Transcendental Predictability
On beauty, loss and remembrance in anime movie
The Tale of Princess Kaguya (2013)

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Abstract

Since its foundation in 1985, Studio Ghibli has become the epitome of a successful enterprise dealing with the production of cultural assets: animation works, both aesthetically reflecting the reality and ideologically tackling current issues such as environmental pollution, social discrimination, the process of growing-up, historical responsibility, the meaning and value of life, love as a complex emotional paradigm. Based on extensive fieldwork – interviews and participatory observation over several years – as well as in-depth literature research, this presentation underlines some of the creative strategies such as emotional ambivalence, dynamic reconsideration of folk-tales, legends and myths, artistic highlighting of the spiral-like dialectics of cause and effect –, employed in Takahata Isao's last anime movie The Tale of Princess Kaguya (Kaguya-hime no monogatari, 2013). While taking into account Studio Ghibli's aesthetic-ideological position within Japan's soft power macro-endeavors, this presentation points out the intricate levels comprised by the phenomenon of "self" as media-related construction in the unstable stress-ratio between individual aspirations and historic-geographical embedding. Thus, it becomes obvious that beyond being a physical appearance with clearly defined standards of "inside" and "outside", "self" is a highly personal concern, related both to the socio-cultural context of its emergence and to the economic-political path of its development. In times of the ubiquitous Cool Japan symptomatology, the reinvigoration of folk tales, local myths and legends provokes a nostalgic U-turn towards a more classical Japan with the simultaneous intellectualisation of the popular culture encompassing the rather conservative message that love, happiness and existential fulfillment are still individual choices in late-modern Japan.

Keywords

anime, femininity, feminism, late-modern Japan, love.

1. Introduction: why individualism matters

Nowadays, it is a common endeavor to search for answers to general questions about humanity and nature, femininity and masculinity, war and peace, technology and emotions, truth and integrity beyond the typical Western dualism of good-and-evil paradigm. Looking across cultures, times and spaces, in an proactive effort to accomplish different results to the same old challenges, implies more often than not the transgressing of emotional and mental barriers while not losing sight of one's own core identity. Such animation movies like *The Wind Rises* (*Kaze tachinu*, Studio Ghibli, director: Miyazaki Hayao), *Frozen* (Walt Disney Pictures,

directors: Chris Buck & Jennifer Lee) and *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* (*Kaguya-hime no monogatari*, Studio Ghibli, director: Takahata Isao), all released in the year 2013, seem to offer unexpected solutions to the century-old interrogations about the role of the human being and its quest for happiness and fulfillment. Miyazaki's work might be by far considered the gentlest animated feature about war, dealing with the fictionalised biography of Horikoshi Jirô (1903-1982), the aeronautical engineer who designed Mitsubishi's A5M fighter and its successor the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter, employed by Japan during the Pacific War, more specifically, during the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. On a deeper level, though, *The Wind Rises* tells the all-too-known story of great dreams and the individuals harnessing them, and the way these dreams and their carriers are taken over by the waves of history. The other two animation movies, *Frozen* and *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, tackle the problematic of femininity and its position in late modernity, while referring to the narrative foundation of old legends and folk-tales (see Barker 1989:31, Drazen 2003:211, Gluck 1985:42, Grajdian 2010:118). Furthermore, in soft tones of emotional transcendence, they obtrusively display parables on the risk and responsibilities of uncontrollable power in the hands of individuals, and thus provide symbolic undertones of female empowerment through the prism of the weight of personal choices in the midst of increasing popularity and solitude, so that Andersen's fairy-tale respectively the old Japanese folk-tale become spaces of longing, and paradoxically, belonging.

This paper will focus on *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, and its role in the redefinition of femininity as a site of acceptance and compassion, instead of an active interplay of competition and power, as the feminist discourse and the historical reality modeled by that discourse has been constructing it for the past 60 years. This will occur in three stages: firstly, in an initial explanation elucidating the technical data of the anime movie, I'll refer to its characteristics, idiosyncrasies and intricacies, both as a product of popular culture emerging in a specific geographical area and within a particular historical moment, and as a reflection of the status-quo which crumbles under the weight of political correctness while challenging cultural identity as an ongoing individual project. Secondly, I'll refer to the *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* as a feminist project, in a research endeavor striving to connect late-modern feminism and feminist parlance with the original ideals and claims of proto-feminists – and what was, and probably still is, at stake when feminism is approached as a battlefield, a "semiotic guerilla-war", instead of an opportunity for growth and communication, an interface for understanding and cooperation, a spiritual journey in the quest for authenticity and harmony. Thirdly, I'll focus on the interplay of Western and Eastern dynamics of modernity as reflected in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* as a product of popular culture as well as its representation of femininity as the driving force for progress and enlightenment, and I'll delve into the problematic of recent trends in Japanese popular culture beyond the classical Soft Power or Cool Japan paradigms and within the framework of historic-geographical events in late-modernity (in the *Conclusion*). Moreover, as it will become obvious alongside the analytical explanations further below, the dialectic relationship between love, empowerment and identity

construction as discursive products are actively negotiated by means of cultural production, marketing, consumption/perception and reproduction. This relationship implies three main strategies – emotional ambivalence, the dynamic reconsideration of legends and myths, the subtle highlighting of the spiral-like dialectics of cause and effect – employed in the process of reconstructing the past as a repository of emotional energy and socio-cultural role-models, beyond economic-political compulsions.

The ideas and concepts outlined in the current paper are the result of an extensive fieldwork over more than de decade of intensive research on anime, animation and the representation of reality in products of the entertainment industry. The fieldwork included numerous interviews with anime producers and anime consumers (hard-core fans or occasional viewers) as well as participatory observation. Takahata Isao, the director of *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, provided powerful meaningful insights into the workings and mechanisms of his activity as animation director and co-founder of Ghibli Studio during countless discussions in the years 2005-2007. Furthermore, the entire research endeavor was rounded-up by in-depth literature research, both directly related to the field of animation and its adjoining fields (entertainment industry, cultural consumption, the politics of leisure, etc.) and indirectly tackling the theoretical dimensions of the academic background (Cultural Studies, Media Anthropology, feminism, semiotics/poststructuralism, Post-Colonial Studies, etc.). In the process of pointing out the intricate levels comprised by the phenomenon of the "feminine self" as media-related construction in the unstable stress-ratio between individual aspirations and historic-geographical embedding (see Clarke 2004:25, Clammer 2000:212), it becomes obvious that beyond being a physical appearance with clearly defined standards of "inside" and "outside", the "feminine self" is a highly personal concern, related both to the socio-cultural context of its emergence and to the economic-political path of its development. In times of the ubiquitous *Cool Self* symptomatology, the reinvigoration of local myths and legends provokes a nostalgic U-turn towards a more classical worldview with the simultaneous intellectualisation of popular culture encompassing the rather conservative message that love, happiness and existential fulfillment are more than ever individual choices in late-modernity. *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* re-constructs, in its own specific ways, a singularly stunning path towards love, happiness and existential fulfillment as an individual choice: without aggressively displaying femininity as the solution to all evils, its main character, Takenoko who will later become Princess Kaguya, the orphaned single-child found in the forest who hides a terrible secret, unknown even to herself until the time is due for it to be revealed, finds in her feminine core the answers to questions and the healing to pains which seemed previously insurmountable.

2. The impact of popular culture products on the consolidation of gender and identity

As a high-caliber institution of the entertainment industry, Studio Ghibli has been establishing specific standards, both ideologically and aesthetically, in delivering its products to the all-too competitive market of popular products. As to

be shown further below, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* was released in a historical context in which a series of events at various levels – cultural, social, economic, political and not least technological and educational – had led to an increasing pressure of redefining "gender roles" in practical terms which would allow larger segments of the population to choose and learn to cope with the new realities of the 21st century. Intentionally or not, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* displays the state of the arts, and while employing a well-known plot based on an old Japanese folk-tale, it commits itself to a process of re-semantization of that very plot through the creative distribution of its characters and their interactions with each other. Thus, there is a two-fold structure of significance: firstly, femininity and its core element "love"; secondly, individual identity and its interplay with "love" as a manifold force.

2. 1. Animated stories and the victory of femininity

Based on the oldest-known Japanese folk-tale named *The Tale of the Bamboo-Cutter* (『竹取物語』 *Taketori Monogatari*), which dates back to the 10th century and is considered the oldest extant Japanese prose narrative, although the oldest manuscript dates to 1592, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* is the story of a Thumbelina-like girl found in a bamboo in a forest by an old bamboo-cutter who decides to raise the small girl together with his wife in their rural home. Life in this sacred space is idyllic, and the mysterious girl soon earns the nickname Takenoko (Little Bamboo) for the speed with which she grows, much faster than other kids. The equally miraculous discovery of gold and rare fabrics in the bamboo-forest convinces the old bamboo-cutter that this eerie creature deserves better, and he moves her to the capital to offer her a life worthy of her fantastic appearance and to seek a husband befitting her apparent aristocratic status. Soon, her newly rich parents install her in a mansion, surround her with servants and have her trained in the ways of the aristocracy, and subsequently try to marry her. A succession of suitors ensue, all desperate to earn the hand of the mysterious young woman whose ethereal beauty has become legendary – but she rejects all candidates, including the emperor, allotting them impossible tasks to fulfill. Deep in her heart, trapped within the superficial cage of a noble home and rigid social etiquette, the now formally named "Princess Kaguya" longs for the lost countryside of her childhood, she pines for her earlier, simpler life – the birds, bugs, beasts, grass, trees and flowers of the nursery rhyme that keeps running through her head, and the friendship of the handsome boy Sutemaru, which has sparked an eternal flame in her heart. Incidentally, she reveals that she is from the moon and must soon return to the land of her birth.

On the surface, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* is the story of a reluctant young girl painfully yearning to go back to the forests and hillsides of her childhood, but in Takahata's vision, it becomes a meditation on life's heartbreaking ephemerality. The film was drawn, over roughly a painstaking decade of quests and drawbacks (though arguably rooted in Uchida Tomu's unfinished Toei Animation project from the 1960s), in an unfinished-looking freehand – like the animators were chasing after the princess in person, trying desperately to capture the essence

of each moment as it flew away. Moreover Takahata, uses the setting of classical Japan as an opportunity to work in an eerie register that blends humane social-realism with a clear-eyed spirituality, and pushes the challenges and limitations of the animated medium to its expressive boundaries. Landscapes fade towards the edges of the frame, and at moments of heightened emotion – such as the princess' frenzied escape from her coming-of-age celebrations, one of Ghibli's greatest-ever sequences – characters fall apart into flurries of watercolor and charcoal. The visual result is a surrealistic construction with the haunting simplicity of an ancient scroll-painting coming back to life.

The story is well rehearsed, yet still startlingly strange, and turns this richly evocative anime movie into a timeless vision corresponding to the tale which inspired it – a parable of the emptiness of earthly possessions and the transcendent power of love. There are, indeed, weighty sociopolitical themes to be extracted out of the story's tale of exile and forgetfulness, reward and banishment, but the dominant tone is one of painful tenderness – of the rapturous, bittersweet enchantment with nature that has underwritten so many of Studio Ghibli's works. While the elaborate set-pieces in which suitors are commanded to bring forth the mythical elements with which they falsely describe their love (the robe of the fire rat, the jewel from a dragon's neck, etc.) remain intact, it is, deep-down, the typically independent heroine's longing for the simple pleasures of the world that actually fire the action: seduced by the woodland haven in which she first makes her home, the mysterious Takenoko ventured from the Moon to the Earth to experience human life. Rendered with deceptive simplicity, the undulating landscapes of her childhood Eden are as attractive and alluring as any fantastical screen environment, both on the Earth and on the Moon. Moreover, Princess Kaguya's legendary and unspeakable beauty is left as much to the imagination as to illustration, implied by the unprettified strokes that delineate her face. The subtle touch of elusiveness in the constitution of her face and stature metamorphoses into a soft uncertainty that allows her visage to slip almost imperceptibly from childish innocence to lunar luminescence, visible as early as in the scenes describing her early years, in which she learns to jump like a frog – in themselves, a profound, sentimental study of the complex (e)motion of childhood that must have had parents all over the world gasping with recognition.

It's a world of charcoal lines and watercoloured flashes; one can almost feel the brushstrokes upon fibrous paper as the proudly hand-drawn action unfolds, skittish motion drawing our attention to the old-fashioned artistry of key collaborators Tanabe Osamu and Oga Kazuo. With its languid pace and expansive running time, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* might have missed the immediate connection with younger audiences, both Japanese/Asian and Western, which more popular anime works had achieved, as reflected in box-office sales. Still, Takahata's sensible historical fantasia, which was defeated to the best animated feature Oscar by Disney's anime-inflected *Big Hero 6* (released as *Bay-Max* in Japan), is a powerful, though subtle masterwork, very different in tone and message as compared to the director's most celebrated works, *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *Only Yesterday* (1991), but arguably more flexible in its display of the frailty and transience of the human existence.

Emotions and moods are anchored to specific moments of stillness, such as when Takahata occasionally cuts away mid-scene to a flower, or an animal, or running water, which become intensive in their unexpected interference: "Flower, bear fruit and die; be born, grow up, and die. Still the wind blows, the rain falls, the waterwheel goes round. Lifetimes come and go in turn." The closing chapter, in which the princess meets the heavenly beings who placed her in the bamboo grove in the first place, is a gorgeous *raigo-zu* – a celebratory tableau of the Amida Buddha and a troupe of *bodhisattvas* descending on a cloud that heralds a passage into the next world (see Takahata 1991:421, 1999a:344, 1999b:62; Köhn 2005:122-131, Grajdian 2010:97). On the highly emotional background of the hope-against-hope finale, it transcends the coolness of the set-up, displaying a fantastical parade of celestial creatures who can glide through walls and turn arrows into garlands of flowers, and almost endearingly encourages the audiences to keep watching the skies: more than previous cinematic adventures as Kon Ichikawa's live-action *Princess from the Moon* based on the adaptation of the 10th-century Japanese folk-tale *Taketori Monogatari*, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* overcomes the science-fiction allusions and delves into the depths of the human longings and fears – and transcends them beyond their all-too-predictable repetition.

2.2. The will to love and the struggles of feminism

At its very origins, feminism started out in an effort to re-capture femininity from the all-consuming jungle of industrialization and urbanization, the two main elements of modernization. Proto-feminists saw themselves in cross-fires in a society rapidly changing, which required both their reproductive and educative abilities and their skills to be employed at the workplace – a workplace patterned upon male necessities and ambitions, to be sure, in factories and ports, in coal-mines and on ships, in the building-industry and on the fields. In the historical context of a brutal and increasing de-feminization of women as potential members of the active workforce and of male voices in the political, medical, technical/technological and cultural discourse, the intellectual among women at the turn of the 19th century toward the 20th century, and in the first half of the 20th century, initiated a counter-movement targeted at disclosing female citizens as equal to the male citizens, but different in their biological and emotional structure. The main ingredient within this discourse was "love" as the core element of the female identity, which mistakenly led decades later to "sex" as equaling "love", and to the "sexual revolution" as the climax of female liberation and empowerment. However, what proto-feminists meant through "love" is what sociologists would identify as the "missing link" in late-modern societies, thus condemning them and their members to loneliness, isolation, alienation: a vital force residing within the human being, the catalyst of all emotions and actions, connecting the universal energy and the individual aspirations into one powerful flow of intent, which consequently leads to profound connections both on the surface of social network and in the depth of the family cell (Kawakita 1992:33, Riesman 1950:18-22). More concretely speaking, "love" as it is referred to in terms of gender affiliation to femininity, is that ineffable strength which resides in women and allows them to be

mothers and primary educators, thus protecting the species from its own extinction, even in times of complete recession or social disintegration.

The reconsideration of the concept of "love" as the core element of female identity and the very force which instigates female spirituality, its re-capturing by means of products of popular culture appears as the main focus in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, and draws on three main ideas: firstly, there is the failure of the paternal figure and, generally speaking, of the classical family model. Instead, it is good to remember that works of popular culture rarely deal with functional families and communities, but rather with dysfunctional structures. Parental love appears as a means to restrict and condition children, and lead those children into inevitable crises which, eventually, will only strengthen their sense of self. Like in *Frozen*, in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, the emotional needs of the children are not met, the kids being advised either to "conceal, not feel" (in *Frozen*) or to give up a life they enjoy for something their father has chosen for them, as the future Princess Kaguya has to painfully acknowledge.

Secondly, there is the failure of romantic entanglements as the solution to all evils. The officially named Princess Kaguya, famous for her unworldly beauty, clearly shows that she doesn't need any man to help her out of her situation and lead her find her place in the world. Rather, her fulfilment as an individual results from the dissolution of gender limitations and the sublimation of her own fears, either by acknowledging that runaway to the past and the recurrent loneliness are not valid alternatives to her current life, or by accepting that there are choices one makes in the rage of the moment, like when she invokes the fellows from the Moon to take her back from the impertinent, inconsiderate advances of the emperor. Ultimately, she learns that she must carry on those choices, as the only control she has over circumstances is her own reaction to what's coming ther way – and the power to move on.

Thirdly, the solution proposed by *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* is one of astonishing simplicity: it indicates of that moment when the necessity and inevitability of building an own identity become imperative, accompanied by an urgent sense of self-awareness and responsibility. Princess Kaguya learns that runaway and hiding are no sustainable solutions, and she must face the realities of growing up and confront the outer world with her own innermost yearnings and desires – and fears, for that matter, as well. She internalizes the lesson that accepting oneself leads, inevitably, to accepting the others, on one hand, and on the other hand, to a deep-going sense of authenticity in pursuing a life in which the self is free to love and live – independently of consequences.

The most important element in the construction process of individual identity is, thus, a profound crisis followed by a conscious commitment towards one's own self, ideals and flaws included, separated from external compulsions. Overcoming the individual levels of self-questioning and self-recovery, this process of identity construction finds its completion in unexpected ways: there is a specific dystopian undertone in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, with its loss of community and the dismantlement of family ideals, visible in the uncanny ending respectively in the sudden leap into fantasy in the love scene at the climax of the movie – an adultery love scene, to be sure, unique in Studio Ghibli's strict moral

guidelines. There is a deep wisdom in this film, but a deep sadness too. The film's tag line, "A princess' crime and punishment," offers a clue, while Takahata himself has said he wanted to explore what "crime" Princess Kaguya might have committed, since the original story is silent on that point. His exploration, though, has little to do with plot, and everything to do with his heroine's emotional and spiritual journey — and the way it ends (see Keene 1993:77, Bary 1995:58). The climax is a haunting, wrenching evocation of *mono no aware* — or as it is literally translated, the pathos of things. The basis of Japanese aesthetics since time immemorial, *mono no aware* is hard to define, but *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* brilliantly illuminates it with images of life being the loveliest in its transience, of parting in its terrible finality, very different from the other 2013-blockbuster *Frozen* which scores points mainly for its originality in the tender acuity with which the relationship between the two sisters is observed.

Thus, in *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*, individual fulfillment and a clear sense of self emerge from "love" as what one could call an "invented emotion" intensively negotiated by proto-feminists in their quest for a working definition of femininity and its features, its necessities and its challenges – as well as its ideals. It allows for transfer of significance in historical terms, which leads, in its turn, to socio-cultural affiliation as the result of conscious choices on the basis of everyday events and accumulated life experience. Emotional ambivalence delivers the impetus to intellectual activism transcending time and space. Social actors, as Pierre Bourdieu put it, grow into responsible, self-aware citizens (Bourdieu 1979:128-137, Morley/Robins 1995:79-81. More than being a plain animated *bildungsroman* in terms of classical education and formation, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* (like *Frozen* in its own way, as well) creates aesthetic-ideological spaces where the overcoming of loss and fear leads to the creation of the mature individual, embedded in historical reality, which turns, again, into a site of responsible, self-aware citizen participation. The responsible, self-aware citizen becomes able to live in the moment and to respect life as the most precious asset one possesses and could ever possess. Thus, instead of running away without looking back and rejecting any sort of responsible awareness, the "feminine self" of late modernity accepts its role as part of a larger community – and emerges from within this very community as a messenger of love, of gratitude and of forgiveness as well as of the power of remembrance.

2.3 Yearning for harmony and the re-negotiation of modernity

In Seventeen years after the beginning of a new millennium, Japan might still seem at times as an incomprehensible conglomerate, with its own dynamics and inner mechanisms. As the only non-Western nation to have attained Western standards of development, both in terms of economic strength and in terms of its citizens' lifestyle, Japan carries into the new era interrogations and insecurities inherited at the beginning of its modernity, by mid-1800s, when the Meiji Restoration was declared with its entire spectrum of decisions and consequences. For once, the challenges Japan is facing nowadays are unique in their historical primordiality, and require unprecedented solutions. Moreover, the historical habit

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of Japanese technocrats to take over and employ Western proven methods to their own crises and misunderstandings, after previously having adapted them to the Japanese realities, is not helpful anymore, due to the unprecedented nature of the problems overwhelming Japan currently.

There are three main challenges confronting Japan nowadays:

1.   the ecological one (the lack of natural resources locally respectively the increasing diminution of natural resource on an international level);

2.   the social one (the historically low birth-rate and the extremely high life-expectancy);

3.   the military one (the aggressive neighbours in Asia as well as Russia in the North and Japan's unstable, rather weak position in the region, lurking under the surface of diplomatic promises, conventions and treatises)

However, the second issue, the one affecting Japan's population, seems to carry the heaviest weight: a general sense of apathy in the society, resulting from a mental and spiritual exhaustion over the past 25 years, following the huge shock in the early years of the 1990s when the economic decline abruptly started, which was, in turn, the result of a blind trust in the political elites and specialists which had led to a lack of self-control and caution among the regular citizens, otherwise natural elements within the survival instincts of the human being (see Allison 2013:145, Bauman 2001b:107, 2002:94). This generalized sense of apathy leads, continuously, though inconspicuously, to hopelessness, which turns, eventually, into the unwillingness to love and procreate. Recent statistics and sociological data talk of "herbivore men" and "carnivore women", of 42% virgin men aged 18-39 and of women marrying men 10 years or more their juniors in order to establish a family according to prevalent standards (see Azuma 2000:28, Saitô 2000:37-45, Shimada 2002:173, Yamada 1999:73-77). There are, surely, multiple reasons at the core of this social upheaval, but the fact strikes out that without an active, strong, confident population in its majority, there is no way politicians and economists can solve and move political and economic challenges on their paths towards constructive, future-oriented solutions. Populations function according to own inner dynamics, which are, though, historically observable and practiced; the lack of children – with the whole range of issues which arise from it, such as a lack of hope, of the willingness to strive for happiness and to share that happiness, to prolong one's ephemeral existence into eternity by finding a partner and procreating, the vision of a future itself beyond the biologically limited individual life, the pursuit of goals meant to make the world a better place – indicates deeper malfunctions within the Japanese society, which have been repressed for decades (see Bauman 2001a:19, Miegel 2005:112-131, Ivy 1995:114). The most fundamental among these malfunctions is the power of the feminine instance and of femininity in its most fascinating dimensions: its regenerative abilities, its comforting glow, its visionary optimism and energy. *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* refers, in this reading, to the necessity to reconsider femininity and its loss through a wrongly understood and applied feminism, and to regard its reinvigoration respectively its re-positioning at the centre of humankind.

     With the plaintive sound of a half-remembered folk song echoing through the trees, *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* brings the audiences to its audacious

final act into a state of elegant readiness. It would have been easy for this section to tip over into fantastical foolishness, but as the narrative takes flight and worlds collide, we find ourselves hoping against hope for a Disneyfied happy-ending. What we get instead is something altogether more elegiac – a cosmic conclusion of operatic proportions that somehow manages to sit organically among the lyrical frolics that have gone before it. The main song, *Memories of life* (「命の記憶」 *Inochi no kioku*), created by the in-house composer of Ghibli Studio Hisaishi Joe, sung by Kazumi Nikaido, puts this best into perspective.

あなたに触れたよろこびが
深く　深く
このからだの　端々に
しみ込んでゆく

ずっと　遠く　なにも
わからなくなっても たとえ
このいのちが　終わる時が来ても

いまのすべては　過去のすべて
必ず　また会える
懐かしい場所で

あなたがくれた　ぬくもりが
深く　深く
今　遥かな時を越え 充ち渡ってく

じっと　心に　灯す情熱の炎も
そっと傷をさする
悲しみの淵にも

いまのすべては　未来の希望
必ず憶えてる
懐かしい場所で

いまのすべては　過去のすべて
必ずまた会える
懐かしい場所で

いまのすべては　未来の希望
必ず憶えてる
いのちの記憶で

The joy I felt when I touched you
Went deep, deep down
And seeped into
Every nook and cranny of this body

Even if I'm far away
And no longer understand anything
Even when the time comes
For this life to end

Everything of now
Is everything of the past
We'll meet again I'm sure
In some nostalgic place

The warmth you gave me
Deep, deep down
Comes to me now, complete
From a time long past

Steadily in my heart
The flames of passion give light
And softly soothe my pain
Down to the depths of my grief

Everything now
Is hope for the future
I'll remember, I'm sure
In some nostalgic place

Everything of now
Is everything of the past
We'll meet again I'm sure
In some nostalgic place

Everything now
Is hope for the future
I'll remember, I'm sure
When I remember this life

At a historical point in which the law of "the strongest who wins and continuously moves forward" as promoted by Western dialectics seems to have definitely got out of hand, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* offers an alternative to this perspective, while deeply touching on the problematic of the return to those tales which made humanity a soft, warm place to embrace all inhabitants, with no need to fight and

hate each other. While clearly successful life is measured nowadays in materialist accomplishments, deeper levels of contentment and happiness are shut-down through education and role-models imposed by mainstream media (Luhmann 1996:32; see Bauman 1997:22). The meaning of "male" and "female" moves from the biological dimension into the discursive formation, and the very nature of masculinity and femininity is challenged in the light of ever-changing patterns of success and progress based on hedonist criteria. In this late-modern chaos, *The Tale of Princess Kaguya* brings a ray of order and hope: There is, to be sure, no reassuring, superficial optimism, no place for a lesson along the lines "the charming prince will come one day" and its aggressive cousin "nevertheless, you are perfectly fine without him – and you can even live happily ever after without him". Instead, there is the powerful, encouraging suggestion of the admittedly more difficult alternative: discipline and hard-work, humility and self-confidence, loyalty and respect, the establishing of a life-goal and its steady nurturing, cherishing victories and learning from setbacks, thus disclosing the delusional charm of a worldview based on the cultural consumption of pre-fabricated emotions and instant gratification, and revealing the beauty of human life as a project of love, belonging and compassion.

3. Conclusion: towards an anthropology of femininity

Liberation and empowerment are powerful mindsets in defining individuality and happiness as well as one's position within the larger framework of the national society or of the world at large. They are important mental assets is fashioning a sense of self both in its own structure and dynamics, and in its relation to an other, in its correlation to an other, eventually, in its transcendence through an other. Being a liberated and empowered human being, as a man or as a woman, means to comprehend responsibilities which come with the right to be free and self-determining, responsibilities which include, for better or for worse, a sense of awareness of the others and of togetherness in imperfection, of one's own fragility and vulnerability, and of one's own need to belong and be accepted. Liberation and empowerment never meant selfishness and self-centredness, disregard for rules and morality, contempt for pain and longing, which are the main catalysts of the current social crises in Japan and in the entire rich, post-industrialized, service-dominated Western societies.

Feminism, as it was envisioned and outlined by its Founding Mothers, was the effort to win back femininity and feminine essence as well as feminine energy from the increasingly, dangerously powerful, unstoppable, all-consuming modernization, with industrialization and urbanization being its two main factors. When Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The second sex* (*Le deuxieme sexe*) in 1949, she referred to the culturally constructed differences between men and women, and how these are exploited by being naturalized through education and role-models. Raising awareness on the differences between genders and on the necessity to accept those differences, was, in this reading, Beauvoir's task, not the disempowerment of men and their over-powering by women. Moreover, Julia Kristeva's references in her seminal work *La révolution du langage poétique* from

1974 to motherhood and motherly love in the semiotic spaces of language and arts, which impact and formulate politics and economics, and thus bring societies and technologies of power into movement, weren't meant as a cry towards limitless sexual liberation and elimination of men – they were, in fact, an act to awaken insight and caution, to indicate of the lurking dangers within the modernization project, based mainly on such features as physical strength, the pressure to advance and impose progress, to dispose of those unable to keep the pace, either by killing or by displacing them, mostly associated with masculinity and the masculine worldview (see Giddens 1990:131, Meštrović 1997:32). Emotions and tender nurturing were not part of the modernity as pursued and developed by technocrats and idealists: they are, though, the fuel on which the engine of femininity works, on which the polarization between masculinity and femininity thrives and, in turn, creates the beautiful contrasts in life and in the world.

On the other hand, aggressive movements in the 1950s and the 1960s, followed by an snowball-like succession of misunderstood publications and fake celebrities, created alongside several decades the image of the "feminist woman" as void of femininity and emotions, a smaller, physically speaking, man, able to compete with her male counterparts in any field: the "alpha female", a highly mechanized androgynous creature. In spite of the astronomical pressure to "achieve like a man", recent history proves that this is not, realistically, the case, as separate standards of physical proveness in almost every domain had gradually emerged and stayed in place. However, educated to be assertive and bold, to reject her feminine gender as "weak and objectified" by instruments of the political discourse, unable to resist as a singular voice in the "lonely crowd" of misguided fellow citizens, the late-modern woman found herself in the new millennium confronted with expectations and tensions she couldn't possibly deal with. The so-called "crisis of masculinity" and the disintegration of the social fabric, visible in huge numbers of single persons, single households, single parents and an unprecedented rate of divorces in the rich, post-industrialized nations – tendency increasing – is a direct consequence of the "crisis of femininity", of the impossible choices late-modern women are facing and compelled to make, of the contradictory loyalties they are supposed to submit to, marching against nature and defying fundamental laws of the universe – such as the basic polarity between male and female, survival and death, procreation and extinction, belonging and isolation, ultimately, love and hatred.

The Tale of Princess Kaguya tackles the "feminine woman" in an empowering and liberating manner, transcending the fears and limitations imposed upon the feminist discourse, as it was initially meant and constructed by such intellectuals as Simone de Beauvoir or Julia Kristeva, into solutions and visions for the future. The "feminine woman" of late modernity does not reject her gender and her sexuality, but regards them as assets in her perception and processing of reality, of the life and of the world. She is nurturing, but not conformist, and the freedom of choice does not include promiscuity and dishonesty. Living with integrity and facing challenges with courage, she lives in harmony with herself and with the other humans, with the nature and with the universe at large. A soft sense of calm enthusiasm brings her to ever deeper levels of peace within herself, and she glows

that peace towards those around her, in the eternal flow of coherent human interactions and exchanges.

The "feminine woman" of late modernity is far more than a plain alternative to *shôjo* ("girl, young woman", a central figure in Japanese popular cultures) and her fluid juxtapositions of power, sexuality, aggressiveness and nonchalance. *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*'s main character Takenoko is, thus, a metaphor of transcendental femininity across centuries, while having definitely extracted crucial elements from *shôjo*'s imaginary conglomerate: she keeps a child-like joy of experiencing life in its everyday transience while maturing under the sign of healthily incorporating new experiences and challenges. Mainstream media and public opinions may still objectify and sexualize its presence, but the "feminine woman" knows that anger and aggressive display of disdain or contempt is far below her dignity, so that she gracefully distances herself from mass-mediated images and stereotypes of "what a woman should be like" and instead focuses on creating a life of her own with people around her with whom she shares common values and ideals.

Rising above impossible standards of success and likeability, the late-modern "feminine woman" decides that her destiny lies in the very choices she is making. Princess Kaguya doesn't find, indeed, her fulfillment in direct connection with a man – but rather in her decision to pursuit her own path in life, and in her determination and commitment to stay true to herself. It takes sacrifice, and pain, as love is not something to take: it is something to give, to oneself and to the others, a mindful choice made every day – like happiness and the warm, soft sense of belonging. Beyond the solitude which might arise from such an attitude towards life, there is the ineffable promise of a better world to emerge from the chaos and confusion of this one, suffocated in sex, consumerism and hatred: a promise of acceptance and solace, of quiet celebration of the human being and of humanity in its astonishing diversity and unleashed potential.

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