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A Society in Transition: Postwar Japan and Suicide's Evolution From a Ritual Act to a Spectacular Performance

This presentation will give a brief overview of the methodological approach that will be applied to the investigation of suicide patterns in post-war Japan. The investigation will explore suicide patterns from late 1940s to nowadays by analyzing the circularity of presentation (the act itself of suicide) and representation (the image that suicide has in newspapers coverage, manuals and websites), unveiling the passage from the importance of the action to the importance of the media in which the action is expressed. The objective of this study is thus to investigate the shifting relationship between post-war suicide patterns and the discourse on suicide patterns constructed by the media and to portray a possible dialogue between the two.

In the post-war, the whole suicide phenomenon in Japan re-emerged with a higher rate and with reshaped patterns. Internet associations, suicide pacts and web suicide groups outlined at the same time a fragmentary expression of a schizoid Japanese self and a nativist reinforcement of the tribe. However, as in that visible inconsistency and in that apparently lack of 'order' could stand the post-war aesthetics of suicide, it is thus indispensable to explore media's contribution in determining the singularity of different identities and in shaping such a dynamic state.

Japan's suicide phenomenon challenges many of the existent theoretical approaches - and not only historical, but also sociological and psychological. An innovative range of methodological approach and discourse theory can give a contribution in refining some categories of historical and sociological analysis of suicide patterns in Japan. Discourse theory challenges the implied assumptions of objectivity, neutrality and transparency of representation and it definitely offers insights into 'ideology' and 'subjectivity' of which our understanding of the past will benefit.