

'Folds of the Heart': Performing Life Experience, Emotion and Empathy in

Japanese Tango Music Culture

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Abstract

In the Argentine tango music culture of Japan, to have undergone many life experiences is considered critical in order to perform the powerful emotions of tango. Narratives by Japanese tango musicians stress 'each musician's feelings' as crucial in shaping a good tango performance, while empathy is considered important in cultivating such feelings. Based on the author's field research in Japan and Argentina, and by adding a different nuance to Carolyn Pedwell's notions of transnational 'affective relations', this essay examines how Japanese historical narratives, rooted in aesthetic and moral ethos, fabricate discourses of tango authenticity by Japanese musicians. Taking a closer look at the ways in which Japanese musicians discuss tango's emotion illuminates how Argentine tango's aesthetics of emotion are given renewed meanings through the channelling of cultural and historical symbols in Japanese contexts. This article argues that Japanese tango musicians create their discourses surrounding tango authenticity at such transnational instances when aesthetics, affect and morality intersect.

Keywords

Tango in Japan; Tango music; popular music cultures in Japan and Argentina; *Mugre* aesthetic; authenticity; ‘affective relations’; music and affect; aesthetics of emotion; music and morality; realist discourse; historical narrative.

Introduction

In Japan’s tango music culture, to have undergone many life experiences that involve multiple forms of suffering,¹ love, joy, or sadness is deemed critical to conveying powerful, and sometimes painful, emotions of tango.² Many Japanese musicians identify tango as an expression of ‘each musician’s feelings’³, and such feelings are believed to be cultivated through years of life experience. Accordingly, discourses of tango authenticity by Japanese musicians point to the need to gain full life experiences such as economic hardship, love’s joy and suffering, or suffering through illness in order to perform tango with powerful emotion. Such life experiences are considered

¹ In *p’ansori*, undergoing ‘pain and suffering’ is also considered necessary for one to become ‘a good *sorikkun* [*p’ansori* performer]’ (Yates-Lu 2017: 99. See also Willoughby 2000 and Killick 2010: 151, 158–61).

² While I resist claiming that every single Japanese tango musician believes this, I argue that the aesthetics of tango’s emotion exists in Japan’s tango music culture in quasi-institutionalised forms. For more discussion see Asaba (2016: 269–72).

³ This essay considers ‘feelings’ and ‘emotion’ in conversation with how, in recent scholarship, the turn to affect has ‘foregrounded the relational nature of feelings and emotions’ (Butterworth 2014).

paramount because they are seen to mirror musicians' tango performances, where 'reflecting real life' constitutes its key genre aesthetic.⁴

Thus during my fieldwork in Japan between 2014 and 2016, many musicians emphasised to me how life experience and each musician's feelings interweave. Life is understood to feed into such feelings and cultivate empathy; an essence that is understood to form a key characteristic of a good tango musician.⁵ The Japanese tango violinist Rica⁶ Asaba described: 'as you get older and the more *folds of the heart* (*kokoro no hida*) you have, the better your tango will be'⁷ (Rica Asaba, personal communication, Kyoto 11 March 2014). The Japanese expression *kokoro no hida* or 'folds of the heart', is replete with the meaning that a sense of empathy and kindness can only be achieved after undergoing many life experiences. Empathy is often translated into Japanese as *kyōkan* (共感), literally 'to feel' (感) 'together' (共),⁸ the meaning of which I deploy in this essay. Here, empathy becomes not only about a shared understanding (*kyōkan*) of all human conditions, but one that transcends the boundaries of the self and the other,⁹ the past, the present and the future, and the public and the private.¹⁰

⁴ Similar aesthetics of emotions are seen in Japanese enka song genre (see below). In Argentina, its folklore music genres share close resemblance to such aesthetics of emotion.

⁵ In this article, I use empathy as it refers to sympathy for all-encompassing human conditions. See below.

⁶ This is the violinist's stage name. Rica Asaba is my aunt. Notes on aspects of autoethnography in my research will appear below (see also Asaba 2016: 25–32).

⁷ All translations in this article, from Japanese and Spanish, are my own unless otherwise stated. For the names of instruments such as the bandoneon—which in Spanish is written as *bandoneón*—I have followed the English convention without the accents.

⁸ For its use to mean pity or mercy, Japanese word such as *nasake* (情け) is used. On the other hand, the word sympathy—as used in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* by Adam Smith—has been scholarly translated into Japanese as *dōkan* (同感). *Dōkan* literally means 'to feel' (感) 'the same' (同).

⁹ LaCapra has argued that the nature of empathy 'risks an obscuring of the boundary of self and other': that 'for ethical empathy to occur, it requires simultaneous recognition that the experience of the other is not one's own.' (2001: 40; see also Tucker, H. 2016: 39). While I

By the eighteenth century, David Hume and Adam Smith considered empathy as important ‘in relation to our capacity to gain a grasp of the content of other people’s minds’ and ‘to respond to others ethically’ (Coplan & Goldie 2011: ix). The relationship between empathy and ethics have been widely debated, among others, by cultural theorists and musicologists (Spelman 1997; DeNora 2000), while recent studies on empathy has focused on its link with privilege and power (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2004; Dean 2005; Pedwell 2014). Dubbed ‘that most important sentimental virtue’ (Butterworth 2014: 98), empathy has been widely appreciated as well as critiqued, precisely because it occupies the top end of the hierarchy of ethical feelings.

On the other hand, the quality of music to communicate through emotion ‘feelingfully and intuitively’ (Meintjes 1990: 38), and in a shared sense of intimacy that extends across different spatial and temporal dimensions, has received substantial critical attention, among others, by scholars working in music and anthropological studies (Abe 2018; Butterworth 2014; Dueck 2013; Gray 2013; Stokes 2007).¹¹ Furthermore, scholars have examined the moments of transcultural intimacy as seen in Japanese musicians embracing ‘foreign’ musics (Bigenho 2012; Williams 2006). However, the intersections of aesthetics, emotion, and morality in transnational¹² instances as manifested in musical practices have been somewhat sidelined.

consider this claim to be valuable, I am primarily concerned here with musicians’ discourses surrounding how life experiences are understood to nurture empathy that is perceived to be crucial in a good tango performance in Japan.

¹⁰ I consider notions of ‘intimacy’ here in a broad sense, as employed to discuss a sense of closeness that transcends boundaries such as the public and private (Bigenho 2012; Stokes 2010).

¹¹ This turn to affect is part of several epistemological ‘turns’ in a number of disciplinary fields beyond music. While the relationship between music and affect has concerned scholars since antiquity, theoretical concerns surrounding music and affect began to appear from the late nineteenth century (Hofman 2015: 38–9).

¹² By ‘transnational,’ I refer to the condition of ‘interconnectedness and mobility across space’ that characterises ‘contemporary social life in the context of global capitalism and postcoloniality.’ (Ong, 1999: 4, see also Pedwell 2014: 22).

In Argentine tango, a sense of intimacy is created in part through its expression of ‘everyday feelings’ and, in some, a shared sense of ‘bad luck [in life]’ that is perceived to have ‘universal implications’ (Taylor 1998: 4). Matthew Karush called such emotional expressions of tango the ‘aesthetic of emotional excess’, pointing to the twentieth century Buenos Aires popular cultural trends that embraced melodrama (2012: 85). Furthermore, and importantly, such realist discourses and notions of melodrama come under the aesthetics of realist art forms.¹³ James Butterworth has argued ‘that which is framed as ‘reality’ or ‘the everyday’’, in this realist context, ‘is itself an aesthetic construction’ (2014: 131). Accordingly, the central concern here is the aesthetic, and I will examine the emotionality of tango in Japan by building on this particular discourse.

By contributing to what Butterworth has called the ‘aesthetics of emotion’ that refers to ‘how emotion is ordered, given meaning, performed and ascribed beauty and value’ (ibid; 36), I will analyse how musicians, in reference to empathy, discuss the aesthetics of emotion in tango and relate themselves to it, regardless of their class positions,¹⁴ backgrounds and experiences. Accordingly, whether the artist is from a relatively wealthy background or not, nor if the musician has led a happy life or a life filled with suffering—though indeed many of them, have—is not the primary concern here. I will argue that Japanese tango musicians create their discourse surrounding its aesthetics of emotion at the intersecting moments of aesthetics, emotion, and morality within transnational instances.

This essay also adds a different nuance to Carolyn Pedwell’s ‘affective relations’ (2014). Stating that ‘[e]motion is not singular’, Pedwell considers affect in

¹³ Realist aesthetics as manifested in musical performance is indeed not limited to tango. See also Butterworth (2014), Gray (2013) and Fox (1992).

¹⁴ Tango in Japan has been entangled with, and has always highlighted, disjunctions of class positions since its arrival in the late 1910s (Asaba [forthcoming]).

close relations with ‘other affects’—namely ‘compassion, hope, anger, shame, melancholia and love’—examining how emotions ‘take shape’ and circulate by resonating with one another transnationally (ibid: 17–9). Central to ‘affective relations’ is the claim that affect, more specifically empathy, ‘is not universal ... it is generated, experienced and felt differently via different transnational circuits and relations of power.’ (ibid: 189). Pedwell thus claimed:

[W]e need to pay careful attention to the ways in which it [empathy] travels, transforms and translates across both cultural, social and geopolitical borders. (2014: 2)

From this, Pedwell moves beyond empathy to what she called ‘affective translation’: a way of thinking about ‘empathies that open up rather than transcribe.’ (ibid: 189).

Again, central to her argument is the importance of allowing diverse understandings—including emic perspectives—of empathy when it circulates. What I take from Pedwell, however, is the understanding that affect is multiple, and that empathy travels in spite of differences and power imbalances.

Japan and Argentina in the 2010s sit within unbalanced realms of power relations. But by taking a close look at the ways in which Argentine-derived aesthetics of emotion and Japanese value-laden narratives of suffering resonate with one another, I will argue that notions of the aesthetics of emotion offer crucial insights into how performers relate to specific emotionality of music today in spite of inequalities. Importantly, my intention is not to essentialise such aesthetic discourses as specific only to ‘Japan’ or ‘Argentina’, nor to claim the uniqueness of tango’s emotionality. Rather, they are used to examine how Japanese musicians approach performing tango.

This is done, first, by examining narratives of poverty experienced after the war, focusing on Japanese tango singer Ikuo Abo (b. 1937).¹⁵ I suggest that Abo's depictions of the Japanese postwar rural and urban migration in his concerts act as a meeting point of the aesthetics of emotion in Argentine tango¹⁶ and notions of Japanese suffering. Second, the focus will shift to the narratives of Japanese tango musicians about financial instability. I will show how these narratives 'take shape' through *mugre* (in Spanish, dirt or smut): Argentine-derived tango's aesthetics of emotion that refers to 'realities of life.'¹⁷ Finally, I will turn to discourses of Japanese tango musicians, in which Japanese traditional¹⁸ mythical values about suffering are highlighted, and discuss how they are claimed to share similarities with the depictions of distress in love in Argentine tango. Through comparisons between Argentine and Japanese-derived discourses surrounding the aesthetics of emotion in tango, I will argue that the three instances above show transnational resonances between multiple emotions, where an aesthetics of emotion and empathy (*kyōkan*) intersect.¹⁹

This essay is based on my field research in Japan (2014–2016) and Argentina (2006–2009), both periods of which consisted of performing with and interviewing tango musicians, dancers and media workers, as well as undertaking archival research

¹⁵ On historical narratives, I am particularly interested in Donna Haraway's 'narrative field' in which cultural and historical symbols are seen to be constructed through narratives (1988). On narrative discourse and the narrative imagination of history, see also White (1987).

¹⁶ These include, in particular, narratives of hardships experienced by European immigrants as they settled in Argentina in the late to early twentieth century. At the same time, Archetti (2007), Plesch (2009) and Schwartz-Kates (2002) have argued that the Argentine nostalgia for its pre modernisation era is represented in the contemporary portrayals of sadness as associated with the Gaucho and the Pampas.

¹⁷ While class politics are integral to the *mugre* aesthetic, my primary concern in this essay is to examine how Japanese tango musicians create their discourses surrounding Argentine-derived aesthetics of emotion in relation to *mugre*. See the Conclusion of this essay.

¹⁸ I situate notions of traditionality in this essay within the contexts and discourses surrounding modernity and globalisation (see Rocha 2006: 1–15).

¹⁹ I consider cultural assimilation in terms of how a 'foreign' music has been digested, disciplined, and institutionalised in another country. For more discussions on tango in Japan in relation to assimilations of other imported cultures in Japan, see Asaba [forthcoming] & 2016.

on tango's aesthetics of emotion. It is important to clarify my positionality in this research. I am a Japanese tango violinist, and have worked as a member of tango orchestras in Japan and Argentina. My aunt, Rica Asaba, is the first violinist of Tango Orchestra Astrorico, established in Kyoto, Japan in 1992. I am thus part of the history of tango in Japan and, inevitably, the inseparable 'I' from 'the field'²⁰ has provided challenges as well as advantages, while this conceptual binary enhanced the structure through which 'I' study 'the field'.²¹

The aesthetics of suffering: Kurō (苦勞)

The Japanese word for suffering, *kurō*, is made up of two parts: the first letter *ku* (苦) that translates to English as covering the same semantic space as 'to suffer' and *rō* (勞) as 'to labour.' The word thus contains the notion of working hard and to endure, and it is often discussed as occupying the central aspect of one's life. For instance Brian Moeran argues that the Japanese moral belief surrounds the need to suffer (*kurō*) in order to build a strong body, spirit, and willpower (1984: 260). Similarly, in Dorinne Kondo's study of Japanese confectionery makers she suggests experiences of long-suffering as feeding into one's artistry (1990: 199–200). Believers of this moral belief also hold that it is through *kurō* that one gains empathy for all human experiences: to use a further Japanese phrase, the '*kokoro no hida*' (folds of the heart). It is through this concept that I now examine the aesthetics of emotion in Japanese tango.

²⁰ Dorinne Kondo problematises a separation of Self and Other in anthropological studies, and discusses how the first person voice 'I' already includes 'the world' in narrative conventions (1990: 24–6).

²¹ For more discussion on this topic, including notions of fieldwork 'at home', see Asaba (2016: 25–32).

The Aesthetics of Emotion in Tango: Suffering Economically and in Love

So what is Japan's tango music culture? In present day Japan, Argentine tango is widely performed in concert venues for Western art music, tango *Milonga* parties, and bars and restaurants dedicated only to offering tango music played by live bands every night. Tango is popular among the younger generations of Japanese people. This is seen, for instance, in the thriving tango ensemble Orquesta de Tango Waseda at Waseda University in Tokyo, a student led professional tango orchestra that performs in major concert venues and at dinner shows. Most of such Japanese tango musicians are classically trained in Western art music, with many of the bandoneon players being the exception.

Japanese tango fans are divided between those who prefer to dance, and those who dedicate themselves only to listening: and there are over sixty tango dance and tango music associations across Japan. Specifically, tango music culture is further organised according to regionally differentiated 'schools' wherein the traditional idea of lineage (*ryūha*) has been adapted to ensure that key knowledge of tango performance is transmitted (Asaba 2016). In this context, one critical tango aesthetic that has been passed down since Japan's 'second Golden Era of tango' (1950s–1970s) concerns tango's emotion, as described and performed by the Japanese tango singer, Ikuo Abo.

Tango's Aesthetics of Emotion in Japan: Suffering after World War II

A celebrated Japanese tango singer, Ikuo Abo, often mentions his 'poor' farming

upbringing in Northern Akita prefecture of Japan.²² Extremes in rural poverty following World War II, especially between 1955 and 1965, led Abo and countless others to migrate to industrialised cities in search of economic alternatives (Maruyama 2007: 3). Rural areas in Japan were deeply damaged by this poverty, and many rice farms became abandoned, while greater metropolitan areas became the sites of ‘giant population absorption’ (ibid: 3). Frequently seen to be performing in tears and making references to postwar poverty in his tango texts, Ikuo Abo continues to invoke the sympathy of his listeners, establishing a sense of emotional depth for tango performance. In face to face conversation, Abo’s narratives of such suffering were also present during our four hour interview in Tokyo in 2014, embodying the aesthetics of emotion that relate to this historical context of great financial—and indeed emotional—hardship. Though Japan has entered on-off economic booms in postwar contexts, Abo creates a sense of bridge between different generations through such historical narratives.

Ikuo Abo’s iconic position as a tango star is evident from his incredibly ‘expressive and beautiful voice that directly reaches the audience’s heart.’²³ His mastery of Buenos Aires Spanish—considered a critical ability in expressing the tango sentiment²⁴—captured the hearts of his fans and wider audiences, making him a star.

²² Tango, throughout its history in Japan since its arrival in around 1914, has always been caught in the politics of cultural legitimisation. Especially after World War II, it was seen to elevate Japanese people’s taste through increased association with Western art music, while maintaining the imagery of the popular (Asaba [forthcoming]). Ikuo Abo’s first encounter with tango falls within this postwar era, when people of working class backgrounds sought to listen to Western art music and popular musical genres from abroad, namely jazz and tango (Nagasaki 2013).

²³ Comment by the presenter who chaired the public tango lecture, given by Ikuo Abo at the Institute for Latin American Studies, Rikkyo university, Tokyo (7 December 2013).

²⁴ This notion of sentiment in the voice (or *sentimiento* as Abo repeatedly commented, and I will discuss later in this article) resonates with flamenco’s *cante jondo* (deep song). This aesthetic of passion or *duende* in the voice, where formal musical structures or technique are transcended, is beautifully evoked by Federico García Lorca who describes the intense *cante jondo* singing of La Niña de la Peines as ‘a gusher of blood worthy of ... her pain and

This was not least also true of his ability to adapt Argentine derived aesthetics of emotion in tango for Japanese audiences. Now in his old age and physically challenged by several severe illnesses which he has endured, Ikuo Abo's passion for tango still comes across in his charismatic ways of talking about tango, a practice that has long since become his life. Abo's prolific use of metaphors in relation to vocal and Spanish linguistic technique, intertwined with his life experiences that have involved much hardship, stressed the aesthetics of emotion in tango. During our interview and various telephone conversations, Abo became tearful several times as he told his life story, giving multiple anecdotes from throughout his long career. This was especially so when he spoke of his first teachers Fernando Tell and Ricardo Francia, to whom he feels indebted. (Ikuo Abo, interview, Tokyo 23 July 2014).

Ikuo Abo was born in 1937 in the countryside of northern Akita prefecture to a family of farmers, and made his debut as tango singer in 1961 after he sang at the nationally televised popular programme 'Uta No Hiroba' (The Song Plaza) by NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai). 'I was born into a poor rice farming family,' he explained at our interview. After entering Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto to study law, he experienced severe facial nerve neuralgia, which was diagnosed as facial paralysis. Devastated by this diagnosis Abo visited a café near Ikebukuro in Tokyo. Here, he encountered tango for the first time as it was being played in the background, and saw an advertisement in the newspaper about tango classes given by Fernando Tell: the Argentine bandoneon player who was residing in Tokyo at this time. 'If it was not for my facial paralysis, I would not have met tango,' Abo said.²⁵ He explained that his

sincerity' (Kirkland 1999: 80).

²⁵ Abo commented: 'the elegance ... the high class feel of tango attracted me immensely' when he first heard tango. The connection between tango and 'the high class feel' may seem paradoxical given its perceived origin in low life contexts. However, from the early twentieth century tango was welcomed into the Western high social classes while the working classes

illness was one of the ‘life ingredients’ that created the ‘sentiment in my voice’: the quality he considers necessary to sing Argentine tango.²⁶ Even in his first tango lesson, Abo’s teacher, Fernando Tell, had observed ‘you have *sentimiento* in your voice’ (*anata no koe ni wa ‘sentimiento’ ga aru*). The Spanish word *sentimiento* means feeling or sentiment in English. Abo repeated this phrase often during our interview, each time enunciating the Spanish word *sentimiento* with Spanish pronunciation as though reciting a tango lyric, creating a somewhat elusive quality for Japanese contexts.

The first year of Abo’s lessons with Fernando Tell was spent learning to sing the tango song, ‘Nostalgias.’ Abo recalled his experience with Tell:

‘Once you have mastered this song, you can sing tango’ said Tell. But after a while I really *really* became tired of the song [laughter](*mō iyade iyade ...*) (ibid).

At this time, Ricardo Francia, an Argentine cellist, was also residing in Japan. Together with Francia, Fernando Tell began teaching the ‘essence of tango’ to Ikuo Abo, who had never sung nor read music prior to this moment. Thus, one entire year was spent learning to sing ‘Nostalgias’ in order to learn to read music, to pronounce and to speak Spanish, and then to understand the emotion, or the *heart* of tango.

‘Nostalgias’ depicts love’s anguish, and is sung by a man who claims to have

continued to embrace it. Tango has been widely appreciated in the high social classes, while discourses surrounding tango has always highlighted disjunctions between class positions rather than uniting them (see Asaba 2016).

²⁶ The interrelation of vocality and suffering is certainly not unique to tango (see Willoughby 2000 on *P’ansori*). However, it is crucial to note that tango’s aesthetics as depicting ‘real life suffering’ while also being associated with the idea of the ‘Western high society’ attracted the Japanese working classes as well as the middle- to upper-middle classes after World War II (Asaba 2016: 88—92).

been abandoned by a woman. Indeed, the fact that Fernando Tell had recommended this song for Abo to learn the tango aesthetic reflects a potential Argentine understanding that ‘gender conflicts were interpreted as given, universal, unavoidable dilemmas.’ (Savigliano 1995: 47). The song begins:

*Quiero emborrachar mi corazón/ para apagar un loco amor/
que más que amor es un sufrir/ y aquí vengo para eso/ a
borrar antiguos besos/ en los besos de otra boca ... (I want
my heart to be drunk/ To extinguish a crazy love/ That love is
also an anguish/ And this is what I have come here for/ To
erase old kisses/ With the kisses of another ...)*

As Abo was learning this song, Francia and Tell told him:

Sing the words, Ikuo ... and put your heart into your performance, because only the heart can reach the audiences’ heart. Even if the melody line is beautiful, do not lend yourself to the melody (Ikuo Abo, interview, Tokyo 23 July 2014).²⁷

Ikuo Abo then told me ‘the *heart* is tango’s *heart* ... people’s life experiences’ (*tango no kokoro wa ningen no jinsei sonomono desuyo*). According to Abo, the *heart* referred to here is none other than how one conveys tango’s lyrics—imbued with

²⁷ James Butterworth also asserts that more importance is given to the words than the song melody in expressing the aesthetics of emotion in huayno song genre (2014: 106–34).

suffering in life—to the audience.²⁸ As such, he stressed the importance of words to tango singing and to its aesthetics of emotion, especially in the mastery of what is known as Buenos Aires Porteño²⁹ or the Rioplatense accent, commonly spoken as an everyday Buenos Aires Spanish. Similarly, according to Julie Taylor in Argentine contexts, tango singers do not need a ‘bold pronouncement or flamboyant gesture. His audience knows what he means and his feelings are familiar ones.’ (1976: 288). Here, feelings of ‘everyday life’ are stressed by Taylor as constituting an important aesthetic in tango performance (ibid: 288).³⁰ Ikuo Abo’s attitudes to tango performance also reflect this aesthetic of the ‘everyday.’

To portray such ‘everyday life’ and to ‘deliver the heart’ through tango singing, Abo spent years honing the pronunciation as well as the *feel* of the Rioplatense dialect. He explained:

When I visited Argentina on long concert tours, I often used to go sit in the Plaza San Martín or Santa Fe Avenue in order to listen to people’s conversation ... ¡Che! ¡Qué haces!
[acting out] you see ... people conversing in the *plaza* ...
these expressions become part of the song (Ikuo Abo, interview, Tokyo 23 July 2014).

²⁸ In Argentina, Spanish words *alma* (soul) and *corazón* (heart) are used for similar purposes. Notions of the heart when used metaphorically differ depending on the contexts. For example in Japanese *min’yo* David Hughes notes that enthusiasts and performers call *min’yo* ‘the heart’s hometown’ (2008: 1—3). As also seen in the footnote 24 of this essay on Spanish *cante jondo*, notions of the heart unite corporeal, temporal, geographical spaces of affect.

²⁹ Porteño refers to people of Buenos Aires (Porteña for a woman, Porteño for a man) or the Rioplatense accent used in this city. The word *porteña/o* derives from the Spanish word *puerto*, or port, that refers to Buenos Aires as a port city facing the Río de la Plata.

³⁰ See below in this essay for discussions on performing life experiences in relation to tango’s aesthetic of *mugre* (dirt).

Abo recalls how he first discovered the pronunciation for ‘J’ (*jota*)—the Spanish throat sound that does not exist in Japanese language—through the physical limitation made inevitable by his facial paralysis. Abo demonstrated how he pronounces the Spanish ‘J’, saying ‘*jota*’ (pronounced as *hota*, with throat-sound on the letter H) with his mouth slightly tilted towards the right, finding the precise position of the airflow in his mouth. In 2001, Abo suffered a stroke during a recording session for a TV drama series. Though he has since recovered and is now able to talk, today Abo is unable to sing. Instead, he recites tango lyrics in concerts without singing them, with instrumental accompaniment in the background. It was ‘the sentiment (*sentimiento*) in my voice and the Spanish language that provided the opportunity for me to become a tango narrator,’ explained Abo.

Ikuo Abo’s sentiment in the voice and his ability to move audiences contributes to what Martin Stokes has observed of evoking sympathy as an important quality within the sentiment of the voice. In particular, in his study on the vocal qualities of the Turkish national star Zeki Müren, inspired by the analysis of the music critic Edip Özişik, Stokes suggests:

Özişik distinguishes “internal” and “external” characteristics.

“Internal” characteristics refer to what one might call this voice’s *sentimental* effects ... It produces its effects in the listener through “sympathy” ... through its amorous qualities ... its capacity to captivate people ... These “internal” characteristics involve an explicitly sympathetic principle: Müren’s voice enfolds us in a familiar embrace because it

awakes within us an internal voice (2010: 62–3).³¹

‘External’ characteristics, on the other hand, are the objective quality, the originality of his voice that is ‘hard to imitate’ (ibid: 63). These refer to the artistic quality of Müren. Stokes suggests that such qualities are ‘imaginings of the sentimental subject’ who is ‘understood as natural, delicate, sensitive, intimate, and sympathetically in tune with others.’ (ibid: 63).

Understanding Ikuo Abo’s voice as possessing sentiments resonates with this moment of awakening a ‘sympathetic’, ‘internal voice’ within his listeners. On the other hand, Amanda Weidman has argued that the ‘notion of an inner voice that stands for instinct and emotional life’ has itself formed a key part in the development of the perception of the self in the twentieth century ‘idealization of rationality’ (2014: 39). Notions of an internal sentimental voice, then, are integral to this modern construction of and rationalisation of the self. By narrating familiar anecdotes surrounding life’s suffering—considered ‘universal’ in the aesthetics of emotion in tango—Ikuo Abo gives ‘meaning and value’ (Butterworth 2014: 36) to tango’s emotionality and to each sentimental self. Told in a foreign medium he evokes an elusive quality while awakening his listeners’ ‘internal voice’, validating each emotion. Furthermore, Abo’s background, life experiences, triumph over physical limitations and years of dedication towards honing his technique have cumulatively shaped his profile as a tango singer.

I argue that the emotionality of tango portrayed by Ikuo Abo in Japanese contexts and Argentine-derived tango aesthetics resonate with one another at such intersecting moments of aesthetics of emotion and empathy (*kyōkan*). Through

³¹ James Butterworth also suggests, to ‘elicit empathy’, is a critical aspect in the aesthetic of huayno popular song genre (2014: 106).

narratives, it is the moment where a ‘familiar embrace’ (Stokes 2010: 63) is felt through a shared historical knowledge, through resonances between each subject’s emotion and Abo’s artistry. The intersections of aesthetics, emotion, and empathy are further evident in discourses by Japanese tango musicians surrounding financial hardship, to which my attention now turns.

Tango’s Aesthetics of Emotion in Japan: Financial Hardships of Musicians

One Japanese tango musician disclosed to me the financial instability experienced by many tango musicians, and referred to this using the term ‘hungry spirit’ (*hangurī seishin*). Reflecting a strong moral value, his claim conveyed a belief that one needs to endure financial hardship as a musician in order to perfect the art of tango performance. Financial security or wealth, according to this Japanese tango musician, is ironically thought of as threatening the authenticity of tango performance.³²

The discourse surrounding financial suffering and hardship at work as an aesthetic construction contributes to Dorinne Kondo’s anthropological study on Japanese traditional confectionery makers (1990). Here, Kondo makes reference to long suffering as feeding into one’s artistry (ibid: 199–200) and argues that financial suffering is fundamental to the process of turning ‘apprentices into skilled craftsmen’ (ibid: 109). She continues that a general Japanese moral belief condemns those who have not ‘undergone suffering ... to remain childlike’, and writes:

... *kurō* [suffering] ... would remove traces of selfishness,
making the apprentices into skilled craftsmen and mature
adults ... hardship would temper his youthful immaturity

³² Notions of financial security as seen to endanger a genre aesthetic, is not limited to tango in Japan. See Butterworth 2014.

(ibid: 109).

Kondo describes how, in the Japanese traditional confectionery factory where she conducted her fieldwork, the period of ‘suffering’ put upon apprentices meant their receiving low wages and ‘laboring long hours in a place outside the indulgence of the natal home.’ (ibid: 109) Additionally, Kondo’s study indicates that such suffering is an important part of a craftsman’s artistry even after becoming a skilled artisan. Such artisans are respected as possessing the virtuous quality of ‘long-suffering’ (ibid: 199–200). Suffering is thus not only an important aesthetic but also one that is expected as being an ethos of life.

Another critical aspect in this concept of suffering in Japan is a belief that suffering *is not discussed* precisely because it is expected to be an integral part of life. For instance the Japanese bandoneon player Toshio Monna talks about financial struggles with a touch of humour: the implication being that this is ‘simply expected’ as a musician. When I interviewed younger musicians they viewed such suffering as a ‘natural’ (*atarimae*) part of being a musician (Satoshi Kitamura, interview, Tokyo 10 August 2014). Indeed, there were striking similarities across generations in their sardonically stoic narratives about long hours of practising, performing for low wages, or sustaining injuries caused by work, such as severe tendonitis. I also encountered the widely shared view that such hardship shapes a good tango performance.

As a counter discourse to the above, however, in Japan’s tango music culture the aesthetics of suffering are often placed in juxtaposition to present day modern technological capabilities enjoyed by a large sector of Japan’s population. These modern modalities are seen as factors which provide for the easy enablement of goals, and that are also made possible through the moderate wealth of today’s middle class

Japanese society. Accordingly, for many elder generations of Japanese tango musicians, the metropolitan context of contemporary Japan does not reflect the hardships they endured in the era of postwar destruction, which they view as key to the aesthetics of emotion in tango. For example, a noted bandoneon player and the pianist of his tango ensemble,³³ complained that ‘young tango musicians today’ lack *mugre* (in Spanish, ‘dirt’ or ‘smut’) in their performance: ‘it is all very pretty and nice, well-executed with good technique, but they lack the *mugre* of life and hardships of life in their performance!’, the pianist explained. *Mugre* is a commonly used word in Argentine and Japanese tango cultures to describe an essence that is crucial to a good performance. When I asked if this lack was because of the performers’ youth, the prolific Japanese pianist disagreed passionately:

No, look at Aníbal Troilo [in the 1940s], his performance had all that [*mugre*] even when he was young. For young people today, it is all too easy. If you want to learn to play tango, you can easily purchase the instrument, travel to Buenos Aires for a while, and there is a convenient school like *Orquesta Escuela de Tango* where they teach you how to play tango (*orukesuta esukuera mitaina gakkōga arudesho*). But back then, it was all learnt on stage, and often those musicians came from non privileged backgrounds (interview, Tokyo 25 July 2014).

Here, *mugre* is used in reference to economic hardship, and again suggests the necessity of financial struggle in order to become a good tango musician.

³³ Both musicians have asked to maintain their anonymities.

*Mugre*³⁴ is increasingly used today as a pedagogical metaphor to achieve ‘lived emotion’ in tango performance, contributing to Christine Yano’s reference to young enka singers in the 2000s. Yano writes:

[N]ew singers ... are often very young, have little in the way of life experience to draw on in order to sing enka convincingly. Instead, they rely on their teachers to tell them how to impart some sense of life experience and lived emotion to their singing. Thus, behind what is meant to sound like heartfelt emotion is the discipline of a patterned and practiced technique (2002: 67).

Enka’s emotion in singing is portrayed by practising what Yano has referred to as Japanese ‘*kata*’. *Kata* is a set of fixed movements in the Japanese traditional performing arts, and here it points to vocal techniques as well as to body movements that carry particular emotional meanings (ibid: 24). In Japan’s tango music culture, imparting emotions follows a similar process to enka’s reference to *kata*, bringing to light the tension between experience and practised technique.

Tango’s aesthetic of *mugre* began to be used in Japan from the early 2000s onwards, when more and more performers began travelling to Buenos Aires to study tango or to polish their existing skills as musicians (Toshio Monna, interview, Kyoto 14 July 2015).³⁵ By then, some of the Argentine musicians, when teaching tango

³⁴ While *mugre* discourse concerns issues of class politics, my primary objective here is to examine how notions of *mugre* shape the aesthetics of emotion in tango.

³⁵ Nélide Rouchetto, an acclaimed tango critic in an interview with the author suggested that in Buenos Aires in the 1960s ‘*barro*’ (mud) was used instead of *mugre* (Nélide Rouchetto, interview, Buenos Aires 23 June 2006).

performance to foreigners, started to use the word *mugre* as one form of pedagogical reference.³⁶ Fernando Suárez Paz—former violinist of Astor Piazzolla y Su Quinteto Tango Nuevo—for example described *mugre* to me in Argentina as the essence that is not written in music, and draws upon each musician’s feelings. He suggested:

In music, it [*mugre*] is the sound that is not necessarily considered beautiful ... It is also not necessarily the correct sound or way of performing ... It is the *rubato*, the *portato* ... and the *glissando*. It is hard to describe and it is unclear (*algo que no está claro*) and not written (*algo que no está escrito*), and it is the *sentimiento* (feeling) of each musician (Fernando Suárez Paz, interview, Buenos Aires 24 May 2006).

In this interview, Suárez Paz seems to argue against the idea that *mugre* can *just* be produced. There is something ineffable and unpredictable about it: you know when you hear it, but he seems to oppose the idea that there is a recipe for producing it. Instead of claiming it is something that can be learnt through technique, he seems to imply that it is about the ‘sentiment of each musician.’ Rather than thinking of *mugre* as the immediate cause of the tango aesthetic, Paz stressed each musician’s ‘feeling’ imparted in a tango interpretation as the essence of a good performance. Tensions between techniques—such as ‘the *rubato*, the *portato* ... and the *glissando*’—and perceived spontaneity of feelings intersect in his discourse surrounding *mugre*.

Mugre, when used in tango performance contexts, refers metaphorically to

³⁶ See the Conclusion of this essay for discussion on *mugre* perspectives held by Argentine and Japanese musicians since the 2000s.

life's hardships and reality (Asaba 2006: 1).³⁷ The Spanish word *suciedad* has been suggested as *mugre*'s synonym (Pelinski 2008: 50) and filth as its English equivalent (Azzi 2002: 38). Life's uncertainty, hard work, and suffering are integral parts of what constitutes this idea of 'life's reality,' and the contemporary Argentine *mugre* aesthetic derives from Argentine historical contexts of the nation's great uncertainty in the latter half of the twentieth century (Taylor 1998; Quiñones 2013). Japanese tango musicians in the 2010s resonate aesthetically with this Argentine ethos by superimposing it upon their own life experiences and Japan's value-laden ethos of suffering (*kurō*). Here, everyday life experiences and struggles are understood as 'dirt' (*yogore*) and, according to Japanese tango pianist Naoko Aoki, something that 'smashes sophistication' (Naoko Aoki, interview, Tokyo 31 July 2015).

In writing about concepts of uncleanness, Mary Douglas called 'dirt' as 'disorder' that 'offends against order' (1966: 2). Wendy Fonarow has conceptualised it further:

Dirt threatens our ordered world of masculine and feminine,
children and adults, black and white, mind and body, emotion
and reason, man and divinity, animal and human, you and me.

Dirt is the union of culturally produced opposites. Dirt is
miscegenation, the taboo (2006: 247).

While tango's *mugre* aesthetic contributes to this understanding of dirt that unites these

³⁷ Indeed, there are other words such as *tanguerro*, *compadre*, and *canyengue* that refer to certain positive masculine qualities in tango performance. However, I focus here on *mugre* as it appears to be a closer fit with the transcultural Japanese perspective.

‘opposites’, what lies beneath Japanese tango musicians’ references to *mugre* is an understanding that ‘dirt’³⁸ reflects *real life* wherein hardships are integral. Naoko Aoki, one of the most prominent of the younger generation of Japanese tango musicians and composers, explained:

Tango is rough, I mean this in a positive way. I also find [this roughness] in [Argentine] films. They are not like the sophisticated and clean Hollywood films, and in a way, [Argentine] films completely smash it [such sophistication]. They are never easy [to predict] ... This is very similar in tango compositions; they do not sound like ‘well, let’s make something that sounds reasonably nice.’ Tango is not easy: it is not easy to remember and it is not easy to understand from the first time one listens to it (Naoko Aoki, interview, Tokyo 31 July 2015).

The sophistication here almost implies pretentiousness, while tango’s ‘roughness’ is perceived as conveying life’s reality: like tango, life is never predictable, but involves uncertainty and is sometimes full of disorientation. Such aesthetics of realness resonates with Aoki’s values.³⁹

This aesthetic associated with *mugre* is often reflected in Japanese tango musicians’ attitudes to performance. According to a number of Japanese tango

³⁸ The aesthetic of dirt as attributing authenticity and giving the performance a real life quality is found in a number of popular music genres (Hughes 2008: 197; Moehn 2005: 47–83).

³⁹ This sense of realism as a key aesthetic in many of the popular music genres has also been described—based on Foucauldian formulation—as the process of ‘ethical subject formation’ (Butterworth 2014: 130).

musicians I have interviewed, *mugre* is achieved through active learning on stage as a way of undergoing *tataki age*, or (forging) training. This word derives from the Japanese term *tataku*, to strike, with the phrase originally referring to how a blacksmith transforms iron into useful shape. *Tataki age* is a phrase used in reference to disciplining and training in the worlds of Japanese traditional craftsmanship and performing arts. In present day Japan where dancehalls are no longer venues for experiencing tango, imparting emotion and learning on stage form central aspects of tango transmission. This contrasts greatly within classroom learning that is considered less valuable, while performing on stage, the real experience, generates a certain authenticity. I argue that many Japanese musicians today attempt to reconcile the binary of tango's 'low life' aesthetics—powerfully associated with the authenticity of tango—and contemporary Japanese contexts by relating and disciplining themselves to the genre expectations that derive from tango's aesthetics of emotion.

Tango's Aesthetics of Emotion in Japan: Love's Suffering

A final examination of transculturality in my essay will consider the place of Japanese folkloric narratives within a transformed context. In addition to economic suffering and endurance, the discourses of Japanese musicians surrounding suffering in tango are often compared with figures and stories from folkloric religion, or *minzoku shūkyō* (民俗宗教). This corpus of historic and contemporary oral and written literature and visual art plays a fundamental role in shaping many moral values in the lives of Japanese people. Discourses of Japanese tango musician are often linked to the value-laden myths from such local and regional tales of suffering in love. As we will examine below, in particular the *oni* or ogres in Japanese popular tales, play a key role

in embodying the suffering, sadness and jealousy of love and lovers.

An intriguing example is seen in translations of tango lyrics by Japanese novelist and poet Hiroo Sakata (1925–2005), whose works show resonating instances between Argentine-derived tango aesthetics and Japanese ideas surrounding the anguish of love. Curiously, in my communications with Sakata’s elder daughter, Keiko Naitō—herself a novelist and an expert on Sakata’s work—the younger writer referred to her father as the ‘author’ of these tango lyrics although Sakata had apparently only translated the lyrics. This derives from the fact that the translations by Sakata, who is not fluent in Spanish, were not literal interpretations but ones that captured the aesthetics of emotion in tango. In some depictions, Sakata’s put forward his own aesthetic theme as a writer: that ‘even when in the greatest love of our time, men and women will eventually become *oni* (ogre)’ (Keiko Naitō, private correspondence, 5 April 2016).⁴⁰ This concept struck me as insightful lens through which to examine how depictions of love through suffering in tango are perceived in Japan.⁴¹ When I asked what Hiroo Sakata might have wanted to convey with his use of *oni* (ogre), Keiko Naitō observed:

He had in mind a once pretty wife who, later in life, becomes taken over by the ‘darkness of the night [metaphor for one’s end of life]’ and turns into an *oni*. The one responsible for this transformation is none other than the husband (ibid).

⁴⁰ I would like to note that Keiko Naitō’s reference to Sakata as the author is not reflected in his published translations, where acknowledgments of original lyricists are made appropriately under the Japanese and Argentine copyright laws.

⁴¹ While notions of intertextuality may be useful here, my central concern is to study the intersecting moments of multiple suffering subjects, and how Japanese musicians and poets have internalised these instances as emotion, empathy and morality interweave transnationally.

Such tensions between men and women symbolised by the use of *oni* have appeared in many of Hiroo Sakata's writings.

For instance, the original version of the famous tango song 'Uno' depicts the virtues of suffering and betrayal in love. Indeed, Sakata's interpretation in Japanese is a long way off from the original lyrics by Enrique Santos Discépolo (1901–1951).⁴² It is, however, important to reiterate that suffering is a critical component of the Argentine tango lyrics too. In Sakata's interpretation of 'Uno', the Japanese lyrics begin:

We fall in love/ believing in happiness/ and picture in our
minds an ignorant dream/ We forget/ no matter how many
times we become betrayed/ that this time, this must be the
true love

We believe over and over again/ only for the love to be taken
away by deception

Even if we bleed/ we once again cling to it

One day, a morning mirror reflects the face of an ogre [*oni*]/
only then we realise

This is the sin of loving too much/ the atonement⁴³

Here, *oni* represents the suffering of love and old age. At the same time, we should also remember that Sakata's uses of *oni* in his work and tango translations are

⁴² Hiroo Sakata is the father of the former Takarazuka revue 'top star', Mizuki Oura (1956–2009). Sakata began his Japanese translations of Argentine tango song lyrics when Oura started to perform tango after her retirement from the Takarazuka revue at the age of 35. Oura had produced and performed in numerous acclaimed theatrical tango shows in Japan and abroad.

⁴³ The original text in Japanese was provided by Rica Asaba with Keiko Naitō's permission.

undertaken with humour and satire. Keiko Naitō commented:

He used the ideas of *oni* from Japanese tales and Japanese ancient stories, but I also imagine perhaps he is referring to his own marriage [laughter]? Because even though I said Sakata's idea that all 'men and women' turn into *oni* ... in my father's work, there are more instances in which *women* become *oni* ... (Keiko Naitō, private correspondence, 6 April 2016).

Distress in love—one of the central themes in Argentine tango songs—and Sakata's aesthetics of *oni* resonate with one another. By referring to *oni* in Japanese folk tales, Sakata adapts the intense feelings in Argentine tango for the value-laden aesthetics of emotion in Japan.

This adaptation is very similar to how Japanese tango musicians discuss tango's emotions by identifying them with other Japanese traditional tales, beyond the *oni*. For instance, Rica Asaba makes a comment about tango in relation to the well known eleventh century literary work, *The Tale of Genji*:

A [Japanese] tango musician told me that tango 'Jealousy' [by Jacob Gade] is like the spirit of rage in Rokujō Miyasu Dokoro, the prince Genji's mistress, who haunts Aoi-no-ue—his wife—in the 'Genji monogatari' (The Tale of Genji). Now whenever I play the opening solo of 'Jealousy' I think of the *oni* driven by jealousy (Rica Asaba, private

correspondence, 7 March 2016).⁴⁴

Another Japanese tango singer, Yuu Kosaka, explained to me how suffering in love in tango is ‘like the jealousy, loss and abandonment present in some of the traditional Noh plays.’ (Yuu Kosaka, private conversation, Daisen [no date] July 2012). Similarly, another young violinist referred to love’s suffering in tango as akin to the figure of *hannya* that appears in Japanese traditional Noh theatre. *Hannya* is a female *oni*, who had turned into an ogre, driven by life’s suffering as a result of unrequited love or rejection.⁴⁵ So what are the folk tales and how do they resemble the distress of love in tango?

The folk *kami* (god) worship, according to Michael Foster, has long existed in Japan and taken numerous forms, playing a significant part in Japanese people’s everyday lives, self making, and moral codes (2015). In particular, the concept of *oni*, or in English ‘ogre’, ‘demon’ or ‘devil’ (ibid: 117), is imbued not only with the idea of good and evil, but with the inevitability of destiny and suffering in Japanese folkloric ideology. Foster writes:

[*Oni* is] generally portrayed in narratives and ritual contexts as a nasty otherworldly being who threatens humans; he is a person-shaped antiperson, encapsulating everything that

⁴⁴ ‘Jealousy’ is a Danish tango song, and it has been hugely popular in Japan since the 1960s as part of a genre in Japan called ‘continental tango’ (*konchinentaru tango*). There is indeed a double layer of transculturality here. Continental tango genre consists of all tango pieces composed in Europe, and it is equally as popular as Argentine tango among Japanese tango fans (Asaba 2016).

⁴⁵ Indeed, Japanese *hannya* derives from Buddhism (Kanaoka 2001), and traditional mythical values surrounding *oni* and Buddhist ideology play a critical role in the lives of many Japanese people. Additionally, for more details about influences of Buddhism in Japanese performing arts, see Kanai (1991).

imperils humans and human society (ibid: 118).

Oni is also portrayed in many different forms, such as in Japanese traditional Noh plays, and the *oni*—who are sufferers themselves—cause suffering to others. Often in such Noh plays, these *oni* become ‘tortured’ by mountain priests (*yamabushi*), in the hope that *oni* will attain Buddhahood (*jōbutsu suru*): to be able to rest in peace.

Shigeru Gorai argues that the Japanese folk tales—some of which later became adapted in the Japanese Noh and Kabuki plays—presented in what is known as the genre of ‘spiritual and monstrous tales’ (*Nihonryōiki*), demonstrate the origin of the Japanese folkloric religion (2008: 318). *Oni* in many of these tales carry certain wider moral gravitas, while portraying human emotions of suffering, anger, fear, or sadness. While such tales have underlying themes of moral teaching about love and empathy, an *oni* also represents the unknown or extraordinary dimension of human lives. Many of these traditional mythical stories are included in children’s literature in Japan, and are considered critical in cultivating a child’s ‘folds of the heart’: i.e., empathy.

According to many Japanese tango musicians, such tales resemble Argentine tango songs that depict powerful emotions caused by distress in love. In particular, the emotions of jealousy, rage or sadness depicted through *oni* resemble Argentine tango’s portrayal of suffering in love. While not all tango depict distress in love, the many that do have striking resemblances to the Japanese tales. Here, brief comparisons of Argentine and Japanese-derived aesthetics of emotion may be used to bring to light moments when Japanese and Argentine perspectives intersect. In traditional Noh plays, for example, the *kijo* (female ogre/demon) that appears in the plays ‘Kanawa’ (鉄輪) or ‘Aoi-no-ue’ (葵上) are women who had been abandoned by their beloved. In such

plays, their sadness turns into uncontrollable jealousy and hatred, leading them to become *oni* and, often, to attempted murders of former lovers and their present love interests (Hata & Nishino 1999).

On the other hand, as seen for example in an Argentine tango song ‘Usted sabe, señor juez’ composed by Orestes Cúfaro (1906–1972) with lyrics by Alfredo Ramos Merillas, a woman is depicted in court on trial for having murdered her unfaithful lover. In a form of speech directed to the judge, she implores the judge to understand her circumstances. She reminisces their romantic relationship in the first years, until the day she encountered her man with another woman. The song ends with her describing ‘*Y poniendo a mi suerte triste broche /Usted sabe, señor juez, que lo maté.*’ (And taking my lucky, sad axe/ You know, Mr Judge, that I killed him). Tango songs that depict angst in love resulting in murder are not restricted to the song above. ‘Amablemente’ (Lovingly) composed by Edmundo Rivero (1911–1986) with lyrics by Iván Diez (1897–1960) portrays a man who, enraged by his lover’s affair with another man, stabs her thirty four times as she stood in the kitchen preparing *mate* (Argentine tea).⁴⁶

I do not suggest that all tango songs which portray the extreme emotions of love end in murder. However, I have drawn these brief comparisons to demonstrate the powerful similarities between Japanese tales and Argentine tango plots. The Argentine aesthetic has been internalised through the channelling of local Japanese folk practice. *Oni* depicted in children’s folk tales have made their presence firmly rooted in people’s everyday lives (Foster 2015: 117–8). I do not suggest that every single Japanese person identifies tango with *oni*. On the contrary, I argue that understanding

⁴⁶ Indeed this might also be seen as the result of ‘macho pride’ and of *cornudo*, or the cuckold (see Brandes 1980). However I treat suffering in love here as not mutually exclusive of such possible macho pride.

oni as a form that embodies multiple emotions is essential to examining how Argentine tango's emotion 'is ordered, given meaning, performed and ascribed beauty and value'—to borrow Butterworth's phrase once again (2014: 36)—through empathy (*kyōkan*) in Japan, where the moral idea of 'folds of the heart' becomes central.

Conclusion

Christine Yano, in her study on enka, aestheticised emotion through notions of *kata*; a method for imparting lived emotion in a performance examined earlier in this essay.

Yano writes:

In the aesthetic realm, the master perfects *kata* to the point where it vanishes. The creative goal of *kata*-training is to fuse the individual to the form so that the individual becomes the form and the form becomes the individual. (2002: 26)

The surface of *kata* and its emotional content reflect a 'lived emotion' where *kata* transforms an emotion into a performed reality. These 'patterning forms', as Yano called them (ibid: 24–5), transform an emotion into an aesthetic, blurring the distinctions between the 'form', the 'content', and the 'real' (ibid: 24–6). While in performing arts practices such merging of the 'form' and the 'content' in the aesthetic sphere is not limited to and particular to Japanese performing arts⁴⁷, *kata* provides a critical glimpse into the moments when the aesthetics of emotion is created and performed as a sincere, lived emotion.

⁴⁷ See Berliner (1994) for jazz performance practice in the U.S.A., where musicians learn to impart a sense of lived emotion in their performance through repetition and imitation.

At the same time, on sincerity and authenticity in popular music performance Simon Frith argued that ‘the voice’ is crucial to such discourse surrounding musical truthfulness (1998). He claimed:

We use the voice ... not just to assess a person, but also, even more systematically to assess that person’s sincerity: the voice and how it is used (as well as words and how they are used) become a measure of someone’s truthfulness (ibid: 197).

Sincerity, here, thus points to *how* musicians tell their life stories as well as the ways in which artists relate themselves to the aesthetics of emotion through morality, creating an emotional depth needed for the performance. I argue that through narratives of hardship, empathy (‘folds of the heart’), and by relating the aesthetics of emotion first derived in Argentina to Japan’s value-laden stories, the emotionality of Argentine tango is given a new meaning in Japan.

On the other hand, any claims on ‘right’ or ‘wrong feelings’ in a music performance must be seen under the lens of wider historical, social and political issues that may condition them. Martin Stokes argues that within what he calls the ‘*distribution* in an economy of affect’ (2010: 189), such ‘right feeling’ forms part of ‘a zero-sum game’, asking, ‘[s]o who derides whom for their sentimentalism and wrong feeling?’ (2010: 189).⁴⁸ Gatekeepers of right feelings, thus, come under critical scrutiny. On ‘each musician’s feelings’ surrounding the *mugre* tango aesthetic as seen in this essay, an acclaimed Argentine bandoneonist, Carlos Pazo, insisted in an interview that ‘tango is not dirty’ as *mugre* may indicate. Stating instead that ‘tango is

⁴⁸ Stokes also cites works by other scholars on this topic. See Stokes (2010: 190).

beautiful’, he claimed ‘*mugre* is not the true feeling of tango’ (Carlos Pazo, interview, Buenos Aires 11 June 2006). Like Pazo, many Argentinian tango musicians when with fellow artists express certain disapprovals of *mugre* associated with tango, but nonetheless refer to it especially when with ‘foreign’ musicians. Indeed, one can speculate how much *mugre* developed in pedagogical contexts, where foreigners played tango ‘too cleanly.’ Additionally, the fact that in the contemporary Japanese contexts *mugre* has come to represent the ‘true feeling of tango’ may indeed be due to the fact that many Japanese musicians are very much aware that they are ‘foreigners.’ Here, Morgan Luker’s notion of ‘expedient sounding’ (2016) may be used to unpack this uncertainty surrounding *mugre*. Luker argues:

[C]ontemporary tango operates as a mode of “expedient sounding,” a means of making productive claims not only on music and the arts, but also on culture, power, history, and politics more broadly (ibid: 35).

As such, musicians are inevitably caught in what Luker calls the ‘managerial regimes’ of contemporary tango productions (ibid: 86-9). However, and at the same time, I argue that many musicians negotiate their musical ‘selves’ with musical expectations—like tango’s association with *mugre*— that arise from these modes of tango productions that, in reality, support their livelihood. Notions of right or wrong feelings surrounding *mugre*, thus, illuminate such tension generated by the expedient uses of tango today.

Furthermore, *mugre* is integral to present day, transnational power imbalances. I refer specifically to the ways in which Japan’s tango music culture in the 2010s sits

within—to return to Pedwell’s notion once again—a complex web of ‘affective relations’ (2014). In this context, notions of ‘the folds of the heart’ (empathy), question any simple understanding of transnational intimacy. Following Lauren Berlant, who considered empathy as an inevitable part of ‘the ongoing ethics of privilege’ (2004:1), Pedwell regarded empathy as ‘an affective relation linked to power and privilege as well as the ambivalent promise of unsettlement and change.’ (2014: 15) Multiple affects and their travels are thus inseparable from such power imbalances and privileges.

While Svetlana Boym argued, through (diasporic) intimacy, that affect connects people in spite of, and even because of, differences and inequalities (1998: 498—501), Michelle Bigenho contested that one of the most common affects between subjects, intimacy, in fact challenges any utopian views about transcultural intimacy (2012). In reference to power inequality between Bolivia and Japan, Bigenho, in her study on Andean music in Japan, argued:

[i]ntimacy, as a concept, chaotically herds the unruly ambiguities of social relations that are infused with historical structures of power and the coexisting experiences of pleasure and affect. (ibid: 177)

Under this lens, Bigenho characterised the musical South America-Japan nexus as thus:

[a] pull of desire toward difference and contrasting distance that one still maintains while taking on the cultural trappings of an

Other, about the multiple and contrasting stories of *intimate distance* (2012: 2).

Bigenho's beautiful portrayal of Japanese musicians embracing the performance practice and cultural meanings of Andean music, suggests a form of cultural intimacy that is maintained precisely by sustaining a cultural, socio-political and even *authentic*, distance. Global travels of musical affect, thus, sit on these unresolved, ongoing inequalities.

Yet despite differences, distances, ambiguities and power imbalances, affect travels. As meanings of affect become negotiated in its new environs, notions of the aesthetics of emotion, I argue, provide lens through which to study how affect changes, becomes manipulated or even rejected, as it travels across spatial and temporal spaces, as well as between social and aesthetic spheres.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Henry Stobart, Dr. Frederick Moehn, Dr. David W. Hughes, Dr. James Butterworth, Dr. Jonathan Roberts, Dr. Hettie Malcomson, Dr. Lonán Ó Briain, the anonymous reviewers, and Dr. Shzr Ee Tan for their advice on this article. Funding for this research was generously provided by the University of London Central Research Fund and the Helen Shackleton Fund (Royal Holloway, University of London).

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