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Mishima Yukio and a literature of the body

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In 1968, Japanese writer Kawabata Yasunari received the Nobel Prize in Literature. This recognition came as a matter of fact to the average Japanese reader, who had long known of and appreciated Kawabata's refined and somewhat melancholic style. Nonetheless, some were surprised at the award not going to the younger Mishima Yukio, one of the best seller Japanese authors at the time. Amongst these, there was Kawabata himself, who barely a couple of years after receiving the Nobel Prize, referred to his younger colleague in the following terms: 'Mishima has extraordinary talent, and it is not just a Japanese talent, but a talent of world scale. It is the kind of genius that comes along perhaps every three hundred years... Before I received the Nobel Prize I said that Mishima would get it... As far as talent goes, Mishima is far superior to me'[1]. One cannot help but wonder about this "literary prodigy", whom a Nobel laureate praised as having such an outstanding talent. Incomparable to Kawabata in terms of style, Mishima Yukio is yet, undoubtedly, one of Japan's greatest authors. Never to receive the great worldwide prizes in literature, Mishima is, still nowadays, one of the most read, translated, and well known authors of East Asia.

Mishima Yukio, born Hiraoka Kimitake, was one of Japan's most prolific contemporary authors, with a very vast and varied series of works that include novels, short stories, essays, poems, theatre plays among other genres. But it is not only the amount of his production what drew hundreds of readers towards his work: Mishima managed to excel in these very diverse genres, making each and every one of his texts a brilliant example of his mastery in style. Certainly, when reading Mishima's works in translations, there is much that is lost in the process of converting them into languages that do not know the multiplicity constituent of Chinese ideograms; however, even after crossing the frontier of translation, Mishima's works have managed to maintain their captivating, universal character.

Mishima gained public recognition in Japan after his first novel *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) was published. The fact that this novel is a rather meticulous account of the inner conflict that a young man experiences as he first discovers his ambiguous sexuality caused a great sensationalist interest which launched the author's career as a polemic writer who was far from afraid of taboo topics[2]. Provocatively enough, Mishima referred to this as his "first autobiography".

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1 Schabecoff, Philip, '*Everyone in Japan Has Heard of Him*' in *The New York Times Magazine*. August 2, 1970. In http://partners.nytimes.com/books/98/10/25/specials/mishima-mag.html Accessed December 11, 2008.

2 Although Mishima has been largely considered a representative "gay author", I believe this matter demands a cautious approach that avoids rough generalizations.

The autobiographical trait has in many cases been considered a crucial element in Mishima's literature; this sort of interpretation is probably most invigorated by the fact that Mishima himself led a life meant to be on display, surrounded both by the voices of disapproval towards his controversial actions as well as by the praising ones of the literary critics. However, Mishima – which, it must not be forgotten, is a pseudonym – wanders freely amidst the ambiguity of reality and fiction, without ever delimiting where one stops and the other begins. Following de Man[3] it can be said that the "fictional" or "real" character of autobiographical texts cannot be easily decided, and that thus the question for the "veracity" of an autobiographic text must be relocated, not concerning the nature of the text itself (that is to say, whether the facts there narrated truthfully correspond to the author's own life or not), but on the conjunction between the author's intention and the reading of such an intention. Therefore, more than a quest for the correspondence between the author's works and the facts of his life, it is *the reality constructed and brought to life by fiction* what calls for attention in Mishima's case.

By 1955, Mishima's popularity among Japanese readers was assured, having already published many of the novels that would earn him international recognition in the years to come: the aforementioned *Confessions of a Mask*, *Thirst for Love* (1950), *Forbidden Colors* (1953), *The Sound of the Waves* (1954). He was then working on the preparation of what is often considered to be his masterpiece: *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956). This year marks also the starting point of another decisive factor in Mishima's life: A weak and sickly kid, Mishima grew up to be a normal yet thin and unattractive man. But in 1955, he decided to undertake bodybuilding lessons and develop his until then poor body. This physical training would be parallel to a series of novels and short stories, as well as essays and plays, which dealt directly and indirectly with the problem of the body (generally described as necessarily beautiful and strong). Among them there are *Kyoko's house* (1959), *The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (1963), the essay *Sun and Steel* (1969), and his last work piece, the tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility* (between 1968 and 1970), whose last volume he handed to the publisher the very morning of his suicide[4].

Mishima would carry on with this physical training and this fascination for the body until his death, which would come fifteen years later, by his own hand. Needless to say, the dramatic episode of Mishima's ritual suicide (*seppuku*) at the Japanese Self-Defense Forces Headquarters is still one of the best remembered episodes of this author's life.

THREE RIVERS, THREE MOVEMENTS

'What I was seeking, in short, was a language of the body'[5].

In November of 1970, just a couple of weeks before carrying out his suicide, one that, judging from its very complex nature, cannot but be understood as carefully planned, an exhibition in a Tokyo department store was launched, with the simple title 'Mishima Yukio'[6]. It comprised a series of photographs of the author, many of which showed his half-naked, built-up body in sexually suggestive or sadistic poses. Mishima himself divided the exhibition into four segments, each of which bore the name of a river, which flowed into what he called 'The Sea of Fertility'[7]. These rivers were 'of Writing', 'of Theatre', 'of Body' and 'of Action'. These four elements, clearly stated by

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3 De Man, Paul, '*Autobiography as De-Facement*' in *Comparative Literature*. MLN, Vol. 94, No. 5, Dec., 1979. pp. 919-930.

4 1955 can be considered as a turning point not only in Mishima's own personal life, but also in the style of his works, which seems to switch from a purely narcissistic, homoerotic direction, towards something that could be described as a 'literature of cruelty' and of destruction. This is clearly revealed in his 1956 novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*.

5 Mishima, Yukio. *Sun and Steel,* New York, Kodansha International, 1970. p. 7.

6 Stokes, Henry Scott. *Life and Death of Yukio Mishima,* Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle, 1975. p. 109.

7 Needless to say, this is a reference to his last work, the tetratralogy *The Sea of Fertility*, which is widely thought to be the summary of his life as well as of his thought.

Mishima himself as being the 'keys' to his whole life (the exhibition was a sort of retrospective and reinterpretation of his life at what would be its end), are so significant that they cannot be overlooked when attempting an interpretation of his life and work.

In the catalogue of the exhibition, Mishima emphasized that it was the river of Body which opened the way for that of Action to exist, and that these two merged and became one, a river flowing far from that of Writing. Mishima was clearly not the first to state this dichotomy – which echoes the polarity between physical and intellectual work, between body and mind –; however, he was concerned with emphasizing the gap that separates action (carried out through a body) and literature (writing), and took them for mutually exclusive paths. Besides, from this duality, he gave a preeminent position to the pole of Action and Body. The ideal Body, which for the author was the expression of 'reality', could only exist in a field where words played no part whatsoever. Words, on the other hand, although they strive to imitate the beauty of reality (and thus of the body) could nonetheless never reach the same status.

This unsolvable antagonism was present in Mishima's life until its very end. In his essay *Sun and Steel*, Mishima affirms that in the latter period of his life, he grew progressively closer to the field of Action, despising anything related to words. He states that by plunging into the river of Action, he has grown more and more tired of words, as if the quest for an ideal body (an ideal existence, in his terms) had actually liberated him from the prison brought about by words.

Naturally, one cannot naively take Mishima at his 'word' lest one falls into the trap that his assertion seems to open; it is quite obvious that, although his devotion for physical training grew stronger with time, his literary production was in no way depleted. Mishima did not *trade* words for body, but rather he built a new, unachievable objective: to find a writing that was not corrupted by words, *a literature of the act* which did not relate to the corrosiveness inevitably present in words. This, Mishima said, could only be achieved through an *action*. What this action means, and what the true relevance it has for this author's theory of the body is a problem we will approach later on.

The present article is thus an attempt at examining Mishima's dealings with the body according to the sequence of three movements, as they become evident in the aforementioned *Sun and Steel*. The first one leads the sickly kid to become a writer, plunging down deep into the waters of literature. In this first movement a character will be created: Hiraoka renounces his name and adopts 'Mishima' as his true persona, a new mask that he would wear until the very last day of his life, a character whose main endeavor was to tame language and, systematically yet poetically, make a dwelling out of the wild territory of words. The second movement makes Mishima, the writer, the character, pursue a quest for something "truer than words", a language of the ideal body, something that can only be achieved by escaping from the trap of letters and trough action. 'Since my own abnormal bodily existence was doubtless a product of the intellectual corrosion of words, the ideal body – the ideal existence – must, I told myself, be absolutely free from any interference by words'[8]. Needless to say, the focus in this second stage shifts from *words* to the *body*.

These first two movements, although clearly antithetical, are presented as simultaneous: according to Mishima, the fact that words were filled with a power to corrode reality, gave way for two contradictory tendencies to appear within himself. 'One was the determination to press ahead loyally with the corrosive function of words, and to make that my life's work. The other was the desire to encounter reality in some field where words should play no part at all'[9].

This second movement necessarily leads to a blind alley. Mishima will find himself living inside the contradiction of supporting two worlds that could not face each other: that of letters and that of the body. This will give way to a third movement, one about which he will never write in terms as clear as the ones he used to describe the previous two, but which will, nevertheless, become the decisive point in his history: In order to overcome all antagonisms he was to use his body as a means to convey a final act, to look for death by his own hand.

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8 Mishima, Yukio. op. cit. p.11.

9 Ibid. p. 9.

Before dealing in depth with these three movements, let us take a closer look at the dichotomy between language and body, from a psychoanalytical point of view.

MISHIMA'S BODY AND LACAN'S THREE REGISTERS

In *Sun and Steel*, Mishima introduces with great precision this problem of the body as opposed to language. In this essay, which deals mainly with the contradictory existence of the body (referred to as 'the flesh') and words, the following quote can be found. 'When I examine closely my early childhood, I realize that my memory of words reaches back far farther than my memory of the flesh. In the average person, I imagine, the body precedes language. In my case, words came first of all; then – belatedly, with every appearance of extreme reluctance, and already clothed in concepts – came the flesh. It was already, as goes without saying, sadly wasted by words'[10].

This body 'sadly wasted by words' resounds quite intriguingly in several of Mishima's novels. Is it not the same weak, ugly body the novice in *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (who has been filled up with his own father's words about beauty) complains about?[11] Is it not the body of the sickly character in *Confessions of a Mask*? Although it is rather difficult to make a bold equivalence, this similarity is worth remark.

The above citation calls one's attention particularly towards two points. On the one hand, Mishima seems to be aware of the fact that the body is not a previously granted object, something one is born with, but is rather a construction, something that emerges as the product of a certain structure. On the other hand, Mishima's conception of the body, at least in regard to his own body, is clearly determined by a language that precedes it.

These two characteristics, which interestingly enough Mishima finds exclusive of his own experience of the body, cannot but remind us of the Lacanian theory of the body as an outcome of the mirror stage, as previously determined both by the image as well as by language.

The body must necessarily be thought as something acquired, rather than as an immanent possession. That is to say that the subject *has* a body but cannot ever *be* a body. According to Pommier, we can only *have* a body for it was first and foremost an object for the mother's *jouissance*. 'Our body was the object of the maternal desire and, to this extent, we *are* not this body, we can only *have* it, we dwell inside this organic structure that in the beginning was foreign to us and which continues to be the locus for shelter we are more or less used to'[12]. From a Lacanian perspective, body can only be understood as a construction, subordinated to a structure that determines it, and therefore a possession. Thus, if the body must be understood as a construct rather than as an *a priori* element of subjectivity, it is necessary to explore the means and processes through which a body is acquired.

In *Sun and Steel*, Mishima strives to present body as the true expression of *reality*, as the incarnation of the nature of reality. This understanding of the body is indisputable; however, it immediately opens the question of *what* a reality is and *how* it is constituted. Considered from a Lacanian perspective, reality must not simply be differentiated from the register of the Real, but must rather be understood as a compound of the three registers (Symbolic, Imaginary *and* Real) and thus as a structure grounded on all of these fields. We will now inquire the ways in which such a reality is produced, in order to understand how the body can become a formation of reality.

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10 Ibid. p. 8.

11 'I had a weak constitution and was always being defeated by the other boys in running or on the exercise bar [...]'. Mishima, Yukio. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle, 1954. p. 5.

12 'Notre corps a d'abord été l'objet du désir maternel et, dans cette mesure, nous ne *sommes* pas ce corps, nous l'*avons* seulement, nous habitons cette charpente organique qui nous a d'abord été étrangère et qui continue d'etre ce lieu d'asile auquel nous nous sommes plus ou moins bien habitués, apparence dont le regard d'autrui ou le miroir nous permettent de vérifier les contours'. Pommier, Gérard. *Naissance et reinassance de l'écriture*, Paris, PUF, 1993. pp. 199-200. Translation from French is mine.

Lacan emphasized on the essential difference between a body and an organism. If an organism is to become a body, a process mediated, firstly, by an image must be required. (Certainly, overstressing the importance of the image might lead to mistakenly ruling out the symbolic dimension; the mere function of the image on the mirror could not ever accomplish to make a body out of an organism. I will deal with this matter later on.) Thus the human infant, who due to its premature birth cannot be considered as the possessor of a completely constituted organism, enters a phase at whose end, and by means of this mediation of the image, the I (and the body as an outcome of the latter[13]) will be produced.

Let us briefly recall the ground upon which the theory of the mirror stage stands: when a six-month-old child stands in front of a mirror, he is able to 'recognize'[14] himself in the image there projected. This *reconnaissance* must be understood in terms of identification, that is, as 'the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image'[15]. What makes this early recognition so peculiar is the fact that the mirror stage occurs among the manifest signs of the child's incomplete anatomy; although he does not yet have an autonomous body, he identifies himself with a fully formed bodily image.

It is the role that the image plays in the mirror stage what Lacan stresses in his first elaboration of this notion. 'The function of the mirror stage thus turns out', says Lacan, 'to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its *reality*'[16]. Here, it is the unity of the image what gives this premature, incomplete body a notion of unity (and thus, of reality), by connecting it into the network of other preexistent images that surround and determine it. This new image is born into a compound of adjoining preexisting images, and is thus incorporated into the imaginary realm. It can be said that bodily unity is, in this first approach, based on an image that is perceived as a whole[17] and that this image works as the reference matrix upon which the perception of all objects will be based.

Lacan would later on refer to this matter in the following terms: 'The image of [the subject's] body is the principle of every unity he perceives in objects. Now, he only perceives the unity of this specific image from the outside and in an anticipated manner. Because of this double relation which he has with himself, all the objects of his world are always structured around the wandering shadows of his own ego'[18]. The temporality of the mirror stage is expressed as anticipation. We are dealing with a mirror that shows a future, the unreachable future. This is the fiction in which the subject must necessarily be trapped in, in order to attain an I, to build up a body. Thus, the body could not be anything but an untimely realization of an unattainable future.

Although the crux at this point in the mirror stage is the identification with a mirrored image, its function cannot be limited to this sole matter.

It is usually stated that Lacan's theory on the acquisition of a body through the mirror stage is divided into two phases, one of which stresses on the role of the imaginary and a latter one, in which

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13 'The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface'. Freud, Sigmund, *The Ego and the Id* (1923b). S.E., XIX, p. 26. And then, in a footnote: 'I. e. the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides, as we have seen above, representing the superficies of the mental apparatus'.

14 Understanding *reconnaissance* as identification elucidates the possible criticism to this early recognition when understood in etymological terms, that is to say, as a recurrent knowledge. There is no previous knowledge to which the infant returns in the mirror stage. It is preferably, thus, to opt for the French term "méconnaisance" which avoids a possible confusion.

15 Lacan, Jacques. 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function-as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience'. (1949) *Écrits*, New York, Norton & Company, 2006. p. 76.

16 Ibid. p. 78.

17 Soller, Colete. '*El cuerpo en la enseñanza de Jacques Lacan*' in *Revista Traducciones*. Medellín, Fundación Freudiana de Medellín, No. 1, 1988. pp. 9-38.

18 Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar, Book II, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. New York, Norton & Company, 1988. p. 166.

the symbolic has a preeminent position. Lacan himself clearly argued against there being two periods in his teaching, one centered on an imaginary process, and another, posterior stage (related to his conference in Rome) in which the symbolic had a preeminence it had not been given before[19].

Certainly, the symbolic element which regulates the whole functioning of the mirror stage not only determines it but also precedes it. Another of the elements at stake during the child's encounter with his own image on the mirror is the adult who holds him and towards whom he directs his gaze in a sort of request for approval. This act of reference addresses not just the adult behind the child, but also the Other whom he stands for. This Other, leaving behind the simple status of caretaker, becomes the embodiment of the Law, the locus where meaning itself is contained. It is to this Other as the agent of language, as the bearer *par excellence* of the symbolic authority at which the child glances back, since it is only this symbolic authority which can give meaning to the image the infant recognizes as his own. Thus, this identification can only be seen as a 'translation' in imaginary terms of a symbolic commandment issued by the Other.

It seems clear that Mishima's understanding of words as a corrosive element that antecedes the body is in fact quite similar to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, as far as the latter emphasizes, in a parallel manner to that of Mishima, that the image of the body is preceded by the 'body of language', which determines it as much as condemns it to the impossibility of ever becoming complete. However, there is yet another element to be taken into account, for in every specular image of the body there must be a remainder, which defines the limits that determine every imaginary relation[20].

The bodily image, to which identification refers, corresponds to the actual organism only in a partial way. Marked by its unavoidable condition of exteriority, this image cannot help but failing in becoming a truthful representation. There is something about the organism that cannot be seized by either the image or by the symbolic, which remains as a testimony of the impossibility of the body, of its condition of fiction. This element belongs to the register of the real. This remainder, this residue that is never apprehended in symbolic or imaginary terms, lingers not only in the structure of the subject itself, but also in the body, becoming the last remnant of *jouissance* that gives birth, among others, to symptoms. This real speaks from within the subject and yet is not completely the voice of his being as a subject.

To outline Lacan's slippery notion of the real is no easy task. However, it is possible to inquire about its nature by looking into its manifestations. For instance, we can find that this real, bursting into the symbolic order in a devastating and inescapable manner, is the core element in the phenomenon of repetition[21]. Let us then take a look at the lights that the notion of repetition might shed on the matter of the real.

In his 11th seminar, Lacan says: 'Repetition first appears in a form that is not clear, that is not self-evident, like a reproduction, or a making present, *in act*. That is why I have placed *The Act* with a large question-mark at the bottom of the blackboard so as to indicate that, as long as we speak of the relations of repetition with the real, this act will remain on our horizon'[22]. Repetition is a perpetually continuous act of going around what does not cease to be said, even if it cannot be said. Freud, in his text on repetition, stated that the process of remembering necessarily stops at the point where it clashes against a traumatic point that cannot be brought into the recollected material. In other words, it can only occur up to the point where it clashes against the real, against a remnant of a traumatic affect, which cannot be remembered.

Following Freud's approach on the matter it can be said that, in the clinical sphere, when the repressed material cannot be brought to conscious remembrance by the patient, it appears (and

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19 'Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait deux temps dans ce que j'ai jamais enseigné, un temps qui serait centré sur le stade du miroir et sur l'imaginaire, et puis après [...] la découverte que j'aurais faite tout d'un coup du signifiant'. Lacan, Jacques. *Le séminaire X. L'angoisse*, Paris, Seuil, 2004. p. 40.

20 Cf. Ibid. p. 50.

21 Lacan, Jacques. *Des Noms-du-Père*, Paris, Seuil, 2005. p. 41.

22 Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1981. p. 50.

reappears, on and on) under another shape, that of an unmotivated action, an *acting out*. 'We may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it'[23].

Repetition, as the recurrent apparition of the bit of real, insofar as it is structurally linked to the phenomenon of the act (in its various forms), opens up a way for better comprehending Mishima's take on the body.

WRITING, BODY-BUILDING AND PASSAGE À L'ACTE

> Why is an act not mere behavior? Let us concentrate, for example, on an act that is unambiguous, the act of cutting open one's belly in certain conditions [...] – why do people do that? Because they think it annoys others, because, in the structure, it is an act that is done in honor of something. But wait. Let us not be precipitate until we know, and let us take note of this, that an act, a true act, always has an element of structure, by the fact of concerning a real that is not self-evidently caught up in it[24].

We have seen how image and language (imaginary and symbolic) give birth to a body that is no different from a fiction, based on which subjectivity works, and that there is an equally constitutive remnant (real) impossible to apprehend, which reappears, for instance, in acts of repetition. Nevertheless, in Mishima's case, in this phenomenon there is a complex turn of events. According to his biographers, Mishima's primarily acquired body was a weak, poor body, one which seemed to be identified with his own grandmother's in terms of sickness. This body was so invasively penetrated by words that, in order for it to exist as such, the two dimensions had to be split. And so, the author decides to escape from this prison (seen by the artist as a characteristic only of his own self), in at least two ways that correspond to the first two "movements" mentioned previously.

On the one hand, he attempts to make the Other's code his, and 'to press ahead loyally with the corrosive function of words and to make that [his] life's work'[25]. This can be seen in general terms as the task that any creator willingly, although not painlessly, undertakes. In the case of language, words (which to a certain extent must be universal in order to become a means for communication) are transformed by any author's action into a purely individual object. According to Mishima, a writer makes words his own thing, uses them for his own private purposes, perverts them, and in this perversion, he finds style[26]. 'As words become particularized, and as men begin – in however small a way – to use them in personal, arbitrary ways, so their transformation into art begins'[27]. Writing becomes for Mishima the instrument for his historization, his becoming a subject; he particularizes language and makes it his own thing, he creates a stage on which the body of his texts is his own. However, according to Mishima, words fail to become a 'true language', one that could reach the very core of the subject.

This gives way to the second movement. Here, he decides to build a new, ideal body over the old, loathed one. Mishima takes a classical notion of physical beauty and determines himself to fit into it. 'The muscles that I thus created were at one and the same time simple existence and works of art; they even, paradoxically, possessed a certain abstract nature... Their function was precisely opposite to that of words'[28] By approaching the ideal (an approach which can only be understood as an

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23 Freud, Sigmund. *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through* (1914). S. E. XII, p. 150.

24 Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, op. cit. p. 50.

25 Mishima, Yukio. *Sun and Steel,* op. cit. p. 9.

26 Ibid. p. 30.

27 Ibid. p. 29.

28 Ibid.

asymptotic one, for the ideal is never fully reached), Mishima realizes that his body has become an abstract object, deprived of any particular characteristic, therefore, a universal work of art, another sort of performance in no way different from the fiction that words bring about. Although this movement corresponds to what Mishima calls 'Action', it only reaches the same impossibility of words. In other words, Mishima's attempt 'to find a language of the body', to place his body where words had been, ends up in failure, and that which could link both realms remains still unachieved.

The transformation that takes place for both words and body seems to be the only actual possibility for binding art and life. However, Mishima discovers that as he isolates and works with each of them, the gap between them keeps on growing larger. Thus, the conjunction between them could only happen through acceptance of their mutually exclusive contradiction. 'The embracing of a dual polarity within the self and the acceptance of contradiction and collision – such was my own blend of "art and action"'[29]. This acceptance, however, is far from taking the form of a quiet resignation. Quite on the contrary, Mishima states that only a *true* form of *action* could embody this acceptance.

Let us here, then, take a further step towards inquiring what action is and how it can be understood from a psychoanalytic point of view.

To better understand the three movements previously mentioned, let us go back to Lacan's three registers, this time from a different perspective. In his tenth seminar Lacan elaborated the notions of the scene and the world. The 'scene' is the locus where the subject as such appears, on stage, symbolized, historized. It is a framework constituted of both the imaginary and the symbolic, and delimits the frame in which the subject stages his own fantasy. 'All of the things in the world come on stage according to the laws of the signifier, laws that we could in no way take at first sight as homogeneous to those of the world'[30]. This structure, however, appears within the context of the 'world', which must necessarily be understood as belonging to the dimension of the real, where the subject cannot exist as such for there is nothing that can *speak* about him (that is to say, the subject can only appear as such on a stage, as a speaking being).

Lacan's take on the scene seems to bear a striking resemblance to a function of body and mind which Mishima calls the 'false order'. For Mishima, both mind and body share what he calls 'the tendency to instantly create their own small universe, their own false order'. 'This function of the body and mind in creating for a short while their own miniature universes is, in fact, no more than an illusion; yet the fleeting sense of happiness in human life owes much to precisely this type of "false order". It is a kind of protective function of life in face of the chaos around it'[31]. This 'false order' shares with Lacan's 'stage' the condition of being no more than an ephemeral fantasy, and yet, it is precisely this fantasy what gives the subject a place to stand firmly in the middle of the wasteland that is the "world".

In *Sun and Steel*, Mishima introduces the idea of 'false order' in order to reveal the reasons behind his beginning to train and develop his body. 'The possibility then presented itself of breaking down one type of 'false order' and creating another in its place'[32]. If words were no more than an ephemeral fantasy, then they could be as easily replaced by another one, in this case, one belonging to the physical sphere.

In this fictional realm called the scene, *acting out* takes place, a concept whose origin must be traced back to the clinical context. As mentioned above, acting out refers to repressed material that reappears in analysis, not under the shape of a remembrance but as an unmotivated action. In Lacanian terms, the return of the repressed occurs when that which did not come to light in the symbolic appears in the real. Acting out is yet another phenomenon of reappearance in the real, but in this case the subject does not suffer from this return, but rather performs it, acts it out; some truth speaks through the subject himself who ignores the message he is conveying through his action.

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[29] Ibid. p. 49.

[30] Lacan, Jacques. *L'angoisse*, op. cit. p. 43. (Translation from French is mine).

[31] Mishima, Yukio. *Sun and Steel*, op. cit. pp. 24-25.

[32] Ibid. p. 25.

For acting out to occur, two elements are indispensable: a stage and an Other, to whom it is addressed. In Mishima's case it is quite clear that the set-up of the stage is carried out by means of performing what he called 'the action' (present, as we have concluded, both in his literature as well as in the creation and consequent exhibition of his built-up body. 'When at last I came to own such a body, I wanted to display it to everyone, to show it off and let it move in front of every eye'[33]). And yet, although this performative element is clearly close to acting out's scenic component, it is not possible to affirm that any performance is a significant acting out. Let us say, for now, that Mishima's bodybuilding and his literature, and also his constant theatrical performances, as well as his narcissistic pictures, are a sort of *staged* acting out. Now, in what concerns the Other, it is quite clear that Mishima built not only the stage on which to perform, and the characters that enter the scene, but he has even managed to build an Other, customized to fit his needs[34]. It might be possible to say, however, that the 'real action' is not contained in this theory of action Mishima proclaims as 'pure', for this action is nothing but a carefully staged sort of acting out.

However, another relation can be set up in relation with this 'scene'. When the subject does not *perform* but rather *escape*, when he lets himself fall from the scene, *passage à l'acte* takes place. *Passage à l'acte* is a jumping from the scene and into the world, where symbolization is lost. It is a radical movement, in which the subject drops what he has built on the scene and runs away from the field of signification onto the more radical sphere of the real. Certainly, the subject involved in such a confrontation, does not come out of it unmodified. It is from this perspective that Lacan's following statement should be taken into consideration: 'from a true act the subject emerges different [...] its structure is modified'[35].

Perhaps, it is something close to a *passage à l'acte* what Mishima carries out in the third of the movements we have referred to. Is it not there, then, where Mishima's true theory of action should be looked for?

If, as Mishima says, true body (as opposed to the ideal one) can only be achieved through a true action, that is to say, an action which reveals the nature of the body, it becomes clear that this action is radically different from any staged form of acting out; it is rather an action that renounces signification and aims at the heart of the unspeakable. Now, this "true nature of the body" cannot but remind us of that inapprehensible remain of the real we mentioned before: body's true nature cannot be seized within the framework of the bodily image, since this image is already a construction built upon a fragmented nature. Thus, in order to grasp the essence of the body, body itself must be torn apart.

Mishima states this in clearer words, by making use of a metaphor.

> *The antinomy between seeing and existing is decisive, since it involves the question of how the core of the apple can be seen through the ordinary, red, opaque skin [...] Let us picture a single, healthy apple. This apple was not called into existence by words, nor is it possible that the core should be visible from the outside [...] The apple certainly exists, but to the core this existence as yet seems inadequate; if words cannot endorse it, then the only way to endorse it is with the eyes [...] There is only one method of solving this contradiction. It is for a knife to be plunged deep into the apple so that it is split open and the core is exposed to the light...Yet then the existence of the cut apple falls into fragments'*[36].

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33 Stokes, Henry Scott. *Life and Death of Yukio Mishima,* op. cit. pp. 184.

34 This introduces the problem of Mishima's supposed devotion to the figure of the Emperor, and the motif of his suicide as a patriotic, nationalistic act of love for the Emperor himself. However, this is a topic that requires further and closer consideration and will thus not be dealt with here.

35 Lacan, Jacques. *Le séminaire XIV, La logique du fantasme.* Unpublished. Class of February 22, 1967. Translation from French is mine.

36 Mishima, Yukio. *Sun and Steel*, op. cit. p. 65.

This is the nucleus of Mishima's theory of the body.

Here a conclusion can be drawn: For Mishima, a perfect body is not just one that is displayed to be seen, but rather one that also manages to exhibit its core, what is irrepresentable, the real. By committing suicide, Mishima is jumping off the scene he had carefully built trough time; he is finally achieving the goal of becoming completely free from words. However, through this *passage à l'acte* there is no possible subject who could remain. At it, language ceases and only a letter remains: the one he wrote on his own stomach at the moment of dying.

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