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EXPLORING THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN MORALITY AND RELIGION: THE
SHIN-SHINSHŪKYŌ (NEW NEW RELIGIONS) PHENOMENON
AND THE AUM ANTI-UTOPIA

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Abstract. The study attempts to complete the conclusions of social-religious research undertaken up till now, and therefore analyzes the new religious phenomenon" (*Shin-shinshūkyō/ New New Religions*), especially the Aum Shinrikyō cult of the contemporary Japanese society, from an interdisciplinary perspective. Focusing upon the terrorist attack with sarin gas caused by the Aum Shinrikyō cult, our analysis uses the method of Chinese boxes (the small box is in a bigger box which, in its turn, is placed in an even bigger box and so on), to deal with the complex issues beyond the criminal dimension. The study presents in this sense the victims' confessions (*higaisha*) as well as the aggressors' confessions (*kagaisha*) as published by the famous contemporary writer Haruki Murakami in the journalistic novel *Underground* (1997). The Aum Shinrikyō cult and the religious terrorist attack from the Tokyo subway eventually become important "confession-evidence" in the process of knowing the Japanese spirituality and the way in which its religious feeling, permanently in search of a way of manifestation, reflects the "normality" of a free modern society. By its aspects of antiutopian "religious affair", the *Aum story* urges mankind on an exercise of autoreflexion.

Key Words: *Shin-shinshūkyō (New New Religions)*, Aum Shinrikyō, religious feeling, apocalypse, antiutopia

*People all over the world see religion as salvation.
But, when religion hurts and leaves victims, where
is salvation?*

Haruki Murakami, *Underground*

Argument

*After all, they'd also joined Aum because the world
outside seemed without value.*

Kanda Miyuki, Aum member

Great attention has been lately given in many specialty papers to the birth of “urban myths” of religious nature and the phenomenon of religious terrorism contemporary society faces, as the aggressiveness and social effects they generate grow more and more serious. However, studies of that kind are generally biased, focusing on either religious or moral and social perspective, since they only assume as object of study the mentality or attitude of the aggressors. Nevertheless, the “religiousness” of a faith cannot be quantified by one single unit of measure, as long as the search of a religious feeling represents the very manner of survival of a community, regardless the traumas or contradictions it might be historically related to. We thus propose an interdisciplinary approach of a terrorist attack that took place in Japan, making use of data provided by both religious and social interpretation, as well as the literary-documentary view and that of philosophy of religions.

The process of understanding a society is complex and categorical delimitations most frequently become uncertain, because the balance is never one directional. It definitely takes temerity to interpret the aggressors’ deeds from the perspective of their own testimonies, but it is also important, we believe, to avoid any preconceived ideas about the analysis of facts and to wipe out borders that might isolate psychologically the ones involved in a religious “affair”, in order to properly comprehend a society.

20th March 1995 is a date that marked the history of post-war Japan: bags with sarin gas (mortal gas, invented by the Nazis) were released on the Tokyo subway by followers of the religious sect Aum Shinrikyō. According to official statements, the attack made over 5000 victims, 12 of whom died.

Was the subway attack eventually just a criminal senseless act, committed by a religious group of “madmen”? On trying to grasp the interior motivations that generated such a gesture of religious violence, Haruki Murakami, the contemporary Japanese writer translated in over 30 languages, interviews, over the year following the attack, the victims involved and also their aggressors. The conclusions of the investigation, published as journalistic novel entitled *Underground* (1997), are

unexpected: victims are further *victimized* by the society that ends up by isolating *the one* who passed through that experience, apart from *the others*, the normal world, left outside the incident; on the other hand, aggressors themselves appear in the hyposthesis of ...innocent criminals, after testimonies made on trial in which they stated they had, at the time, neither the power nor the liberty to oppose the orders given by the leader of the sect, Shōkō Asahara, even though having been fully aware of the tragic consequences they might produce on pricking those bags with umbrellas, inside the subway, at rush hours in traffic.

Shock, horror and fear. Dead end, when logic and senses are neutralized. The Japanese society seemed to face an unprecedented challenge. However, the many studies of religious sociology published after the attack regard the phenomenon only from the point of view of the attacker: it is the aggressor who comes to the forefront, and not the the aggressed one, who remains in some anonymous mass. Nevertheless, such a complex phenomenon cannot be properly understood unless several approaches are used. We thus wonder whether the conclusions of analyses undertaken up till now could be completed by an investigation of the new religious phenomena (*Shin-shinshūkyō*/ *New New Religions*), particularly the Aum Shinrikyō cult, starting from the analysis of the victims' confessions (*higaisha*) and those of the aggressors (*kagaisha*), as published by Haruki Murakami in the book mentioned above, a kind of dossier containing "live evidence" in the "Aum process"?! Religious attacks known in the history of mankind were generally directed towards the other, the one of different religion, sometimes of another language also, or from another territory. What is mostly striking about the attack with sarin gas from Tokyo, is the detail, impossible to elude, that the criminal gesture was of the Japanese against the Japanese... A criminal group was in conflict with the Japanese social conscience.

However, on analyzing a religious attack, one finds difficult not to distinguish between the two "parties", of victims or "the healthy" on the one hand, of criminals or "the unhealthy ones", on the other hand, although justice never seems to belong to a single side. The media presented the event insisting especially upon the moral dimension: good against evil, normality in contrast to madness, sickness fighting health. "Correct", "healthy", "normal" became terms with uncertain semantic value. As opposed to Aum, the other world was "right", "healthy" and "sane". Of course, things could not possibly have been as simple as presented. Both sides shared in fact problems of the same kind, yet they had *different consciences*.

By its manifestations, the Aum cult turned upside down and reversed¹ the perspective of the *inside* (*uchi*) and the *outside* (*soto*), the foundation of the Japanese society, which separates the *self* (*my family, my house, my company, my country*) from *the other* (*the other's family, the other's house, the other's company, the other's country*), revealing the close

connection (*heisasei*) between the self and the surrounding environment, as well as the regressiveness (*taikōsei*) characterizing them.

The social and religious impact exerted by the Aum sect, which was regarded prior to 1995 as *an unidentified threat*, reveals the vulnerability of the Japanese society, oriented towards overproduction and consumption, and points out the necessity to refocus upon the “spiritual” dimension of existence: “The most important thing for Japan at this point is to pursue a new spiritual wholeness. I can’t see any future for Japan if we blindly persist with today’s materialistic pursuits.”². After all, the most important issue the subway attack raises regards not *who* produced the drama, but rather how to realize consciously *what* exactly had led to that:

“As to the criminals who actually planted the sarin, I honestly can’t say I feel much anger or hatred. I suppose I just don’t make the connection, and I can’t seem to find those emotions in me. What I really think about are those families that have to bear the tragedy, their suffering is so much bigger to me than any anger or hatred I might feel toward the criminals. The fact that someone from Aum brought sarin onto the subway... that’s not the point. I don’t think about Aum’s role in the gas attack.”³.

The Aum phenomenon (*Aum story*) becomes the distorted image of a specific society, in a manner one could have hardly imagined. But could the story proposed by the cult, senseless as it might appear, be annulled by a much stronger story, provided by the subculture or the dominant culture, in an “efficient subsystem” or a “safe network”, so that other groups of the Aum type not be able to enter the scene and provoke similar incidents?!

Innocent ...criminals ?

*What I feel towards the Aum sect is not mere anger.
What mostly drives me out of my wits is the fact
that they play innocent. It so pisses me off I cannot
put it into words.*

Ōnuma Yoshio, victim

The Aum Shinrikyō religious cult (オウム真理教), created in 1984, is the first civil organization to use chemical weapons in two terrorist attacks (Matsumoto and Tokyo) against fellow citizens, as a consequence of which 19 people died. It is the sect which registered a record growth of the number of followers in Japan, up to 40.000 people in 1995.

Aum or *Om* is the Sanscrit name of the first mantram, one of the most powerful and famous from the Indian tradition, which states that universe

was created when the demiurge uttered the first formula to raise to life all things: AUM BHUR BHUVAH SVAH ('Aum Earth! Atmosphere! Sky!'). The strongest symbol of divinity, expressed on the outside and realized inside one soul, this primordial combination of sound sums up, in itself, "the creative breath", as its utterance implies a special charge of energy, highly efficient for the spiritual transformation. The *aum* was also related to the Hebrew *amen*, adopted by the Christian liturgy. It represents, in the latter sense, the word closing the prayers. Psychologists assert that all successions of vocal and consonant sounds share "the same archaetypal drive" called, by utterance, the creative breath⁴. Moreover, according to component ideograms, *shinrikyō* would mean 'learning of the supreme truth'.

The cult's credo, a mixture of Hindu, Buddhist and yogi beliefs, is based on meditation, asceticism and total devotion to the guru. It predicates radical change of the national-state system and the leader of the group even touches upon the necessity to exterminate Japan, so as to "purify" it and replace it with an "ideal society". These prescriptions are made in accordance with the model of the Aum organization itself, which adopted, in 1994, the structure of government ministries, trying to become, in various ways, a self-sufficient, alternative mini-society or even a mini-state⁵. This status could only be reached on starting the Armageddon (*harumagedon*), in order to take control first upon Japan, then upon the entire world. The end of humankind becomes thus imminent once the United States of America start the third world war against Japan; the Aum sect already invokes a supposed attack with poisoning gas from the American army.

Aum Shinrikyō was meant to function as an escape from routine and stress and to promote the belief in autonomy and individual power:

"What Aum did was reduce that type of psychological stress, and by doing so increase each individual's power. Ninety-nine percent of the image that Aum followers have of Aum Shinrikyo is exactly this – a way of looking at spiritual and physical phenomena, and a remedy or solution to these."⁶.

The cult was using hallucinating substances in order to initiate the sectarians and had the capacity to fabricate sarin gas. There lay however great cruelty under the humour displayed by the "circus mask". It was as if, for the authorities themselves, the Aum cult represented *a kind of new partner*, whom it had never dealt with up till then. It had a strange, fascinating vital force.

The terrorist attacks of the cult start on 4th November 1989, with abduction and assassination of lawyer Tsutsumi Sakamoto (and of his family), who made an official complaint against the sect. The next is the

attempt of bioterrorism from 1990, when members of the sect try, with the help of three vehicles, to release toxic gas in Yokohama, at the American navy headquarters from Yokosuka and on the international airport Narita, from Tokyo. The attack, however, half-failed. In 1992 they intend to obtain the Ebola virus from Zair, and the following year they want to disseminate anthrax from the roof of a building. All attempts fail. In June 1994, the word “sarin” appears in the learning of master Asahara, within the so-called “Sermon of the sarin gas”, followed by a sermon about the Armageddon, and repeated several times. The first terrorist attack with sarin gas took place in June 1994, in Matsumoto, a locality close to Tokyo, when Aum members drove a changed automobile in order to spread the gas around a building sheltering the judges and the auxiliary personnel of the instance who assessed at the time a case referring to the Aum cult, as the inhabitants of the city had initiated a protest against the sect. Eight people were killed and over one hundred and fifty were injured. The second attack took place in March 1995, in the Tokyo metropolis, when sarin gas was released in the subway transporting at the time approximately four million passengers. Aum is the first group to make use in its attacks of a mass destruction weapon, which makes it a “turning point”⁷ in the history of terrorism.

The spiritual leader of the Aum Shinrikyō sect is Shōkō Asahara, pseudonym of Chizuo Matsumoto. His biography is a mixture of presences and absences from Japan, and his activities a combination of the spiritual and the political coordinate: in 1970, he opens an acupuncture centre which he has to close ten years later, after being arrested and imprisoned for sale of false medicine. He spends the next two years in India and returns to Japan in 1984, as yoga instructor. In 1987 he creates the religious group Aum Shinsennokai, renamed in 1987 Aum Shinrikyō (‘the Supreme Truth’). On assuming he has reached illumination (= mystic experience) in the Himalaya mountains, he declares himself a prophet and attracts proselytes by promising them the trainings practised under his command would provide them with “superpowers” such as levitation, reading of thoughts etc. In 1990 he unsuccessfully runs for the Parliament together with his wife and other twenty three followers. He then starts to preach a catastrophe war, which he places chronologically in 1997, when only few people would survive the Armageddon, namely the ones who got God’s power through proper training. Their mission was consequently to create a new world, as he himself would often say: “If one trains and is liberated, then one can change the world.”⁸. Shōkō Asahara is described by those around him as a charismatic man, who managed to use some sort of mysticism in order to lead his followers to committing one of the most “shocking”⁹ crimes in the history of Japan.

In 2004, together with other 13 members of the sect, the leader of the cult is sentenced to death, as proven guilty of accusations of murder and attempt of murder in thirteen law files, summing up the death of twenty

seven people and injury of other few thousands. A report of the Japanese government of the time stated the sect was further “a threat for society”¹⁰. On 11th November 2008, Asahara requires revising of the sentence. However, the sentence issued by the Japanese court has not been yet executed.

Religious terrorism. From *kamikaze* soldiers to Aum “killer machines”

I don't consider Aum's crimes simply reckless behavior. Of course part of it was reckless, but there was a religious viewpoint pervading those actions.
Takahashi Hidetoshi, Aum member

The thought did cross my mind: "Some crazy's probably sprinkled pesticides or something."
Ichiba Takanori, victim

Kamikaze or “divine wind” (*kami*=‘god, spirit’; *kaze*=‘wind’) initially referred to typhoons which chased away the Mongolian fleet that was about to invade the Nippon archipelago in the 13th century (1281). The native *shinto* faith of the Japanese, animistic feeling and religious practice according to which everything surrounding the man possesses spirit, led the Japanese to believing the typhoon winds were sent by gods, which consequently made them divine¹¹. During the second world war, the term comes to denote the suicidal missions from the Pacific front, especially those of the Japanese pilots sent to counteract, like former typhoons, the anticipated arrival of American troops. Some kind of pseudonym for the “Special body of attack” (*Tokkōtai*), composed of volunteer students, *kamikaze* symbolizes a desperate means of resistance of Japan, which had already lost war to foreign occupation that could be foreseen. It was the answer the archipelago gave the double penury it faced during the last years of war: lack of experienced pilots and of fuel, which threatened to paralyze the Japanese air force. Such missions seemed more and more the only solution to avoid the dishonouring condition of prisoner. As a matter of fact, it appears the *kamikaze* gesture dates back to 1932, when, during the Shanghai incident, Japanese soldiers were seen heading in the Chinese trench, after having clothed their bodies in explosive. They became instantly national heroes. It is believed¹² to be the first recorded such phenomenon in the history of mankind. Its origins can undoubtedly be linked to the ideology of an imperial “mysticism” which regarded religion as basic instrument of the nationalist ideology¹³, turned in Japan, at the beginning of the 30's, into an ultranationalism invading all social structures: school, media, military service etc. *Kamikaze* soldiers, dead on the “Meiji revolution” (1867), in the name of the emperor, in a number of more than two million and a half, 5,000 out of whom only between 1944

and 1945¹⁴, are all considered divinities in the shinto sanctuary from Yasuguni, which even holds a register with their names.

If *kamikaze* soldiers would die in the name of an ideology, Aum's "killer machines" would kill in the name of a religion. The portrait of the aggressors made by victims suggests some automatic bodies that lost any human qualities:

"Most of the cultists there, they look spaced out, like their souls have been sucked away. They don't even laugh or cry. Like Noh masks, expressionless. I suppose you'd call it mind control. But not the Central Command. They've got expressions, they're thinking. They haven't undergone any mind control. They gave the orders. They joined forces with Asahara in that Universal State of theirs. Whatever they plead, there's no excuse."¹⁵.

Members of the organization seem to be led by a different ethics, have a different way of thinking and strongly believe in the legitimacy of their deeds, even though contrary to any common-sense rule. They consequently leave the impression of not belonging to this world, but to some other dimension:

"The way in which the Aum sect judges is radically different from ours, the majority of people. We believe they have done a wrong thing. But, from their point of view, we are the mistaking ones, moreover, they see it as a divine punishment. To be honest, I think it is wrong to start from the premise they are human as well. Because they have already given up the status, so they no longer need be given these rights. They act on basis of different laws."¹⁶.

Hayashi Ikuo, one of the five criminals involved in the subway assault, which killed two people and severely injured other 231, was a reputed cardiologist surgeon. He reached fast professional appreciation, but, even with the prospect of a brilliant career, he resigned to enter in 1990 the Aum sect, being appointed "Minister of Health" within the organization. Deep doubts regarding his own profession and attempt to find answers outside science make him leave, together with his family, in search of a religious life. He thus enters the "game" of the Holy War predicated by the Aum cult. Although aware of the fatal consequences of sarin gas infection, he does not oppose the order to take part in its release: "When asked by Asahara's legal team whether he could have refused if he had wanted to, Hayashi replied: 'If that had been possible, the Tokyo gas attack would never have happened.'" ¹⁷.

Hirose Kenichi was head-graduate of the Faculty of Physics from the Waseda University. After postuniversity studies, he declines any job offer and converts to the Aum cult, becoming an important member of the “Ministry of Sciences and Technologies”. Together with Yokoyama Masato, another criminal of the five, he is the main character in the Secret Plan of the Automatic Light Weapon. When ordered to release sarin gas in the subway, he instinctively rejected the idea, but his attachment to the doctrine of the sect was eventually stronger. He reminded in those moments of the teachings of the cult asserting that human feelings are the result of a wrong perspective, so they have to be surpassed. Faith in Aum meant absolute devotion.

The list of criminals is completed by Toyoda Tōru, another scientist of the Aum super-elite. Exceptional graduate of the Tokyo University, he pursued his studies in an elite laboratory until very soon finding himself on the way of “searching the truth”, which made him give up his career and join the sect. He takes part in the secret preparation of the sarin gas. And when ordered the mass assassination, just like his fellows to murder, he leaves behind all doubts, feelings and imagination with an “I’ve got no choice!”. Abandoning himself to the truth of teachings received, he fulfils his mission dedicated to the cause of Aum.

The death team includes, finally, Hayashi Yasuo, who had only part time jobs before entering the organization. He wandered all over the world, to finally get the revelation of faith in India. Out of the five, the subway line he is in charge of records the greatest number of dead and the most severely injured victims: eight people lost their life and 2 475 were intoxicated.

The ideal of the “harmonious Japanese society” had been brutally stricken, at least for a while, by tensions and conflicts generated by an action with religious motivation. Social values seemed reversed, the religious ethics was changed, responsibility no longer belonged to anybody. Human intelligence hit the human kin, eventually proving the frailty of the contemporary world: “Even Aum, after bringing together such brilliant minds, what do they do but plunge straight into mass terrorism? That’s just how weak the individual is.”¹⁸ Man proved to be dehumanized, torn apart from his own mind and his own feelings, turned into a powerless mechanism, lacking any discernment. Human being, be it aggressor or victim, found itself collapsed in a trap built by itself, a fact which victims of the subway attack admit altogether:

“I work in the scientific field and there are several such elites in Aum. I sometimes hesitate doing certain things... it happens. It doesn’t matter if the study you undertake involves weapons, because the feeling that you want to finish the experiment prevails upon anything else. This is why it is generally said we are rather vulnerable people. We

don't waste time analyzing what is right and what is wrong. We look for logic in things: 'I would like this to be so.', 'What happens if you do so?', 'Let's do this experiment.'. I get the feeling you just go with the flow until the end. I understand perfectly this fact. Because we deal with facts and the interaction between them, we focus on their rational side. But, when you are asked to ponder upon the irrational side, it is not so simple anymore."¹⁹.

In the eye of a hurricane: the birth of an “urban myth” with religious appeal

We certainly didn't have any tragic sense of being driven into a corner or anything . Inside Aum it was like the eye of a hurricane, very calm.

Kano Hiroyuki, Aum member

Victims of the subway drama admit, somehow “disgusted”, that a criminal attack in the name of religion took place in one of the less dangerous cities in the world: “I have never imagined something like that could happen in Japan, an extremely safe country, yet it did happen’...”²⁰.

Shintoists, Buddhists and Taoists, the Japanese seem to have ever had a very less “Western” understanding of religion. Evidence in this respect is provided by the number of the faithful recorded by the *Annual of religions from Japan*²¹ (109 million Shintoists, 96 million Buddhists, 10 million followers of another religion, 1,5 million Christians and 45000 Muslims), which exceeds the real number of population, standing thus for the numerous religious organizations (over 3000²²) that exist in the Nippon archipelago. One person can often be counted twice or thrice. Strange as this fact might seem in West, it is perfectly justified by the way the Japanese understand religion and relate to it: their beliefs are not founded on exclusive assertions, but rather combine various sensibilities. Japan's religious history means mixture and syncretism, sometimes overlappings of various autochthonous or borrowed beliefs and practices, that only specialists or politicians try to distinguish clearly: Shintoism, Buddhism, yin or yang path, ancestors worship, Confucianism, Christianity and so on. A common nowadays Japanese would utter his first prayer in the first day of the year in a shinto sanctuary, but he would go to the Buddhist cemetery for the celebration of the dead and would carefully choose in the rest of the year the wedding day or the day to change the house according to a calendar with *fasti* and *nefasti* days, based on belief in the sexagesimal time cycle. This lifestyle according to which a Japanese could be born a Shintoist and die a Buddhist made Western interpreters²³ consider the respective behavior a sort of *religious indifference* (“une sorte d'indifférence

religieuse”), and some Japanese, who would later become Aum members, confess the threat felt in this respect: “Aum’s finished as a religion.”²⁴

However, we live in a world of paradoxes and confusions, where survival becomes more and more difficult. Human individuals get caught in their own circle, where the macro and the micro overlap, with no chance to escape. Searching for a new source of energy to live, man creates an ideal universe and, if he finds a group displaying a similar slogan, he inevitably joins it, giving up the “normal world”. It seems the Aum sect satisfied such an expectation, as stated by its own followers:

“Aum was the most amazing group of all. I really admired them for the way they practiced what they preached. Compared to them, other religions were resigned, cozy, comfortable, passive. Aum training was very, very tough. Their religious view – that you must transform your own body before you can transform the world – had a hard-hitting realism. If there’s any chance for salvation, I thought, it has to begin like this.”²⁵

Analyzed by specialists in the domain²⁶ as religion rather than as some cult movement outside the “true” religion, Aum has antecedents in the history of Japanese religions. As multifaceted reality, religion can be approached from various angles. Starting from 1960, Japan records rapid urbanization and technological revolution with the immediate consequence of a spiritual vacuum. To fill this emptiness, sects appeared between 1920 and 1930 gain a great number of followers, while society witnesses another wave of “new new religions” (*Shin-shinshūkyō*/ *New New Religions*) between 1970 and 1980. In this period, people move from village to city and the matrix of traditional family is broken. New townspeople, separated from their roots, feel the lack of emotional and spiritual comfort in conditions of an extremely competitive and stressful life. Urbanization leaves behind the sacrifice of spiritual and cultural tradition, while the city society brings forth the epoch of the three non-principles: “indolence”, “indifference”, “irresponsibility”, accompanied by the ethics of working, rejection of the magic and cultivation of the existential tension between world as it is and some transcendental sacralty²⁷. Providing an eclectic doctrine, with elements from various traditional or spiritual religions of the world, these “new new religions” guarantee through their message²⁸ a sort of mystic experience, which addresses the individual rather than the family unit.

Insecurity of contemporary society, with its inevitable consequences, leading to chaos on several levels: economic, social, political and, last but not least, religious, becomes more acute than ever, and Haruki Murakami admits it openly:

“Things are in chaos. I understood that then [by the early '70s], but it's especially true today. There's no solid center, not just in Japan, but everywhere. So many people are feeling insecure these days, but for me, since I was 20 years old, that's what I've been feeling all along.”²⁹.

As carrier of fundamental values and source of spiritual salvation, religion adapts the new requirements of society; hence the Aum doctrine can be understood by integrating it in the social context of contemporary Japan. Mystic and exotic elements of master Asahara's teachings were firstly addressed to isolated, solitary and purposeless young people, for whom the cult opened the new world of a spiritual and mystic life: “I want to be this man's disciple and devote myself to him”, I decided. If I could to do that, I wouldn't mind abandoning all the dreams, desires, and hopes of this world.³⁰. People who join the sect are alienated, not having discovered up to then anything important in life, moreover they confess with no reserves the inability to “adapt” the worldly system, either because they feel incompatible to it, or because they had been at some point excluded:

“I was always drawn to religion, but my father was materialist, a rationalist. This caused problems between us. I'd come out with some religious opinion and he'd laugh at me, saying, “Enough of this God nonsense!” He'd get furious. This made me so sad...”³¹

The threat of death, the irreversible passage of time, the ephemerality of the world, the suffering produced by this precarity brings the young generation in search of a religious feeling. Disappointed by philosophy treaties they see as mere displays of “linguistic talents”, accepting the entropy law of the universe and trying to find the answer related to the significance of “not to be” (*mu*), some young Japanese see the “after death path” and the devotion to the law of Buddhist karma as the only way “to heighten the spiritual level” worth considering. The books of the Aum cult, *Beyond Life and Death*, *Initiation*, *Mahayana Sutra*, starting from the explicit idea that world is inherently bad, also seem to satisfy the expectations of people suffering from people-phobia, from various reasons:

“The books explained how the path to true happiness lay in being liberated. Once liberated, you will gain eternal happiness. For instance, even if in my life I feel happy, it won't last – but how wonderful it would be if happiness could last forever.”³².

The characteristics³³ of the Aum Shirikyō cult could be synthesized in five coordinates: elements from Japanese popular beliefs, inter-human relations based on a pseudo-system parent (father)/ child, antisocial conduct, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, valorisation of life in a particular way, very good capacity of organization and obvious mercantile features.

The origins of the Aum ideology relate to Buddhist philosophy and Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhism, presumably the most controversial oriental religion, is the sole religion whose founder doesn't declare himself the God's prophet or his messenger, and which, moreover, rejects the idea of a God as supreme being³⁴. Yet, this founder proclaims himself "the Awaken" (Buddha), hence guide and spiritual master, who wants to free people. His soteriologic message becomes thus a religion oriented towards "Salvation". The Buddhism, religion and philosophy attempting to redeem the man, considers the true faith is of two types³⁵. It is, in the first sense, the *dharma faith*, founded on the "Power of the Originary Oath" and following the prescriptions of the right way (*dharma*), whereas, in the second sense, it is the first faith to have come in touch with human sins, which actually makes it the *human faith* itself. The faith is striving for mystic illumination, while the only way of redemption resorts to the interior activity of focused contemplation which empties the soul of the thirst for world³⁶. Buddhism starts by realizing the fact that *the ego* you believe as yours is not the true *self*. In consequence, Buddhism is the farthest religion from the control of mind, resembling in this respect Socrates' idea that wisdom means not to think you are wise. In other words, initiation in Buddhist belief hints at the discovery of the true *self*. All impurities or attachments of any kind are eliminated.

However, the Aum cult changed the initial precepts of Buddhism: "[...] but at Aum I found myself developing a Buddhist mind-set completely new to me."³⁷, turning its teachings in a "way to control the mind", although claiming spiritual power, discernment, perfectionism as "targets" of the doctrine:

"But what Mr. Matsumoto [Asahara] did was equate "Self" and "attachments". He said that in order to get rid of the ego, the Self must be disposed of as well. Humans love the "Self", so they suffer, and if the "Self" can be discarded then a shining true Self will emerge. But this is a complete reversal of Buddhist teachings. The Self is what should be *discovered*, not discarded. Terrorist crimes like the gas attack result from this process of easily giving up on the Self. If the Self is lost, then people will become completely insensitive to murder and terrorism. In the final analysis, Aum created people who had discarded their Selves and just followed

orders. Therefore enlightened practitioners in Aum, those most steeped in Aum doctrine, are not truly enlightened people who have mastered the truth. It's a perversion for believers who supposedly have renounced the world to run around collecting donations in the name of "salvation".³⁸

Man could know the deepest part of him and reach that *essential personal distortion* which must be corrected only through the practice of meditation. The Aum cult proposed the way to redemption by yoga training, conferring the meetings mainly a thaumaturgic and soteriologic dimension. Followers first joined the sect in order to cure a disease or surpass bad luck, but the experience resulted must have also had another effect upon the initial impulse, everything changing eventually in a sum of motivations and, later, even obligations.

Inspiring from "the Transcendental Meditation", the leader of the sect Shōkō Asahara self-entitled "guru" and promised his followers the capacity to levitate and experience mystic travels:

"For me, the Master was a spiritual leader. Not a prophet, but someone who could have put off any doubt concerning the Buddhist faith. He was able to interpret. And hard as you might try to grasp the meaning of old scriptures, you cannot."³⁹

As practitioners confessed, the cult used the bases of primitive Buddhism to develop *kundalini* through ascetic practices, whereas Asahara himself, believing to be the Last Freed One, was deified and all those in relation to the guru – thus blessed. Accordingly, followers strongly believed the guru would return as Maitreya Buddha after four billion years, to *raise the souls of the dead*.

But the high spiritual aspirations of the Aum "doctrine" cancel "individual responsibilities". Even the gravest of events can be explained through *karma*, the wheel of karmic causality leaving no-one to be actually affected. Nothing could make the Aum practitioners suffer, this is why they regard the outsiders with a certain superiority: "Aum members looked down on ordinary people in the secular world. Like: 'Look how they're all suffering, but we're not bothered'."⁴⁰

To Aum's logic, any criminal gesture is entirely justified, were it necessary to reach the Nirvana, the eternal sleep and the ultimate state unaltered by any transformation⁴¹. Followers confessed the Tantra Vajrayana doctrine was invoked on the given circumstance, as it annulled the distinction between good and evil and stated that, once on the way to redemption, *anything could happen before redemption*:

"If by killing another person you raised him up, that person would be happier than he would have

been living his life. So I do understand that path. But that should only be done by someone who has the ability to discern the process of transmigration and rebirth.”⁴² .

Religion becomes a need and a necessity in life only when anything else loses importance and utility. When existence becomes a dilemma and even the own self resembles an interrogation, only religion seem to still try finding some answers. The search stimulated by such questions starts with violation of the ordinary perspective of man relating everything to himself and with reversal of the habit to place the man in the centre of all things. The abyss opens at the feet of human individual and the perspective of death gives life new value:

“Our life stands poised at the brink of the abyss of nihilism to which it may return at any moment. Our existence is an existence at one with non-existence, swinging back and forth over nihilism, ceaselessly passing away and ceaselessly regaining its existence. This is what is called the “incessant becoming” of existence.”⁴³ .

Where is life, there is also death, and where is death, there is life also. In front of death, life becomes uncertain, loses its importance as reality, and seems un-real.

The feeling of desacralization of death, as Eliade called it, and the fear of the near future come to affect even a country that records post-capitalist prosperity. Nostradamus’ prophecies predicting the end of the world in 1999, make some Japanese be happy not to grow old in “this tough society”. Convinced the world is heading to apocalypse, the Japanese look for a religious formula which could provide them with a lifestyle adequate to such vision and one which could actually be put into practice. The Aum Shinrikyō sect exploits the context and receives all those who accept *the end*. Of all cults, Aum is the sole organization which makes use of the apocalyptic vision upon the world in terms of *propaganda*. Caught in the rhythm of daily life, the religious feeling of death reached a dead end in the contemporary Japanese society. Hence the Aum sect appeared:

“When the Aum question comes up, people always start talking about relations between parents and children going sour, and family discord, but it can’t be reduced to something so simplistic. Certainly one of the attractions of Aum lay in people’s frustrations with reality and unrest in the family, but a much more important factor lays in apocalyptic feelings of “the end of the

world”, feelings all of us have about the future. If you pay attention to the universal feeling of all of us, all Japanese – all humankind, even – then you can’t explain Aum’s appeal to so many people by saying it’s all based on discord in the family.”⁴⁴.

The end of the world has always played an important role in shaping meanings throughout the history of mankind: the world has certain poles, in the sense of terminus and *telos*⁴⁵. For five hundred years, for instance, people expected the year 1000 to bring forth the end of the world. Then, as the year 2000 was approaching, it appeared only natural that apocalyptic fear should further increase. An Aum follower states this fact as such:

“Apocalypse is not some set idea, but more of a process. After an apocalyptic vision there’s always a purging or purifying process that takes place. In this sense I think the gas attack was a kind of catharsis, a psychological release of everything that had built up in Japan – the malice, the distorted consciousness we have. Not that the Aum incident got rid of everything. There’s still this suppressed, virus like apocalyptic vision that’s invading society and hasn’t been erased or digested. Even if you could get rid of it at an individual level, the virus would remain on a social level.”⁴⁶

In times of maximum tension, of excruciating strain, Messianic hopes and apocalypses are even stronger⁴⁷. Eschatological imagination led and fed during time the illusion of reconstruction, the hope in a personal or collective *renovation*, a *mystic restoration* of dignity and origin powers of man⁴⁸. Apocalypse became a negative utopia⁴⁹ turning human anxiety and the end of human life into the hope of rebirth. One of the Aum faithful reveals in an interview such a vision regarding the end, which he sees not as complete wiping out of the actual system, but as something similar to electronic resetting: “I prefer to think of it as being reset. It’s the desire to push the reset button on life. I imagine it as a catharsis, very peaceful.”⁵⁰

Diagnosed by theoreticians of religion⁵¹ as the source of apocalyptic violence, the Aum cult proposes eventually “an endless end”, which almost the entire 20th century comes to confirm by its experiences: world wars, nuclear weapons, destruction of the environment. The “anti-utopia” uttered by Aum Shinrikyō buries the hope of rebirth and leaves no place for an alternative way of living: “In what concerns the Aum cult, i feel disgust rather than anger. I loathe the followers who “were blinded”. ”⁵². Led by Asahara, the followers of the sect become robots whose function is to help fulfil the master’s prophecy regarding the end of the world, adopting a purely pragmatic or ironic attitude towards the world and devoting only to personal purposes:

“I got involved in this activity to kill daily world or, better said, to reject it completely. This is why I opened the gate called Aum. It was not a liberation of the soul, but an encounter with the dark side of your own soul.”⁵³.

The Aum cult, which appeared as signal of a social crisis, represents therefore an example of a social-religious phenomenon⁵⁴, with a synthetic doctrine, a charismatic leader who avails himself of signs and apocalyptic miracles and promotes an ecstatic behaviour, a fact which even the victims of his aggression admit:

“Maybe it sounds strange, but it’s not like I don’t understand all this religious fanatic stuff. I’ve always had a feel for that side of things. I don’t want to reject it straight out. I’ve always enjoyed the constellations and myths from the time I was small, which is why I wanted to be a sailor in the first place. But when you start organizing and forming groups, I don’t go in for all that. I have no interest in religious groups, but I don’t believe taking that sort of things seriously is necessarily all bad. I can understand that much.”⁵⁵.

It is true that, to oriental logic, the chain of phenomena functions according to rules different from the Western causal logic. Complex relations of determination link the cause and the effect, in both senses, and the reciprocal interrelation often blocks proper access to meaning, as rendered by formal and exact thought. Buddhism states that phenomena of the existence are the cause as well as the effect of suffering. The passage beyond means overcoming duality and entering a state of indistinctness.

Instead of conclusions: “the Aum epoch” or in search of a religious feeling

Usually people who go to these kinds of places are lacking something or seeking something.

Masutani Hajime, Aum member

I was looking for a purer kind of doctrine. Like Aum. Aum was closer to the original teachings of Buddhism.

Namimura Akio, Aum member

Mourning families should splash Asahara with sarin from a toy-gun.

Hiranaka Atsushi, victim

The concept of *Shin-shinshūkyō* (“New New Religions”) used in reference literature is meant to point out a new stage of development, respectively the second generation of “new” religions, formed after 1970. Referring actually to recent movements appeared within the so-called “new religious movements”, the term is used in Japan after the second world war to mark the normality of a process in a free society⁵⁶. The main characteristic of these “new new religious movements” is the great number of followers, especially young, gained after 1970 and their engaging in the promotion of religious doctrines with a certain degree of occultism and magic. Although Japanese statistics⁵⁷ showed diminution of religious belief in Japan, the moment paradoxically coincides with the apparition of these new religions.

Since the young seem to be more and more interested in life after death or the spiritual life, it has been highly likely for this religious “trend” to become a “boom”. Interestingly enough, studies before 1995 dedicated to the phenomenon treat such movements as a simple fashion (“minor wave”), with no characteristic features different from Japanese religiosity in general. They, however, exploit eventually in remarkable ways such features as polytheism, syncretism and world vanity⁵⁸. But at the same time, these “new new religions” give special attention to changes in contemporary society, they adapt the new requirements of existence, which makes researchers of the phenomenon⁵⁹ define the new movements as religious organizations rooted in the concepts and practices of Japanese traditional religions, but which also respond, in a specific manner, to the needs of modern societies, in permanent search of ways of religious living:

“Most of these organizations, can be regarded as atavistic revitalization movements based on religious and magical practices such as shamanism, ancestor worship, purification rituals, and exorcism which can be traced back to prehistoric times” .⁶⁰.

The novelty of such movements consists in their area of prozelytism and manner of organization rather than in doctrine and practice. At the beginning of the 90’s, analysts regarded the phenomenon with certain indulgence, although implying some rethorical questions, such as the ones concerning the impact they might have not only upon the ulterior orientation of Japanese religions, but also upon the Japanese society and culture on the whole.

Anyway, the year 1995 brings the new Japanese religious movements not only in the specialists’ attention, but also in front of the eyes of public all over the world. After the attack with sarin gas from the Tokyo subway, people wonder in astonishment how could some elites, with high learning, believe in a new and illogical religion?! Data become even more alarming once it is proved the respective people did not join the sect in spite of, but exactly *because* they belonged to the elite: “If there was something

wonderful there, something uplifting, things might change, but right now there isn't. I could only find that in Aum Shinrikyo.”⁶¹.

Surgeon Hayashi Ikuyo, the doctor totally devoted to his patients until entering the organization, one of the five criminals who released sarin gas in the subway, confesses in the volume *Aum and I* his own projection of the mission and the personal understanding of the doctrine of the cult he had adhered to:

“In his sermon Asahara spoke about the Shambhala Plan, which involved the construction of a Lotus Village. There would be an Astral Hospital there, and a Shinri School that would provide a thoroughgoing education [...] Medical care would be so-called Astral Medicine, which would be based on Asahara's visions of another [astral] dimension and memories of past lives he would see during meditation. Astral medicine would examine the patients' karma and energy level, and take into consideration death and transmigration [...] I'd had a dream of a green, natural spot with buildings dotting the landscape, where truly caring medical care and education were carried out. My vision and the Lotus Village were one and the same.”⁶².

The motivations of the followers are pure, but they lie much far from the reality full of confusions and contradictions, whereas their visions become inevitably transparent caricatures of society. Aum represented an option and almost confirmed the fact that the “promised” world, if not here, could not possibly be somewhere else. The wall separating the everyday from a dangerous religious cult proved to be unthinkably thin.

The apparition of the Aum Shinrikyō cult could not be considered a bizarre aberration, but a mirror reflection of the shortcomings of Japanese society⁶³. One should take into account, in this respect, the education system, the imperial system, the influence of mass-media, the development of the consumer society, the political corruption, the fall of the paternalist system, the rigidity of traditional religions and, last but not least, the spiritual vacuum:

“The Aum affair illuminates a deep problem that seems to lie in the self-defense mechanism of the Japanese psyche, that avoids confronting oneself by means of diversion, parodying, transferring the blame, and escaping into a kind of virtual reality.”⁶⁴

Then, Aum is related to the experiences of various generations belonging to the 20th century: militarism from the period of war, student movements from the 60's, elements of contemporary popular culture such

as animation, manga etc. from the 70's and 80's. In addition to that, it has also been seen as a possible reaction to the influence of Western values upon the Japanese mentality. Exploiting and taking advantage of the tares of society, Asahara "sold" religious feeling for all those who wanted it: "I wanted to lead a religious life."⁶⁵ Without necessarily understanding the path of redemption proposed by the cult, considering there must be somewhere a deeper meaning, many Japanese gave up "the normal world" and joined the organization, where they finally felt fulfilled: "Maybe instead of painting', I thought, 'living a religious life will help me get closer to the reality inside me'."⁶⁶

If we accept the explanation that Aum members were controlled mentally, we may understand why they not even apologized, as it would have been normal between *higaisha* (victims) and *kagaisha* (aggressors): "I hate the criminals and i will in no way ever forget them. I would really want to know why they did such a thing. I'd want them to explain me and apologize. I really want that."⁶⁷ Claiming some sort of "irresponsibility" the sociologists consider characteristic to the contemporary Japanese social-political environment, the conflict is nevertheless very unlikely to solve through simple excuses. In fact, Aum should be completely abandoned, while those involved in the organization should reconvert (*tenkō*) to that social "common sense"⁶⁸. Yet, victims are further victimized, whereas aggressors themselves become, in their turn, victims. A real solution is hard to foresee. The Aum cult and the subway attack become important "confession-evidence" in the process of knowing the Japanese spirituality and its religious feeling:

"The war ended in '45. We had 50 years of prosperity and peace, exactly 50. Now, everything is shifting. The Aum attack was like a critical punctuation mark. We lost our confidence then, almost for the first time, and we changed sociopsychologically. That was the point."⁶⁹.

Aum Shinrikyō was analyzed⁷⁰ as an example of totalitarian community, due to the following characteristics: modality of control of means of communication inside the group, mystic manipulation and legitimization of deception in terms of a supreme truth, requirements of purity (chastity), development of a sacred science that could explain everything, control of language ("The reason why you cannot integrate in the world is the karma of alienation", was, for instance, the manner in which Asahara used to explain the young the spiritual and social problems they faced), valorization of the doctrine over the individual, faith in the power to decide who is entitled to living and guruism or total devotion to the leader. But, at a closer look, one can notice that Japanese societies also show similarities to this type of community organization. The resemblance between the Aum organization and the Japanese company

suggested by Haruki Murakami in *Underground* is by no means far-fetched, but actually hints at two types of relations: one of a “common base” between the two systems considered as distinct and one in which the two systems are no longer seen as separate entities:

“There was, on the one hand, the system of companies and, on the other hand, the systems of religious conduct. [...] I think the system of the Aum sect has a common basis with the other system. Some employees even admitted they might have done the same if ordered. In addition to that: They are not two completely different entities. This system and that system are not distinct. They came to fuse, and the sick part would cure in time.”⁷¹.

A group of people formed a new religious organization which, without having survived the following generation, acquired national importance by the consequences determined at the social, psychological, para-psychological, economic, historical, political and ... religious level. The journalistic novel *Underground* by Haruki Murakami proves through the interviews of victims and aggressors implied in the terrorist attack from Tokyo how painful and difficult can *survival* become in a post-capitalist society, where economic development provokes spiritual wounds and deceptions inevitably leading to the formation of individuals like those from the Aum sect. Through its aspects of antiutopian “religious affair”, the Aum story suggested by *Underground* urges Japan and humankind on an exercise of autoreflexion.

On 18th January 2000 Aum Shinrikyō reappeared under the name of “Aleph”⁷², the first letter of the Judaic alphabet, signifying ‘infinity’. The sect currently includes 800 followers.

During the time, religious practices have always been in continuous metamorphosis, but the religious feeling underlying them is undoubtedly timeless.

Notes:

¹ Richard A. Gardner, “Lost in the Cosmos and the Need to Know”, *Monumenta Nipponica* 54 (1999): 232. See also Nicu Gavriluță, „Secta Aum în România” în *Hermeneutica simbolismului religios. Studii și eseuri*, (Iași: Editura Fundației Axis, 2003), 103-106.

² Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, (New-York: Vintage Books, 2001), 131.

³ Murakami, “Underground,” 18.

⁴ See Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1982), 84-85.

⁵ Richard A. Gardner, The Blessing of Living in a Country Where There Are Senryū. Humor in the Response to Aum Shinrikyō, *Asian Folklore Studies* 61 (2002): 37.

- ⁶ Murakami, "Underground," 256.
- ⁷ <http://crezuri.wordpress.com>
- ⁸ Murakami, "Underground," 320.
- ⁹ <http://gnspey.org>
- ¹⁰ <http://gnspey.org>
- ¹¹ Michiko Yusa, *Japanese Religions*, (London and New-York: Routledge, 2002), 14.
- ¹² "Massacres dans le Pacifique". Entretien avec Jean-Louis Margolin. *L'Histoire*, no 333, 2008, 83.
- ¹³ Cf. Winston Davis, *Japanese Religion and Society. Paradigms of Structure and Change*, (New-York: State University of New-York Press, 1992), 232.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Lexique, *L'Histoire*, 110.
- ¹⁵ Murakami, "Underground," 29.
- ¹⁶ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 228. Our transl. (The English translation [Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, (New-York: Vintage Books, 2001)] we used does not reproduce entirely the Japanese original. We have consequently proposed for the missing fragments our own English version.)
- ¹⁷ Murakami, "Underground," 9.
- ¹⁸ Murakami, "Underground," 65.
- ¹⁹ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 266. Our transl.
- ²⁰ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 224. Our transl.
- ²¹ See Nathalie Kouamé, "Shinto, bouddha et le taoïsme", *L'Histoire*, no 333, 2008, 40.
- ²² Cf. Yusa, "Japanese Religions," 107.
- ²³ Cf. Kouamé, "Shinto, bouddha et le taoïsme," 40.
- ²⁴ Murakami, "Underground," 255.
- ²⁵ Murakami, "Underground," 349-350.
- ²⁶ Gardner, "Lost in the Cosmos and the Need to Know," 222.
- ²⁷ Cf. Davis, "Japanese Religion," 116.
- ²⁸ Cf. Yusa, "Japanese Religions," 109.
- ²⁹ *Metropolis. Tokyo Features Stories: Up from the Underground*. <http://www.metropolis.co.jp>
- ³⁰ Murakami, "Underground," 320.
- ³¹ Murakami, "Underground," 268.
- ³² Murakami, "Underground," 306.
- ³³ See Ichiro Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan. Continuity and Change*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 223.
- ³⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase. II. De la Gautama Buddha până la triumful creștinismului*, (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986), 73.
- ³⁵ Cf. Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 26.
- ³⁶ Max Weber, *Sociologia religiei. Tipuri de organizări comunitare religioase*, (București: Teora, 1998), 261.
- ³⁷ Murakami, "Underground," 320.
- ³⁸ Murakami, "Underground," 302.
- ³⁹ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 250. Our transl.
- ⁴⁰ Murakami, "Underground," 261.
- ⁴¹ Max Weber, "Sociologia religiei," 261.
- ⁴² Murakami, "Underground," 263.
- ⁴³ Nishitani, "Religion and Nothingness," 4.

- ⁴⁴ Murakami, "Underground," 348.
- ⁴⁵ See Malcom Bull, *Teoria Apocalipsei și sfârșiturile lumii*, (București: Editura Meridiane, 1999), 9-16.
- ⁴⁶ Murakami, "Underground," 356-357.
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Jacob Taubes, *Escatologia occidentală*, (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2008), 32.
- ⁴⁸ See Mircea Eliade, *Ocultism, vrăjitorie și mode culturale*, (București: Humanitas, 1997), 71.
- ⁴⁹ See Krishan Kumar, *Apocalipsa, mileniul și utopia astăzi*. Edited by Malcom Bull. 244.
- ⁵⁰ Murakami, "Underground," 276.
- ⁵¹ Lifton, apud Richard Gardner, Review of *Destroying the World to Save It: Aum Shinrikyō, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism*, by Robert Jay Lifton; *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyō*, by Ian Reader, Richmond, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 56, Spring, 2001, 126.
- ⁵² Murakami, "Underground," 209.
- ⁵³ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 575. Our transl.
- ⁵⁴ See Hori, "Folk Religion," 220.
- ⁵⁵ Murakami, Murakami, "Underground," 48.
- ⁵⁶ J. Gordon Melton, "Perspective New New Religions. Revising a Concept", *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 10, Issue 4, 109.
- ⁵⁷ Cf. Davis, "Japanese Religion," 247.
- ⁵⁸ Cf. Inoue Nobukata, *Recent Trends in the Study of Japanese New Religions*, Kokugakuin University: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, 1991.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. Nobukata, "Recent Trends," 3.
- ⁶⁰ Davis, "Japanese Religion," 247.
- ⁶¹ Murakami, "Underground," 315.
- ⁶² Apud Murakami, "Underground," 362-363.
- ⁶³ Cf. Gardner, "Lost in the Cosmos and the Need to Know," 221.
- ⁶⁴ Hiroko Kawanami, Review of *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society through the Aum Affair*, ed. by Robert J. Kisala and Mark M. Mullins, *Social Science Japan Journal*, Apr. 2005, 8,1, 151.
- ⁶⁵ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 229. Our transl.
- ⁶⁶ Murakami, "Underground," 292-293.
- ⁶⁷ Murakami, "Underground," 45.
- ⁶⁸ See Gardner, "Lost in the Cosmos and the Need to Know", 235.
- ⁶⁹ *Metropolis. Tokyo Features Stories: Up from the Underground*. <http://www.metropolis.co.jp>
- ⁷⁰ Lifton, apud Gardner, Review, 128.
- ⁷¹ Murakami, "Underground. Atentatul de la Tokio," 57. Our transl.
- ⁷² Cf. Yusa, "Japanese Religions," 110.

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