

Suicide Maps and Manuals

In the final act of Chikamatsu's 1721 puppet play *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (*The Love Suicide at Amijima*), the doomed lovers Jihei and Koharu walk aimlessly over bridge after bridge in old Osaka seeking a place to commit suicide. In frustration, Jihei remarks, "No matter how far we walk, there'll never be a spot marked 'For Suicides.' Let us kill ourselves here." For the play's audience, however, the final destination is definitively marked both in the title and in the penultimate lines of the play that clearly mark the spot: "They have come now to Amijima, to the Daichō Temple. The overflowing sluice gate of a little stream beside a bamboo thicket will be their place of death."¹

As with his earlier 1703 love suicide play set (and titled) "... at Sonezaki," Chikamatsu's locales were dictated by real-life suicides reported in the broadsheets. In the hopes of being memorialized themselves, young couples were said to be imitating the drama played out onstage in such great numbers that authorities subsequently banned both fictionalized depictions of love suicides and criminalized the act by punishing the dead with the desecration of their corpse. While one strategy tackled the problem by disallowing any textual reproductions that would mark the event, the other sought to mark the corpse.

As we have seen, there were many possible ways to mark a suicide. If it was sometimes poetic, it was sometimes more literal, as we have seen was the case with the "sign" (標) marking "the journey of no return" carved into a cherry tree branch at Mount Mihara by one man in 1928. After Fujimura, it was as if a sign did, in fact, point the way to Kegon Falls, or as a character from Tayama Katai's 1917 story put it, "This is *the* place to come to die."² Satirizing this notion, one manga artist depicted a death god beckoning travelers next to a sign pointing one way to Kegon

and the other to its new rival, Shiobara, a locale made famous in March 1908 after the double suicide attempt between author Morita Sōhei and his student (and later feminist activist-critic) Hiratsuka Raichō.³

In this chapter, I consider these more literal signs, including maps, tourist guides, gravestones, and suicide manuals. As we will see, even the flatter, more factual markings among these—sometimes literal X's that mark the spot—entail ethical responsibilities for writers and readers alike.

INOKASHIRA PARK: KON WAJIRŌ'S SUICIDE DISTRIBUTION MAP

My first example is a scholar's attempt to map the more traceless and anonymous suicides that occurred in a suburban Tokyo neighborhood. This was undertaken by ethnographer Kon Wajirō, who lived near Inokashira Park in the mid-1920s. If not for Kon's maps, park visitors would likely never know that it was once the site of many a suicide. In fact, I myself was utterly unaware when living in this area—just blocks from the park in neighboring Mitaka—while doing dissertation research in 2001. I routinely ran the trail around the park, admiring the lake, boaters, and the many picnickers under the cherry trees that line its banks. I never knew, or even considered, this locale as a suicide site. Only while researching this book over a decade later did I discover Kon's detailed map.⁴ On a research trip in June 2017, I spent a long day orienting and reorienting myself, struggling with print map in hand and attempting to decipher its handwritten inscriptions while walking around the lake with a newfound vision of what the place contained.

Kon's "Inokashira Park suicide distribution map" (Inokashira kōen jisatsusha bunpuzu) marks out eight locations in the park where suicides occurred when Kon was living nearby, having taken refuge in this sleepy suburb after the Great Kantō earthquake of September 1923 (fig. 8). Each numbered spot is marked by a crudely drawn stick figure besides short descriptions jotted down in terse language resembling a police blotter: "⑥ 1926.3.23: a.m. discovery, hanging on a single cedar tree. Apparent craftsman, kimono, stiff sash, hung by loin cloth. Shikishima [culture matches] in pockets (half-filled)." Some entries are more elaborate, such as this one from the day of Emperor Taishō's funeral service: "⑧ 1927.2.7. Discovery on morning of the Imperial Funeral, apparently had come at night after ground froze, 32 or 33 years, male, appearance of a clerk, matching serge *haori*, sturdy body, hanging, loin cloth tied between two cedar trees, a newly purchased white cotton cloth placed over the loin cloth. -9 sen in pocket, complaints from the villagers because he used as a footstool some logs that had been set aside for use during the next day's Imperial funeral procession" (253).

In May 1927, Kon wrote an essay to accompany the map that he had cobbled together over the years, "the paper gradually getting older and yellower with use until [he] moved from the area and gave up on the project" (252). In it, he offers

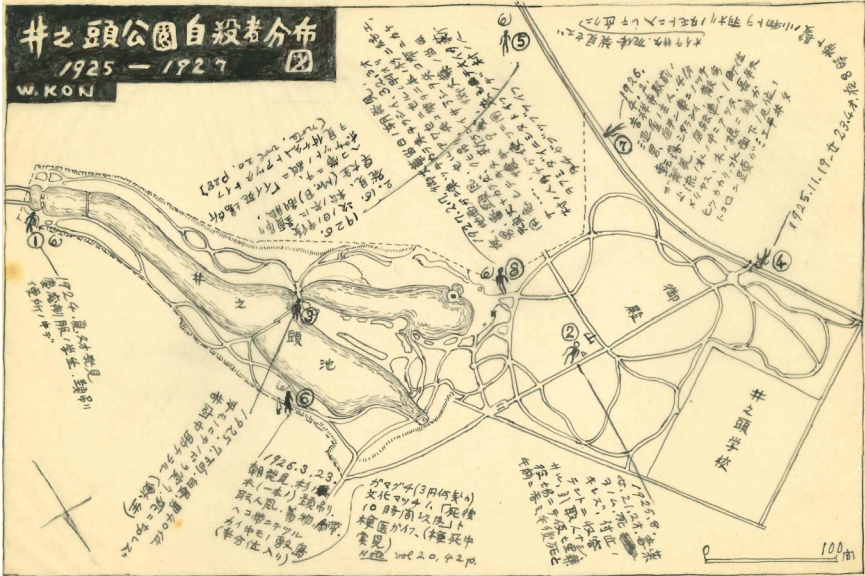


FIGURE 8. Kon Wajirō's "Inokashira Park suicide distribution map, 1925-1927" ("Inokashira-kōen jisatsusha bunpuzu, 1925-1927"). Courtesy Kogakuin University.

a more elaborate narrative description of each incident while retaining the same flat factual tone. For example, the above entry opens: "(No. 8) 1927 February 7: The park had been peaceful for a while but on the morning of the Imperial funeral I got word that 'There's been one! [Aru!]' –A hanging on a cedar tree behind Daiseiji Temple" (258). For another, he reveals in the same neutral tone that he knew the person who had died, a "Waseda student in uniform who hung himself on a pine tree in a withered forest on the park outskirts and whose body was found the following day with a note in his pocket reading, 'I found a good place to die' [いい死場所ヲ見ツケタ]" (255).

In a companion essay that he published alongside this one in his 1930 *Modernology: Kōgengaku*, Kon included a similarly hand-drawn map of "Inokashira Park spring picnickers" (Inogasira-Kōen no picnic no mure).⁵ In this one, numbered markers indicate where families ate hardboiled eggs on a park bench, where a middle-aged man read a Bible, and where young couples gazed at the lake, while the other depicts spots where individuals hung, drowned, and poisoned themselves. The former captures a precise moment in time, a sunny Sunday, April 18, 1926, at 3:10 p.m., when Kon and his collaborator, Yoshida Kenkichi, divvied up the park and sketched out the forty-odd groups they sighted over a five-minute period. The latter records eight suicide attempts that Kon either heard about secondhand or witnessed firsthand between the summer of 1924 and winter 1927.

There is something perverse in Kon's juxtaposition of picnics and suicides. It begs the question: What might have impelled him to capture these in twin mapping exercises? And what is a reader to do with these overhead maps that record these ephemera from a bird's-eye view?

Evident in both projects is Kon's signature method of cataloguing people in public spaces, a methodology based in the new field of urban ethnography that he dubbed *modernologio*. Like his famed diagrams capturing the demographics of passersby strolling down Ginza streets in early summer of 1925, in his suicide distribution map, too, he is similarly attentive to the person's gender, age, clothing, and occupation.⁶ What they wore and what they carried on their person get special attention, as does their chosen method, timing, and location, each of which he carefully notes both in his essay and in shorthand on the map. (Only for females does he note their marital status, in both cases, a young "wife" [*fujin*].) At the end of the essay, he lamented his lack of sufficient data on these "outdoor suicides" (*yagai jisatsu*). Given more, Kon might have created one of his signature graphic representations. Based on the data he did have, perhaps a sketch of a body whose parts were proportionally split by clothing type (63 percent kimono and 25 percent school uniforms); gender (75 percent male and 25 percent female); or by method (half hanging, one-quarter drowning, and an eighth each for poisoning and stabbing). Suicides committed in public places were an observable phenomenon and, like any other, subject to his scientific gaze.

For someone who was interested in capturing "the moving present" (*ugoki tsutsu aru*), suicide offered an especially attractive, if slippery, prospect.⁷ As he pointedly notes, he began this project in the aftermath of the devastation wrought by the 1923 Kantō earthquake. Kon's suicide map also offered a means of preservation in the face of (self-)destruction.

In many ways, his record resembles the kind of suicide data collected by the Japanese government since the early 1880s—a list of suicides by age, month, gender, and method. Importantly, though, these official records also catalogue "suicide motive" (*jisatsusha in'yu*), or, as the bilingual French translation designed to facilitate overseas distribution puts it, "*Suicides par motifs présumés*." Beginning in 1882, motive was parsed into thirteen distinct reasons ranging from love and remorse to mental alienation and reversals of fortune, and in 1884, motive began being broken down also by gender.⁸ Today, annual white papers issued by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare continue to track suicide rates by cause, albeit with now significantly less colorful and more streamlined categories: "Problems at work, home, or school, with health, love, or finances."⁹

Motive (*in'yu*, *gen'in*, or *dōki*) usually heads even the most barebones list. As we saw above, Kego officials included "Cause: For the sake of philosophical research" alongside an otherwise stark list of Fujimura's name, age, address, and date of death.¹⁰ Another fascinating example from 1971, a comprehensive chart listing literary works featuring suicide that range from premodern

to contemporary times, even attempts to delineate the motives for fictional characters' suicides.¹¹

In contrast, motive is conspicuously absent in Kon's work. He displays a marked refusal to psychologize actions, instead relying on his usual method of recording externally apprehensible phenomena. As Miriam Silverberg notes, unlike other ethnographers, Kon "did not concern himself with the consciousness of the urban practitioners. ... He did not investigate how choices are considered."¹² Not one of Kon's case studies speculates about the reason behind the deaths. Even when he knew the person who had died, as in the case of the young Waseda student, there is no sense that the individual was his focus, much less their psychology. He may have aspired to capturing the world "as though observed by a divine eye," but godly omniscience is not the point; as he put it in his October 1927 manifesto of sorts for his fellow modernologists, "We harbor neither envy nor sympathy toward the world. ... We pay attention to the manners of people today from the same standpoint as one would look at the behavior or customs of animals."¹³

If Kon refuses to individualize or personalize any one death, he also does not aggregate them into sheer numbers. If the latter helps his project from seeming like a callous god's point of view, even more important is the way he refuses to allow the data collector to disappear from the picture.¹⁴

For each entry, Kon begins by carefully specifying his source, whether it is secondhand or how he came to witness the aftermath of a suicide firsthand. When he describes his penchant for firsthand observation, he exhibits a slight sense of compunction over pursuing such a morbid subject and enlisting the help of neighborhood informants in the process: "A young middle school girl would come running to say, 'Mister, they told me to tell you that there's a hanging at the park right now,' and I would say, 'Thanks,' and happily (?) would leave whatever I was doing aside and take off for the park" (251–52). In another episode, he notes how he had "a reluctant acquaintance [*iyagaru shijin*] guide him straightaway to the spot where he had witnessed an unbelievable hanging [*monosugoi kubitsuri o jikken shita*]" (254–55). In these moments, Kon authenticates his own position as an all-seeing observer while implicating himself as an embedded and embodied spectator. At the same time, he resists any visceral descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells he might have encountered. It is this combination that saves the project from becoming either dry, flat reportage or a ghoulish rubberneck-worthy spectacle.

Kon's choice of a map to represent these suicides is crucial to treading this fine line. It enables a certain degree of de-individuation by presenting a bird's-eye view of the locale from the safe distance of an overhead shot. This privileging of place over person has its limitations, however. Kon himself admits that his chosen medium falsely delimits boundaries; he notes, for example, that his map's boundary has forced him to omit some suicides that he himself witnessed just outside the perimeter. A map, he suggests, imposes a frame of reference that does not necessarily capture his own personal experience. This tension becomes especially

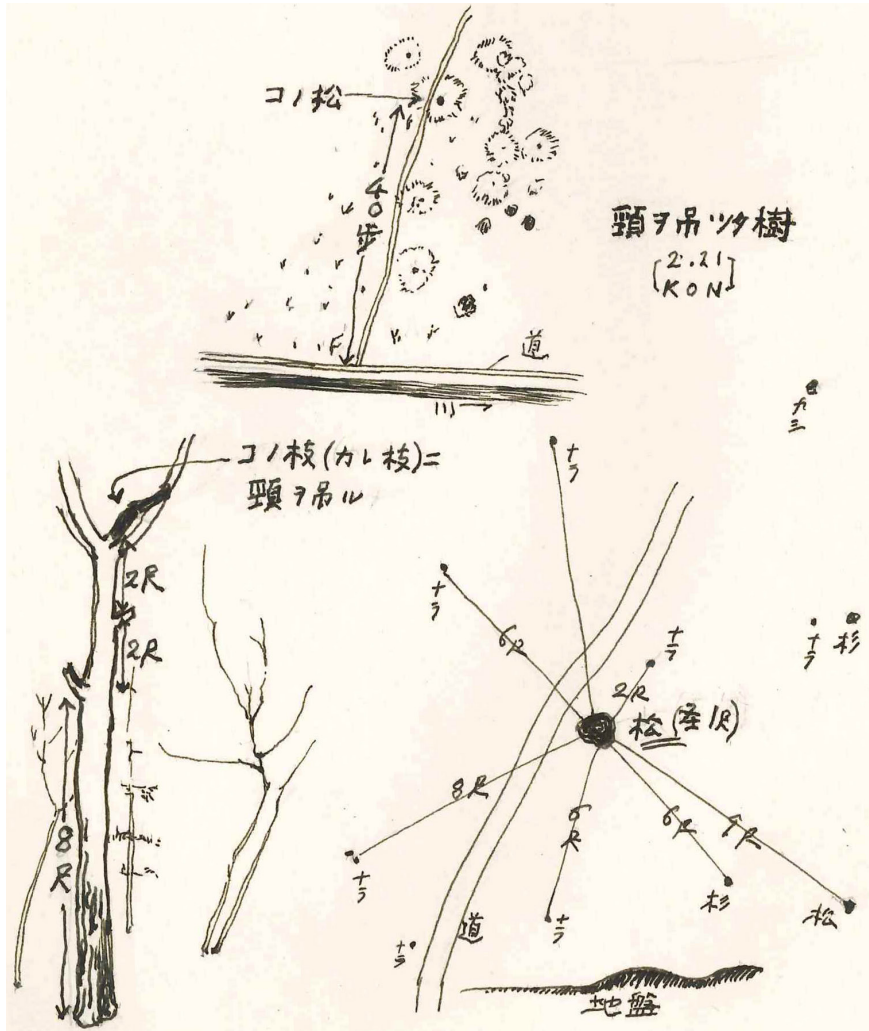


FIGURE 9. The hanging pine tree ("Kubi-tsuri jisatsu no basho"). Courtesy Kogakuin University.

clear in his detailed discussion of the one suicide whom he personally knew, the Waseda student.

For this one, Kon includes three supplementary drawings of the pine tree used by the student to hang himself (fig. 9). In two overhead sketches, Kon carefully marks the distance of the pine tree from the road (forty paces) and from other trees (seven elms, two–six *shaku* away; another pine tree, nine *shaku* apart; two cedars, ...). In the third, the perspective changes to that of a walker encountering the tree in the forest. In this close-up view, he marks out the precise heights of its various branches with an arrow pointing at "this branch (a dead branch) for hanging" (257).

In these drawings, maps, and narrative accounts, there is a sense that Kon is self-consciously grappling with the appropriate distance, tone, and form for capturing these self-deaths. His approach wavers between being above the forest and in the trees, quite literally.

What is a reader of Kon's maps and essay, or a picnicking park visitor, to do with these obsessive markings? The map is now available digitized, courtesy of an anonymous netizen on Google Maps.¹⁵ It helpfully (?) pinpoints the precise locales of Kon's hand-drawn markings.

At the very end of the essay, Kon at least offers us a suggestion of how they functioned for him. In a rare display of some emotion, he notes that "the hanging tree has never been cut down and still stands. When I walk the park, it always makes me feel a bit somber, but I can also see, in that very same spot, scenes of young couples shy with one another and families happily opening up their picnic lunches" (258). Here, he offers himself and the reader a rewrite of the scene that lingers in his mind's eye. If his own maps have revealed the haunting invisible specter of suicide at the park, they can also assuage that vision by supplanting it with images of happy picnickers. These otherwise traceless picnics and suicides, lives and deaths, have gained a surprisingly long afterlife through Kon's meticulous acts of mapping.

MITAKA: "THE TOWN WHERE DAZAI OSAMU LIVED"

In 1948, the Tamagawa Canal that runs through Inokashira Park would become famous as the drowning suicide site of author Dazai Osamu (1909–48) and his companion Yamazaki Tomie (1919–48). Like Kon Wajirō, who relocated to these suburbs after the 1923 earthquake, the area offered Dazai a refuge, in this case from 1940s war-torn Tokyo. He lived in neighboring Mitaka for most of his final seven years, died there on June 13, 1948, and now lays buried nearby at Zenrinji Temple.¹⁶

Neither Inokashira Park nor the city of Mitaka ever became a famed suicide spot on the same scale as Mihara or Kegon Falls, although in November 1949, one of Dazai's literary disciples followed him to the grave; fellow author Tanaka Hidemitsu (1913–49) committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills and cutting his wrists at his mentor's gravesite. Tanaka had anticipated this act in his own fiction and also had left behind a work titled "Sayōnara" in an echo of Dazai's unfinished final work "Guddo-bai" (グッド・バイ, Goodbye). Lest these clues were too subtle, he had inscribed his suicide note onto the tattered cover and title page of an edition of Dazai's complete works.¹⁷ In so doing, Tanaka was taking a page from his mentor's book in more ways than one, imbricating his suicide and death writings with those of Dazai, a writer who himself was well known for scripting suicide.

Dazai repetitively fictionalized his suicidal desires and his multiple attempts. By one scholar's count, no less than eleven characters in just six of Dazai's works commit suicide, and he himself attempted suicide five times.¹⁸ As Alan Wolfe's work has shown, Dazai relentlessly fostered an intertextual reading between

his life, suicide, and writings in a way that frustrates easy interpretations. He ultimately died in such an ambivalent fashion—leaving only a couple of hasty, nearly illegible suicide notes scribbled in his drunken, shaky hand—that many claimed it was tantamount to a murder-suicide plotted by his lover. The open-ended and incomplete nature of his many suicidal texts and attempts have led to unending debates over the degree to which he exerted control over his writings and over his self-death.¹⁹

Rather than revisiting this debate, here I want to focus on Mitaka and its construction as a Dazai memorial site that commemorates this long-dead author in the places where he lived, wrote, and died. My central question is how a site that is so haunted by self-deaths—not just Dazai’s but Yamazaki’s and Tanaka’s, too—and a site so haunted by self-writings about self-death could be transformed into a desirable literary tourist destination. Predicated on the life, writings, and suicides of this famous author and two of his faithful companions in death, Mitaka would seem to offer an uneasy tourist attraction.

In recent years, Mitaka has become something of a mecca for Dazai fans and for local officials seeking to revitalize a flagging city economy by marking (and marketing) Dazai’s sites of self-writing and self-death alike. In 1998, at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of his death, they undertook a conscious project to transform the city into a Dazai memorial. The aim was to revitalize Mitaka as a literary haunt where many celebrated literati formerly lived, including Dazai, who remains perhaps its most infamous denizen.²⁰ City officials nominally promote tourism in Mitaka as the “town where Dazai Osamu lived” (*Dazai Osamu ga ikita machi*) but are also clearly capitalizing on it as the place where he died and is buried. Coincidence helps link Dazai’s birth and death dates since his body (alongside his lover’s) was belatedly recovered from the Tamagawa Canal on June 19, 1948, his thirty-ninth birthday. Since 1949, every year on this day, a memorial service called Ōtōki takes place at Zenrinji Temple.

Mitaka is both the setting for many of Dazai’s works and the site where Dazai wrote a large portion of them.²¹ The entangled nature of these things is evident in the detailed marking system adopted in an illustrated “Dazai map” published by the local Dazai Club (fig. 10). Quotes from Dazai’s works (in bubbles) appear alongside the words uttered by Dazai himself (in double-lined bubbles), and the settings for his stories are distinguished from where he wrote stories (marked with cherries).²²

On this crowded map appear sites of living, writing, dying, burial, and mourning: scenes of Dazai reading to his children appear alongside poignant quotes from his fictional works set in and around Inokashira Park. These include the plaintive cries of his fictional protagonists: “I’m sorry for being born” from *Nijū-seiki no kishu* (Standard-bearer of the twentieth century, 1937) appears beside the spot where he and Yamazaki entered the canal with their lined-up geta sandals marking the spot; beside an empty boat in Inokashira Lake, the bitter words of a sister whose alcoholic brother drowned there assert, “No, it is because my brother died



FIGURE 10. Mapping Dazai's life, death, and writings at Mitaka ("Dazai Mappu"). Mitaka Dazai no Kai, Bunshin Shuppan, 2008. Courtesy Bunshin Shuppan.

that we are now happy" from the final line of "Hanabi" (Fireworks, 1942); and beside the "place where [their] corpses were pulled from the canal" (*itai hikisage basho*), the penultimate line from his 1948 *Ningen shikkaku* (*No Longer Human*): "Another year merely passes by."

Like Kon's twin maps of Inokashira Park picnics and suicides, this one, too, offers an overhead view of a locale pockmarked by moments of people's pleasures and pain. This map's two-dimensional sweetly cartoonish representation of Dazai's life and death offers a safe perch from which readers can get a distant overview.

What happens, though, when we travel to these sites ourselves? When a tourist seeks to retrace Dazai's journey from life to death? Or when we take up the invitation of the Mitaka city website: "Won't you try following in the footsteps left behind by Dazai Osamu in the city of Mitaka?" (*Dazai Osamu ga Mitaka no machi ni nokoshita ashi-ato o tadotte mimasen ka.*)²³

Walking in his "footsteps" (*ashi-ato*) depends on the traces he left behind both in his life and in his literary works. These physical places, where he lived and visited, died and was buried, are overlaid with the many versions of those places he scripted into his fiction that often imagines protagonists who live and die in those very sites. As we will see, capitalizing on their touristic potential requires selective invocations of this author's body and his body of works.

Monthly walking tours have been offered by the volunteer Mitaka Tour Guide Association since 1999, and in 2008, the Mitaka City Arts Foundation established the Dazai Osamu Literary Salon (Dazai Osamu Bungaku Saron).²⁴ The salon, housed in the former site of the Isemoto sake bar frequented by Dazai, seeks to revive Dazai and his Mitaka, bringing his literature to life with monthly readings by actors and popular radio and TV announcers and with exhibits that display his original manuscripts alongside historical maps and photos of prewar Mitaka.

Although the salon was initially conceived as a temporary exhibit that would last for just a few years, it became such a popular destination (with about 194,000 visitors as of November 2023) that plans aimed to relocate to larger, more permanent quarters. Pilgrims range from young fans to nano- and octogenarians who treasured this cult author in their youth; on one day I visited the salon on the sixty-ninth anniversary of his death in 2017, both demographics were present, a pair of wheelchair-bound elderly visitors accompanied by their hip, stylishly dressed young caretakers all avidly listening to the docent. A vast collection of Dazai paraphernalia is available for purchase: T-shirts, pencils, postcards, coasters, and hand towels emblazoned with Dazai's silhouetted figure in his signature pose, hand broodingly cupped to chin.²⁵ One can even pretend to *be* Dazai, donning a cape like his own for a commemorative photo opportunity or drinking in Dazai in the form of latte art at a nearby café. Visitors can sit on a bar stool from Lupin relocated from Dazai's favorite Ginza bar, posing there just as his disciple Tanaka Hidemitsu did for his own author photo.²⁶

The tours offered by the volunteer-led Mitaka Tour Guide Association and signposts marking them across town enable visitors to see his favorite unagi shop where he ate and drank, places where he wrote and met with his editors, and other more lurid sites. On the tour, the specter of death is not absent, with stops that include "the lodgings where he became intimate with Yamazaki" and "where the two set out for the Tamagawa Canal on Dazai's last day" (#2), the site where they entered the water (#11), and finally his grave in nearby Zenrinji Temple (#16).²⁷ Visitors are invited to travel Mitaka through Dazai's eyes, along the highs and the lows of his artistic creativity, drunken revelry, and ultimately his suicide.



FIGURE 11. Plaque at Dazai's suicide site, "man-eating river" turned "tunnel of green."
Photo by author.

The two tour sites most explicitly marked by his suicide are the canal entry point and his grave. Both sites involved a companion in death, who situated themselves by his side and who also inscribed their suicides into written texts of their own making. Yet in the end, traces of Yamazaki and Tanaka have been largely erased from the scene. What remains here are the less visceral traces—those marked in literature and those perpetuated in literary tourism—that ensure a long-lived presence for the long-dead author. These reveal the crucial role of literary texts to serve as memorials that enable reader-travelers to navigate these locations of violent self-death.

Near the spot where Dazai and Yamazaki entered the canal, a memorial plaque (fig. 11) features a photo of Dazai seated cross-legged in those very grasses under blooming trees beside this quote from his 1941 short novel *Kojiki gakusei* (*Beggar Student*): "It is around noon in mid-April. When I raise my head and look up, I see the Tamagawa Canal flowing past slow and deep. Cherry trees on the banks of the river have already lost their blooms, their leaves a lush green. Their branches drape down, like a tunnel of green leaves."

By blurring the lines between the Dazai in the photo who visited the spot on a spring day, the Dazai who scripted a similar scene into his fiction, and the Dazai who entered the canal to die one night in June, his life, art, and death are collapsed here. Since we, too, gaze on this same landscape, it also collapses the tourist with Dazai. The grammar of the original, which lacks a specified subject, further encourages

this: “When *I/you* raise *my/your* head and look up” (*atama o agete miru to*). We, like Dazai, are prompted to gaze on the beautiful landscape purged of any marks of death.

The choice of this prettifying quote is even more conspicuous when we consider the alternatives from the very same story. Recounting an accidental 1919 drowning in the canal, Dazai writes “Near this area long ago, there was a kind teacher named Matsumoto Torao who drowned trying to save her pupil. The river is not very wide at all, but it is terribly deep with a powerful current. The locals here fear what they call the ‘man-eating river.’”²⁸

Although this teacher’s memorial stone nearby is also part of the walking tour, any such visceral description is conspicuously absent here at the suicide site. Also absent is any mention of his female companion, Yamazaki, who bore the brunt of public scorn in the immediate aftermath.²⁹ If the tour marks the location of Dazai’s death, it also works doubly hard to erase, or overwrite, those traces by envisioning his death site not as any feared “man-eating river” (*hito-kui gawa*) but as a “tunnel of green” (*aoba no tonneru*).³⁰

In retrospect, it is Dazai’s own words that help transform the locale from a place of violent death to one of peaceful respite. In his fiction, he even foretold his own final resting place, the gravesite at nearby Zenrinji Temple. In his story “Hanafu-buki” (Cherry blossom shower, 1943), he wrote:

In back of this temple is Mori Ōgai’s grave. I had no idea how his grave came to be in these Tokyo suburbs of Mitaka. But this graveyard is tidy, as if it contained a shadow of Ōgai’s prose. If my dirty bones could also be buried even in a corner of this neat and tidy graveyard, maybe there would be salvation for me. At least this is the sweet fantasy that I secretly nursed some days, but now those dreams have vanished into thin air. I lack the right qualifications. I have no right to rest in the same graveyard as this fine mustachioed hero who fell from the edge of a veranda after brawling drunkenly with another fellow. *No, someone like you is not the sort who can choose his own gravesite. You oughta know better the limits of your station.* Just one glance of Ōgai’s upright black gravestone that day had me rushing back home. (emphasis in original)

This passage led Dazai’s widow to install his stone diagonally across from Ōgai’s at Zenrinji. Even as he modestly denies the power or rights to do so, Dazai scripts his own burial site.

As we have seen, the biddings of the dead are not, however, always followed. In a suicide note addressed to Dazai’s wife, his lover Yamazaki wrote, “Shūji is a weak person so he can’t devote himself to both me and you, his honorable wife. Because I love him, I will die together with him. ... I ask that even the smallest bit of my bones be buried with him.”³¹ Instead, when the lovers’ bodies were discovered bound together by a red sash to signal their love suicide, Dazai’s editor-publisher Nohira Ken’ichi cut the tie, and Yamazaki’s body was left behind and only later returned to her family.

Dazai's disciple Tanaka Hidemitsu met a similar fate, notwithstanding his own insistent attempts to imbricate his life, writings, and death with his mentor's. Tanaka foretold his own suicide at his master's grave in a posthumously published short story titled "Rikon" (Wandering spirit). The protagonist plans "to take fifty strong sleeping pills, crawl his way to the grave and cut his left wrist with a disposable razor. When he first thought about how this would be his revenge on Tsushima [Dazai's given name], who had left him behind, and on the women who had mistreated him, he became obsessed with the desire to make it happen, no matter if it meant sacrificing his writing or his life."³²

In a suicide note inscribed onto the cover of Dazai's collected works, Tanaka claimed to be committing a *junshi* of sorts, loyally following his master to the grave. Identifying himself as a "novelist [*shōsetsu-kaki*] and Dazai's disciple ... who chose to die because he has nowhere to go," he also requested to be "buried in Dazai-sensei's grave."³³ Like Yamazaki's, his request was similarly ignored. Instead, he is buried at Aoyama Cemetery, and his reputation—literary and otherwise—only suffers from the inevitable comparisons with his mentor that he himself invited.³⁴

If Tanaka and Yamazaki are absented and unmentioned at these locales today, it is the more literary traces of Dazai's literature that are invoked in their, and his, stead. Even Dazai's annual memorial service at Zenrinji is named after one of his stories, as if he posthumously christened it. When starting this in June 1949, his friend and fellow Mitaka author Kon Kan'ichi decided to call it "Ōtōki" (桜桃忌, Mourning cherries) after Dazai's story "Ōtō" (Cherries) published the month before his death. The story follows a despairing and suicidal middle-aged writer named Dazai who goes to a bar to console himself with drink after a spat with his wife. In a drunken haze, he fantasizes about delighting his children by returning home with a wreath of cherries around his neck. In a twist on the stereotypical association of sakura blossoms with youthful kamikaze self-sacrifice, in this story, the ripe young fruit (*sakuranbo*) of the tree symbolize the self-sacrificing parent. In the end, instead of bestowing the fruit on his children, he spits out cherry pit after cherry pit while whispering to himself his mantra that "parents are to be valued over children."

As if following a pointedly revised version of the script laid out in this story, Dazai's memorial services find devout fans decorating his gravestone with plump cherries—alongside cans of beer, sake, cigarettes, and copies of Dazai's books—even today.³⁵

With his cherry-laden grave by Ōgai's side or sitting beneath the "tunnel of green" on the canal bank, Dazai's presence endures. In a sense, he haunted these places even before his death, for he is depicted as presciently having imagined a semi-fictionalized version of himself dead and mourned in these locales. Like the fourth-person narrator identified as a core feature of Dazai's metafictional literature, a layered haunting (and hovering) presence remains in Mitaka.



FIGURE 12. Dredging up the dead with an X marking the spot. *Mainichi shinbun*, June 20, 1948. Courtesy the Mainichi Newspapers.

Conspicuously, the site where Dazai's and Yamazaki's bodies were ultimately discovered is not part of the official tour and is unremarked in any way. Contemporary newspapers, however, offered vivid coverage of the love suicide and its aftermath, even including photos of the lovers' bodies at this site. In the pages of the newspaper *Mainichi*, for example, appeared photos of search teams dredging the canal with the help of avid Dazai fans, who searched five hours daily for several days to no avail. In pictures from June 19 when the bodies were retrieved from the canal (fig. 12), crowds of spectators on the banks and bridge gather, and an X marks the spot in the photo for the curious newspaper reader. The article headline reads, "The discovery of Dazai's corpse: Found hugging Miss Tomie" (June 20).³⁶

How to mark (or un-mark) sites of self-death continues to provoke debate. In fact, the question remains as to whether to mark these sites at all. Currently, plans to establish a more permanent museum in Inokashira Park have been shelved because of all the negative public feedback. The vast majority objected to the choice of location, questioning the necessity of building it in the park's greenspace. One

citizen called for it to be built instead at “a location that was already surrounded in concrete,” while another wondered, “Wouldn’t it be better at the former site of the ‘man-eating’ bridge?”³⁷

A couple of critics directly address the appropriateness of erecting a monument to Dazai at all. One claims Dazai’s connection to Mitaka to be weak at best and asserts that he “lacks any significant worth—either his individual works or in the scope of literary history.” One particularly outspoken blogger points explicitly to Dazai’s dissolute life and death as the reason for opposing the plans: “The governing administration should prioritize life above all else, but instead seeks to erect a monument to a spoiled literati who got drunk and then to make matters worse, drank poison with his lover and then leapt into the Tamagawa Canal, which served as the waterway for the 23rd ward at the time. Isn’t this a perfect example of the government screwing up their priorities entirely? ... In this era of high numbers of children who commit suicide, the folly of lionizing a literary hack who killed himself should be avoided at all costs.”³⁸

There are clear echoes between critics like these today, and those from over a century ago who excoriated Fujimura and his Kego Falls death poem that would lure “fools” to that death site. The attempt to locate long-dead authors in the places they wrote and died by their own hand remains fraught.

SUICIDE MAPS AND MANUALS

The final example in this chapter is Tsurumi Wataru’s controversial bestselling *Kanzen jisatsu manyuaru: The Complete Manual of Suicide* that offers its readers literal directions guiding them to suicide. With its ratings charts divided by suicidal method—hanging, leaping, gassing, poisoning, and so forth—and four “suicide maps” (*jisatsu mappu*), it aids the would-be suicide in locating the best place to die in the most efficient manner possible, or what is billed as a “verbal suicide device that is more useful than the Bible” (*Seisho yori yaku ni tatsu, kotoba ni yoru jisatsu sochi*).³⁹ Since its publication in 1993, *The Manual* has sold over 1.2 million copies with over a hundred print runs and has also been labeled a “harmful book” (*yūgai tosho*) in seventeen prefectures to date. It has been widely targeted by PTA groups and politicians who accuse it of “teaching how-to methods and inducing people to commit suicide. Entranced by the book, there is a good chance youths will rush headlong toward suicide.”⁴⁰

It provides a script for those looking to die. In 1993, two suicides in Aokigahara Jukai forest left behind a copy of the manual, one with it open to “Suicide Map #1: Jukai.” A third man who attempted suicide but survived explained to authorities, “I came because I saw it in the book” (*Hon de mite kita*).⁴¹ As we will see in the next chapter, it is far from the only text accused of aiding and abetting suicides at the infamous “suicide forest.” Other glossier seductive representations of the forest abound in fictional stories and films made in Japan and in Hollywood.

For these texts, the key question is how and why readers were led to identify with and imitate fictional characters.

The question raised by Tsurumi's suicide maps is a bit more literal than that. Here I ask, How did these maps in the manual offer readers access to the locale and lead some of them to choose to die there? This may seem obvious. It is a map with directions, after all. "I came because I saw it in the book." Taken at face value, this statement suggests a clear cause-effect, with the text leading its reader to the tangled forest to die. The page opened to a map beside a dead body suggests the same. But can a journey to self-death be so straightforward?

In Tsurumi's presentation, this is precisely how the journey to this final destination is presented. Its series of maps, photos, and prose suggest the rhetorical power of words and images to emplace a reader in a suicidal space. As I argue below, it is this same power that policymakers intent on preventing suicide at these sites seek to curtail through strategic interventions both at the site itself and in the representations of that site from afar.

As noted above, grittier urban suicide sites, like railroads and high-rises, are rarely the subject of the kinds of highbrow aestheticized representations as naturally beautiful locales like Kegon and Mihara. But in Tsurumi's suicide maps, both types appear and in a strikingly parallel manner. Readers access the seductively beautiful forest of Aokigahara and the ugly, hulking *danchi* suburban apartment complex of Takashimadaira alike through a succession of images and text that guides a reader directly to the precipice.

Each suicide map is accompanied by a series of photos that offer multiple viewpoints. Long shots suggest the grandeur of the vista—the eponymous "sea of trees" (*jukai*, 樹海) before towering mountain ranges (71) or the "gigantic apartment complex" (*kyōdai danchi*) stretching across the horizon (95)—while point-of-view shots emplace the viewer at and inside the site.

In the manual, the reader-viewer gradually accesses the site, as if mimicking the steps of a traveler intent on dying there. In the Takashimadaira series, images move from the bird's-eye view of the map and a longshot of the looming *danchi* set against the horizon to the exterior of apartment buildings with iron railings and then to the single unit that lacks suicide prevention barriers. A shot of an inside corridor moves to the final first-person perspective peaking over the railing to the pavement fourteen floors below (95–96). In the Aokigahara series, accompanying narration in the form of a second-person address goads the reader along the path. It begins with the promise that "you will go missing and gradually disappear from people's memories," points out an ideal spot from which to enter the forest so that "your dead body will never be found," and anticipates "your" hesitance and "your" disorientation until finally landing at your destination "further from the mountain road and away from people's eyes. And like this, you will eternally fade away from people's memories" (70–73).

If Tsurumi's visual and verbal depictions emplace the reader in the position of an imminent suicide, suicide prevention strategies take the opposite tack by

implementing physical and psychological barriers that restrict access. Tellingly, they do so with a two-pronged strategy that tackles the act itself and representations of the act at these hotspots. While literal, architectural barriers bar physical access to the site, censoring literary and other representations of the site work at the level of the reader's or viewer's imagination. Both seek to foreclose access.

Takashimadaira offers a compelling example that demonstrates the important role representations have in both the making and the unmaking of a suicide site. Located about thirty minutes northwest of Tokyo, the massive suburban complex of sixty-four high-rise buildings and over ten thousand apartments opened in April 1972. It was christened with the lofty name of "Takashimadaira," (Tall island plains, 高島平), a reflection of the high hopes held for these low-rent, maximum-efficiency units. Within two months, a nonresident committed suicide by leaping from a rooftop, and four more occurred by year's end; in 1973, there were five more suicides, and although the number declined to one or two per year, the numbers exploded in 1977 after a pair of incidents particularly sensationalized in the media.⁴² Thereafter, the numbers escalated rapidly: twelve in 1977, fifteen in 1978, eighteen in 1979, peaking at fifty total in 1980–81.

Takashimadaira has since been credited as a model of suicide prevention architecture that was implemented by the Japan Housing Corporation in 1981 at significant cost—700 million yen (approx. \$8.5 million today)—to install over eight thousand fences (adorned with decorative flowers and islands) along all higher-floor corridors and stairwells. Roof access was closed, safety nets were installed every dozen floors or so, and patrols and phone help lines were put in place.⁴³ In large part, these tactics were designed to physically restrict access to the site, especially for those nonresidents who represented 80 percent of the suicides there and were traveling from either nearby Tokyo or as far as two hundred miles away for what some have dubbed a "destination suicide" (*ensei jisatsu*).⁴⁴

The officials also tackled the battle over representing Takashimadaira in the mass media. A PR campaign messaged that it was no longer possible to leap at the housing complex. A suicide prevention strategy report compiled after a four-month study was distributed in pamphlet form with one clear message distilled in its title: "Let's eliminate the nickname 'famed suicide spot' for Takashimadaira" (*Jisatsu meisho' no yobina o Takashimadaira kara nakusō*).⁴⁵

Such rhetorical repositioning is key, for as many suicide researchers admit, there are often fairly simple ways to get around any physical obstacle.⁴⁶ But a 2003 report by a team of Japanese psychiatrists titled "Suicide Prevention and Place/Space" approvingly cites the techniques adopted by Takashimadaira for offering not only physical but also psychological barriers against leaping. What this report suggests is the importance of both tactics to disrupt any fantastical vision of a swift, sure death at a famed suicide site. This can be accomplished either by restricting a distant view of the locale from afar that might lead a suicidal individual to travel there or alternatively, if that fails, by restricting their point of view just before the leap.

As the researchers explain, if the attraction depends on being a “geographically scenic spot that easily tempts suicide, one rich with historical or legendary stories of leaps, or one with dramatic, famous precedents that have been sensationalized in news reports,” then the remedy is to unwrite these associations. In line with WHO guidelines, the researchers advocate media self-censorship to reduce “chain reactions” of suicides at these sites. Alternatively, they endorse the opposite tact of an overrepresentation that echoes Edo period tactics: “It is effective to educate the public about the injured state of the corpse after death”—or “the wretched aftermath of the death site strewn with flesh and blood”—for “at the very least, it can counter the popularized aesthetic image of suicide [*ryūkō-teki jisatsu bigaku*].”

For those who nonetheless travel to the site intent on dying, the researchers suggest that onsite barriers can work not just on a “hard level” (*hādo-men*), but also to reorient “a person’s visual and mental state when standing on an elevated spot” and enable them to “maintain their stability. . . . If there are no physical supports to keep from falling or visual indexes that allow one to confirm one’s own position, then it produces an extremely unstable mentality.”⁴⁷ Fences, nets, and signs advocating would-be suicides to “Wait a bit” all offer some barrier that might reorient their position and point of view.

Tsurumi’s text conspicuously lacks any such orienting devices. Instead, its images and narrative conspire to produce unimpeded sight lines and indiscriminate access to these suicide sites. In fact, the manual acknowledges any physical and psychological barriers that have been put in place to deter suicide only to readily bypass them. As noted above, the Takashimadaira images move rapidly past apartment buildings with guardrails toward the single one that lacks any impediments for a point-of-view shot of the pavement from fourteen stories above. Likewise, the Aokigahara photos quickly move past signs that are meant to deter suicide with reminders to “value this one life you have” and “cherish the life given to you by your parents” (5, 7) back onto the secluded trails (8) and finally “into the primordial forest” where a caption reassures the reader, “If you have come this far, you are safe.”⁴⁸

If it is the suicide maps in the manual with an X marking the spot that guide a reader-traveler to Aokigahara forest, it is the narrative’s second-person address and the photographs’ first-person perspective that offer an unobstructed vision of self-death. I turn now to consider a series of genre films and fictional texts that offer their own maps of sorts guiding audiences to this most recent, infamous *jisatsu meisho*.