

# The Birth of a Theatre and the Besieged Body: A Strategy for Globalization

A Dialogue between Otori Hidenaga and Shimizu Shinjin

Photographs — Miyauchi Katsu

## Part I

O : Today I would like to talk about what is being considered when we think of theatre as a form of representation, within a fundamental discussion about issues in theatre. What if we look at matters like what form can be established when theatre is questioned as a concrete representation? In order to do so, first we have to talk about what has been emerging and subsiding over the past decade. I'm thinking that theatre artists and critics in the 1990s have been discovering much the same thing. For instance, in 1988, the Polish director Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990) observed, "There is Something that is manifested only when one is faced with the END." (in the essay "To Save from Oblivion") Only towards the end of the 1980s did Kantor



The Drifting View @ Hinoemata Performance Festival (1985)



Shimizu Shinjin



himself come to realize the significance of the mark he had left in the world. Only then did he become aware of the fact that his Theatre of Death was intimately related to the wars of the twentieth century. He grasped this more clearly and sharply than when he was writing his Manifesto of the Theatre of Death. His theatre was a response to Theodor Adorno's comment that "to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbarous." (in "Prismen-Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" 1955) Around the end of the 1980s, various writers had started to experience such a realization. Incidentally, it was in 1984 or '85 that you began searching for a new direction in theatre practice wasn't it?

S : Yes. I began with Mobile Outdoor Theatre in the Hinoemata Performance Festival. This performance series was called "The Drifting View."

O : So you began with outdoor work at Hinoemata in 1985. Previously, you had been doing shows in closed rooms. It was around 1985 when you started exploring

Outdoor Theatre in locations like fields and river-beds. Of course, to some degree you were working without really grasping its significance. But, as you gained experience, you began to reconsider the significance of this transformation in your theatre. And I believe it was then that you first came to realize a kind of historical awareness in connection with this movement.

In the 1990s, KAITAISHA was offered more opportunities to perform abroad. On a practical level, you've been experiencing the transformation of theatre by performing in different spaces for differing audiences. Amidst this sequence of activities, what have you been thinking as a director? Have you had any key experiences? What's the significance of the 1990s in your history of directing? How do you reflect on it from the present of 2001? I believe these matters are important for theatre. So, first of all, can you tell me how you as an artist have observed this transformation in theatre over the past 15 to 20 years? Also, please say something about what you have been trying to do. You could respond to these questions directly if you like, although it's not necessary.

Theatre of Images and the Body as a Medium:

S : Well -- the 1980s, right? I might jump from one point to another, since I have various memories entangled in each other. The reason why I started doing Outdoor Theatre was because as a starting point I wanted to literally go out of the theatre. At that time, it was very hard

for me to sit in the audience and watch what we call the Little Theater. I would get rather overwhelmed by the waves of remorseful recollections and sentiments. I realized then, that it would be impossible for us to advance if we were to remain in the same arena with these people. Our theatre was too similar to these small theatres, especially in the area of acting. Well, I thought, if that's the case, we have no recourse but to change the various conditions our theatre depends upon along with the performance style which holds these conditions intact. In short, we decided to make "acting" impossible. Ordinarily, if you hear about an outdoor play, you might think it's a performance on an outdoor stage. However in such cases, the only difference is whether the theatre is indoors or outdoors. Outdoor Theatre, as I conceived and formulated it, was something entirely different from that. First of all, there were no audience seats, nor any stage. It could happen in daytime or at night. Both the audience and the actors would move along with the performance, which meant there was no fixed performance space. It might be in a park, in a river-bed, on the street, at a train station, or beside an abandoned ruin. It was an effort in which actors and audience attempted to manifest theatrical events. And it was during this very period of time that we encountered the problem of "the body." In the midst of these vast, freewheeling, chaotic circumstances, we discovered we could neither dance nor act! We could not possibly draw on pre-existing acting techniques that involve gushing emotions and large-as-life naturalism. What was

invoked instead, was "Theatre of Images" supported theoretically by notions of "the body as object" or "the body as a medium".

#### The Gulf War and The Death of Aesthetics:

For instance, if one places a body (the performer) as an infinitely foreign substance in the midst of a familiar landscape (the space), and then there's some collective body such as a train arriving at a station, people walking on the pedestrian bridge and cars pulling away, then we see all of them differently through that one body (placed in their midst). The audience experiences a transformation of perception of a landscape it ought to be familiar with, to a perception renewed and reborn as the performance progresses. At that time, I was really drawn to methods that used the body as an opportunity for perceptual transformation. I was planning to expand this type of performance by shaping it as we traveled, doing it outdoors, moving the audience physically or by using technological art. These ideas were bankrupted when the Gulf War broke out in 1991. All my motivations disappeared instantly. I guess that was real bankruptcy. So I shut myself in to wrestle with issues surrounding the body and the power that besieges it. Practically this meant continuous practice in "walking" with the actors in our warehouse rehearsal space in Kawasaki with no performing for two years! (laughs)

O : In a sense, this method of Theater of Images of the 1980s - replacing the

body as a theatrical image to transform the space - is aesthetic isn't it? And for you, it was the Gulf War that made you realize this point at issue.

S : The political element was minimal. Or rather, there were certain circumstances or language constraints that prevented the political element from surfacing, as in "the Global Village" and (Marshall) McLuhan. Media technology gradually differentiates people's desires in a homogenized world. This is nothing but Theatre of Images, right? It encompasses the varieties of body, music, art, and ethnicity within an overall concept of "total theatre," that continuously strives for new aesthetic compositions to accelerate the consumption of images.

What the Gulf War clarified was that such differentiated desires can be unified. Diversity is affirmed as long as power does not come to the surface. But when power is invoked and exercised, it easily unifies the world at once, by information control and crisis management. For precisely this reason it is possible to say that Theatre of Images can be politicized. For instance, the body used in Theatre of Images essentially has no aim or objective. It doesn't involve the perspective of a subject working toward self-realization. The body is simply a part of the whole and a medium for establishing a relationship. It is physicality that gets foregrounded by the relationship between the body and space, objects, or whatever else is there. I present "the body as a battlefield" through a process of reinterpreting this relationship in a political context and rearranging it in terms of power structures. These were the

thoughts in my head that led to a series of performances at "Hongo DOK".

O : I'm wondering why it was the Gulf War that was the trigger for these thoughts? I mean, around that period of time, I think there were several major events besides the Gulf War, like Sarajevo in 1993 and the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which could have equally made you to expose the body as a battlefield. It's natural that such a moment of realization is different for each person but why was it the Gulf War for you? You mentioned McLuhan, maybe it's related to that. Could you elaborate on this point?

Theatre is a Battlefield:

S : Basically, I regard theatre as "war". It's truly war, in the sense that a human body is indiscriminately consumed (in war). However, there was no body in the Gulf War. It was such a shock for theatre, that a war without bodies had raised the curtain of the 1990s. That is one reason.

The other is related to globalization by the media. I'm talking about television here. Massive amounts of information were being broadcast. Anyone and everyone was inundated with media images from television. I also realized that what I called "my own intuition" had vanished as well.

O : Naturally. As you were saying, war is related to theatre through the connective phrase "the body as a battlefield." If I may digress a little, the Gulf War gave the impression that it was manipulated by media technology. Among several literary

works being discussed at that time was (Jean) Baudrillard's "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" (*La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu*, 1991). To sum it up, he proposes that the perception of the Gulf War as a form of battle occurring in a hyper-real space dominated the media, hence the loss and concealment of the body. Such a formulation was implicit in the Gulf War victory. However, bombs were actually being dropped and oil fields were being destroyed by the multi-national forces. At that time, the press was thoroughly controlled. For instance, on TV we incessantly saw two water birds smeared black with oil which was pouring out of the oil field destroyed by the Iraqi army. People throughout the world saw only these two birds, but we were made to believe that all water-birds were black with oil. In this kind of manipulation, you recognize what was suppressed and hidden from us, so to speak. I think it's important to consider what significance this phenomenon held in your activities as a director in the 1990s. Furthermore, in connecting this phenomenon to representation, what does it mean when it is represented by a theatre artist, as opposed to a visual artist, a writer, or film maker? For instance, in what way do you see the Gulf War being related to your approach of 'the body as a battlefield'? Can you talk about that?

S : It is, after all, imagination. This might sound a bit unrefined, but we must re-train our imagination. The corpses of Iraqi soldiers were definitely buried alive in that desert that we saw on our TV screens. I can't imagine what kind of body it was

and what kind of meaning was attached to it. But I can't help being drawn to such a body, I mean a human body. In relation to theatre history, ever since Modernism, the body has ceased to be a vessel to express someone's character. It has been reduced to physical elements such as velocity or body temperature or weight. It has become the locus of data. As a result, we can only see a human body as a number and a quantity. If we look back, this was first seen in World War I. War in the twentieth century discovered conversion techniques which turned bodies into materials, quantities, data. The consequence of which is the corpses of Iraqi soldiers buried in the desert, which we now are unable to count. They're lying there, it seems to me, like "vanished shells".

O : Well it's not that you have actually seen them, so there are still just an infinite number of corpses in your imagination right? The situation of the collection of corpses in such a place, I think it would be possible to call a human condition, which you then make a reality.

S : Yes, I stage it.

O : You stage it. When you stage it, you have real actors. That means that their bodies will appear on stage. How do you realize your imagination in them? Do the actors appear on the stage representing corpses of Iraqi soldiers?

S : No, that's impossible. It is impossible to represent. That is why I had to consider representation as a fundamental problem.

It is not like explaining some specific incident, or replacing it with something else that demonstrates the act. This won't unveil the concealed body. No, what I was wondering was whether an original event gets repeated during a specific action, in the midst of executing that action?

O : You mean a repetition of form?

S : Or rather, a form exists first, although it is perhaps somewhat chaotic. For example, say I'm talking about a particular picture, a movie, a painting, or a text with the actors. I start creating a form from there. However, this is still no more than mere gesture amidst daily life as it is. No word helps. There has to be some definite event, in order to make it representative.

O : You mean what happened in Iraq?

S : No, that's not it.

O : What, then?

S : As a simple example, there is an exercise called "Restriction" in our movement training. An actor literally presses down the upper body of another actor: it is bound. It is bound and released again and again. When we repeated this exercise, one actress started escaping from the restriction in a very strange manner. It always happened in one particular scene, and it always happened to this particular actress in the particular restriction exercise. After rehearsal I asked her the reason. She said, "My first memory was that I learned how to write from my mother. She guided my right

hand with her right hand. But I couldn't write the word 'Ma'. Then my mother got upset and said, "Ma' is the word for mama, so you have to learn it no matter what! I won't forgive you." Then she pressed down on my body." Such a memory, presumably which she had suppressed thirty years ago, was evoked and repeated in this movement. I'm wondering if I can actualize a representation as such an event, such a situation. Given that I cannot represent the corpse of an Iraqi soldier, can I compete with that by utilizing the actor's inability to achieve representation?

O : So you are not representing what happened in Iraq are you?

S : No. It's impossible.

O : But you are thinking about it.

S : Such an idea cannot come to my mind unless I'm thinking about it.

O : In other words, even if you are thinking about it, you're not reproducing it, because it's impossible to reproduce via representation. The issue here is the form of representation, which confronts it -- and which, I suppose, cannot really be called "its representation." When you attempt to accomplish an action in the face of the untenability of representation, the problem of representation comes to light.

S : Such representation has to resonate with what's happening in the world at this very moment.

O : In short, you engage in the representation of the situation in Iraq by being involved in the impossibility of representation?

S : Yes.

Representing the Impossibility of Representation:

S : I'm repeating myself here, but it's an issue of imagination. We have to activate our political imagination in regard to what's happening in the world, what's being concealed, and what kind of body is being imprisoned. In terms of the necessary attitude for that, now is not the time to maintain the same theory and method constructed from a transcendent vantage-point. Especially when you tour abroad, you have to keep close contact with contingencies and rearrange the structure of your work all the time, on the spot. The significance of the specifics of a particular work is no longer important. The universality of the work no longer exists. This was our experience, for example, in Croatia a couple of years ago. It's a place where a machine-gun jumps out at you from the boot of a normal car. How do you deal with the impossibility of representation in such a place? You cannot fall back onto stereotypes and conventions. In a place where refugees are right there in the suburban hills, how can you relate to that situation, unless you can break through the perceptual boundaries of the situation?

What Globalization Exposes:

O : If that's the case, and you try to do it in Japan, we have the problem of subject matter, since we don't have refugees like Zagreb does. You made mention of what might be concealed by the word "globalization", but conversely, some things may be exposed by it. Many different problems are exposed and concealed in various forms. It's often the case when we talk about globalization that homogenization is raised as an issue. On the other hand, it sometimes exposes the existence of differences. Artists have to respond to that. For instance, Professor Arjun Appadurai from the University of Chicago raises the relationship between globalization and urban culture as an issue; from this he draws out an argument regarding the dilemma of the restroom in Bombay. In short, what globalization brought into question in the city of Bombay, was the system of hygiene and the dilemma of the public amenity. The dilemma of the public toilet must have existed in the slums of Bombay for a long time, but it surfaced as an urgent issue in light of globalization. This is a problem almost impossible to solve. Still, a project to build restrooms one by one was conceived. While it may be solved in the distant future, it presents a difficult dilemma. What one notes here is that homeless people in Japan don't confront the same issue of public toilets. They live in parks where they can use public toilets. Furthermore, while homelessness is a problem, whether it's a major dilemma or not is uncertain. There must be much more formidable problems in Japan, only it's not clear as to what they are. For

instance, the problem of the refugees in suburban Zagreb is a kind of exposed problem, I think. When you perform in Zagreb, you respond to that. I'm not saying that it's easy, but what do you try to respond to when you perform in Japan? What exists as a problem? What do you try to plug in, in terms of the problematic in Japanese culture which might exist as the impossibility of representation? The question is what the 'body as a battlefield' should be connected with, isn't it?

S : To put it simply, it is violence imposed on the body. Regarding my method of structuring performances, initially I expose the violent gaze which besieges the body. Exposed to direct examination, the power structure becomes rough. As soon as this occurs, media images strip away and reconstruct the structure. The body is concealed and the structure prevails suspended in mid-air - reactionary restrictions, brainwashing, disciplinary training...

O : Could you be more specific?

Origins of Domestic Violence:

S : For example, in my directing there is a signature scene of violence which these days most audiences equate with domestic violence and maltreatment. I would like to see this change in audience reaction as progress. It was not regarded that way a couple of years ago. When they saw the actress being pummelled and her back becoming blood-red, they would say things like "the marks look like angel's wings,"

or they felt the pulse of life in the rhythm of the beatings. (laughs) However, on the other hand, there's an impulsive reaction to fervently attribute this violence to individual human nature. They consider the cause of this violence a "darkness of the mind." This darkness of the mind is so elusive! How is it possible to comprehend the mental condition which is quite literally "darkness"?! (laughs) Why is critical domestic violence more prevalent than the violence we knew of in the past, such as husband and wife quarrels, or the strict disciplining (of a child)? The structure that produces domestic violence must be questioned and criticized in performance. That is what theatre should do.

O : To put it plainly, can we say it's a product of globalization?

S : Yes. And its' breeding ground is capitalism and the nation. On one hand, it encourages dismembering families. On the other hand, it parasitizes them. We are all aware of such hollow mechanisms. It isn't something which lies in (individual) "darkness."

O : If that's the case, it's extremely important how one responds to the condition of globalization or how one opposes it. In a sense, globalization is currently popular, while contemporary artists are looking for ways to deal with it. For instance, in the case of Japan, in the midst of globalization there is rising nationalism, which means excluding the outside, or the others.

S : Yes, racism is hidden in the shadows.

O : Globalization may have been conceived to allow for the possibility of differentiation, disruption, and individualism. But the reality under capitalism is the development of racialism by restricting select individual areas of movement by access-deprivation, thereby forcing a homogeneous norm. Thus, in the end it becomes apparent that power has come to control the body even more tightly.

S : It is like those campaign slogans which incite fear and hatred. They are encouraging us to supervise and rule more, as if they were Volunteer Self-Defense Forces.

O : It is for this reason that Japanese theatre is becoming more conservative.

S : As is often said, imminent opposition to globalization is hyper-nationalism. Hyper-nationalism sounds new, but actually it was known as imperialism in the past. The other thing is fundamentalism. Neither of these are an option for Japan, so nationalism begins to emerge. The reality is that, the "Japanese art revival" consists of a return to recent mysticism. Apart from works in other genres which have received attention, as far as theatre is concerned, it can never achieve success going in that direction. To be honest, it makes me squirm to think about a reactionary so-called National Theatre being critically regarded in the international theatre market, which under globalisation is thriving as art tourism.



Takuhon Cultural Entertainment and Japan:

O : You are an isolated figure within the overall current of Japanese theatre. In Japan a huge project has been developed to create the theatre for the nation. The 1997 opening of the New National Theatre (Hatsudai, Tokyo) devoted to modern theatre was not simply a celebratory event. There had been a strong movement in the 1990s in support of this opening. With this theatre as the leader, Japanese contemporary theatre began developing based on exceedingly nationalistic and parochial values. The fact that it was realized in 1997 epitomizes the developments in theatre in the 1990s. The theatre has hardly any links with the outside world. Even in dramas which use war as a motif, the problem of war is staged completely from a domestic view, in the same way Kato Norihiro addresses the problem of war-responsibility and ethics as a domestic problem in his "Post-Defeat Theory." For instance, Kaneshita Tatsuo wrote a play set in a concentration camp in the Philippines. But only Japanese people appear in the story in this Philippine concentration camp. This phenomenon is also found in "The Burmese Harp". This kind of insular sensibility has become a reality. The inter-communication with the world made possible by globalization, has come to naught. Most plays employ this approach. In its' endeavours to represent the reality of Japan, theatre is making a commitment to pop-phenomena, if anything. People call this Takuhon culture.

S : What does that mean?

O : Takuhon is a paper print on stone. If you place a piece of paper on the surface of a tombstone and tap it a couple of times, the letters are transposed to the surface of the paper. This kind of theatre doesn't deeply analyze and commit itself to the reality, it copies it like a Takuhon. You can tell whenever you see it. For instance, the theatre of Kerarino Sandrovich's Nylon 100°C company is Takuhon cultural entertainment. Here, you'll encounter a girl who you think you would actually meet if you were to go to a place like the reality in which she exists. Or a modern family is depicted, which you imagine might really exist somewhere in reality. However, it is, so to speak, a duplicated reality, like Takuhon, made into a sequence of scenic entertainments. I cannot possibly imagine that it produces anything that activates theatre or stimulates one's mind.

The Paradox of Tragedy and Dignity:

Theatre is a response to reality. For instance, Greek theatre was a response to reality. It portrays Oedipus' destruction, as the Gods' oracles foretold. Oedipus' tragedy lies in that he lives as the Gods predicted. However, according to Walter Benjamin's "The Origin of German Tragic Drama", it is wrong to only see this as human defeat. He argues that Oedipus defeats the Gods. Strangely, when watching Oedipus, the Greek audience disapproved of and rejected the

schemes of the Gods. This decision is what's crucial. In short, Greek tragedy exists as the place to reject the Gods whose orders controlled Greek civilisation. In depicting a human figure being destroyed by those orders they are rejecting the Gods. The nobility of Greek tragedy lies in the paradoxical appearance of the human figure. And it is when such a powerless human being rejects the Gods, despite their overwhelming advantage, that the Gods' fall begins. I see the possibility for theatre in the structure underlying this apparent tragedy. The 'impossibility of representation' problem is related to this. In short, in the reality of Japan, one's awareness of the impossibility of representation when representing is the issue. Recently, in the Festival de Théâtre des Amériques in Montreal, I saw a play with which I was fairly impressed. It kept me surprised for seven hours while watching it. It was a play about massacre called "Rwanda '94," which a collective called Groupov in Belgium created with a community in Rwanda. It was a work which raised the 'impossibility of representation' and the matter of decision for deliberation.

#### Limitations of Representation and the Theatre of Testimony:

Belgium is the nation which had ruled in Rwanda. After it returned Rwanda to independence, racial conflict re-ignited. This was one of the precipitating causes of the massacre. Some survived it. At the beginning of this play, one of these survivors testifies as to what she witnessed.

She does not tell us how to solve this problem, she only tells us what she has seen. The group went to Rwanda to collect various testimonies and to investigate the facts of the situation. They acquired various resources, materials, and documents and in the actual performance showed us footage of the massacre recorded secretly. Several texts, like the testimonies of the dead were also presented, to which people respond by saying it was not a good idea to expose such materials in public. Then a newscaster called BBB says, "No, we must see them," and systematically pursues an illumination of the facts. We watch and hear the progress as the play develops. We come to learn the facts of a massacre that couldn't be prevented, in great detail. No solutions for the prevention of the massacre are suggested. But what's important here is what we think. That is to say, in our overwhelming powerlessness we make a collective decision to renounce massacres. Theatre exists as the place for this decision. But it is done in tandem with someone's testimony. Survivors convey the voices of the dead in their stead. This is nothing other than the construction of history. It is the Greeks who discovered that testimony, as the construction of history and fundamental disapproval, are the very things achieved in theatrical space. This is the power of theatre that the significant theatre artists of the twentieth century have conveyed to us. People like Tadeusz Kantor definitely created such theatre. This form of theatre approaches the impossibility of representation in its connection with 'Testimony'. Significant

theatre in the twentieth century was established with the trigger of testimony. Kantor himself often said, "The dead testify." As one possibility for contemporary theatre, I'm thinking of the theatre as a place for testimonies which turn the past into history. As I listen to you, it seems that you also are involved in theatre which aims to do so.

S : Yes, this is what I have to do.

O : I've been engaged with plans for the LAOKOON Festival 2002, happening in Hamburg next year. I'm wondering about "History and Memory" as a unified theme. (Walter) Benjamin's "Awakening" will be the pivotal idea which Kantor said, "Something that is manifested only when one is faced with the END." However, we already passed the year 2000 and are now in 2001. We are standing at the beginning. Therefore, I think we need to shift our awareness a little. We're about to wake to 2001. If that's the case, what will we recall from the first moment of awakening? In the moment of awakening, the dreams we remember will be quickly forgotten. How can we analyze them and fix them before we do so? Is this itself not the work of history? I think it may well become a key



ZERO CATEGORY @Tokyo Metropolitan Art Space (1997)

motif for thought in contemporary theatre. That's because the performance of theatre in the "contemporaneous present" also means placing the past into the present and critically rearranging it. I'm thinking about the body you were talking about a little while ago, and the story of an actress who couldn't write the character for "Ma." I wonder if the situation which came from work like this can be connected with the testimonies of survivors.

The Trap of Confession:

S : Yes, it can. However, you would need a new approach to connect them. Otherwise, even if it's expressed on stage it ends up becoming a confession. How can we connect this confession with testimony? This very "how" is in question. We will probably talk about this in a more concrete fashion in the later section of work analysis... but now I can tell you that the reason why the circuit of confession to testimony appears to be broken is because the body is deprived. "The body" is deprived of its owner - the only one who is supposed to be able to tell the truth. It is of course achieved by media images. For instance, you mentioned Rwanda a little while ago, which I saw via satellite broadcast.

O : You mean the incident in Rwanda itself?

S : It was about the investigation of reasons why the massacre occurred, through testimonies of people involved. I think it was in 1997. I remember it well, partly

because I used some of the voices in the performance of "Zero Category."

O : It wasn't a play?

S : No, it wasn't. It was a documentary film called "The Tragedy of Rwanda," produced by a Canadian television station. What shocked me most was the sight of a prison. A massive number of people had been captured. Their cells were so small they couldn't lie down. They had to urinate at their feet while standing. The scars in their feet would rot and turn necrotic. Many people had to have their rotten feet amputated, and collapsed on the spot. Television cameras shot the spectacle. Of course no one uttered a word although one man tore off his rotting big toe and threw it at the camera. The television programme showed this sight to us. Recently also, a documentary film about the massacre in Bosnia was aired. It included detailed materials such as testimonies from the Dutch army officers on the front, who had been the core of the United Nations Forces. These officers withdrew and returned to their own country, even though they knew that it surely meant the massacre of these refugees. One testimony of such an officer was filled with bitterness. He started out saying something like, "At that time . . ." just like an actor says his lines. I see this is as confession. Not a single word from the voices of the people concerned, the victims, nor the survivors, who really should testify. These people are always seen just standing in utter amazement. There were voices here and there in the Bosnia one, but the Rwanda film had only pictures, not

a single word...anyway. I'm often driven to screaming, "Please say something!", but it's always the same picture of them

just standing there. If you depicted this situation as "Cattle before the slaughter", it would be understood but it will never reach the level of representation. These bodies are not "poetry". They are not literary phenomenon. If I may borrow your phrase Mr Otori, I think the bodies just as they are, standing in overwhelming powerlessness are the testimonies themselves. Testimony cannot be explained in speech or words. However, we can salvage testimony by directing our gaze to the body, or by sifting the imagination in situations of repetition. I earnestly hope to continue developing these methods more and more.

## Part II

O : So far we've talked about principles: how artists regard this world and when they make their works how they bridge their techniques of recognition and expression. So, let's change our focus to Kaitaisha's works performed during the nineties. You have said that since the Gulf War you have come to think "Theatre of Images" means an imperialist or capitalist way of suppressing human beings. That's one very important concern, and secondly, your works are actually changing aren't they? In your own analysis, what do you think such changes are about?

S : Ok. I'll reply in the context of our productions "THE DOG" and "TOKYO GHETTO".

As I said earlier, "THE DOG" was the first performance after a two year silence in which we gained new members and made a new studio at Hongo (Tokyo). I think you can say we came from the outdoors to a closed room. That was 1993, the year we went to the States. At that time, I used to think only two things; how do I amputate "Theatre of Images"(from our work), and the political nature of the body. "TOKYO GHETTO" was first performed in 1995 and toured to Europe and Korea. Its theme was how to represent human bodies exposed to violence. In method I'd become more aware of "deconstruction" or "inner-breaking" as a way of performing. Why was this work so provocative to European spectators at that time? I would like to summarise this now.

Performance, Violence, Provocation:

O : What was so provocative?

S : It was the direct use of human bodies for violence. A man actually beat the back of a woman for as long as he could physically endure. He continued to beat her for 20 minutes.

O : Violence used as the beating of another's body?

S : This is a prohibited thing. Within European stage expression, violence is only suggested, is just represented.

O : They don't actually hit on stage.

S : On the stage, usually violence is only suggested/represented. I've seen the action

of sex on stage and people cutting their own bodies. But presenting this kind of violence on stage, of one body to another in a way so as to incur suitable damage, is taboo.

O : To speak conventionally, in hitting scenes you hit your own hand right? This is the way used in most movie or dramas, but you actually hit.

S : Yes, I tried to show through the scene I spoke of, the possibility of non-fictionalism. The fact of beating and the action of continuous beating until its limit; meaning the very fact and its continuous action, and that's all. I made a stage consisting of only these two things: facts and actions. One of the most important things as a director was not to give the spectators any explanations about these actions. I didn't show any reasons, motives or factors which would account for why he beat her. I made it impossible to judge cause-effect and good-bad until the theatre was full of living anxiety.

When I think about it now, this approach may have been the reason why this work was so provocative. At any rate, violence and anxiety, as I was told on tour, has a positive function and can communicate in relation to the global representation of theatre. And another thing was Orientalism.

O : Asia!?

S : No, Orient. I thought the boundary between East and West no longer existed.

O : You mean, they have it but you don't?

From East-West to South-North:

S : Yes, I presented the boundary between South and North.

O : Its a little hard to understand what you are saying, so I will ask a little more precisely. You mean to say the notion of human bodies as it were, exists as part of a system, and more importantly, you are trying to figure out how to manipulate that. Perhaps if you share your thoughts about the meaning behind the various techniques you have employed in this context...

S : Movement.

O : If you think in terms of movement, whether it be the bodies of Noh or Kabuki, or the Butoh body, I would guess that they are all different. But those stages have come about over a long period by thinking about the body of the actor.

S : No, they're the same. Everyone is saying the same thing.

O : So, it isn't different to what I was saying right, is that what you mean?

S : For example, Zeami's "Hana"(flower), Artaud's "Double", "Hakusei"(Taxidermy) of Hijikata Tatsumi, Kecak, Kathakali, "Contraction" of Martha Graham, Contact Improvisation, Classical Ballet, Forsythe's "Neglected bodies", all of them have grown from one shared root. They are all related to incest. In other words, they are fundamentally based on whether it is

possible to move without prohibition.

Yes, Artaud said "Human beings aren't created well, there is no order, harmony, nor anything." Hijikata communicated "Being born is an improvisation". Basically I interpret what he means, for humans being born is a system. That's what I hear. As Adorno says, "I am without doubt living the age of Enlightenment". However, my body, the contemporary body, whichever way you see it, is only being lived as a result of (the) Enlightenment. Therefore, the aim of freeing the human body means transforming oneself into a living thing other than 'human' and unpacking formalised movement processes. Obviously others have also done this work.

O : So you're saying there's nothing unique to Noh or Kabuki. And even aside from Noh and Kabuki, that Martha Graham and classical Ballet are doing the same thing. In fact you're saying all have body representation in common. In this sense, East-West thinking is problematic isn't it.

S : Geo-politically speaking, this boundary has already been discarded. Since the Cold War era there has been a USA-Russian space strategy. Currently the body is the point of contact in the theatre-site of cultural practice. Cultural boundaries are being strongly recognised in order to protect cultural identity.

I am speaking not only of Europe but it was something I felt last year in Hong-Kong as well. Anyway, this desire for restoring "stability" must be rejected.

O : I see. So is the idea that "East and

West" becomes insignificant as the problem of South-North emerges?

S : Its class-division, the separation of classes.

O : Can you speak a little more about the relationships between the South-North problem and the body?

The Asian Body Myth:

S : Its a problem of how to connect the theatrical act of repetition with the impossibility of expressing the Rwandan refugee problem, which is related politically and historically to confession and testimony.

Let me recall an event, was it 1995, at the opening performance of "TOKYO GHETTO". I remember your impression when you saw the bodies of the actresses. You said," (they look like) the Joy Division for the Japanese military!" This made me a bit bolder, as they had done nothing but sit for some time on stools. And at that time, quite a few overseas producers had begun to visit our studio. Most of them didn't appear too pleased. Someone said, "What I want to see is Asian kindness!"

In Asia, there's been events like the Nanking Massacre and the Sahako (Pol Pot's concentration camps). Ignoring this is worrisome. These events must not be forgotten. It is an artist's responsibility not to allow a structure capable of producing such events to go unchallenged.

My stage becomes quieter, and more than before, the bodies are exposed. I am dealing with naked bodies. The materiality

of bodies - sweat, weight, skin, blood, tears - which I thought I had discarded when I returned to the studio. How do I relate them to history?

And yet again, the other thing I become aware of is "Theatre of Images". I said earlier "trans-nationalism" was in opposition to globalization. In spite of this, at the risk of being contradictory, I have begun to think of Theatre of Images as a possibility.

O : Do you think it is advantageous?

S : Yes, because it's trans-nationalism, from the view of Theatre of Images.

O : So for you trans-nationalism is an image.

S : Everybody is in closed spaces digging holes in various ways in the hope of self-realization. Actually, they are only appearing to dig. But these bodies are actually just parts of the overall structure. As I pointed out before, these bodies will always be mediums or objects.

Returning to our earlier discussion, power and force are the things that have been intentionally erased. Especially, in the prevailing structure of Theatre of Images, in most cases it happens with no compulsion from anyone. In this way, each body appears independent or free, presenting a world in which spectators imagine people moving by their own will.

This isn't easily criticised, as "Peace" is stated as the goal while politics and power relations are ignored.

No one can speak ill of autonomy or

peace, and so, this system is world-wide. In answer to the Theatre of Images I say "Wars are the result of aiming for peace".

### **C o l l a p s i n g   B o r d e r s   a n d Borderlessness:**

O : In this regard, Theatre of Images is linked to the myth of the universality of theatrical representation. That is to say, theatre can be understood all over the world. So someone says, "this theatre is universal." That means, for example this superb theatre is not only understood by Japanese but also by Americans, and will even have value in Africa. This method of making immutable myths relevant to all is where Theatre of Images comes in.

So, unlike the written language of conventional theatre, Theatre of Images doesn't use much language. Although I'm sure there is a locality even in a language of images as well.

When people say dance is easier to understand than theatre when looking at it for the first time, or when they use the word "borderless" without much thought, the notion of Theatre of Images as global is being celebrated. But actually, people began to recognise in the 90s that this situation must be criticised.

S : Yes, in my way there is nothing but "kaitai" (deconstruction). In order to criticise I used to create functional disorder from within the structure - the way of inner collapse. But that is far from enough. Something must be "amputated".

I used to think the various elements such as light, object, voice, picture slicing

through the space as "Amputation" but I misunderstood this as scenographic construction. But it's not, it's not that... it's "meaning" that is desired. It is "meaning" that amputates Theatre of Images, or it could be called language. At that time, "meaning" for me meant Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and Gender.

I used them for duration, the duration of the standard image until its limit, at which the point to "amputate" would come.

### **Bodies with AIDS:**

O : In relation to the States of 1980s, theatre was very politicised, in '88-'89 in particular. "Politics of representation" was often used in those days, so it became very important to practitioners to express and problematize how they made their works in the relation to reality and cultural issues. For those on stage it was also an important issue.

For example, the problem of how directors and others deal with bodies which are actually collapsing inside. Numbers of these people were on the increase in cities everywhere, relatives, people close to you, performers on stage, or even you yourself, all of which changed how human bodies were seen. Reza Abdoh (1963-1995), who died in 1995, said that the first thing he did when he first recognised he had AIDS was to look at his excretions. He began to look at his excretions differently to the way he had seen them before.

Excretions come out from the inside and are, as it were, both inner and outer parts of the body. He scrutinised them closely, their texture, shape, colour, and their viscosity. It



was a turning point. The change in the way of seeing his own excretions was a point of departure for a change in seeing his entire body and so too, other bodies. Since coming to exist in this state, when making his performances, physical states of the performers became very important. In his theatre the exposed body received special attention. His theatre in 1988 and 1989 and into the 1990s was closely related to the contemporary human state. So the physical state of people itself had become the site of theatre.

Therefore the collapse of Theatre of Images started from the inside, from its technique of expressivity. It was an important issue for artists whether they noticed the breakdown of the theatre of images, or if they subscribed to it. I don't think when you recognise this phenomenon is the issue. I think the recognition of the issue is the most important point.

You said, "I amputate by meaning". So does Reza Abdoh, whose productions look like Theatre of Images. With his spectacular productions Abdoh is regarded as the Robert Wilson of his generation. He made formative works on a very large scale.

S : Was it in a proscenium?

O : He used factory-like locations. In seeing photos from those productions, I had the impression they also had been amputated by meaning from the Theatre of Images. I think this was seen and felt by many directors during the transition

from 1980s to 1990s, when the world was progressing toward a critical state. This time, as you were saying in relation to the Gulf War, was your turning point. Although Abdoh died in 1995, I think things had already begun to change. Including the things you have mentioned, how have you come to appreciate those changes?

The Aspect of Amputation in the Theatre Space:

S : I want to relate an experience during the production of "TOKYO GHETTO" in Zagreb, Croatia. The performance was interrupted twice by a spectator intervening in the performance. I realised that neither the boundary between the stage and seats nor the joining of the two were important. I think the precise moment of that interruption was very important. It was only a few seconds, and happened twice, but a division appeared at those moment. A man was hitting a woman. Seeing that, the spectator came to the stage from his seat, and pulled the legs out from under him yelling "Stop it!" The actor fell down, and spectators started making a lot of noise. He thought the actor looked back at him



TOKYO GHETTO - ORGIE @ Eurokaz Festival, Croatia (1996)

angrily, as if to say 'back off!'

But the actor didn't stop, and began hitting her again so some of the spectators started an uproar, calling out "Stop it!" one after another. He got up heroically amidst the noise, and pulled the actor away again. But without looking back the actor started to hit her again. If the audience member repeated it a third time, the situation would have got out of hand, so I was preparing to get up on stage to say "Please continue watching the show until the end", but the scene changed before there was time and the performance succeeded in continuing. What I mean to say is, maybe he thought the actor would look back at him. I think he went up on stage hoping the actor would look at him. Meaning he met something he didn't expect, another completely different from him. He was exposed to the Other. I think a split appeared there. In other words, a hidden division which cannot usually be seen appeared. You could see the dividing line rip the space open between the two men. In this moment the essence of their bodies normally confined by Image was revealed by accident.

O : To the spectators ?

S : Yes, to everyone.

O : To the spectator who got up as well?

S : Yes, perhaps, it was he who saw it most. After the performance when asked by a German journalist why he intervened in the performance he went on and on about the act. According to the article, he spoke about the couple living next door.

He said he could hear the husband beating his wife every night. He wanted to stop it, but couldn't because he looked far stronger. He said he counted how many times he hit her every night, while she screamed. He said until then he had been a pathetic individual but felt at the theatre that night at long last he had succeeded in stopping violence.

O : What year was that?

S : 1996 at the Eurokaz Festival. It was an international theatre festival which specially focused on theatre at the forefront of the next generation. That experience had such a big impact on me.

It would be easy to say Theatre of Images has changed to "Theatre of Body", but it wouldn't be true. To be precise, Theatre of Images is amputated by meaning or by accident. That momentary division has revealed that the body is confined and unable to express. At the site of amputation of the Theatre of Images, the formation of "Theatre of Body" can be seen.

Away from Drama and Community:

O : You came across this by accident. But, it was in your sub-conscious wasn't it? Up until that time you weren't aware of it, but you recognised the division by the accident, didn't you?

Listening to you I remember Kantor wrote about the dividing line. While known as the theatre death, he wanted to engage with people outside the existent cultural or religious bodies. People who have been exiled are destined to have various

experiences, and by accepting their destiny, they who were 'disappeared' return. When he or she returns to a community, while he or she may seem ordinary, they aren't. They remain on the doorstep of the community, preferring to stand and look in from there. Its a very strange scene but in his opinion performers have always been such people, since their origins. Their faces and shape are the same as ordinary people, but they are far from being like us, they have a different nature. Kantor wrote this in his manifesto "Theater of Death"; "It is necessary to recover the primeval force of the shock taking place at the moment when opposite a man (the viewer) there stood for the first time, a man (the actor) deceptively similar to us yet at the same time infinitely foreign, beyond an impassable barrier."

In this moment we have a terrible sense of foreboding, fearfully expecting to see the birth of a new strain of human. Kantor believed this was what theatre was for. When examining exactly what happens at such a moment - as I have wanted to change our discussion to focus on the purpose of audience - the audience are able through discovery to glimpse an opportunity to transform. I agree with him. With this in mind, existence in the world of the performer must be completely different from existence here, and they must be abject. That is the structural nature of theatre.

It becomes apparent from what you have said, although not knowing of Kantor's philosophy of "Theatre of Death" you are saying the same thing. Many people think theatre is primarily based on sympathy because since ancient Greek drama the

affinitive relationship between audience and performance has always been regarded as important. That's why people believe ancient theatres in Greece were round.

S : Yes, it is often said so.

O : And in the case of modern theatres, there is a stage slightly above the seats, which are like a bed for catfish. So, when someone says "let's make a round theatre outdoors in order to get rid of such flat atmosphere..."

S : (laughing) Yes.

O : But that is far from the nature of theatre. This talk has nothing whatsoever to do with theatre. So, it is the dramatic event which incidentally becomes clearer by this kind of accident. And this event enables us to recognise the essential theatrical structure. Finally, please tell what you're concerned with now.

Bodies of War and Phantom Pain:

S : Bodies of War. Bodies to be produced for wars of the future, bodies discovered through past wars. The former is related with the aforementioned "Theatre of Body", which will enable us to see past. As a technique, it is similar to physical movement, but in my image it means an uncontrollable "crowd", a crowd which disappears in the light. These are the dead bodies of Iraqi soldiers, you could call them the dead army. Anyway, I want to reveal the various dividing lines between the classes of South and North. The latter

is what I call "neuro-system" or the state of "phantom pain". It can be compared to a loss of body perception due to amputation, a kind of virtual actuality.

O : Like the pain you feel in a lost leg?

S : Yes, it is an illusion. The movement of a leg torn off, the sensation of the limbless living body, are shown in our system of "senses" and "atmosphere". I want to clearly specify what these things are in a body system. So I'm running with this process.

O : How have you come to do this?

S : In 1998, most of the membership changed, and the new young members were neither actors or actresses nor dancers. They had no intention of becoming so. As it is difficult to categorise accurately, maybe they can just be called bodies. It is so important for me to be able to confront such bodies which are starting from scratch, uninformed by process.

To summarise, I want to say that the "Theatre of Body" includes crisis within its structure: a crisis that is recollected in "Theatre of Images". If amputation is unsuccessful, many spectators will be satisfied and immediately consume the image. It's like walking a tightrope.

It is said that the bodies I present are very real. But, this is a fallacy, real bodies do not, they cannot exist. Like I said before, we live within the result, within the system, so we don't exist, we only experience our bodies. This basically is impossible to discuss. The so-called real

as used to oppose the virtual is merely part of an overall 'image language'. In this way paradoxically, it prevails all over the world at once. By contrast, that is far removed from what I am doing. I use object materials such as sweat, blood, and pain, not because they are real but because they are virtual. Virtual things are more important. How can we perceive our arms, legs, bodies as specks on the planet? This actuality is an urgent problem in the progress of media technology. Secondly, in the beginning I thought a lot about cloned bodies. The more advanced clone technology, the less power nations have, as they make nations redundant. This is because control and production of labour for which capitalism has always depended on nations, would become possible with no government interference. Capitalism could produce labour independently, which is unacceptable to nations. So, as globalization advances, the existence of the human clone offers a moral ambivalence which is unsolvable.

Just now I was saying new members were just bodies. I saw an opportunity in them to represent the human clone. For example to present bodies as inorganic substances which have lost the tension of living. These bodies don't see this world. They are just shown scenes on the surface of their eyes. For example, is it possible to express the clone through the physical quality of a mineral substance? At present I haven't been able to find a way, but I'm trying. Anyway, I find it so important to recognise that our bodies are not in our possession yet. Lastly I want to make war bodies historical. At the risk of making

a foregone conclusion, I will make the connection between these bodies and "shell-shocked" bodies which appeared first after WWI. Moreover, they were "Bodies in deep trenches". It is the syndrome Freud discovered, where soldiers after months at the front hide in deep trenches.

This autumn, we're going to perform around Europe and the States for almost three months. Those bodies uncovered in the beginning of the 20th century will be rediscovered at the beginning of this century. I want to converse with audiences from all over the world through these performances.

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