

Desire *Versus* Ego: On How Kaneko Fumiko Transcended Stirnean Egoism

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Abstract

Kaneko Fumiko (1903–1926) was an anarchist rebel during the Taishō era of modern Japan. She was arrested in 1923 and charged with high treason for participating in a plot to attack the imperial family. She also had connections with members of the Korean national liberation movement, most notably her partner Park Yeol. Her experience of abuse, abandonment, and exploitation growing up led her to form a highly critical and dismissive attitude towards established norms and institutions, which she saw as hypocritical, self-serving and oppressive. She describes her position as anarchist, nihilist and egoist and cites Max Stirner, the founder of egoism, as her most significant influence. Egoism is a radical individualism that denies any authority and espouses that the individual pursues her self-interest unhindered.

Kaneko strived to always live by her egoist principles by following her wishes. However, in one of the letters she gave to the court during her imprisonment, she doubts a past decision. Namely, she felt that Park was at one point making decisions unilaterally and not respecting her will. Hence, she wrote that, according to her egoism, she should have left Park. Nonetheless, in the same letter, she reaffirms her love for Park and defiantly accepts all the consequences of their relationship, including the death sentence. Using psychoanalytic theory from the Lacanian tradition, I argue that Kaneko's confirmation of her love for Park indicates fidelity to her desire. This fidelity opens up a dimension where she can be more faithful to herself than through Stirnean egoism.

Keywords: Kaneko Fumiko, egoism, Max Stirner, psychoanalysis, desire, ego

Želja proti egu: o tem, kako je Kaneko Fumiko presegla stirnerjevski egoizem

Izvilleček

Kaneko Fumiko (1903–1926) je bila anarhistična upornica v obdobju Taishō moderne Japonske. Leta 1923 je bila aretirana in obtožena veleizdaje zaradi sodelovanja pri načrtovanju napada na cesarsko družino. Imela je tudi številne povezave s člani korejskega narodnoosvobodilnega gibanja, predvsem prek partnerja Parka Yeola. Izkustva zlorabe,

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zapustitve in izkoriščanja med odraščanjem so izoblikovala njen zelo kritičen in odklonilen odnos do uveljavljenih norm in institucij, ki so se ji zdele hinavske, sebične in zatiralске. Svoje stališče opisuje kot anarhistično, nihilistično in egoistično. Kot najpomembnejši vpliv navaja Maxa Stirnerja, utemeljitelja egoizma. Egoizem je radikalen individualizem, ki ne priznava nobene avtoritete in se zavzema za to, da naj posameznik neomejeno uresničuje lastne interese.

Kaneko si je prizadevala, da bi vedno živila v skladu s svojimi egoističnimi načeli, zato je vedno sledila svojim željam. Vendar v enem od pisem, ki jih je med prestajanjem zaporne kazni predala sodišču, podvomi o svoji pretekli odločitvi. Menila je namreč, da je Park nekoč sprejel odločitve enostransko in ni spoštoval njene volje, zato bi ga morala takrat zapustiti, če naj bi še naprej živila po svojih egoističnih načelih. Kljub temu v istem pismu potrjuje svojo ljubezen do Parka in kljubovalno sprejema vse posledice njunega razmerja, vključno z obsodbo na smrt. Z uporabo psihoanalitične teorije lacanovske tradicije trdim, da njena potrditev ljubezni do Parka kaže na zvestobo svoji želji. Ta zvestoba ji odpira dimenzijo, kjer je lahko zvestejša sama sebi kakor pa prek stirnerjevskega egoizma.

Ključne besede: Kaneko Fumiko, egoizem, Max Stirner, psihoanaliza, želja, jaz

Introduction

The subject of this paper is the thought and actions of Kaneko Fumiko (金子文子), a Taishō era Japanese anarchist, nihilist and egoist. Specifically, I intend to reconsider an episode in her life from a philosophical and psychoanalytic perspective when she harboured doubt towards herself and her convictions. As a radical individualist and egoist, Kaneko acknowledged no authority above herself and had a principle to follow only her wants. However, while she was in jail for plotting to assassinate the emperor, she admitted that there was a point when she failed to follow her egoist principle, and that the consequences of that decision ultimately led to her imprisonment. Specifically, as she, her lover Park Yeol (朴烈) and other comrades were discussing the planned assassination, Park made some decisions on his own, without consulting Kaneko and acquiring her consent. For her, that was a severe breach of trust and mutual respect, so she believed that at that moment she should have left Park and gone her own way. However, this did not happen, and she ended up staying with Park and became embroiled in the plot.

Nevertheless, she neither expressed regret for her actions nor pleaded for forgiveness from the authorities, despite this. She instead pronounced her love for Park, confirmed the integrity of her decision at that time, accepted all its following consequences and even provoked the authorities to execute her. An apparent

contradiction arises: how can Kaneko admit that she betrayed herself while concurrently affirming that decision as being true to herself?

This paper attempts to answer this question by reconsidering Kaneko's decision through philosophers influenced by Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis, such as Slavoj Žižek and Mari Ruti. I argue that a rift appeared between her ego, i.e. the image of her ideal self, and herself as a subject. In other words, a rift appeared between demands issued by her ego and her unconscious desires. Her decision to stay with Park and participate in the plot means she chose to follow her desires. Consequently, while Kaneko may have felt that she betrayed her egoist principles, by doing so, she was able to stay true to herself as a desiring subject. That is why she ultimately could identify with her decision and welcome all its consequences, even when such a move ultimately led to her death.

Kaneko's Life

Firstly, a short presentation of Kaneko's life is necessary to acquaint the reader with the basic facts of a generally obscure historical figure. Furthermore, any presentation of her philosophical thought must begin with her life, because her experiences played a crucial role in shaping her worldview. While the various different ideologies that she embraced (and some later discarded) had given her thought an interpretative and expressive tool, her outlook ultimately originates from all the injustices Kaneko was subjected to during her short life.

Her memoirs were appropriately titled *Nani ga watashi o kō saseta ka* 何が私をこうさせたか (*What Made Me Do What I Did*), since they are essentially a recollection of all her experiences which led her to embrace a nihilistic and rebellious attitude. It is not an exaggeration to say that Kaneko's negative experiences, rife with abuse, exploitation and abandonment, shaped her as a person. In presenting her life story, I will rely on her memoirs (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 7–289) and Yamada's study of her life (1996), unless specified otherwise.

Kaneko Fumiko was born in 1903 in Yokohama to her father Fumikazu and mother Kikuno. As soon as she was born, she was already subjected to a form of violence. Her father could not be bothered to record her birth in the family register (*koseki* 戸籍), which would be the source of much pain later. Her days of a happy childhood were short-lived, since her father soon began to lead a life of debauchery and idleness. Therefore, the family fell into poverty. Fumikazu would often argue and be violent toward Kikuno, and their relationship would ultimately end when Fumikazu left them for Kikuno's younger sister (Kaneko's aunt).

Kaneko would, after that, move around with her mother, who had multiple lovers. Their life was so destitute that, at one point, Kaneko's mother seriously considered selling her daughter off to a brothel.

Kaneko was genuinely excited to finally go to school, but she was barred from entering as she was an "unregistered" (*musekisha* 無籍者). After her mother pleaded with the school to allow her to attend class, she was finally allowed to enter, but even then, Kaneko was constantly subjected to discrimination and shaming.

When Kikuno got remarried, she left Kaneko with her parents (Kaneko's grandparents), so Kaneko was in effect abandoned by both parents. In 1911 she received a visit from her grandmother on her father's side, a Japanese colonist in Korea. The grandmother offered to adopt Kaneko and take her to Korea, to which she agreed. Her grandmother's family was well off, so Kaneko hoped that her life would finally take a turn for the better, but this did not come to pass. Instead, she was treated as a servant and would regularly be the victim of beatings, humiliation and abuse. All the mistreatment eventually drove her to attempt suicide by jumping into a river. However, she changed her mind at the last moment and swore revenge upon all those who torment others.

Kaneko went back to Japan in 1919, where she was yet again subjected to abuse. Her father attempted to wed her off to her uncle (Kikuno's younger brother), a monk at a temple. The engagement fell apart, and her relationship with her father further soured. In 1920 she decided to go to Tokyo by herself and study.

While she attended schools in Tokyo, Kaneko supported herself with part-time jobs, such as selling newspapers and soap. However, her employers exploited her aggressively, so she barely made any money. She also became acquainted with different social movements, such as Christianity and socialism. She joined both for a short period, but was left disillusioned by their followers' hypocritical actions, as they preached high ideas but did not seem to practice them.

Nonetheless, socialism left a lasting impact on Kaneko's thought. While all her negative experiences made her discontented with society in general, socialism gave her a language to understand and express those feelings.

Socialism has not given me anything new. It only gave me a theory of the correctness of my feelings that I had acquired from my past circumstances. I was poor. I had been used, bullied, tormented, held down, deprived of my freedom, exploited, and controlled by people with money. Thus, I have always harboured a deep-seated antipathy towards those with such power. At the same time, I have always had deep compassion for those in

the same situation as me. [...] It was socialism that ignited this rebellion and compassion in my heart.

Oh, I want ... I want to fight for us, the wretched class, even if it entails sacrificing my whole life. (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 250)

社会主義は私に、別に何らの新しいものを与えなかった。それはただ、私の今までの境遇から得た私の感情に、その感情の正しいということの理論を与えてくれただけのことであった。私は貧乏であった。今もう貧乏である。そのために私は、金のある人々にき使われ、いじめられ、なまれ、抑えつけられ、自由を奪われ、搾取され、支配されて来た。そうして私は、そうした力をもっている人への反感を常に心の中に蔵していた。と同時に、私と同じような境遇にある者に心から同情を寄せていた。(中略) 私の心のなかに燃えていたこの反抗や同情に、ぱっと火をつけたのが社会主義であった。

ああ私は……………してやりたい。私たち哀れな階級のために、私の全生命を犠牲にしても闘いたい。

While Kaneko had always felt indignant because of how people treated her, the socialist theory of class struggle and exploitation made her understand that her misery was not simply the result of simple misfortune, but a systemic issue. Perceiving one's misery as simply a result of bad luck is fatalistic, as it naturalizes one's circumstances and, consequently, gives the appearance that nothing can be done. In contrast, a socialist understanding demystifies and undermines such fatalism since it presents one's circumstances as a result of class divisions that are structured to benefit a small layer of society at the expense of others. This implies that society is not natural but artificially structured to be unjustly stratified, and, therefore, alterable.

Furthermore, a socialist critique also makes evident that systemic injustices affect many others in similar ways, which creates the potential for solidarity for a common cause. It is questionable whether, despite Kaneko's later disillusionment with the socialist movement, she would still have gone down the path of rebellion if she was not exposed to these ideas.

In school, Kaneko became friends with Niiyama Hatsuyo 新山初代, whose strong, independent and assertive personality, and that impressed Kaneko. Niiyama introduced Kaneko to the ideas of Max Stirner, Friedrich Nietzsche and Mikhail Artsybashev, and Kaneko soon noticed the connection between Niiyama's personality and the nihilist-egoist ideas. Disappointed by mass movements and most people, it is not surprising that Kaneko saw her path with the radical individualist

self-assertion of egoism and the rejection of external and established values of nihilism.

She also became acquainted with some Koreans and felt an affinity with them. Kaneko's time in the country had made her compassionate towards Koreans, who, as colonized people, also felt the unjust sting of the system. One of her Korean friends showed her a poem called "*Inukoro* 犬ころ (Pup)" by Park Yeol, which entranced her so much that she became determined to meet its author. When the two finally met, Kaneko noticed that Park possessed similar individualist ideals, so she proposed that they start living together. Park concurred, and they started living together in 1922, making a mutual pact to respect their individualities and treat each other as equals.

They organized many activities, such as publishing rebellious and pro-Korean newspapers and holding meetings with other like-minded individuals. Park introduced Fumiko to the Black Wave Society (*Kokutōkai* 黒濤会), a Korean socialist study group, and together they founded, edited and wrote for its newspaper *Black Wave* (*Kokutō* 黒濤). The Black Wave Society would split between communists and anarchists, and the latter would reorganize themselves as the Black Friends Society (*Kokuyūkai* 黒友会), where allegedly the famous anarchist, Ōsugi Sakae (大杉榮), held a lecture (Raddeker 1997, 199). Raddeker (*ibid.*, 195) suggests that this split echoes the broader dispute between anarchists and communists at the time, called the anarchist-Bolshevik dispute (*ana-boru ronsō* アナ・ボル論争). It is possible that this tension also contributed to Kaneko's further endorsement of the anarchist-nihilist position. Kaneko would edit and write for its journal *Cheeky Koreans* (*Futoi Senjin* 太い鮮人), later renamed *Today's Society* (*Genshakai* 現社会).

While the Black Friends Society was dedicated to legitimate and legal activities, Kaneko, Park and other anarchists also formed its underground wing, the Malcontents' Society (*Futeisha* 不逞者), to carry out direct action. Plotting to assassinate the crown prince, they tried multiple times to procure explosives, including once from the Korean rebel group the Heroic Corps (*Giretsudan* 義烈団). This plot never came to fruition, but that did not stop the authorities from coming after them. The Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 was followed by many fires, for which Korean residents were blamed and massacred. In order to justify this senseless slaughter, the authorities required a scapegoat so they could say that Koreans represented a genuine threat (Yamada 1996, 150). Kaneko, Park and some others were soon arrested and presented as a threat to order and security. The plot to assassinate the emperor came to light during the interrogations, so the authorities found their perfect scapegoat. Despite interrogations and the trial lasting until 1926, Kaneko always stood tall and never asked for forgiveness from the

authorities. In the end, she was convicted of high treason (*taigyakuzai* 大逆罪) and was sentenced to death, but was soon bestowed an imperial pardon and had her sentence commuted to life imprisonment. She died in prison in 1926, and the circumstances of her death remain undetermined. However, it is popularly believed that she committed suicide as the last defiant act against the state, the emperor and his pardon (Raddeker 1997, 68–69).

Kaneko's Egoism

Kaneko Fumiko was not a prolific writer, so few direct reference materials exist. To present Kaneko's egoism, I refer to her memoirs (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 7–289) and archives from her imprisonment, such as recorded interrogations (Suzuki 2013, 291–344), and two written statements to the supreme court (*ibid.*, 344–56). Furthermore, while Kaneko mentions other influences on her thought, such as Nietzsche and Artzybashev (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 271), she admires the 19th-century German philosopher Max Stirner (1806–1856) the most (Suzuki 2013, 345). Furthermore, Stirner is considered the founder of egoism as a philosophy, so I will refer to him when Kaneko's thought requires clarification.

The following quote is the best starting point here, because it thoroughly and inclusively encapsulates many aspects of Kaneko's philosophy. After making a metaphysical claim that all things in existence consist of two inseparable and utter opposites (light-dark, joy-misery) and denouncing as sophistry any religious hope for the negative aspects disappearing and the world becoming perfect, she concludes:

So I declare: therefore, I do not recognize any “vocation” or “mission” above human beings, nay, above myself. In other words, “I want to do this, so I do this” is the only law and command that I have to govern my actions. To put it simply, all my actions are just “I do it because I want to”, and I don't tell others that “you have to do this” or “you should be like that”. I think: just as I have my own head and my own feet to think about myself and walk my own path, so should others have their own head and their own feet. In other words, autonomy and self-governance—there where everyone becomes the master of their lives and governs their lives accordingly is where I feel like drawing a faint picture of my favourite society. (Suzuki 2013, 351)

で、こう私は断定します。したがって私は人間の上に、いな自分の上に「天職」とか「使命」とかいうものを認めません。つ

まり「自分はこうやりたいからこうやる」これが私にとって自分の行為を律すべく唯一つの法則であり、命令です。もっとわかりやすくいうと、私の行為すべては、「私自身そうしたいからそうする」というだけのことであって、他人に対しては「そうせねばならん」とも「そうあるべきだ」ともいいません。私は思うんです。私が私自身のことを考え、私自身の道を歩むために、私自身の頭と足を持ってるように、他人もまた自分の頭と足とをもってるはずだ。——つまり、自主自治——すべての人が自分の生活の主となって、自分の生活を正しく治めるところに、かすかながら私の好きな社会を描いてみる気にもなるのです。

I extract three significant aspects of Kaneko's egoism from the above quote: denial of authority, ownership of oneself and free association.

Denial of Authority

Kaneko's overwhelmingly negative experiences during her childhood and adolescence instilled a strong suspicion of authority and social norms. For example, during her second interrogation on the 17th of January 1924, she presents her critical understanding of the role of morality in society (ibid., 299–300). Kaneko opens her critique with a rejection of filial piety (*kōkō* 孝行), which she describes as just a power relation where the strong (parent) can do with the weak (child) as they please. She sees this dynamic of weak and strong as the truth of morality in general:

In that way, morality is always elaborated to suit the strong.

In other words, the strong protect their freedom of conduct and force the weak to submit. Speaking of this relationship from the [the position of the] weak, the promise of obedience to the strong is so-called morality.

This morality governs each era and constitutes each society. Thus, the rulers always make it a primary condition to sustain this morality longer. (ibid., 300)

そうしてその道徳はいつも強い者に都合の好いように練り上げられております。

つまり強い者は自分の行動の自由を擁護しつつ、弱者に服従を強いる。この関係を弱者から言えば強者への屈従が、いわゆる道徳であります。

この道徳が各時代を支配し、各社会を構成しております。そうして支配者はいつもこの道徳をより長く保つことを第一義的条件としております。

Kaneko also experienced the exploitative and subjugating function of morality in the context of gender dynamics. She describes how she and other women are made to marry without their consent and compares it to slavery. Women are reduced to commodities, yet they are expected to accept such practices as natural (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 161, 172).

She extends her critique to the highest echelons of society: the state and the emperor. For her, a state's dignity or the emperor's divinity are not inherent, natural properties. Instead, both the state and emperor depend on violence and brute force in order to claim such characteristics for themselves (Suzuki 2013, 346). Authority has no natural or divine right to its position in a social hierarchy, but instead achieved this position by oppressing others. Hence Kaneko concludes that morality and authority lack inherent worth, so there is no need to obey them.

Stirner is critical of morality as well, and describes it as a kind of "phantasm". The first half of his magnum opus, *The Unique and its Property* (2017), is called "Humanity". There, he describes how people create certain concepts, such as the sacred, morality, legality and humanity, but become enslaved to these ideas when they imbue them with value. They elevate those ideas to a point where they appear as something divine-like and, consequently, as something that demands unconditional respect and obedience. These divine ideas always trump the interests of individuals, so people must suppress their selfish wants and align their lives according to the dictates of these values. Morality, as such a divine-like phantasm, "takes its start where *humiliation* begins; indeed, it is nothing more than this humiliation itself, the breaking and bending of courage down into *humility*" (ibid., 97).

But if I tell him: "You're going to pray, honour your parents, respect the crucifix, speak the truth, etc., because this belongs to the human being and is the human *calling*"; or even, "this is God's will"; then moral influence is complete: a person should bend to the human calling, should be obedient, become humble, should give up his will to an alien one which is set up as rule and law; he should abase himself before something *higher*: self-abasement. (ibid., 98)

Morality subdues people, and, like Kaneko, Stirner is well aware that it is used to subtly protect and advance certain people's interests, particularly in the context

of the state. The state has a monopoly on morality, and “all that concerns the principle of morality is a state matter” (ibid., 237). For Stirner, the church and state are functionally the same—the only difference is their tools: the former espouses devoutness as a virtue to its flock, the latter propagates morality to its subjects.

Both Kaneko and Stirner reject morality because they see it as essentially empty, as nothing, and this is why nothing is a central concept for both of them: Stirner titles his introduction “I Have Based my Affairs on Nothing” and in it valiantly proclaims that “for me, there is nothing greater than me!” (ibid., 25, 27), while Kaneko describes her desired lifestyle as “living on the edge of nothing (*nibiru no sakai ni ikiru* ニヒルの境に生きる)” (Suzuki 2013, 347). By reducing everything to nothing, they do not recognize the authority of any morality, religion, state or emperor.

I propose that Kaneko’s “living on the edge of nothing” applies to the individual as well. Morality gives people commandments about how to behave, but these commandments are often connected to the individual’s role in society. A wife is thus expected to embody certain virtues and behave in particular ways, while a teacher in others. In linguistic terms, society confers specific signifiers on individuals, and each signifier carries different social expectations (or lack thereof) and their corresponding treatments. Kaneko felt the weight of these signifiers when her status as an “unregistered” subjected her to abuse in school (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 81) or when she witnessed how the signifier of “Korean” brought mistreatment and violence upon colonized bodies (ibid., 88, 111). Another apt example is when she asked her father to let her go to Tokyo and he simply reminded her of her status by saying: “Fool, you’re a woman, aren’t you? (*baka na, onna ja nai ka omae wa* 馬鹿な、女じゃないかお前は)” (ibid., 178).

Signifiers assign people to designated social positions and bind specific behavioural patterns and expectations to those who occupy these. That is why an egoist must reject identification with such labels by becoming nothing. Stirner says that “I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator” (Stirner 2017, 27).

To be nothing means not to be defined by anything that comes from the outside. Moreover, rejecting being defined by social labels is egoistic because an individual is irreducible to any signifier. An individual is one-of-a-kind and singular, beyond any social position associated with a signifier. That is why Stirner calls such a true egoist, who does not identify herself with social labels, as “the unique”. Or, as he puts it:

This is true of me: No *concept* expresses me, nothing that is said to be my essence exhausts me; they are only names. [...] I am owner of my power, and I am so when I know myself as unique. In the unique the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, from which he is born. (ibid., 456)

To be creative nothing also means that one defines and builds oneself directly, according to one's own criteria and wants. By rejecting social signifiers, an egoist as creative nothing rejects all authority but herself. In other words, she will not be owned by anyone or anything, whether that be a person or a lofty ideal, but will own herself. This leads us to the next concept, that of "ownness".

Ownness

In the extended quote from the beginning of the paper, Kaneko states unambiguously how she wants to live. She says that everyone should be the master of their own lives (*jibun no seikatsu no nushi* 自分の生活の主) and uses the words "autonomy and self-governance" (*jishujichi* 自主自治) to describe her desired lifestyle. Her usage of verbs and adjectives that donate possession, such as "to have", "to own" (*motsu* 持つ) or "my", "own" (*jibun no* 自分の), is significant. For example, Kaneko says she has her own feet and head to think her own thoughts and walk her own path. The only authority she acknowledges is herself, i.e. her ego.

For Kaneko, an "urge to own" (*shoyūyoku* 所有欲) animates all of society (Suzuki 2013, 344). This urge manifests itself as selfishness or self-love (*jiai* 自愛) and self-benefit (*jiko o risuru to iu katachi* 自己を利するという形), and is "another name for the overflowing of human life that transcends the urge to live (*seimeiyoku no iki wo koete, ningen seikatsu no ue ni afureideta mono no besshō dearu* 生命欲の域を越えて、人間生活の上に溢れ出でたものの別称である)" (ibid., 345).

Kaneko does not give an exact definition of what she means by "ego" (*jiga* 自我), and uses the term interchangeably with "self" (*jibun* 自分). She claims all people are essentially egoists and can only love themselves, i.e. their egos. She also claims that a person's ego is elastic, which gives the veneer of love for another.

However, that self is never fixed. The ego expands and contracts. Sometimes it expands to the point of being a nation or the human race; other times, it sees a conflict between self and other even within its own individual self. Therefore, the so-called social cohesion of the human world is maintained only on the basis of this elasticity of the ego. (ibid.)

しかし、その自分は決して固定してはいない。自我は伸縮する。あるときは、国家とか、または人類とかいうところまでも拡大され、またあるときは、この自分一個の個体の裡においてさえ、自他の対立を見るので、人間界におけるいわゆる社会的結合は、ただこの自我の伸縮性の上にのみ保たれている。

Kaneko has a narcissistic understanding of human relations: a person can only accept and love another as long as she can see herself in the other. Consequently, altruism is just egoism in disguise, since a person may believe she is helping another when, in actuality, she is only doing it for herself.

We can thus discern the meaning of ego from the above quote. A person as a unit, a single body, can identify with other people or entities when she projects herself onto the other. So the ego is, therefore, an image, an idea of the self that is projected onto other bodies. However, does it not then follow that a person who, for example, sacrifices herself for the state is also an egoist? To answer this question, I turn to Stirner.

In Stirner's philosophy, we can distinguish between two meanings of egoism: the first being self-aware and the second a "duped" egoism. Stirner gives religion as an example of the latter (Stirner 2017, 179). Religion is a form of duped egoism since it preaches about high-sounding ideals, yet must always promise people a form of compensation, such as an afterlife or a long life in this world. This need for compensation reveals that people follow religions for selfish, egoistic reasons. Even religion's praise of altruism or "doing good for the sake of good" has an egoistic side, since a reward is contained in the satisfaction such actions engender.

The problem with duped or "unconscious" egoism is that, according to Stirner, it is not true egoism (*ibid.*). Because people dupe themselves into believing that they are not motivated by egoistic urges—they deny their egoism—they end up in self-denial. Consequently, despite its concealed egoistic motive, a single urge is elevated into a virtue, such as altruism, while the rest are stifled, sacrificed. Religion promises the highest good, yet "to gain this [we] pay no attention to any of [our] other desires and do not nourish them" (*ibid.*).

Hence for Stirner, a true egoist must listen to all her urges and interests and not blindly follow one passion. To give into one passion is equal to becoming a slave to and being owned by it; a person who gives into one passion "is ruled by a passion to which he brings the others as sacrifices" (*ibid.*, 92). Mastery over one's urges, passions and desires is central for a true egoist.

I am my own only when I am in my own power, and not in the power of sensuality or any other thing (God, humanity, authority, law, state, church, etc.); my selfishness pursues what is useful to me, this self-owned or self-possessing one. (ibid., 183)

Ownness is the essential condition for an egoist. An egoist puts her I (ego),¹ i.e. her uncompromised, unmitigated and unmediated self-interests, as their only criterion and guide.

Now why, if one strives for freedom out of love for the I, why not choose the I itself as beginning, middle and end? (ibid., 178)

The I or ego is not some abstract philosophical or psychological concept, but the concrete, one-of-a-kind, unique and finite individual (ibid., 195).

To return to Kaneko, a true egoist is a concrete and singular individual whose I or ego strictly coincides with her wishes and self-interests. A person whose ego has extended to incorporate the nation and has, consequently, adopted the nation's interest as her own has already compromised her self-interest, and thus become a false, duped egoist. If one sees her selfish interests as bad or evil, her understanding of said interests is already mediated by social standards. Such a socially mediated view of one's interests means that the individual does not own her interests. Only when the I or ego is strictly the individual's own and unmediated is the individual the unique.

However, this begs the question of how could a collective of egoists function? Would it all end in chaos and violence? To answer this question, we must look at the concept of "association".

1 Stirner uses the German words *Ich* and *der Einzige*, which Landstreicher translates as "I" and "the unique", respectively. However, this is a new translation from 2017, and until that then, the old translation from 1907 by Steven T. Byington was the only English version. In there, *Ich* is occasionally translated as "ego" (cf. Stirner 1995, 127, 134, 318–19, 321). Furthermore, Byington also translated *der Einzige* in the title as "ego" and, consequently, cementing *The Ego and Its Own* as the official title. Interestingly, in the text, he translates *der Einzige* as "the unique one" (cf. ibid., 319–20, 324). Tsuji Jun 辻潤 was the first to fully translate *The Ego and Its Own* into Japanese in 1921 (Matsuo and Takagi 1982, 3–4) while using Byington's translation as his reference (Tsuji 1982, 9). In Tsuji's translation, Stirner's *Ich* is also inconsistently translated in some places as *jiga* (自我) (cf. Tsuji 1982, 268, 545, 547), while in others as *jibun* (自分) or *jiko* (自己). In addition, Stirner's *der Einzige* has also been equated with *jiga* by other thinkers, writing about Stirner's philosophy (cf. Osugi 2014, 35).

Association of Egoists

If we assume that all people are essentially egoistic, how is any other state besides a war between everyone even possible? Neither Kaneko nor Stirner shies away from this problem. Kaneko proclaims that good or goodness (*zen* 善) would be a situation of co-existence and co-prosperity (*kyōzōon kyōei* 共存共栄). However, she quickly admits that the current state of affairs is far from such goodness (Suzuki 2013, 346–47). Nonetheless, Kaneko still sees hope in the act of rebellion; she sees it as the only goodness and beauty left in the world:

Here I cry out—Rebel, rebel! Rebel against all power! It is good to restrain a strong power. To rebel against an oppressor is not only good for the oppressed; it is also good for all humankind. And that alone is the only good and the only beauty in what man does. (ibid., 347)

ここにおいて私は叫ぶ——反逆せよ叛逆せよ！あらゆる力に反逆せよ！強い力に掣肘を加えることは、それは善である。すなわち圧制者に反逆をすることは被圧制者にとって善であると同時に、それは全人類の善である。しかしてそれのみがただ人間がすることのうちにただ一つの善であり、美である——と。

The ability to rebel grants us the possibility to retain or recover our human dignity. Of course, like any other activity, rebellion is also egoistic, since it comes from the urge to protect oneself. Through rebellion, people can throw off the yoke that exploits, oppresses and owns them. Through rebellion, people can come to own themselves, which is the very essence of egoism. The difference between the egoism of the state and that of the people’s rebellion is in their directionality: the former is unilateral while the latter is multilateral. The state one-sidedly owns its subjects as its property, while rebellion can make people become owners of themselves.

Additionally, the potential for rebellion, what Stirner calls “the war of all against all” (Stirner 2017, 271), functions as a guarantee of fairer relations. As Blumenfeld (2018, 112) points out, there is a reciprocal recognition at work in an association—“the recognition of one another’s power of annihilation”. However, this “is not the recognition of personhood, or freedom, but of the mutual power for violation, consumption, and expropriation”.

With its one-sided, coercive egoism, the state is not a desirable form of collectivity for an egoist, who does not wish to submit her will to that of the state. In contrast, Stirner describes an association as a better alternative where people’s self-interests would not be stifled or subsumed by a greater entity (such as the state).

And if I can use him, I surely come to an understanding and reach an agreement with him, to strengthen *my power* through the agreement and to accomplish more through combined force than individual force could achieve. In this mutuality I see nothing at all beyond a multiplication of my strength, and I'll keep at it only so long as it is *my* multiplied strength. But so it is an-association. (Stirner 2017, 324)

The association provides an opportunity to enhance one's ability to pursue egoistic goals. An individual is limited in many ways, while collaboration with others may help her overcome these limitations. Therefore, associating with others is congruent with egoism.

What is more, a person is free to leave an association when it no longer represents a means for realizing her self-benefit. Alternatively, suppose the association degenerates and becomes a unilateral coercive entity that stifles and subordinates its participants' self-interests to those of a minority (as is the case in the state). In that case, rebellion is still an option for the participants to break the coercive chains and re-establish themselves as owners.

One can describe Kaneko's and Park's relationship as an attempt at forming an association of egoists. The reason Kaneko liked Park in the first place was that she saw him as ideologically similar. She realized that Park "is not a nationalist, but a man who has always been strong enough to start from his ego and to risk his life for the cause" (Suzuki 2013, 305). When they began living together, they made the following pact.

1. They live together as comrades.
2. Kaneko would not be perceived as a woman in the context of their activism.
3. If one party becomes ideologically corrupt and collaborates with the authorities, they would break up their relationship.
4. They would mutually cooperate in their activism for the sake of their ideology (*shugi* 主義). (ibid.)

それで私は朴の思想がほとんど私の思想と一致しており、なお同人が直接、民族運動者ではなく常に自我から出発してその運動のために生命を賭し得るだけの力ある男であることを知りましたので、私は朴に対し同志として同棲すること、運動の方面においては私が女性であるという観念を除去すべきこと、一方が思想的に墮落して権力者と把握することができた場合に

は、ただちに共同生活を解くこと宣言し、相互は主義のためにする運動を協力することを約して、私らは同棲することに決意したのであります。

Kaneko considered it vital that their relationship was based on mutual respect for their individualities and the independence of their wills. No partner should coerce another against their will, or make unilateral decisions concerning both parties without acquiring consent. While in prison, Kaneko would reminisce about their life together and recall an event when Park allegedly breached this pact. The reconsideration of this event would instil doubt about their relationship.

Kaneko's Doubt and Self-Assertion

Naitō (2020, 212–13) rightfully points out the importance of a passage in the letter Kaneko submitted to the court. In that passage, Kaneko expresses doubt (*utagai* 疑い) about her past actions, namely that she stayed with Park. She considers whether the truly egoistic path would have been leaving Park and becoming single (Suzuki 2013, 353).

When Kaneko, Park and others were plotting to assassinate the imperial heir, Kaneko temporarily left the meeting. During that time she was reconsidering whether she truly wished to go through with such a plan. However, despite Kaneko's absence Park continued to negotiate to obtain a bomb. Park's one-sided actions thus subsumed Kaneko's will to his own. The fact that he unilaterally made decisions on such an essential matter without consulting with Kaneko and obtaining her consent was, for her, a clear breach of their pact. In other words, such unilateral action was unambiguously incongruent with the principles of an association of egoists. Kaneko describes her thoughts on the matter as follows:

So I realised, after this incident came to light, that when I had doubts about myself, I should have pursued myself to the limit. Then I would have seen the gap between Park and me. Park and I were together. But it was not a life of two people. It was a life of one person and one person. No individuality has the right to absorb another individuality. Just as Park follows his own path, I follow mine. In my own world, I am absolute. For me to continue down my own path, unhindered, I should have become alone. (ibid., 353)

それで、私はこの事件が発覚した後、気がついたのです。私は自分に疑いをもつそのとき、どこまでも自分を追求すべきであ

った。そしたら私は多分朴との間に隔たりを見たろう。朴と私とは一緒にいた。だが、それは二人の生活ではない。一人と一人との生活である。どんな個性にも他の個性を吸収してしまう権利はない。朴が朴の道を歩むように、私は私の道を歩む。自分の世界にあっては自分が絶対だ。私が自分の道を、誰にも邪魔されず、まっすぐに歩みつづけるためには、私はひとりになるべきだったのだ、と。

The very essence of an association is voluntarism. An individual freely chooses to join when they believe that doing so would enhance their ability to pursue their self-interest. Likewise, they can leave it when they believe that their self-interest no longer coincides with the interests of the association. According to such logic, for Kaneko to remain her own, i.e., to stay an autonomous and self-governing individual, she should have left.

Surprisingly, Kaneko completely shifts her tone in the same letter. Instead of expressing regret or repenting, which could have possibly saved her life, she reaffirms her love for Park and all the consequences, including their potential execution.

I know Park. I love Park. Beyond all his faults and all his shortcomings, I love Park. I now unconditionally acknowledge all the wrongs that Park has done to me. And to Park's companions, I say: "If you find this incident ridiculous, go ahead and laugh at us. That's who we are." And to the bureaucrats, I say: "Please throw us both on the guillotine together. If I die with Park, I will be satisfied." And to Park, I say: "Even if the official's sentence draws us apart, I will never let you die alone." (*ibid.*, 356)

私は朴を知っている。朴を愛している。彼におけるすべての過失とすべての欠点とを越えて、私は朴を愛している。私は今、朴が私の上に及ぼした過誤のすべてを無条件で認める。そして、朴の仲間に対してはいおう。私はこの事件がばかげて見えるのなら、どうか二人を嗤ってくれ。それは二人のことなのだ。そしてお役人に対してはいおう。どうか二人を一緒にギロチンに放り上げてくれ。朴とともに死ぬるなら、私は満足しよう。して朴にはいおう。よしんばお役人の宣告が二人を引き分けても、私は決してあなたを一人死なせてはおかないつもりです。

The strong affirmation of love, the acceptance of past events and the readiness to die indicate Kaneko's genuine desire. One cannot but get the impression that, no matter the consequences, staying with Park was the right decision in her eyes after all. Kaneko admits this when she states that such doubts arose only because

the plot had failed (ibid., 354). She says that if the plot had succeeded, she would probably never have had any doubts and would have celebrated the result. She even expresses an apology to Park for doubting him and describes such thoughts as “egoistic” (ibid.), and here we should note that it is unexpected that an egoist like Kaneko would use the word “egoistic” in such a negative way. These are all pieces of evidence that she made the correct decision and did not betray her real desire.

Nonetheless, a problem remains: how can we consider the affirmation of her decision to stay with Park as an expression of her genuine desire when she also states that leaving him would have been the proper egoistic choice? To answer these questions, I turn to psychoanalysis.

The Deceptive Nature of Ego

Lacan’s Ego Theory

I have already shown that Kaneko primarily uses the word “ego” to designate herself as a one-of-a-kind individual—a unique, in Stirner’s sense of the word. However, there was a case where she was arguing about the ego’s flexibility: how it can stretch to encompass a whole nation or even all of humanity or retract to include only part of the individual. Referring to Stirner, I have argued that an ego that extends beyond itself (or retracts to only a part of the self) is a “duped” egoism. This egoism identifies with something other than itself (e.g. the nation) and, consequently, betrays its self-interest. Put differently, it subordinates its will to another and so does not own itself.

Nevertheless, in this particular case, it is clear that Kaneko understands the ego to mean an image of oneself that may be projected onto other entities. This idea of the ego as an image of oneself is not dissimilar to the ego theory of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. According to Lacan, the ego is an image a subject has of herself. A subject² (i.e. the creator and bearer of the ego in contrast with the ego as the imaginary image of the subject) typically creates this image in infancy (6–18 months), when she can recognize herself in a mirror. Because an infant is “still trapped in his motor impotence and nursling dependence” (Lacan 2006a, 76), she has no

2 The definition of the subject in Lacanian psychoanalysis is very complex, and a precise exposition of all its nuances would far exceed the scope of this paper. For now, it is essential only to know that the Lacanian subject is not a substantial entity, such as Descartes’ *res cogitans*, but rather something that happens on rare occasions like a lightning bolt. Her presence manifests itself in events that expose something unique and singular about the person. An example of such an event is the explosion of desire for the Thing, which I will explain below.

coherent idea of a self. The mirror projects a holistic image of the infant back to her, giving her a primordial idea of self as a whole.

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an *identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*. (ibid.)

This primordial image is indispensable in a person's cognitive development, and will accompany them and evolve throughout their life. Nonetheless, despite the indispensable role the ego plays in one's psychic life, it is still just an image, a fiction, a construct. It is an idea, or rather an ideal, with which one identifies or strives to identify. As an image, it is separate from the subject and therefore something essentially alien to her.

This idea of a whole and coherent self exists only on an imaginary level; the actual individual remains fragmented. A discrepancy persists between the ego and its bearer, and this discrepancy constantly threatens to undermine our sense of self. Lacan calls this discrepancy a "fundamental alienation" (Lacan 1991, 126). Furthermore, identification through a mirror image is a perfect example of a misidentification: the image of ourselves, which we perpetually renew through our daily encounters with mirrors, is a reverse image of how other people see us. Therefore, the ego is not the centre of one's being, the essence of one's personhood, but a product of a fundamental misrecognition. In other words, the ego believes itself to be "the cause of its mirror image, while, in reality it is only an effect of that image. [...] It miscognizes the primacy of the image" (De Kesel 2009, 21).

Psychoanalysis teaches us that the ego, the image of oneself, is not the same as oneself as a subject, the creator and bearer of said image. Because of this discrepancy, there is always a possibility that the ego betrays the subject by no longer being a faithful representation of a subject's desire. In other words, the subject can be surprised by a desire that does not coincide with how she perceives herself. What does this theory tell us about Kaneko's egoism?

Ego as an Authority

Because of the interchangeable way Kaneko uses terms such as "I" (*watashi*), "self" (*jibun*, *jiko*) and "ego" (*jiga*), her egoism acquires two not necessarily compatible facets. These can be discerned from the long quote at the beginning of this paper.

I want to isolate two parts: her egoistic imperative of “I want to do this, so I do this” and her egoistic ideal of an autonomous, self-governing self.

The two aspects are interchangeable in most cases. Being autonomous and self-governing implies Kaneko doing what she desires, and she desires to be autonomous and self-governing. However, this seeming symbiosis fell apart in the incident with Park. There, it became apparent that the ego as an ideal is an image. In other words, Lacan’s lesson that the ego is an inherently alienated entity, distinct from the subject herself, came to light. Kaneko’s love for Park, i.e. her desire, conflicted with what the ego demanded of her. Kaneko herself describes her egoistic imperative “I want to do this, so I do this” as a law (*hōsoku* 法則) and as a command (*meirei* 命令), but because of the lack of distinction between the ego as an imperative and as an ideal, it was also her ideal giving her orders. She perceives autonomy and self-governance as a condition to follow her desire, and *vice versa*, she perceives being autonomous and self-governing as desirable. Consequently, her ego is ordering her to leave Park so she will again be autonomous and self-governing.

However, because the ego is alien to the subject, it is not unreasonable to conclude that her ego is a figure of authority. Since the subject misperceives the ego as being the subject herself, the ego’s authority is also misrecognized as the subject’s authority over herself. I propose that Kaneko’s ego functions as what is known as “the (big) Other” in Lacanian psychoanalysis. McGowan (2016, 124) explains the Other as follows:

Social existence involves the encounter with others, but beyond these others the subject sees the Other, a figure of social authority that represents the social order as a whole and makes demands on the subject.

Many rules guide people’s interactions. Žižek (2007, 8) gives the example of a Mexican soap opera, where the actors wear earpieces that give them acting instructions directly. Without these rules, such as linguistic grammar or the way we must silently pass obscene innuendos to a partner without being noticed (*ibid.*, 9), interaction would become impossible. In the case of the obscene innuendo, we need to perform it discretely because we presuppose an authoritative gaze that must not notice the gesture. This authoritative gaze can be embodied in personalized figures, such as parents, bishops, teachers, political leaders, or in more abstract figures, such as God. It can be embodied even in a collective like a group of peers or society³ in general. What is essential is that the subject endows this figure with authority that grounds the rules of social behaviour.

3 I propose that the Japanese word *seken* 世間 is an excellent example of the Other. One must try hard to constantly adopt the correct behaviour and keep up appearances not to be judged by this

This also indicates the insubstantial nature of the Other. It is purely virtual—it represents authority only as long as subjects perceive it as such. It is

the substance of the individuals who recognize themselves in it, the ground of their whole existence, the point of reference that provides the ultimate horizon of meaning, something for which these individuals are ready to give their lives, yet the only thing that really exists are these individuals and their activity, so this substance is actual only in so far as individuals believe in it and act accordingly. (ibid., 10)

Kaneko is an example of an individual who has disinvested her interest in the rules of the Other, be it her parents, the state or society in general. Nevertheless, considering what has been said about the ego being an inherently alien entity giving commands, Kaneko's ego can also be described as functioning as an authoritative Other.

Granted, this is a different Other from the one described above, i.e. the Other as a social authority. Her adverse experience of society and its norms gave birth to her egoistic ideals. Therefore, her ego, the image of herself she wants to embody, is the opposite of what society expects. For example, Kaneko would often express disdain at her mother's inability to be independent.

My mother was so dependent [on other people] that even I, as a child, was embarrassed. She was a woman who could not take a single step on her own. She was a woman who needed something to support her in order to take a step forward. (Kaneko in Suzuki 2013, 41)

子供の私にさえはがゆい程、母は依頼心が強かった。母は、ひとりでは一歩も踏み出しえない女だった。一足歩むにも何か自分を支えてくれるものがなくてはならぬ女であった。

Kaneko's experience living with her mother gave her a disdain for dependence, so she wanted to become the opposite: independent. Her greatest wish was “to be independent and do my own thing. This desire is an irresistible wish that comes from the heart of an I that is greater than myself. (*Watashi no negai wa, dokuritsu shite jibun no koto wa jibun de suru to iu koto da. Kono ganbō wa, watashi ijō no watashi kara deru fukakōna negai da* 私の願いは、独立して自分のことは自分ですという事だ。この願望は、私以上の私の心から出る不可抗な願いだ。)” (ibid., 199).

gaze. One does not need to be personally acquainted with the people who make up this gaze; they can be complete strangers. Behaving inappropriately in a social situation, e.g. on a public train, can bring shame and a loss of face to the subject.

While in Tokyo, Kaneko also consciously rejected going to an all-female school, and instead chose to go to a school where the number of female students was almost zero. One of her reasons was that the education offered at all-female schools tended to be inferior. However, more than that, her attending a school generally meant for males was a form of revenge by which Kaneko asserted her determination not to lose to men (*ibid.*, 207).

One could say that her ego is an “inverted” (big) Other. I call it inverted because her ego, her ideal self, is born out of her rejection of social norms. She moulded her ego as an obverse, negative image of social norms. Therefore, the Other (parents, state, society, etc.) she rejected is still present in her ego, albeit negatively, i.e., as an absence. In other words, if society as the Other is a photograph, her ego is a negative of that image. The result is that Kaneko elevated her ego to the position of the Other, a position of authority, and she followed the law and command of this inverted Other. Her ego was the gaze before which she regulated her behaviour. However, a desire manifested in her heart that went against the commands of this inverted Other.

The Subversive Nature of Desire

Desire in Psychoanalysis

I have been using the word “desire” in this paper without adequately defining it. In colloquial speech, desire is commonly interchangeable with other everyday words: want, wish, will, craving, yearning, and many more. While all these words may have slightly different nuances, they have one commonality: consciousness. Therefore, in colloquial speech, we say that someone desires something when they know what they want and actively strive to obtain the desired object. Moreover, when they obtain or, at the very least, fantasize about obtaining the targeted object, their desire is satisfied.

However, in psychoanalysis desire has a precise meaning that differs crucially from the colloquial use of the word. A detailed exposition of the Lacanian concept of desire would far exceed the length and purpose of this paper, so I will limit the explanation to the aspects necessary in the context of this text.

The most distinguishing feature of a psychoanalytic understanding of desire is that it is conceived as unconscious. We may believe we know what we want and why we want it, but that is not the case. Unlike a simple biological need, such as hunger, which can be easily satisfied with nourishment, desire is slippery and

is perpetually unsatisfied. We may desire one particular object⁴, yet the moment we obtain it, said object loses its desirability, and the odyssey of desire continues. Desire's aim is not to be satisfied but to perpetuate itself as desire. The reason for this perverse structure of desire lies in humans as animals of language.

Language has an objective, social, trans-subjective character. We are born into a linguistic world, and language will persist long after we die. But no one is born with an innate knowledge of language—we must all go through learning what words mean and how to use them. This fact has a radical implication: language is inherently alienating.

An infant is helpless and must rely on others (parents, caretakers, tribe members...) to satisfy her instinctual needs. Consequently, the infant has no choice but to vocalise her needs to call for the caretaker's attention (Evans 1996, 38). In other words, the infant is compelled to express herself by using means that originate from the outside. Because the infant is at the mercy of her caretaker, she sees them as a powerful and authoritative entity—a (big) Other.

Moreover, because language originates from the Other, language is also marked by alterity and authority. The infant is, therefore, compelled to express herself by using inherently alienating means. Also, because an infant's primary exposure to language is through the Other, i.e. an authority figure, language itself becomes associated with authority. From a parent's scolding or order to God's commandments, language has always been the vehicle through which authority asserts itself. What is more, language is a social phenomenon and, as such, transcends any particular individual, so it appears as something that no one person can completely own or master. Hence Lacan (2006c, 688) also describes language as an Other:

Let us begin with the conception of the Other as the locus of the signifier. No authoritative statement has any other guarantee here than its very enunciation, since it would be pointless for the statement to seek it in another signifier, which could in no way appear outside that locus.

Lacan adopts the term “signifier” from Saussurean linguistics. A signifier is the vocal or visual representation of a word. In contrast, the meaning, i.e. the image conjured up in one's mind when a signifier is uttered, is called a “signified”. According to Saussure, the link between signifier and signified is inherently arbitrary. There is no necessary or natural reason why a particular concept, e.g. dog, should be represented by a particular signifier, such as the sound “dog”. A particular signifier's

4 By object, I do not mean only material objects, but also people, status, experiences... Anything whose acquisition or experience we believe will finally erase our lack and make us whole again.

association with a particular signified is purely conventional. Since there is no necessary bond between these two elements, signifiers become associated with their respective signifieds through differentiation with other signifiers. The sound “dog” conjures up the image of a dog (a four-legged loyal animal companion with a strong sense of smell) because it is different from the sound “cat”, which is associated with a different signified.

Language as a system of signifiers is set up in advance, so an infant must learn to navigate this world full of signifiers by differentiating between them (and associating them with particular signifieds). To have its needs satisfied, a child must learn to express this need as a vocal demand. However, the vocalization of a need as demand becomes associated with the presence of the Other (e.g. parent)—the Other’s response to demand also becomes a sign of the Other’s attention, its love (Evans 1996, 38). The demand thus acquires two aims: to satisfy a need and call upon the Other’s attention. It is in this difference where desire comes into being.

However, whereas the Other can provide the objects which the subject requires to satisfy his needs, the Other cannot provide that unconditional love which the subject craves. Hence even after the needs which were articulated in demand have been satisfied, the other aspect of demand, the craving for love, remains unsatisfied, and this leftover is desire. (ibid.)

When a child begs their parents to buy chocolate cake, this is not a simple expression of biological need since, in that case, any food would suffice. The verbalization of our needs perverts them, creates an excess which is desire. An excess always permeates the demand for chocolate cake that transcends the need for nourishment. The signifier “chocolate cake” does not only stand for the chocolate cake as an object, but the very excessive nature of the object represents the love and attention of the Other (parent). Desire, which uses demand as its vehicle, aims at the Other through particular objects. Put alternatively, by desiring the Other’s love, we desire to be desired by the Other. That is why we learn to desire what the Other desires: by obtaining the object of the Other’s desire, we unconsciously believe that the Other’s desire will focus on us. Different people, groups, institutions, or ideas come to represent the Other, so our desires also receive their coordinates following what we interpret the Other wants from us. For example, we may desire an attractive partner because we believe this would procure us admiration from our peer group, or we desire a successful job to make our parents happy. This excessive element is the unconscious aspect of desire.

Moreover, we must use language, an Other, to express our wants, which means that this Other gives our demands and desires its parameters. We learn to desire

through the Other, and this is why Lacan famously says that “as a characteristic of an animal at the mercy of language, man’s desire is the Other’s desire” (2006b, 525).

However, because the craving for love can never be satisfied, we never cease to exist as desiring beings. This insatiability of desire manifests linguistically in the perpetual shifting from one signifier to another. We desire and demand a particular thing, but the moment we acquire it, it loses its desirability. As Ruti (2018, 187) puts it:

Under normal conditions, the subject’s desire as a function of the signifying chain moves metonymically from object to object. [...] Moreover, everything that at any given time becomes associated with this chain—any circumstantial object—“can be taken as equivalent to each other under suitable conditions”.

This metonymical sliding makes all potential objects of desire interchangeable. Our desires can adapt according to changing social contexts. A different environment has a different Other who gives us the coordinates of our desire. Ruti calls such a desire “hegemonic” (ibid., 111), because its objects are determined by what is socially considered desirable. Moreover, by identifying with and following society’s hegemonic desires, we are moulded into hard-working, conformist model citizens who do not threaten the established order. That is why Ruti calls this “the morality of the master”. Its purpose is to compute “the value of life by purely pragmatic criteria, so that its model citizen is a subject who shows up at work reliably every morning, undertakes its duties with a degree of diligence, does not allow its desires to get the better of its productivity, and seeks satisfaction (‘enjoys’) in efficiency-augmenting ways” (ibid., 104).

Nonetheless, desire can also function in a non-conformist, subversive way that is not directed by the Other. Such a desire reflects something truly singular about the subject. It cannot be subsumed by the Other and therefore has a counterhegemonic edge.

Desire for the Thing

A subject’s entry into language is, in a way, a traumatic event. Once upon a time, we as infants allegedly existed in a pre-linguistic bliss. All of our needs were quickly met, and we had no sense of lack. Psychoanalysis calls this mythic period a state of unmitigated enjoyment or *jouissance* (ibid., 108). The entry into language disrupts

this state and forces the child to “submit to language, to agree to express his or her needs through the distorting medium or straitjacket of language, and to allow him or herself to be represented by words” (Fink 1995, 50).

By becoming linguistic beings, subjects of the signifier, we also inevitably become subjects of lack. Indeed, if we did not lack in any way, there would have been no necessity to verbalize our needs as demands in the first place. We are compelled to sacrifice the mythical primordial state of non-lacking, pre-linguistic wholeness at the altar of the signifier. As animals of language, we are eternally marked by a constitutive lack, and this lack is the fuel of desire. Furthermore, we desire the Other’s love because we believe that the Other can heal our lack.

However, this state of pre-linguistic wholeness and unmitigated enjoyment is a retroactive fantasy, a myth. Psychoanalysis calls this fantasy of primordial loss the loss of “the Thing”. Lacan reminds us how a child will often want to get away from his mother’s lap—the over-proximity of the mother triggers a sense of anxiety in the child (Lacan 2014, 53). Nevertheless, even if the idea of a lost wholeness is just retroactive fiction, it still holds powerful sway over us. Ruti (2018, 108) explains this as follows:

This dynamic becomes crystallized around the fantasy of having lost the Thing, the original (non)object that (supposedly) offered unmitigated jouissance. Nothing of course was lost in reality; there never was any unmitigated jouissance. But the fantasy of having lost this jouissance brings us into being as subjects of lack who experience ourselves as having been deprived of something unfathomably precious.

Unlike objects of the Other’s hegemonic desire who are metonymically interchangeable, an object who echoes this (imagined to have been) lost Thing gives us a much higher degree of satisfaction and fixates our desire on itself. Moreover, “even though the loss of the Thing is a universal precondition of subjectivity, each of us relates to this loss in a manner that is wholly peculiar to us” (*ibid.*, 110). In other words, a desire that aims at the Thing is unique and singular.

The object that echoes the Thing elicits a powerful sense of fascination that makes us value this object above any others. Notably, it can overshadow the desirability of exchangeable objects promoted by society’s hegemonic desire. That is why following one’s unique desire for the Thing can liberate a subject from the tendency to conform to the master’s morality. Therefore, a stance of fidelity to one’s singular desire can “represent an ethical force that we can only betray by betraying something essential about our very being” (*ibid.*, 111).

This advocacy for realizing one's singular desire is why Lacan called his seventh seminar from 1959–1960 the "Ethics of Psychoanalysis". In it, we find his famous statement that "the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire" (Lacan 1992, 319).

What type of object can be an excellent example for the Thing's echo? Ruti states that "this dynamic is perhaps most obvious in relation to people we love, as Lacan conveys when he proposes that when I desire you, it is because I perceive that there is 'in you more than you'" (Ruti 2018, 113).

When in love, one finds an echo of the Thing in the object of love, i.e. in one's beloved. This "in you more than you" in the beloved person is something sublime, which cannot be definitively verbally expressed as just one characteristic among many. A subject in love no longer desires a partner according to some traits that society designates as desirable. Instead, the subject becomes fixated on that sole partner—her desire's incessant shifting from object to object is arrested. Ruti describes love's fixation as an event where two dignities—the loving subjects' and the beloved objects'—are saved. The latter become dignified as they become vessels for the Thing. At the same time, the formers' dignity as subjects is saved "by turning us into something other than subjects subjected to the infinite sliding of the signifier" (*ibid.*, 188).

I argue that Kaneko's love for Park is an example of such an ethical act. But the question thus remains—what does this mean in relation to her egoism?

Conclusion: Desire Beyond Egoism

From an egoistic standpoint, it is possible to argue that Kaneko betrayed her egoism when she stayed with Park. He made a unilateral decision without her consent and, therefore, forced his will upon her. Nonetheless, this argument holds if we take Kaneko's ideal self-image—an autonomous and self-governing individual—as a starting point. I have shown that the ego, i.e. one's self-image, does not necessarily reflect its bearer, i.e. the subject, but it can come to contradict the subject's innermost desire. This implies that it is desire (in the case desire is aimed at the Thing), not the ego, that expresses what is unique to the subject, what is most her own. Following one's desire can express a subject's singularity that exposes the limits of Stirnean egoism and transcends them.

The reason such a desire escapes the scope of Stirner's egoism is that, despite all its self-centred, anti-moral and anti-societal tendencies, his egoism is still profoundly Aristotelean. As for Aristotle, for Stirner, self-realization is the goal,

and balance is the key to achieving it. According to Stirner, a true egoist must control their passions and keep them in a healthy balance. Focusing on pursuing one passion at the cost of all others brings only partial satisfaction to the individual. It thus cannot be compatible with the individual's comprehensive self-fulfilment.

Who then is self-sacrificing? In the full sense, certainly one who risks everything else for one thing, one goal, one desire, one passion. Isn't the lover, who abandons father and mother, endures all dangers and hardships, to reach his goal, self-sacrificing? Or the ambitious person, who offers up all desires, wishes, and satisfactions to the single passion, or the miser who denies himself everything to gather treasures, or the pleasure-seeker, etc.? He is ruled by a passion to which he brings the others as sacrifices.

And are these self-sacrificing people perhaps not selfish, not egoists? Since they have only one ruling passion, they provide only for one satisfaction, but for this one all the more eagerly; they're completely absorbed in it. All that they do is egoistic, but it is one-sided, close-minded, bigoted egoism; it is being possessed. (Stirner 2017, 91–92)

For Stirner, an individual who devotes his energies to the pursuit of one passion is possessed. The word "possessed" here has two meanings: to behave irrationally (against one's egoistic self-interests) as if one was being controlled by a supernatural power (e.g. a ghost), and to be owned, in the egoistic sense, by something other than oneself. Furthermore, Stirner is unimpressed by people who are willing to go to self-sacrificial lengths for the truth—he says people need the courage to lie:

Because no less courage belongs to the lie than to the truth: a courage that the young are most usually lacking in, since they would rather confess the truth and mount the scaffold for it than confound the enemy's power through the insolence of a lie. (ibid., 314)

This is in stark contrast to Kaneko, who wilfully and proudly confirmed the truthfulness of the accusations made against her (intending to harm the imperial family) and did not disassociate herself from Park. It is safe to assert that Kaneko's defiant and death-provoking stance would appear un-egoistic to Stirner, since she behaves as if "possessed" by a single passion. She also does not lie even when doing so would serve her egoistic self-preservation. An out of balance individual no longer owns themselves and therefore cannot be egoistic. Aristotelean ethics, despite their difference from egoism, condemn in the same way an unbalanced attitude:

The role of ethics is to keep human strivings strictly on track in regard to man's fullest potential. Desires that do not respond to this teleological orientation of being thus fall outside of ethics for Aristotle. Everything one does that has no role in the specific realization of man's being is a reversion to the "bestial". It is not that such behavior is ethically wrong in Aristotle's eyes. It is worse: it does not even come into consideration for ethical qualification because it is corrupted at the level of its very nature—"owing to natural depravity", to quote Aristotle. (De Kesel 2009, 63)

Giving in to a single passion and becoming an unbalanced individual is "bestial" for Aristotle, and akin to "being possessed" for Stirner. However, Kaneko's "bestial" passion, her unyielding desire, which eventually leads to a death sentence, reflects her innermost uniqueness and singularity. Her desire is genuinely her own because it is a desire for the Thing, which is beyond the world of signifiers and, therefore, not sanctioned by the Other. In other words, it cannot be fully domesticated by the broader social environment and thus has an inherent non-conformist and potentially counterhegemonic tendency to it.

The Other in this context is not limited only to the state or society at large but also designates her ego, the inverted Other. Her desire frees her from the imaginary identity with her ego and its commands and, ironically, lets her live in a truly singular and unique way.

As a result, we—for a moment at least—cease to function as wholly symbolic creatures, creatures enslaved to the signifier (the big Other). We individuate ourselves through the specificity of our desire. Lacan implies that this kind of desire renders not only the object but also the subject "unique, inestimable, irreplaceable". (Ruti 2018, 188)

I conclude that while Kaneko's decision to stay with Park and her acceptance of all the consequences, including death itself, can be interpreted as un-egoistic from a Stirnean perspective, they also represent her being true to herself in a way that goes beyond such an egoism. By being "bestial", by going against an egoistic self-interest, such as self-preservation, Kaneko becomes singular beyond Stirner's horizon. Since desire for the Thing aims beyond the signifier, i.e. the domain of the Other, the subject of desire is perhaps a perfect example of what Stirner calls "the unique". For if I am unique, then "no concept expresses me, nothing that is said to be my essence exhausts me; they are only names" (Stirner 2017, 377).

Furthermore, the death that desire brings upon Kaneko may contradict self-preservation as an egoistic self-interest. Nonetheless, her acceptance of death does not originate from a morbid death wish, but from a will to live to the fullest extent. Moreover, what could be a better expression of living according to one's will than following one's desire? As Kaneko says, simply being alive is not the same as truly living (Suzuki 2013, 349). Only when one acts according to one's will is one genuinely alive, "even if it leads to the destruction of the body. It is not a denial of life. It is an affirmation (*Shitagatte jibun no ishi de ugoita toki, sore ga yoshi nikutai no hametsu ni michibikō to mo. Sore wa sei no hitei de wan ai. Kōtei dearu. したがって自分の意志で動いたとき、それがよし肉体の破滅に導こうとも。それは生の否定ではない。肯定である。*)" (ibid., 349–50).

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