikyō, both the idea of a body borrowed from God and where God resides as providence, and the idea of a heart-mind where dust is accumulated, make sense. Like we said above, the idea that sin can accumulate in one's heart, or the fact that one's heart can be pure, or clean, is already part of a Newar understanding of personhood which can thus easily find parallels with the Tenrikyō metaphysics of dust piling up in the heart and the need to clean this heart and make it pure again.

[8] It might be interesting to draw a comparison between these ethnosemiotic theories of passions in Nepal, and the semiotics of body theorised by Jacques Fontanille (2004), insofar as the *brain-mind* and the *heart-mind* play two different actantial roles in mutual interaction. Accordingly, the brain-mind plays here the actantial role of the Self as "body proper" (one's own body), which controls the somatic drives and affective forces of the heart-mind, while the latter might play the role of "Me as flesh" (*Moi-chair*) in Fontanille's theorisation. See also Marrone (2011, pp. 102-106).

3. The Moral Implications of Dust: A Semiotic Analysis

In my analysis of the concepts of *kokoro* in Tenrikyō, *man* in Nepalese culture, and *nuga:* among the Newars, I have mainly focused on the embodied experience of personhood, what Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) have defined as the phenomenological "individual body", only touching upon the social. However, a more complex analysis could be undertaken if we further widened the reflection to include both the "social body", that is ways in which ideas on the body are used to describe nature, culture, and society, and the "body politic" (roughly corresponding to the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics), that is all those practices of surveillance and control over bodies enacted by institutions and legal systems (Scheper-Hughes, Lock 1987, pp. 18-28). For reasons of space, I am only focusing on conceptions of personhood and illness as embodied experiences narrated by Nepalese members of Tenrikyō.
From their perspective, mistaken thoughts – i.e. "states of mind that do not accord with the intention of God" (Tenrikyō Kaigaibu 2010 [1997], p. 77) – constitute the origin of all illnesses, and are conceptualised as "dust" which accumulates on the heart/mind. This accumulation is said to be rooted in selfishness and the doctrine provides a list of "eight dusts", i.e., "miserliness, covetousness, hatred, self-love, grudge-bearing, anger, greed, arrogance" with the addition of "falsehood" and "flattery", that in fact can derive from a selfish mind; but these are only some among a larger number of possible negative states of mind and actions that can hinder the realisation of the Joyous Life. The accumulation of dust is also understood as the main reason that problems arise in a person's life. These problems can concern the environment in the form of natural disasters, the person's social life and relations, their emotional states, or also their health. So that, from this perspective, the ultimate cause of illness is understood to be a mistaken mind, the dust of the mind, that goes against God's will. Illness can thus be conceived as a twofold reminder that our bodies are not ours, but rather belong to God, and thus we don't have full control over them, and secondly, illness is one way in which God can reach out to us to warn us that dust has been accumulated in our heart/mind and that we should take action through repentance and self-reflection, awakening to God's intention. This conceptualisation of illness transforms it from a mere source of suffering, into something that can help people open their mind to the true way of living which has been revealed by God the Parent. According to their teachings in fact (*ivi*, p. 158):

> Realizing God's intention, sweeping out the dust of the mind, and settling their mind will allow them to receive any blessing they need from God, thereby helping them overcome even a complete collapse of the body's vital functions. What this means is that whether or not humans will be saved will depend entirely on their state of mind, that is, whether they have the willingness to bring themselves into accord with God's intention being conveyed through their illness.

From a semiotic point of view, dust thus seems to play the *actantial role* of an Anti-Subject, which needs to be removed through ethical practice (Laidlaw 2014) and through the ritual gestures of a sacred dance – in order to allow the practitioners to fully realise themselves as Ethical Subjects in conjunction with their Object of Value, i.e. a pure "heart/mind" or, in the bigger picture, the Joyous Life (Greimas 1983; Marrone 2011, pp. 37-53).
However, the dust of the mind accumulates persistently, almost as if it were inevitable, so what is important is to notice it and promptly sweep it away, because:

> If one neglects to sweep the dust away […] it can eventually pile up to the point where its removal will become difficult (*Ofudesaki* VIII, 61; XII, 3). When the dust piles up, it clouds the mind, causing it to lose its inherent clarity and brightness. This prevents the Joyous Life (Tenrikyō Kaigaibu 2010 [1997], pp. 77).

In the sermon I mentioned at the beginning of the paper Santosh in fact stated:

> It is very unpleasant to live in a place which is not tidy and clean, and also, the dust (Np. *dhūlo*) and dirt (*phohar*) accumulated can be unhealthy for the person living there. […] however, […] "no matter how much we clean, without us noticing, dust and dirt will definitely come back and get accumulated again" (*koṭā mā jati saphā gare pani dhūlo ra phohar pheri aihalcha ni ani thuprincha*). So, the same is true for the heart/mind.

Dust is here conceptualised on the one hand, as the result of an act of negligence, and on the other hand as an inevitable condition eluding the control of the subject[9]. And the only way to fight against it is to commit to acting according to the will of God, avoiding selfish behaviour, and performing the service. This daily ritual, which consists of ancient songs accompanied by hand gestures and dance movements, starts with the phrase "Sweeping away evils, please save us, Tenri-Ō-no-Mikoto" (Jp. *ashiki wo harōte tasuke tamae, Tenri-Ō-no-Mikoto*) which is repeated twenty-one times, while also performing a gesture that mimics the act of sweeping. Furthermore, one of the songs which are part of the ritual dance says: "Water and God are the same, cleansing the dirt of the heart" (Jp. *mizu to kami towa onaji koto, kokoro no yogore wo araikiru*) and also "Forgetting away a cruel heart, come to me with a gentle heart" (*Mikagurauta* V, 3, 6, in Tenrikyō Church Headquarters 1985 [1967]; cf. Morishita 2001, p. 54).

However, we could say that followers first experience the process of subjectivation in a passive/negative way, as the subject who lets the dust pile up. Only later they actively construct themselves as ethical subjects, through the enunciative praxis consisting in the daily performance of the ritual, while simultaneously receiving the help of God to remove it. At the discursive level in fact, if the practitioners are the ones who perform the ritual action, they are also the ones who are acted upon by the dust that piles up on their heart/mind, and by God who contributes to sweeping it away. The same is true for the dust, which is acted upon by the practitioner and by God, and the same is true also for God, because it is only when the dust is removed and the Tenrikyō follower attunes to God's will that this last one can rejoice. At the discursive level, through the enunciative practice of ritual, the practitioner, the dust and God are all receivers of each other's actions.

In another passage from one of the sacred scriptures, God is compared to the broom that sweeps away the dust from the heart/mind. The text says: "Throughout the world, God is the broom for the sweeping of the innermost heart. Watch carefully" (*Ofudesaki* III, 52, in Tenrikyō Church Headquarters 1993 [1971]). In other words, dust is to the broom of God, what selfishness is to the divine will, to which the ethical subjects must try to attune. In this complex semi-symbolic configuration of meaning (Fontanille 1998, pp. 86-88; Marrone 2011, p. 90), dust is not only connected to dirt, as we would expect, and thus conceptualised in opposition to cleanness and purity of the heart/mind, but it is also coated with an additional moral implication which derives, as stated above, from negligence and selfishness:

dust : broom of God :: selfishness : divine will

Dust is thus a multi-layered term which comprises specific types of selfish behaviour – eight dusts, as well as mental attitudes and dispositions which hinder the Joyous Life – but it also refers to the tangible particles in the air that pile up forming a layer of dirt on things. And in fact, one of the major activities that Tenrikyō followers engage in, as part of their religious practice, is a voluntary work called *hinokishin*, which often consists in cleaning common areas near the church or in the neighbourhood. Such voluntary cleaning, undertaken while cultivating a thankful attitude towards God, is said to simultaneously contribute to helping the subject develop a non-selfish heart/mind, and it is a practice that is typical of a three-month spiritual training course undertaken by more committed members. So that, people who

[9] On the paradox of pursuing purity while living in a situation of constant contradictions and impurity, as an inevitable condition coming from experience, see Douglas (1966, p. 163).

attend that course are often seen cleaning the premises of the main sanctuary in Tenri city, or sweeping the dust from the floor of the sanctuary using a wiping cloth and moving in their knees[10].

Similar to what Holbraad (2007) says with regard to the *aché*-powder in Cuban Ifá divination, when looking at dust in Tenrikyō, it seems like as if we are dealing with some sort of *mana*-term. This would be a category that apparently transgresses the axiomatic distinction between "abstract" and "concrete", or between "concept" and "object", "word" and "world" as Holbraad (2012, pp. 180-81) would have it. Dust can in fact be understood both as the particles that accumulate on buildings and objects, as well as the metaphorical dirt that piles up in our hearts as a result of our selfish actions. Lévi-Strauss had talked about the category of *mana* discussed by Marcel Mauss – the "mysterious force" and "secret power" connected to vitality and sacredness – in terms of a *floating signifier*, that is a pure signifier "liable to take on any symbolic content" (Lévi-Strauss 1950, p. 64). However, mistakenly interpreting the relation between signifier and signified as a relation between "concept" and "object", Holbraad (2012, p. 183) ends up criticising Lévi-Strauss's approach for being based on *a priori* axiomatic oppositions. He suggests using the concept of *mana*, or in his case *aché*-powder, as an analytical tool through which it might be possible to think in ways that overcome the opposition between signifier and signified. In order to do so, he focuses on *aché* as the *powder* used during the divination and as the *power* of the diviner, describing how both powder and power are able to transform deities from transcendent entities into immanent ones, during the divination ritual.

I find this approach problematic because Holbraad seems to dismiss the fact that, despite his attempts to dismantle semiotic relations between signifiers and signifieds, his own informants the *babalawos* diviners indeed use the term *signos* (signs) to describe the divinatory configurations (Holbraad 2007: 203). More important, by only focusing on *aché*-powder, Holbraad risks falling into the trap of axiomatically assuming that this element can be understood in isolation, rather than by tracing the connections and relations it may have with other relevant cultural units, which might need to be taken into account to understand the role of *aché* in divination rituals. In a similar way, we should not think of dust as something that can be defined in isolation from other elements. Dust in fact, as we have already seen above, is only one of the four relational elements, including dust, broom of God, selfishness, and divine will, which constitute part of a semi-symbolic configuration, outside of which it would be impossible to understand the role of dust in Tenrikyō ritual metaphysics. Thus, by only considering dust as part of an oppositional relation between concrete particles accumulating on things and abstract concepts of selfishness, we would end up overlooking the complex system of relations between the body, the heart-mind, God as broom and providence, voluntary work, prayer, and divine grant, which underlie Tenrikyō ritual action and healing practices. The opposition between concrete and abstract dust can be pertinent in so far as it appears in Tenrikyō practices like *hinokishin* voluntary work consisting in cleaning the sanctuary and morning prayers, aimed at cleaning the heart-mind. However, this oppositional relation should be further articulated, in the way we have done above, in order to be able to understand how its meaning is produced and motivated *a posteriori*, as a result of its relational engagement with other relevant cultural categories[11].

4. Between Active and Passive: Sweeping the Dust as Enunciative Praxis

In an anthropological discussion of the memorial projects submitted for the rebuilding of Ground Zero after the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, Sturken (2004) analyses the different ways in which dust went from initially being associated with a shocking, unexpected but also uncannily familiar substance that had to be removed as fast as possible so that life could continue, to embodying the material remains of the bodies of the dead, a sacramental substance, and thus something that needed to be kept, treated

[10] For a discussion of how the practice of *hinokishin* and the idea of sweeping the dust in Tenrikyō might be related to a conceptualisation of cleaning as a ritual process, also found in Sōtō Zen tradition, other new religious movements, and Japanese daily life more in general, see Reader (1995).

[11] Since, as put it by Lévi-Strauss (1958, p. 91), the "sign is arbitrary a priori, but ceases to be arbitrary a posteriori".

with care, or incorporated into a memorial. Sturken thus demonstrates how the meaning of dust constantly shifts according to the context of use or the subjects who interpret it.
In the case of Tenrikyō metaphysics, the eight dusts accumulating in the heart are certainly seen in a negative way as cause of suffering, however, it is the constant effort to sweep them from their hearts that transforms Tenrikyō followers in ethical subjects who attune themselves to the intention of God the Parent. One way in which this can be attained is through the performance of a healing ritual called Osazuke ("Divine Grant"). This ritual consists of a series of prescribed hand movements performed by the *yōboku* that administers it to the ill persons, while lightly touching their afflicted body parts. The person does it by also reciting the words: "Sweep away evils, and save us, Tenri-Ō-no-Mikoto" (Jp. *Ashiki harai tasuketamae Tenri-Ō-no-Mikoto*). It is believed that if the person administering it has a pure heart, they can evoke the salvific power of God which will heal the patient. It is interesting to note how, once again, here it is the complex relation between God, the *yōboku*, and the patient that is believed to be the source of a successful healing.
As reminded by Marrone (2005) who starts his introduction to *Il discorso della salute* ("The Discourse of Health") with the analysis of an 18th century painting by Marco Zapatta entitled *Assistenza ai malati nell'ospedale Sant'Andrea di Cuzco* ("Care for the Ill Patients in St. Andrew's Hospital in Cuzco"), we should not think of the relationship between healer and patient as a static bond between an active and a passive subject, nor we should be quick in defining illness as a specific object which is defined once and for all. The forefront of the scene represented in the painting portrays a patient sitting in a hospital bed, while two subjects, who appear to be a monk and a doctor, seem in the process of checking his wounded leg where gangrene has set in. In his analysis, Marrone acutely shows how each of the three subjects, while apparently embodying a well-defined role in the interaction, are in fact characterised by an inherent ambiguity that makes it difficult to define them, and that also implies a different understanding of the illness they are trying to treat or face.
The monk and the doctor are apparently constructed as oppositional subjects: the monk has a direct relation with the wound that he touches with his mouth and licks with his tongue, whereas the doctor who is holding a scalpel, seems to have a mediated contact. Also, they represent two different conceptualisations of the body and consequently, two different approaches to illness. The monk understands the patient's body as repository of a soul: treating the illness also represents an opportunity to treat the soul, as true healing is ultimately only possible through faith and repentance. The doctor understands the patient's body as a complex mechanism that is malfunctioning, a disorder that he will treat through science and upon which he is acting as representative of a class of professionals trained in Western medicine. As for the patient, he seems to appear as a passive subject, acted upon by both the monk and the doctor. At a closer look, as explained by Marrone (2005, pp. 9-12), the nature of these three subjects is much more ambiguous and much more similar than it appears. For one thing, the monk does not have a direct relationship with the wound, because contact is still mediated through his tongue, in the same way as for the doctor it is mediated by the scalpel. Also, they both act as representatives of two epistemological systems: the church and the medical science. The monk uses his tongue and his hand as efficacious tools in the same way as the doctor uses the scalpel as an instrument of a delegated action of healing, what differs is their system of values within which those mediating instruments make sense. Finally, the patient who seemed to have a merely passive role, displays a certain agency in so far as he is actively showing his affective stance towards the treatment he is receiving: he appears suspicious, frightened, but also hopeful (Marrone 2005, p. 11).
A similar ambiguity between a passive or active role played by the subjects involved in the interaction can be found in the *osazuke* healing ritual. In the case of Tenrikyō members in fact, although both the *yōboku* and the patient must make an effort to change their heart/mind attitude for which they are held responsible, it is only by letting God act upon them as the broom removing the dust, or as the one granting salvific power, that true healing can occur. When reciting their invocation to God the parent the *yōboku* performing the healing ritual seem to enact a *débrayage*, that is a "shifting out" or disengagement (Greimas, Courtés 1979, pp. 87-91) of the subject through which they project, while simultaneously making present, God the Parent as an active healing force. However, by repeating the invocation and moving their hands in the symbolic action of cleansing one's heart/mind, the performers

also complete an act of *embrayage*, that is a "shifting in" or engagement (*ivi*, pp. 100-102) through which they present themselves this time, as full subjects that have fully embodied the *yōboku* identity, the only one entitled to perform a healing ritual and thus pass over the divine blessing[12].
In the third phase of the ritual, when the performer lightly touches the affected part of the patient's body, once again the *yōboku* seems to perform an act of *débrayage* which confirms God the Parent – now gesturally evoked in the form of blessing to be applied on the patient's body – as the ultimate source of healing. At the same time, however, God's active contribution can only be completely fulfilled when the humankind will have succeeded in cultivating a pure heart, attuned with God's will. It is only then that the Joyous Life will be realised, allowing God to rejoice, so that, to a certain extent, God's own fulfilment of subjectivity somehow depends on or is intertwined with humans' actions and decisions. All the actors involved in the relation can thus be simultaneously seen as *active* or *passive*, as *subjects* or *objects*, or better as "subjectified" or "objectified" entities according to the perspective from which we analyse those relations.
Furthermore, the performance of this healing ritual could be seen as an example of *enunciative praxis* as theorised by Denis Bertrand (2000, pp. 57-59). Bertrand, by referring to Hjelmslev (1942), defines enunciative praxis as that moment when signifying structures – sedimented through collective use and located at the level of system/schema (roughly *langue* for Saussure) – are used to produce a specific act of *parole*[13]. These signifying structures would include both a priori morphosyntactic constrains, as well as those sociocultural ritualisations, schemes, genres, phraseologies, etc. that have been socio-culturally generated by habitus – something that Silverstein (2004, 2023) would call "cultural concepts". From this perspective thus, each act of *parole* is no longer a moment of absolute creativity, but rather as a moment in which socio-culturally established concepts, phraseologies, ritualisations etc. are re-arranged and re-shaped in a new creative production. When looking at enunciation as a mechanism of production of utterances which is simultaneously and intrinsically connected to socio-cultural schemata, that is when we look at meaning production and communication as a social enterprise (Greimas, Fontanille 1991), Bertrand says, we are no longer merely dealing with "enunciation", but rather with "enunciative praxis".
Nepalese followers of Tenrikyō who engage in performing *osazuke* healing rituals, use highly ritualised linguistic forms and gestures which are part of those sedimented formulae and concepts produced within the context of Tenrikyō socio-cultural environment and historical tradition, thus evoking those socio-cultural schemata in the here-and-now of the enunciative moment. At the same time however, precisely because they are performing that ritual in Kathmandu, embedding it in a different socio-cultural context, they are also re-signifying those gestures making them meaningful to the other practitioners. They are using these ritualised forms to construct themselves as *yōboku*, that is, as committed members of Tenrikyō in Nepal, who have made an effort to remove the dust from their heart/mind, and who thus cultivate a pure heart/mind that can become a medium for the transmission of God's blessing onto the sick recipient. Any instance of enunciation inherently implies an *enunciative praxis* as it does not occur in a vacuum and in isolation, but rather re-plays cultural concepts and it occurs in the midst of other socio-cultural practices (Bertrand 2000).
Nepalese members of Mitsu-moya church experience their belonging to Tenrikyō as one among other religious belongings that they are involved in. Becoming a follower of Tenrikyō does not in fact require them quitting other affiliations. The performance of morning prayers and healing rituals in Tenrikyō is thus experienced as part of a broader commitment towards one's own spiritual development and towards the realisation of a better society in Kathmandu. Tenrikyō moral values and ideals are appealing to

[12] On the concepts of *débrayage* and *embrayage*, see also Bertrand (2000, pp. 60-61).
[13] According to Bertrand (2000, p. 58), Saussure (1916) conceived each act of *parole* as an individual act of creativity through which sedimented structures at the level of *langue*, could be used to produce new utterances. Bertrand elaborates ideas of Algirdas J. Greimas on how each historical act of *parole* not only limits the virtuality of meaning already embedded in the structure, but also always includes discursive configurations or lexical stereotypes which could be understood as "forms of 'socialisation' of language" (Greimas 1970, 1976 in Bertrand 2000, pp. 58-59). Also, he takes the concept of enunciation from Benveniste (1974, p. 141) who defines it as "the enactment of language through an individual act of use". And finally, he draws on Hjelmslev (1942) on the concept of "use" as something located between *parole* and system, and referring to those practices which have sedimented over time through linguistic and cultural habitus.

Newar followers because they speak of the possibility of realising the Joyous Life in this world, constructing a society where people are altruistic and where they cultivate a pure heart/mind. It is precisely by performing the daily prayers that followers can clean the dust accumulated in their heart, to the point that many Mitsu-moya members told me that after the prayer "peace and lightness are felt in the heart/mind" (Np. *man mā śānti huncha, man mā haluka huncha*). This sense of peace, and their participation in daily altruistic activities for the construction of a better society, is what ultimately motivates people to join this religion[14].

5. Conclusion

We started this paper by asking a series of questions concerning the role of dust in Tenrikyō metaphysics and the way in which this element, which is also charged with a specific moral value, plays a significant role in the construction of the subjectivity of followers of this Japanese new religion. In order to answer these questions ethnographically, we looked at the specific experience of Nepalese Newar followers of Tenrikyō in Kathmandu, Nepal. We started by looking at the different ways in which the body, its relationship with the heart/mind and with God, are conceptualised in Newar culture and in Tenrikyō doctrines. And in so doing we have ethnographically demonstrated how these conceptions of personhood significantly affect the way in which illness is perceived and faced through specific healing practices. We have thus shown that dust, and its complex metaphysical, abstract or concrete meanings, cannot be unpacked unless we consider the semi-symbolic structure where it is embedded. Saying that the dust stays to the divine broom of God like selfishness stays to the divine will, means to consider dust not only as a negative value, but also as a category which is characterised by a moral dimension: it is generated by an act of selfishness, and it is removed by a ritual *enunciative praxis*, through which the followers piously fight their selfish heart/mind. Dust, therefore, operates as the negative, passive but needed aspect of the enunciative praxis, through which Nepalese Tenrikyō followers construct themselves as ethical subjects.

[14] See Reader (1995, pp. 238-243) for an analysis of the role of communal cleaning activities in Japan as a way of creating a sense of belonging, both inside and outside institutionalised religious practice.

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