[12]The dissertation *The Bunraku Puppet Theatre since 1945 to 1964: Changes in Administration and Organization*, by Julianne K. Boyd includes important information about the period of formation of the Bunraku Kyōkai.

CHAPTER IX

THE MODERN THEATRE: SHIMPA

Origins of the Shimpa *Movement: Sudō Sadanori*

The word *shimpageki* means "new school drama" and is used (mostly in its abbreviated form *shimpa*) to designate a specific form of theatre, the first to develop outside the *kabuki* world after the Meiji Restoration as an attempt to modernize and westernize Japan's drama. The name began to appear in the newspapers starting from the very first years of our century to distinguish the drama of the "new school" from that of the "old school" (*kyūha*), that is, of *kabuki*.[1]

It was unavoidable that the theatre would join the general movement of change that swept Japan after the opening of the country to western influence. The efforts of the *kabuki* and *bunraku* professionals to modernize their art produced only sporadic results of short duration, and certainly did not transform those genres into forms of westernized spoken theatre. They instead generated today's *kabuki* and *bunraku*, which present a change from the pre-Meiji outlook something like that accomplished in the performances of many operas in the West in which music, libretto, and basic acting style have remained much the same, while modern technical resources have been incorporated.

The lack of participation by professional actors in the creation of a modern theatre resulted in amateurism and low levels of acting skills in the courageous pioneers. Not much could be expected from the first groups that dared to present themselves to the public without acting training and without a clear idea of what a modern style should look like; this was largely because the only experience of theatrical performance

in Japan was that of the traditional performing arts, and direct experience of western theatre was not yet available to the young amateurs.

Despite the lack of professionalism and a model for modernization, one thing was very clear in the mind of Sudō Sadanori (1867-1907), who is considered the founder of *shimpa*: theatre was to be an instrument of political propaganda against the conservative regime.

The first expressions of this goal occurred in conjunction with a tense political situation. In 1884 the conservative government dissolved the major opposition force, the Liberal Party (*Jiyūtō*), of which Sudō was a militant member, and forbade all political rallies. A group mostly made up of young militants decided to continue the fight against the government with the means left at their disposal, such as lectures, newspaper articles, and, eventually, the theatre. These young people called themselves *sōshi*, a word that means both "courageous young man" and "political bully" or "henchman." Several *sōshi* were lawless ruffians, who did not shy away from violent revolutionary actions, and often got into trouble with the police. Their political aims of freedom were unfocused, and their unrest was expressed primarily as a manifestation of a sense of frustration with the conservative leadership, rather than as the execution of a clear and systematic plan of action.

A group of *sōshi* came together under Sadanori's leadership and formed the Dainippon Geigeki Kyōfūkai (Great Japan Society for the Reformation of the Theatre), one of the many "improvement societies" born in the middle eighties to promote the westernization of some aspect of life or culture, this time, however, with the aim of using theatre for the purpose of liberal political opposition against the conservative government. The first performance took place in Osaka in December 1888.

Rather than epoch-making events, this and similar performances were generally considered by contemporaries as a kind of a curiosity, an odd attempt by amateurs to present theatre outside the monopoly of the *kabuki* establishment. Many failed to recognize until much later the importance of a movement that broke the ice in the process of thrusting Japan into the stream of contemporary spoken drama, introduced new theatre customs such as darkened auditoriums and elaborate

stage lighting, added the new dramatic subject of social and political struggle, re-introduced women to the stage, and, above all, showed the possibility of surviving outside the traditional theatre monopoly.

The founder of *shimpa*, Sudō Sadanori—a Kyoto policeman turned journalist, a *sōshi*, and eventually a full time actor—spent twenty years of his short life mostly touring the provinces, but reaping only scattered success in the big cities where he could not last long in competition with both the professional *kabuki* theatre and the offspring of his own reform, such as the more aggressive and better organized troupe of Kawakami Otojirō. Sudō died at forty, in the dressing room of a Kobe theatre. On the memorial erected in his honor in 1937 in the cemetery of the Tennōji temple of Osaka an inscription describes him as the "father of the new theatre."

Kawakami Otojirō

If Sudō was the first to show the possibility of survival outside the *kabuki* world, Kawakami Otojirō (1864-1911) succeeded in proving much more: that stardom and financial reward independent from *kabuki* were possible even for a man of obscure origins without any family connections with the professional theatre world.

Kawakami's life reads like a fast-paced adventure novel, a sequence of continuous changes, failures, new enterprises, and a series of "firsts" in the Japanese theatre world.[2] Though he never achieved greatness in the quality of his performances as an actor, his role as a catalyst in the process of forming Japan's new theatre was unique. Kawakami's family had served for generations as official purveyors under the feudal lords of Hakata in Kyūshū. He left home at fourteen and started a series of diverse experiences: among others, as an apprentice in a Buddhist temple, as a pupil of the famous scholar Fukuzawa Yūkichi at Keiō University, as a policeman, and as a political propagandist. In 1887, he was on stage with *kabuki* actors in Kyoto, his role being to improvise outside the curtain at those points where the text broke off. In 1888, he became the disciple of a famous Osaka *rakugo* storyteller, Katsura Bun'nosuke, and used his new skill to put together his original

Oppekepe bushi, a satirical ballad sung to a very popular tune composed by Katsura Tōbei, a storyteller of the same school. The ballad's onomatopoeic name derived from the sound of the trumpet which opened its refrain. The ballad made Kawakami famous three years later, when he performed in Tokyo in 1891 with his new company formed in imitation of Sudō's *sōshi* theatre. He appeared at the Nakamura-za in plays not worth remembering, gaining his success because of his entr'acte performance of the *Okkepeke bushi*, which he sang while dashing like a swashbuckler in front of a golden screen with a Japanese flag in his hand. His success was so great that even the major *kabuki* stars went to see him.

Kawakami is responsible for the introduction of such "sensations" from the West as the changing of scenery in darkness, the new system of lighting the stage while the orchestra is darkened, and the "authentic reportage" drama in which in a relatively realistic way he presented war episodes from the Chinese campaign of 1894/95. His war plays were enormously successful, gaining a better public reception than the corresponding war plays done by *kabuki* actors. To enhance the patriotic atmosphere he had soldiers and sailors fight in formal uniform, and instructed the audience to bow when the name of the Emperor was mentioned. He traveled to Korea to inspect the front-line and then produced his most successful play, *Kawakami Otojirō senchi kembunki* (Kawakami Otojirō Reporting from the Battle Field, 1894) in which he played himself in the role of a reporter at the front line witnessing the valiant deeds of the Japanese heroes. For the first time, *shimpa* won over *kabuki*, and for the first time the most important *kabuki* stage, Tokyo's Kabuki-za, was at *shimpa*'s disposal.

Kawakami was also the first to present Japanese theatre abroad. He toured with his company to America, England, France, Germany, and Russia. As a consequence of his experiences abroad Kawakami introduced western-style tickets and shortened the duration of his shows. He pioneered childrens' theatre in 1903. Also in 1903 he began the presentation of western masterpieces: he began by staging his adaptation of *Othello*, and followed it between 1903 and 1906 with *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and plays by Maeterlinck and Sardou.

Contemporary sources agree in judging rather harshly the quality of Kawakami's performances. It is clear that his forte was sensationalism, not art. In his war plays the secret of his success was a rhetorical, sentimental appeal to patriotism, and an ostentatious, one-sided glorification of valiant Japanese heroes. Photographs of the time show cheap operetta-like sets and exaggerated, melodramatic gestures. In the play *Itagaki-kun sōnan jikki* (The True Story of Itagaki's Misfortunes, 1891) during the scene of the attempted murder of the famous liberal politician, Itagaki Taisuke, he had actors in police uniforms suddenly appear on the *hanamichi*, so that the audience momentarily believed in a real intervention by the police. His presentation of western masterpieces could hardly give an idea of the originals; he often relied on western curiosities such as introducing Hamlet by having him make a sensational entrance on a bicycle.

It is doubtful whether the type of Japanese theatre shown by Kawakami abroad was a service to the cause of international exchange. The purpose of his foreign trip originally had been to study the western theatre, not to perform. An enterprising theatre manager in San Francisco, however, induced him to go on the stage with his fellow actors. Part of the mixed success was due to his wife, Kawakami Sadayakko (1872-1946), who was not an actress, but, before her marriage, had been a professionally trained, high class *geisha*. She was therefore capable of fascinating European audiences who had never seen the live performance of a *geisha*.[3]

It is clear that Kawakami was successful both in Japan and abroad as long as he could capitalize on spectacular or emotional elements which did not require real acting skills. Their very lack of acting skills, however, gave to the performances of his troupe a freshness unknown to the stereotyped traditional models. While most *kabuki* plays repeated themes that were becoming increasingly obsolete, Kawakami's presentations exploited the hottest issues of the day. While the language of *kabuki* was sounding more and more like something from the past, Kawakami's colloquialisms reflected the latest, rapidly changing expressions of "modernized" society. Kawakami did not abolish the convention of female impersonation in *shimpa*, but selectively used actresses for certain female roles, thereby initiating a new

tradition of female stars on the Japanese stage. In 1908 he established the first modern school for actresses, the Teikoku Joyū Yōseijo (Imperial Actresses School), which was headed by his wife Sadayakko. His last enterprise was the building of a new theatre, the Teikokuza, in Osaka, which he hoped would become the center for the "true theatre." Shortly after opening the new house in 1911 he died, aged forty-seven.

Seibikan and Other Companies

During Kawakami's time, realization of the need to improve the quality of acting and the standards of the plays was at the root of efforts by several of the most serious theatre reformers. Several groups were formed, those especially worthy of mention being the Seibikan, the Seibidan, the Isami-engeki, and the Hongōza.

The Seibikan was short-lived; it performed only one program in Tokyo in 1891. It was the brainchild of Yoda Gakkai (1833-1909), a scholar and theatre critic who gave to the company the purpose of high artistic ideals exclusive of political concerns. It was the Seibikan who introduced young Ii Yōhō (1871-1932), an actor who was to become very famous as a *shimpa* star for decades; the troupe also was the first to break the ban on theatrical companies comprising both men and women.

The Seibidan also was a short-lived effort to stress quality over sensationalism. It was founded in 1896 by an ex-member of Kawakami's troupe, Takada Minoru (1871-1916), who is credited, with such collaborators as Kitamura Rokurō (1871-1961) with having set the standards for the best achievements of *shimpa*. In 1898 the name Seibidan disappeared from the records, but Takada's teaching about the importance of *iki* (breathing) and his exemplary dedication to the art of acting as a technique of realistic expression had great importance in the process of finding a serious new professionalism within *shimpa*. Takada died at forty-six, in 1915. Kitamura, an offshoot of the Seibidan, founded a school of acting which continued the same methods.

The Isami-engeki was formed in 1895 by the actors Ii Yōhō, Satō Toshizō (1869-1945), and Mizuno Yoshimi (1863-1928; the name I-Sa-Mi was formed with the initial syllable of

each actor's name). Ii was the most popular among the *shimpa* actors. A very handsome and talented performer, Ii is also remembered for his serious effort to rediscover for the new theatre treasures of traditional playwriting or new interpretations of Japanese legends as presented by important contemporary authors. Famous are his cycle of eight plays, *Chikamatsu kenkyū-geki* (Research Plays on Chikamatsu), and *Tamakushige futari Urashima*, novelist Mori Ogai's philosophical adaptation of the Urashima Tarō legend. The contribution of such talented modern writers as Mori Ogai (1862-1922), and the dramatization of famous contemporary tragic novels such as Tokutomi Roka's *Hototogisu* (The Cuckoo) and Ozaki Kōyō's *Konjiki yasha* (A Demon of Gold) provided the *shimpa* stage with a new repertory representative of contemporary Japanese culture, quite different from whatever Kawakami had been dressing up to display his showmanship.

The Golden Age of Shimpa

The first decade of the twentieth century was a period of prosperity and busy activity for *shimpa*. The death of the two major *kabuki* stars Kikugorō and Danjūrō in 1903 had left a great vacuum in the Tokyo theatre. The beginning of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 inspired *shimpa* to revive the genre of war plays which had been extremely well received at the time of the Sino-Japanese War. The success of war plays by different *shimpa* groups was such that an invitation was extended to *kabuki* actors to produce one of them jointly. The invitation was not accepted, but *kabuki* actors did themselves produce a *shimpa* war play—a sign of the new importance reached by *shimpa* on the Tokyo scene. *Shimpa* was taking a vigorous leadership in the professional theatre world not only by choosing timely themes for its plays (war plays and plays adapted from successful novels and newspaper serials), but also because of the input of serious and well trained actors such as Ii and the female impersonator Kawai Takeo, son of a *kabuki* actor and therefore belonging by birth to the traditional theatre establishment. This "great age" of *shimpa* saw times in which *shimpa* plays were simultaneously presented at three

different Tokyo theatres: a famous example is that of the three competing productions of *Hototogisu* running at the same time a few blocks away from each other.

In 1907 two hundred thirty *shimpa* actors formed a Grand Coalition of New Actors (*Shinhaiyū daidō danketsu*), which lasted only two months, but was a clear indication of the strength and diffusion reached by the *shimpa* movement in a period of two decades. Novelists whose work had been dramatized for *shimpa* use began to write original dramas. The most important among them was Mayama Seika (1878-1948). A number of successes of this period are still performed as "classics" of the *shimpa* repertory: an example is the play derived from Izumi Kyōka's novel, *Onnakeizu* (A Woman's Chronicle), a tragic love story with strong sentimental overtones, that opened in 1909.

The Decadence of Shimpa

The beginning of *shimpa*'s decadence coincides with the rise of *shingeki*. The function of *shimpa* as a catalyzer of new theatrical energies seemed soon to be exhausted. Attempts to revive audience interest, such as Inoue Masao's production of western plays with his new Shinjidaigeki Kyōkai (Association for the New Epoch Theatre, founded 1911), or Kawai Takeo's production of such plays as Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* with his Kōshū Gekidan (Public Theater Company, founded 1913), were unsuccessful.

Shimpa went through very difficult years during the Taishō period (1912-1926). Even the most popular stars such as Ii and Kawai could hardly survive; the famous female impersonator Hanayagi Shōtarō, however, scored some success with his *geisha* roles, which became and have remained very important in the *shimpa* repertory.

In 1929 the Shōchiku Company took the initiative of bringing together all *shimpa* performers and managing regular performances. *Shimpa* was slowly taking its place in the Tokyo theatre establishment, in a new position, well defined by Inoue Masao in 1937, of *chūkan engeki*, the "theatre in-between" *kabuki* and *shingeki*.

Around this time the actress Mizutani Yaeko (born in 1905), whose long career saw her rise to legendary status, was already enriching *shimpa* with her great acting and introducing a repertory of sentimental dramas with melodramatic heroines against the backdrop of the *demi-monde*.

Shimpa *from World War II*

During World War II three *shimpa* companies were active, Engekidōjō (The Theatre Studio) directed by Inoue Masao; Geijutsuza (Art Theatre), directed by Mizutani Yaeko; and Honryū Shimpa (Main Stream Shimpa), directed by Kitamura Rokurō and Kawai Takeo. The revival of patriotic plays helped the fortunes of *shimpa*, but the end of the war opened a serious crisis of survival. The great post-war boom of *shingeki* attracted some of the best *shimpa* actors to the rival field, making the *shimpa*'s situation even more critical. Finally, in 1950 all remaining *shimpa* performers came together in a company called Gekidan Shimpa, which relied heavily on the fame of Mizutani Yaeko and Hanayagi Shōtarō for a hoped-for revival. The famous Kubota Mantarō, Kawaguchi Matsutarō, and Nakano Minoru wrote some successful plays for *shimpa*. *Shimpa* became a synomym for light, sentimental, old fashioned drama, geared above all to an audience made up primarily of housewives, and performed in a style in between the realism of *shingeki* and the traditional stylization of *kabuki*.

Shimpa was born in the Meiji period, during which time it reached the zenith of its success. There have been recent attempts to introduce *shingeki*-like plays and performance style into *shimpa*. In a true sense, however, *shimpa* still reflects the uncertain period of Japan's early modernization, and embodies a nostalgia for what today is felt as the old-fashioned, strangely distant, mixed esthetic tastes of a period when Japan was being introduced to the culture of the West.

NOTES

[1]Komiya, ed. *Japanese Music and Drama in the Meiji Era*, 270.

[2]Ortolani, "Nō, Kabuki and New Theatre Actors in the Theatrical Reforms of Meiji Japan (1868-1912)," 113.

[3]See an attempt to interpret the importance of Sadayakko's performances in Europe in Savarese, "La peripezia emblematica di Sada Yacco."

CHAPTER X

SHINGEKI: THE NEW DRAMA

The Period of Trial Plays (1906-1913)[1]

The pioneers of *shimpa* had shown little interest in the serious study of western drama as a literary genre and as a guiding light in the process of modernizing the Japanese theatre. The occasional performances of great western plays by *shimpa* companies previous to *shingeki*'s beginnings were experiments in superficial sensationalism; even in the golden era of *shimpa*, the repertory remained made up primarily of makeshift Japanese plays which did not even try to achieve literary value. *Shimpa* was born in the ebullient arena of active, sometimes violent, political confrontation, developed in a commercial direction, and stabilized under the management of the very same Shōchiku company that ruled the *kabuki* world.

Shingeki, on the contrary, was born around two major Tokyo universities. From the very beginning the serious study, translation, and performance of western dramatic literature, as well as the development of a Japanese dramatic literature comparable in value to that of the West, have been central to the *shingeki* effort at creating a modern theatre in Japan. These principles were essential to at least some of the *shingeki* pioneers, who shunned commercialism, and worked mostly outside Japan's professional entertainment world.

A) ***Tsubouchi Shōyō.*** The establishment of the Bungei Kyōkai (Literary Association, 1906) by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1858-1933) at Waseda University, and of the Jiyū Gekijō (Liberal Theatre, 1909, centering around Keiō University) by Osanai Kaoru, are usually considered by historians as the starting point of *shingeki*. The two leaders and the movements

they originated represent two very different approaches to the same ideal of modernizing the Japanese theatre.

Tsubouchi was a man of many activities and many merits. His concerns were broader than the theatre: they encompassed the wide spectrum of modernizing literature in general, although focusing especially on the novel and the drama. Early in his career he became the leading literary critic of his time, and pioneered the study of the nature of the western novel in his *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel, 1885). Besides being considered with Osanai one of the two founding fathers of *shingeki*, and having produced and directed the very first *shingeki* performances, he wrote a number of novels, translated the entire dramatic work of Shakespeare, authored a few important plays of his own, published essays on the new esthetics, was the editor with Shimamura Hōgetsu of one of the most influential literary journals of the time, the *Waseda bungaku*, and was a highly esteemed university professor, and the recognized founder of theatre research in Japan.

Tsubouchi's basic approach to the complex problem of modernization was that of using the serious study of the western masterpieces as a means to his end of reforming contemporary Japanese literature. His main purpose in translating Shakespeare was not so much to capture his spiritual message, but rather to learn his masterful playwriting technique and use it for the reform of *kabuki*.[2] From the commencement of his activity to his death Tsubouchi was concerned with the continuity and improvement of the existing forms of Japanese literature, including drama. As a theatre historian, Tsubouchi had no doubt that *kabuki* was *the* theatre of Japan, and that the problem therefore was not whether to abandon *kabuki* or not, but how to reform *kabuki* for the new times. He had been disillusioned by Danjūrō's *kabuki* experiments with the historical accuracy of the *katsureki* plays, and was convinced that the way to modernize *kabuki* was by providing new literary texts that would satisfy the needs of a contemporary psychological approach.

Tsubouchi did not consider himself a playwright; wanting, however, to give an example of what he meant, he wrote in 1884, when he was only twenty-five, *Kiri no hitoha* (A Leaf of Paulownia). The protagonist of this historical play—a famous sixteenth-century warrior, Katagiri Katsumoto, caught in the struggle between his master Hideyoshi and the future ruler of

Japan, Ieyasu—offered an ideal case to demonstrate the new technique of dealing with psychological insight into a complex character facing extremely difficult circumstances; the traditional *kabuki* would simply have handled such a character as a villain. Despite the favorable reception by the critics who read the play in *Waseda bungaku*, the *kabuki* actors did not feel confortable with the implications of the new style. The play was not performed for twenty years until 1904, when it became a great success with both critics and audiences.

More important is Tsubouchi's second play, *En no gyōja* (The Hermit), published in several versions between 1914 and 1921 and written under the influence of Ibsen, whom Tsubouchi in the meantime had discovered. The subject matter is a poetic re-telling of a legend about a Buddhist hermit and his deep disillusion caused by the failure, because of a woman, of his beloved disciple to follow his path of living. The personal emotion of loss and betrayal caused by the desertion of the actor Shimamura Hōgetsu from Tsubouchi's company gives the play a sincere autobiographical touch, and, even more than in his preceding play, a dimension of profound psychological insight.

Tsubouchi's importance is not limited to his contribution to a renewal of playwriting. Even before establishing his Literary Association, Tsubouchi had started a playreading group to teach proper methods of elocution. He continued his mission as guide to the new generation of actors through his new association, the purpose of which more and more became that of training amateurs for the new plays. Tsubouchi had lost the hope of reforming the professional *kabuki* actors, and therefore concentrated his efforts on preparing a new breed of professionals from the ranks of amateurs having no family connections with the traditional theatre world.

Beyond his efforts as a teacher and founder of a school for actors which gave Japan some of its finest *shingeki* artists—such as the renowned actress Matsui Sumako and the actor/entrepreneur Sawada Shōjirō, who became famous because he founded the theatrical group Shinkokugeki (New National Theatre, very popular in the twenties)—Tsubouchi is very important as a pioneer in producing and directing plays that remained as landmarks in the history of the new theatre. At the beginning of his producing/directing activity Tsubouchi had single acts or scenes from Shakespearean plays performed

in between *kabuki* plays, of which the first was the court scene from the *Merchant of Venice*, presented at the Kabukiza theatre (1906). After a few performances of *Hamlet* at the actors' school, he directed in 1911 a very successful production of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. This led to an invitation to perform at the Imperial Theatre, then the most modern and best equipped stage in Tokyo. This recognition of *shingeki* can be considered as the highpoint of the Bungei Kyōkai as a producing company, and a landmark in the history of the modern Japanese theatre.

The unfortunate romance between Tsubouchi's disciple Shimamura Hōgetsu and the leading star Matsui Sumako provoked a crisis in the Bungei Kyōkai which led to its dissolution in 1913, after a final performance of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* at the Imperial Theatre.

B) *Osanai Kaoru.* While Tsubouchi had championed continuity and gradual reform, Osanai Kaoru (1881-1928) became the promoter of a complete break from the past and of a new start according to the models of the contemporary western theatre. Tsubouchi had programmatically avoided professional actors and placed his hopes for the future in the transformation of amateurs into professionals through his school. Osanai, on the contrary, with his collaborator, the *kabuki* actor Ichikawa Sadanji (1880-1940, the first among the *shingeki* pioneers to visit Europe), wanted to re-educate professional *kabuki* actors into non-professional *shingeki* performers. Tsubouchi had aimed at a renewal of drama, music, and dance without ever abandoning his ideal of a modernized *kabuki*. Osanai had no interest in music and dance—which he dismissed as entertainment for the masses—and concentrated on the inception of a realistic, psychological drama, according to what he considered to be the real message of the most important modern western playwrights. While Tsubouchi had given equal importance to Shakespeare and Ibsen, Osanai placed every western author before Ibsen at the same level as *nō* and *kabuki*, and therefore considered them irrelevant to the efforts to speed up the modernization of Japan. While the morally conservative Tsubouchi had not particularly appreciated certain Ibsenian attitudes—such as those exemplified by Nora's behavior in *A Doll's House* —Osanai loved controversial plays which scrutinized values taken for granted in the past.

The first production of the Jiyū Gekijō was Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*, only thirteen years after its premiere in Copenhagen.[3] This production, considered by many as the first real *shingeki* performance, was staged on November 27, 1909, at the Yūrakuza, then probably the most up-to-date theatre in Tokyo. Despite the fact that the female roles were performed by *kabuki onnagata*, and that Sadanji interpreted the intense guilt feelings of the typical Northern introverted main character with the falsetto tones of traditional *kabuki* diction, audiences were deeply moved and perceived that a new kind of drama was being offered for the first time in Japan.

Osanai organized his theatre according to the model of the Stage Society of London, which his associate Sadanji had experienced during his stay in London. Each year he presented only a couple of new productions to a limited membership until the group ended in 1919. His repertory consisted primarily of non-Anglo-Saxon authors such as Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Gorkij, Hauptmann, Wedekind, and Pirandello.

During the early years of *shingeki* the performance style of both the Bungei Kyōkai and the Jiyū Gekijō troupes remained closely related to that of *kabuki*, especially in the matter of diction. Tsubouchi had studied closely the technique of *jōruri* singing, and Osanai had been involved with *kabuki* actors from the onset of his *shingeki* activity. The definite step in the direction of a realistic acting method was taken after Osanai's trip abroad in 1912-1913, during which he experienced the work of Max Reinhardt in Berlin and of Stanislavskij in Moscow, each of whom remained lifelong models for his work.

The Period of Commercialization (1914-1923)

The years that followed the dissolution of the Bungei Kyōkai saw a number of *shingeki* companies coming together and falling apart without any special achievement as far as the quality of performances was concerned. Tsubouchi was silent and hurt. Osanai, fresh from his experiences abroad, did not hide his disillusionment at the poor quality in the performances of the period's best troupes, including the Geijutsuza (formed by Shimamura Hōgetsu and Matsui Sumako after the dissolution of the Bungei Kyōkai). The Geijutsuza

had a great success in 1914 with the production of Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, which went on tour all over Japan, but the critics insisted that popularity had come at the price of quality and accomodation to the taste of the masses. The death of Shimamura in 1918 and the suicide of Matsui in 1919 marked the end of the Geijutsuza.

According to the critics, *shingeki* of this period had lost the enthusiasm and inherited the defects of its early days. The division into numerous, mostly short-lived, small companies did not help the cause of quality. "The intellectuals of that time found pleasure in the mere sight of red-haired people with pipes in their mouth and their shoulders against the mantelpiece, engaged in philosophical discussion, or just cutting meat with their knives and forks."[4] This statement by playwright Takada Tamotsu expresses the feeling of those contemporaries who became very critical about the exaggerated hopes of intellectuals looking to the West as a saviour. At this point several critics began to divorce themselves from a *shingeki* that was slipping into a superficial acting-out of western curiosities.

On the positive side, *shingeki* playwrights such as Yoshii Isamu, Nagata Hideo, Kurata Momozō, and others began to write *shingeki* plays that achieved success. Kurata Momozō's *Shukke to sono deshi* (The Monk and His Disciple, 1916), a drama about an idealized Shinran Shōnin, the famous thirteenth century Buddhist reformer, provides a touching example of the search for a new synthesis between Japanese and imported ideals.[5]

The Early Tsukiji Little Theatre Movement (1924-1927)

The years between the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923 and the death of Osanai Kaoru in 1928 are dominated by the opening of the first theatre exclusively dedicated to *shingeki* and by the activities of Osanai's final years. The vast destruction in the capital provided Tokyo with an opportunity to modernize its appearance: new buildings, new streets, and new theatres. Hijikata Yoshi (1898-1959), who was in Germany at the time of the earthquake to study contemporary theatre movements, immediately returned to Tokyo at the news of the earthquake and financed the building of the Little

Theatre at Tsukiji (Tsukiji Shōgekijō), in an area close to the Ginza and far away from Asakusa, the entertainment quarter where most of the previous *shingeki* performances had taken place. The move to Tsukiji meant catering to a more exclusive audience, limited in number, and conscious of being an intellectual elite interested in ideas in foreign plays. Osanai became the soul of the new five-hundred-seat theatre, which was designed according to the latest developments in western theatre architecture and provided with excellent equipment for lighting and scenic effects. He conceived the new theatre as an experimental laboratory where the various western styles, from realism to expressionism, from impressionism to symbolism, and all avant-garde novelties were to be tried out and presented to a public eager to become acquainted with them. The Tsukiji Shōgekijō became the center of *shingeki* activity, the place where a new generation of *shingeki* theatre people was formed.

Osanai had been especially influenced in Europe by the importance of the director, as exemplified by the period's two European directorial giants, Max Reinhardt in Berlin and Stanislavsky in Moscow. The work of the Russian maestro in building an ensemble remained in Osanai's memory as probably the most important model to imitate in his future work in Japan. This explains why he did not give much importance to the development of new Japanese plays, which he considered inferior—his own plays included—and which he completely neglected for several years; he instead concentrated all his enormous energy on building the "cult of the director" as applied to the production of translations of the best contemporary western plays. In this period about fifty major western plays were produced, against very few original works by new Japanese playwrights.

The difference in taste between Osanai and Hijikata became more and more evident. Osanai preferred authors who were primarily interested in an artistic message, especially those in the psychological-naturalistic vein such as he had experienced during the time he spent with Stanislavsky. Hijikata, on the contrary, during his Russian trip had particularly admired Meyerhold's brilliant combination of vivid theatricalism, daring stylization, and political message; hence his preference for expressionistic and politically involved plays. Hijikata became more and more part of a trend

towards socialism which was to take over most of the *shingeki* world as soon as Osanai's leadership was brought to an abrupt end by his premature death in 1928. Tsubouchi's and Osanai's battle against Marxist infiltration into the *shingeki* world—they never showed any understanding of or inclination toward socialism—was lost.

The Leftist Propaganda Plays (1928-1932)

In the economic crisis of the twenties trade unionism and other leftist workers' movements developed in Japan, but were severely repressed by the conservative government. A number of leftist intellectuals rallied around *shingeki* theatre companies to continue their political battle for socialism. In 1921 Hirasawa Keishichi started the Rōdō Gekidan (Worker's Company), and in 1925 the Toranku Gekijō (Trunk Theatre, inspired by the European Agit-prop theatre), began its performances. Its founders were to give life to a number of leftist companies, such as the Zen'ei Gekijō (Avant-garde Theatre) and the Proretaria Gekijō (Proletarian Theatre). After the death of Osanai, Hijikata left the company of the Tsukiji Theatre and started the Shin Tsukiji Gekidan (New Tsukiji Company), which became, with the Sayoku Gekijō (Leftist Theatre, a company that had coalesced out of smaller leftist groups) the main force of the *shingeki* world.

The leftist movement was sharply criticized by non-socialist historians, who found the plays and performance style of this period dull, repetitious, and devoid of artistic inspiration; theatrical values were replaced by propaganda slogans inciting to class struggle, and the proletarian plays offered classes in Marxist ideology instead of genuine poetical drama. Leftist critics, on the other hand, consider this time as the fervent years of *shingeki*; the plays of such leftist playwrights as Murayama Tomoyoshi (born 1901), Kubo Sakae (1901-1958), and Miyoshi Jurō (1902-1958) are thought of as typical, important examples of *shingeki* political theatre. There is no doubt that there were no geniuses among those talented authors who tried to succeed at the difficult task of joining political propaganda and playwriting: it would be unjust, however, to dismiss their contributions, in difficult circumstances, as worthless. The leftist companies did rely

almost exclusively on Japanese scripts, thus providing for the first time the place for new Japanese plays that Osanai had refused. However, Osanai's "cult of the director" had deeply penetrated the mental attitude of the leftist leaders, who relegated the playwright to the inferior position of a scenario-writer subject to the demands of an omnipotent director—thus perpetuating the old *kabuki* traditions of the playwright being mainly a hack in the service of a leading actor.

The Marxist political dominance of *shingeki* could not go unnoticed by the military authorities, who began to censor "subversive" leftist propaganda, jailed leaders like Murayama, and eventually suppressed the principal leftist *shingeki* companies.

The Artistic Period (1933-1940)

The harassment of the leftist companies by the authorities reached a point at which plays were censored and occasionally forbidden, leaders and actors sometimes arrested and jailed, and spectators attending the plays had to face the risk of being held and interrogated by the police. The Nihon Proretaria Gekijō Dōmei (Japan Proletarian Theater Federation), which had succeeded in obtaining control of most of *shingeki* by 1930, was finally dissolved in 1934. Meanwhile, a group of anti-leftist *shingeki* actors and playwrights had come together in 1932 as the Tsukijiza, a company with an artistic program which introduced two new important elements to the *shingeki* structure: first, the elimination of the all-dominant figure of the company leader in favor of a collective leadership by actors, and, second, a preference given to serious, original Japanese plays as the backbone of the repertory. This is a time during which a number of important playwrights developed new Japanese plays of lasting value. Among them the important contribution of Kishida Kunio (*Mama sensei to sono otto*, Professor Mama and Her Husband, *Ushiyama Hoteru*, Ushiyama Hotel), Kubota Mantarō (*Fuyu*, Winter, *Kadode*, Leaving Home, *Odera gakkō*, Odera School), Satomi Ton (*Ikiru*, Living), Tanaka Chikao (*Ofukuro*, Mother), and others.

Kishida (1890-1954) was educated as a specialist in French literature, and in France he learnt the technique of the French conversation plays.[6] Upon his return to Japan in 1923

he began to work in small *shingeki* companies. He played an important role in the formation of the Tsukijiza, supporting the two major actors, Tomoda Kyōsuke and Tamamura Akiko, and providing leadership in the choice of the repertory. He was a major factor in switching the main focus of attention of the *shingeki* people from the German, Scandinavian, and Russian dramatists—who had been the favorite of Osanai and of the leftist groups—to the French and English authors. In France Kishida had learnt to admire Copeau's work, and had nurtured the ideal of transferring to Japan Copeau's intention of renovating the dramatic literature. Kishida, moreover, hoped to assume a mission in Japan as *shingeki*'s teacher-theoretician-reformer, much as Copeau had been for the contemporary French theatre. Kishida's achievements, however, were not as high as his ideals. He succeeded, though, in leading a number of the best *shingeki* talents to a serious pursuit of non-political, purely literary, and theatrical values in the plays, and of artistic integrity in their performance. These ideals became the program of the Bungakuza, the company he was instrumental in forming (1936), which became the longest lasting group in *shingeki* history.

After the suppression of the major leftist companies, Murayama Tomoyoshi, who had been in prison until 1933, rallied some of the left-over politically involved *shingeki* people and formed the Shinkyō Gekidan (Collaboration Company) in 1934. It was a time in which Socialist Realism was enforced in the Soviet Union over "formalistic deviations," and the Japanese Marxists followed the new party line. The best plays in this style were *Kazanbaichi*, by Kubo Sakae, which criticizes capitalistic farm policies, and *Hokutō no kaze* (North-East Wind) by Hisaita Eijirō.

Meanwhile, the government had become less and less tolerant of any activity "unsuitable to the national feeling." The leftist companies took refuge in the performance of western classics and the training of their actors according to the Stanislavsky method. They tried not to attract the attention of the hostile authorities, but it was to no avail. On August 19, 1940, the two remaining leftist *shingeki* troupes, the Shinkyō Gekidan and the Shin Tsukiji Group, were dissolved and a number of their members arrested. The only survivor during the war years was the Bungakuza, which had no political

affiliation and quietly continued the pursuit of its "art for art's sake" ideal. Those *shingeki* actors who were released from jail could perform during the war only under the supervision and control of the nationalistic authorities.

Shingeki *after World War II (1944-1994)*

Immediately after the war the American occupation authorities favored *shingeki*. They were distrustful of the "feudalistic" traditional drama of *kabuki* and *nō*, which was censored and subjected to special control, while complete freedom and support was given to the new westernized drama as a potential instrument of democratization. All prominent veteran *shingeki* actors joined forces and in December 1945 opened with a production of the old favorite of Japanese audiences, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. Soon a number of companies were organized, and an extraordinary torrent of productions followed, with a success that for a short while seemed to indicate a possible assumption by *shingeki* of the leading role among post-war theatrical genres.

Among the post-war companies one of the most important is the Haiyūza (Actors Theatre, founded in 1944), centered around the director/actor Senda Koreya. Senda has been for many years one of the main leaders of *shingeki* activity; he had a great influence also as the founder of an actors' school in which numerous successful recent *shingeki* performers were trained. Senda had been involved with the leftist theatre movement for years before starting the new company with the director Aoyama Sugisaku, the actors Tōno Eijirō and Ozawa Sakae, and the actresses Higashiyama Chieko and Kishi Teruko.

Also important is the Tōkyō Geijutsu Gekijō (Tokyo Art Theatre), the major members of which formed, after its dissolution, the Gekidan Mingei (People's Art Theatre, founded in 1950) around Unō Jūkichi. The Bungakuza flourished after the war, continuing its artistic mission, while companies like the Haiyūza, Mingei, and Murayama's reconstitued leftist Shinkyō Gekidan showed a renewed Marxist involvement. The honeymoon between *shingeki* and the occupation authorities was soon over. Marxist propaganda

began to appear more dangerous than the "feudalistic" traditional plays—which were actually admired by audiences not because of their remote contents but for the enjoyment of politically harmless stylized theatricalism. While the censorship of *kabuki* plays was being eased, and eventually abolished, the official backing of *shingeki* soon became a policy of the past. *Shingeki* was on its own, and the wave of initial enthusiasm gradually leveled off. Numerous companies came and went, many of them lasting only a short time. In an average year in the fifties and the sixties there might have been in Tokyo forty to fifty such companies producing about a hundred plays yearly.

The *shingeki* companies, as a rule, have no fixed place of performance; for each production they rent for their production a hall, proportionate in size and importance to their means and their hope of public reception; these places range from large modern theatres to small private or public halls, or even locales comparable to off-off Broadway lofts. In 1954 the Haiyūza Company built its own 400-seat theatre called Haiyūza Gekijō, which was rebuilt in 1980. The ensemble, however, no longer uses that facility for its major shows because it would not be financially possible to produce an expensive play for such a small audience.

Most *shingeki* actors have traditionally supported themselves with work outside their company, especially in television and other commercial jobs, both acting-related and not, because it has been well known since *shingeki*'s birth that "you cannot make a living with *shingeki*." For the great majority of *shingeki* people their many years of hard work in the theatre has been an act of faith in political and/or artistic ideals with minimal financial reward. As a matter of fact, the actors have been in the habit of contributing their earnings to the company so as to be able to produce plays, *shingeki* never having been granted state support, and high rents, taxes, and low returns creating a constant economic strain.

In recent years, however, greater flexibility and interchangeability among the various fields of the performing arts has increasingly blurred the border between the despised "commercial"[7] and the revered "artistic" and/or "politically committed" theatre. The beginnings of this process were seen as early as the fifties and the sixties, when it became fashionable to experiment with the use of stars of one genre

for performances in another. Important companies like Kumo (The Clouds), founded in 1963 by Fukuda Tsuneari (born 1912), one of the most important critics and leaders of *shingeki* from the sixties to the present time, made use of famous *kabuki* actors in the interpretation of the major Shakespearean roles. *Kyōgen* and *nō* actors like Nomura Mansaku and Kanze Hideo became part of avant-garde experimental groups, and important *shingeki* actors like Akutagawa Hiroshi or even avant-garde directors like Suzuki Tadashi became famous in the so-called commercial circuit of the theatre or through the movies.

Moreover, an important development inside the *shingeki* world is represented by the enormous diffusion of both government and commercial television networks in Japan, especially since the seventies. Entire *shingeki* productions have been broadcast and followed by millions of viewers, opening for the best *shingeki* actors the wide market of television popularity, which greatly enlarges the range previously reached by the work of a few *shingeki* actors in films.

Shingeki actors and directors are also hired along with movie and television stars for the so-called "commercial" productions of hit plays often transferred from Broadway and West End theatres to the Tokyo stages—thus increasingly blurring the boudaries of what defines *shingeki*.

Since the fifties a number of *shingeki* groups have come and gone; only a few still survive to the present (1988) or have left a lasting mark in Japan's theatrical landscape.[8] Among them is the group Gekidan Shiki (Theatre Four Seasons), founded in 1953 and directed since its beginning by Asari Keita (b. 1933), who was inspired by the ideals of playwright Katō Michio (1918-1953). Katō was deeply influenced by the French literature and the French way of acting, and this explains why the repertory of Gekidan Shiki consisted almost exclusively of French plays—especially those by Giraudoux and Anouilh. Since 1972 Shiki has ventured into the production of large scale musicals, among which the recent *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera* were immensely popular.

The Kumo company—established by Fukuda as a part of his Modern Drama Foundation— specialized in performing Fukuda's translations of the major Shakespearean plays. Kumo sought to realize the high aspirations of its demanding leader

for a literary theatre, in contrast with the overtly political and ideological aims of groups like the Haiyūza and Mingei, and in opposition to the flatness of a style inspired by socialist realism. Kumo's inheritance was taken over by the company Subaru (The Pleiades), founded by Fukuda in 1976 after the dissolution of Kumo.

The Hayūza company still maintains a position of leadership in the *shingeki* world. Veteran actor-director Senda Koreya (b. 1904, real name Itō Kunio) continued his important mission of training hundreds of actors at his Research Institute of Actor's Theatre until 1967, when the training work was transferred to the newly established theatre department at Tōhō Gakuen. The Bungakuza company, the longest living *shingeki* group established in 1937, continues, notwithstanding a number of painful secessions, its non-political performances of valuable, literary texts. Gekidan Mingei, the spiritual heir to the proletarian theatre of the leftist tradition, solidly anchored in realism, is still—with the Hayūza and the Bungakuza—one of the three major *shingeki* companies.

Probably the most interesting achievement of *shingeki* in the last few decades has been the maturation of playwrights of sustained distinction, some of whom recently have achieved a deserved international recognition. Outstanding among them is Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) whose modern *nō* plays are frequently produced by many companies all over the world. Most of Mishima's plays, which followed an almost morbid and decadent "art for art's sake" estheticism before he became involved in his dream of the restoration of ultratraditional samurai values, were premiered by Tokyo's Bungakuza in the fifties and in the sixties.

Also important is the work of Kinoshita Junji (b. 1914), whose play *Yūzuru* (Twilight Crane) is a delicate masterpiece of the poetic-symbolic genre, and an important break from the realistic *shingeki* tradition. *Yūzuru* was also adapted for *kabuki*, *nō*, and opera performance. Besides his plays centered on the theme of folklore, such as *Hikoichibanashi* (Tales of Hikoichi) and *Akai jimbaori* (The Red Tunic), Kinoshita has written successful plays on social themes, such as *Furō* (Wind and Waves) and *Otto to yobareru Nihonjin* (A Japanese Called Otto).[9]

Tanaka Chikao's (b. 1905) lifetime work spans many periods of *shingeki* history. In his many plays, from *Ofukuro* (Mother, 1933) to the more mature *Maria no kubi* (Mary's Neck), Tanaka shows a delicate and profound insight into the intricacies of modern Japanese interior struggles, not only, as so often had been the case, on a political level, but primarily on the individual and religious levels as well.

The break from the realistic/naturalistic style, even in leftist *shingeki* companies, began with the introduction of Brecht in the fifties. In the sixties the advent of absurdism sharpened the discussion about the place of theatrical elements (*engekisei*), ideological elements (*kannensei*), and literary elements (*bungakusei*) in theatre, with the result that there was, at least theoretically, an acceptance of the importance of theatricality in the new absurdist plays by Japanese authors such as Abe Kōbō (b. 1925).

Abe already had become known abroad because of the filming of his novel *Suna no onna* (The Woman in the Dunes, 1962). His many avant-garde plays, starting with *Doreigari* (Slave Hunting) in 1955, through the more recent plays such as *Tomodachi* (Friends) and *Suichū toshi* (Underwater City) baffled Japanese critics because of their pitiless and unconventional vivisection of the contradictions in today's society. Abe's plays also have been presented abroad, in an avant-garde style typical of the sixties by his own company, the Abe Sutajio (Abe Studio), which was founded in 1973, and continues in Tokyo with performances in repertory of the plays by its leader.

It was unavoidable, in the wake of a renewed nationalism and pride in the value of the Japanese tradition, that *shingeki* artists would "rediscover" the importance of *nō* and *kabuki* as a source of inspiration for new plays and for actor training. Mishima, taking a hint from the modern adaptation of the Greek classics by French playwrights, had opened the way by using themes from the classical *nō* for his modern *nō* plays. Kinoshita had found in *kyōgen* inspiration for his folkloristic plays. A further step in this direction was to be taken by the new generation of post-*shingeki* theatre groups, that are now known under the common denominator of underground theatre, or *angura*.

During the last few years of the Shōwa period (ca. 1985-1989), after the gradual fading away of the underground theatre movement (1960-1985, see next paragraph), *shingeki* has shown little artistic vitality. The healthy number of companies, productions, and new theatre buildings reflects the extraordinary prosperity of the Japanese economy. The Japanese critics, however, lament *shingeki*'s lack of direction and its widespread escapism, deprived of serious inspiration, as exemplified by the great number of senseless, superficial comedies. They cannot avoid the comparison with the "commercial" shows, which follow production patterns similar to those of Broadway or the West End and often succeed in reaching higher quality and greater success, while employing, also in competition with the media, an increasing number of the best *shingeki* talent. The role of the traditional *shingeki* companies and, in general, the characteristics of *shingeki* in the pluralistic Japanese theatrical scene of the next decades, remain, at the beginning of the new period of Japanese history, Heisei, difficult to foresee.

The Underground Theatre Movement (1960-1985)

While *shingeki* was finding its place among the legitimate forms of the Japanese theatre, the function of protest and avant-garde experimentation was being taken over by the underground movement (*angura*).[10] Although born from an explicitly anti-American protest, the *angura* developed a following in the manner of the off-off Broadway theatre and of the "happenings" in New York in the sixties, with the same purpose, that of creating a new counterculture. Its origins were in the violent demonstrations led by the leftist Zengakuren student organization against the renewal of the United States-Japan Security Treaty in 1960. The fact that the *shingeki* groups—even those that openly proclaimed themselves pro-communist—failed to react seriously to the treaty renewal caused deep disaffection among the young protesters with what they sneeringly started to call the "Old Left." They also felt alienated from the powerful leftist Rōen (acronym for Rōdōsha engeki hyōgikai, The Workers' Council on Theatre), which had deteriorated, in their eyes, into a champion of

conservativism concerned only with the profitable recruitment of audiences and with the preservation of its own power. Politically, a number of the young protesters wanted neither the alliance with the United States, favored by the government, nor a new one with the Soviet bloc, favored by the pro-communist leftist organizations. They were fighting for a complete "independence" of Japan, in a non-aligned, neutral position.

Most of the protest-inspired youth produced rather poor, overwritten plays and sophomoric acting, often displaying grotesque elements in costume and make-up, shocking nudity, loud music, and so on; they thus were akin to a part of the avant-garde work being done in the radical New York theatre of the sixties. Among bursts of exuberant and often confused anti-*shingeki* energy some important common characteristic traits emerged in the work of a number of representative post-*shingeki* playwrights, who deserve special consideration.

After World War II the major *shingeki* groups had developed—notwithstanding differences in artistic and political ideals—a silent consensus in accepting the following characteristics typical of much western modern theatre: a commitment to realism; the principle that theatre must be based on a text, which both actor and director cooperate to correctly intepret on the stage; a deep conviction that the theatre "educates" the audience, which takes therefore the passive attitude of a pupil towards his master; and the use of a conventional proscenium stage. The commitment to realism took the shape of a thorough effort to completely secularize drama in Japan, ignoring the existence of, and replacing the native gods and demons—omnipresent in pre-Meiji drama—with imported psychology and Marxist slogans. The better *angura* artists began to question the above *shingeki* tenets, and eventually rejected them, one by one, in the attempt to create a new, original, non-western contemporary Japanese theatre, rooted again in the native tradition. Goodman calls this process of re-rooting "the return of the gods"[11] and warns that such return is not meant as a religious revival, but as a process to liberate Japanese ghosts (i.e., the Japanese gods, as a symbol of the Japanese archetypal, aesthetic, and sociopsychological heritage) "not to affirm them, but to aknowledge and negate them."

Most *angura* groups, including the first inspired by the new ideals, the Seinengeijutsu (1959), had a very short life, lacked professionalism, and relied more on shocking the audiences than on learning the necessary acting techniques. The five groups that succeeded in achieving results worth mentioning are the Kurotento 68/71, the Jōkyō Gekijō, the Tenjō Sajiki, the Tenkei Gekijō, and the Waseda Shōgekijō.

The theoreticians of the Kurotento 68/71 (called in English Black Tent Theatre, or BTT 68/71) are Tsuno Kaitarō (b. 1938) and Saeki Ryūkō (b. 1941), who gave shape to the criticism against *shingeki* shared by most *angura* groups.[13] Instead of using the typical proscenium stage in a conventional *shingeki* theatre, the BBT 68/71 built in 1970 an enormous black tent where any kind of stage could be set up. The tent made possible a complete independence from the organized network of traditional *shingeki* theatres, confined mostly within the Tokyo metropolitan area. Instead of traditional realistic plays, a number of performances were presented, including "songs, dances, one-liners, agit-prop, promotions, readings, record concerts, film screenings, standup comedy, slapstick, Noh and Kyōgen, through lectures and panel discussions, to demonstrations, carnivals, parties, and mass meetings."[13] Instead of catering almost exclusively to the Tokyo *shingeki* audiences, the BTT 68/71 began traveling extensively all over Japan, performing in a great number of centers which had never been reached by *shingeki*, and trying always to involve the audience in the action. BTT 68/71 also performs sophisticated theatrical extravaganzas/new plays by such playwrights as Satoh Makoto, Katō Tadashi, and Yamamoto Kiyokazu, in a small locale called the Red Cabaret in Tokyo. Instead of preserving the *shingeki* cult for European style, the BTT 68/71 has increasingly leaned towards the creation of an Asian style, going back to *nō* and *kyōgen* and assimilating elements from other Asian countries such as China, Korea, India and the Philippines.

While the BTT 68/71 always tried to draw its repertory from a number of new playwrights, the Jōkyō Gekijō (Situation Theatre) orbited around the work of its charismatic leader, the playwright Kara Jūrō (b. 1940). Also departing from *shingeki* tenets, Kara led his troupe to perform in most unusual environments, using "public toilets, railroad stations, and even lily ponds (from the waters of which the cast make

their entrances and exits) as the setting for his plays."[14] Kara was the first to use a tent for his performances (1967), and his red tent in the precincts of the Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku became a symbol of revolt against environmental abuses. Searching for inspiration in the Japanese tradition, especially in *kabuki*, Kara called his actors *kawara kojiki* ("river-bed beggars," the name by which Tokugawa era *kabuki* actors were called), and found in the *kabuki* techniques models for a non-realistic acting style, while also the content of his plays leaned more on traditional *kabuki* themes than on the modern western models. A prolific playwright, Kara received the Kishida Prize for his *Shōjo kamen* (Virgin Mask, 1969), and was honored also with the important Akutagawa Prize for literature (1983). Among the best of his plays is *Ai no kojiki* (John Silver, The Beggar of Love, 1970),[15] a typical example of retreat of the avant-garde from the political and social action of the sixties into the individual consideration of human fragmentation and a search for a world of fantasy and poetry typical of the seventies and the eighties. Kara also pursued an Asian ideal of independence from western models, and traveled often with his company to third world countries, remaining on purpose aloof from a pursuit of fame in the industrialized countries of the West. Recently Kara has begun directing "commercial" productions in Tokyo, joining therefore other avant-garde artists like Suzuki Tadashi who have, in recent years, capitalized on their fame to be hired by the once despised corporate establishment.

The third group, Tenjō Sajiki, owes its existence to one man, Terayama Shuji (1935-1983) who produced a large amount of avant-garde work not only in the theatre, but also in poetry, film, photography, television, radio scripts, and children's theatre.[16] His happening-like underground theatre provided hallucinatory visual and sound experiences for an audience invited to share in the continuing search for a more intense and meaningful reality than that of everyday routine. Terayama, born in the poor and mountainous Aoyama region, grew up with the hard memories of the postwar years, as an underprivileged and sickly youth: eventually he had to drop out of Waseda University and struggle for the balance of his short life because of poor health. This partially explains his poetic and escapist vivid imagination, never tired of creating happenings, street theatre, and theatrical events, one of which,

Jinriki hikōki soromon (The Man-Powered Airplane, Solomon, 1970) for example, required the spectators to go to different places in Tokyo at a variety of times, making therefore the experience different for each individual. Terayama did participate with his troupe in a number of European and American Festivals and became therefore well known abroad because of his "scandalous" style.

The post-*shingeki* reaction against the foreign dogma of realism is especially represented by the work of Ota Shōgo (b. 1939), founder and director of the Tenkei Gekijō (Theatre of Transformation), founded in 1968 and disbanded for financial non-viability in 1988. Ota is especially known for his three-part play, *Mizu no eki* (Water Station), *Chi no eki* (Earthhill Station), and *Kaze no eki* (Wind Station), and for his work as a critic and theoretician (*Doshi no in'ei*, Shades of Verbs, and *Geki no kibō*, The Hope of Drama). *Mizu no eki* is a two-hours play in which not a word is spoken: the wordless intense performance by actors trained to perform with almost blank facial expression and slow movements, impressed public and critics in Japan and abroad because of its successful attempt to rediscover the *nō*'s secret of the moments of non-action.[17] The tendency to silence is also evident in *Komachi fūden* (Tale of Komachi Told by the Wind, 1977), one of the few contemporary plays that uses a *nō* stage and has a protagonist a heroine who does not speak throughout the play. Ota believes that "only what is difficult to convey is worth artistic expression," and therefore drama should emphasize the power of "passivity," that is of being, instead of the easier to convey power of "activity," that is of doing. Silence and quiet are a great part of human "being," and should therefore be prominent on the stage instead of word and action. In the early nineties Ota has switched to a new period of his creativity, as the artistic director of the new Civic Theatre, a municipal theatre in Fujisawa, a suburb of Tokyo. His play *Sarachi*, which premiered there in 1992, presents speaking characters and confirms Ota's preoccupation with simple daily life: "dispossession, wandering, a search for for connectedness; questioning and reaffirmation of life."[18] Ota is basically apolitical, like a growing number of today's leading theatre people belonging to the surviving *shingeki* companies or to whatever is left of the post-*shingeki* movement; he is, however, concerned with an intercultural approach that

furthers experiments with foreign artists—an approach that he shares with the abroad better known theatre directors Suzuki Tadashi and Ninagawa Yukio.

The Waseda Shōgekijō (Waseda Little Theatre, since 1984 called SCOT, Suzuki Company of Toga) rooted in the student theatre at Waseda University, developed around the personalities of the already mentioned leader, Suzuki Tadashi, and of the gifted playwright Betsuyaku Minoru (b. 1937). Betsuyaku is the author of the first play of some importance written for the post-*shingeki* movement, *Zō* (The Elephant)[19] produced in 1962 by the group which at the time was called Jiyū Butai (Free Stage), before taking the name Waseda Little Theatre in 1966. *Zō* shows evident influences of Beckett, and repeats the lack of action, the sense of futility and hopelessness of man trapped in life, the darkness and pessimism expressed through the poetical helplessness of a clown, so typical of numerous avant-garde/absurdist plays since *Waiting for Godot*. The deceptive simplicity of the language had also a great influence on the stage language of the *angura* plays.[20] The return to Japanese traditional *nō* theatre for inspiration is also typical of Betsuyaku's work, as much as it is in some aspects of Suzuki' s method of training. The Waseda Little Theatre did not limit itself to Betsuyaku's plays, on the contrary it was responsible for presenting to the public the two important works *Atashi no biitoruzu aruiwa sōshiki* (My Beetles and the Funeral, 1966) by Satoh Makoto, and the already mentioned *Virgin Mask* (1969) by Kara, both directed by Suzuki Tadashi. In collaboration with the actress Shiraishi Kayoko, Suzuki developed a series of collages titled *Gekiteki naru mono o megutte* I, II, III (On the Dramatic Passions, I, II, III) which gave Suzuki the chance to develop his synthesis of an acting style founded in severe discipline, the martial arts, and *kabuki* and *nō* techniques.[21] Of all the post-*shingeki* groups, the Waseda Little Theatre was the one that received the greatest attention in Europe and in the United States, because of the keen interest in finding a bridge between eastern and western traditions and solving the practical problem of making the experience of classical Japanese acting techniques meaningful for today's performers of western plays. The success of Suzuki's production of *The Trojan Women* both in Japan and in the tours abroad is to be explained in view of this special interest of elites. In imitation

of Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre in Wroclaw, Poland, Suzuki moved with his troupe to a small village, Togamura, far away from every important cultural center, and began there a five-year period of intense training that lasted until 1980. Togamura has become since an important center, where yearly groups of professional actors from many countries are trained, and theatrical events of international interest take place.

The vitality of the *angura* movement appears to have subsided since the onset of the eighties, to the point that many critics have declared it as practically finished by 1985, notwithstanding the fact that most of its major playwrights are still very prolific. It is still premature to attempt a definition of its historical position and value. In the long range, the phenomenon of *angura* might end up in the history of Japanese theatre as a short and not very relevant offshoot of the *shingeki* movement, or as the turning point for a new, yet to be named, post-*shingeki* period. Today, at the beginning of the Heisei era (began 1989), it becomes ever more difficult to draw the lines of demarcation between *shingeki* and *angura*, and between *shingeki* and the commercial theatre. Suzuki's career is an example of the blurring of borders among the genres of the modern Japanese theatre. He began as a student at Waseda University during the politically activistic anti-*shingeki* underground theatre movement of the sixties, then started to reevaluate the treasures of the Japanese tradition after discovering the power of the *nō* at a 1972 international festival in France. From an avant-garde position he developed his own group into a conservative, highly disciplined unit that many would probably categorize as a form of contemporary *shingeki*; at the same time, Suzuki directed commercial productions of Broadway-like plays for major Japanese producing companies, and made his mark on the international scene both through the presentation of his productions and the teaching of his method abroad, as well as by organizing his international school and festival in the mountains at Togamura.

The increased mobility of several performers and directors from one to the other genre of the pluralistic Japanese scene, with the consequent blurring of the borders among the genres themselves, might well be the most characteristic development of the Japanese theatre of the eighties and beginning nineties.

NOTES

[1]The division of *shingeki* history follows with few modifications the one proposed by Toita Yasuji in his *Shingeki gojūnen*, (Fifty years of *shingeki*), Tokyo: Jijitsūshinsha, 1956.

[2]Ortolani, "Fukuda Tsuneari: Modernization and Shingeki," 484-488. See also Rimer, *Toward a Modern Japanese Theatre: Kishida Kunio*, 17-27.

[3]Rimer, *Ibid.*, 29. Tokyo: Shinchōsha 1958, 221.

[4]Words by the playwright Takada Tamotsu during a conversation with Fukuda, referred to by Fukuda himself in his essay "Nihon shingeki-shi gaikan (Outline of Japanese *shingeki* history)," in *Watakushi no engeki hakusho* (My theatre confessions), Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1958: 221.

[5]See a summary of this play in Ortolani, "Das japanische Theater," in Kindermann, ed. *Einführung in das Ostasiatische Theater*, 401-403.

[6]See Rimer, *Toward a Modern Theater: Kishida Kunio*, 57-71, and passim, for a thorough discussion of Kishida's life and accomplishments.

[7]See Tsubaki, "Bunraku Puppet Theatre, Kabuki, and Other Commercial Theatre," 100-102, for a listing of the most important companies producing "commercial" theatre, among which the two giants are Shōchiku and Tōhō.

[8]See Tsubaki and Miyata, "Shingeki, The New Theatre of Japan," 103-110, for a listing of the major *shingeki* companies operating at present in Japan. See also *Theater Japan 1989. A Companion to the Japanese Theater: Companies and People*, the most up-to-date information available in English on the subject.

[9]Ortolani, "Shingeki: The Maturing New Drama of Japan," 174-178.

CHAPTER XI

MODERN MUSIC AND DANCE THEATRE

Opera

Soon after the Meiji Restoration, the government began a campaign for the diffusion of western music, as a means of promoting the desired modernization of the country. At first, however, western music did not find the same enthusiastic reception which had greeted the introduction of other novelties from the West. A substantial change in the attitude of the new generation began when, in 1898, the study of western music became a compulsory subject in all schools. A gradual familiarization with the new sounds and the new rhythms followed, leading eventually to the great diffusion of western music in twentieth century Japan.

Operatic music and the singing of famous arias from classical operas were a part of this process, and eventually reached a wide audience. The history of opera production, however, shows a slow and difficult development, from its amateur beginnings in the 1890s to the sophisticated stagings of recent decades. High production costs, made more prohibitive because of opera's restricted appeal and the lack of government support, always have been the main reason for the limited activity of Japanese opera companies.

Opera production was introduced to Japan in the excerpted performance of a work that took place in 1894 in Tokyo as part of a benefit program for the Japanese Red Cross: the first act of Gounod's *Faust* was performed by a group of foreign amateurs who sang the leading roles in collaboration with students of the Tōkyō Ongaku Gakkō

(Tokyo School of Music), who provided the chorus, and with the musicians of the Imperial Household Ministry conducted by Franz Eckert (1852-1916).

In 1902 the Kageki Kenkyūkai (Opera Study Society) was formed by students of the same Tokyo School of Music and of the Imperial University. On July 23, 1903, this group sponsored the first complete opera performed in Japan, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, which produced a loud echo in the Japanese music world and inspired Japanese composers to enter the new field of opera. The libretto was translated into Japanese for the occasion. Because of the lack of an orchestra the production had to make do with a simple piano accompaniment. The sets were prepared by students of the Bijutsu Gakkō (Fine Arts School). The single performance incurred a huge financial loss and provoked a series of controversies which reached the Ministry of Education, with a consequent official warning to the School that discouraged the continuation of such pioneering opera activities.[1]

The first attempt at a Japanese opera was *Roei no yume* (Dream in Camp, libretto and music by Kitamura Kisei), presented in 1905 at the major *kabuki* theatre of the time, the Kabukiza, between *kabuki* plays, on the same program. *Kabuki* actor Matsumoto Kōshirō VII—employing traditional *kabuki* vocalization—performed the leading role of this operatic composition written in unaccompanied monotones with orchestral intermezzi. Kōshirō was supported by *kabuki* actors who also recited their parts in *kabuki* style. Rather than an opera it was actually a play with spoken parts and connecting songs.

The *shingeki* pioneers, Tsubouchi Shōyō and Osanai Kaoru, were involved in the first phase of operatic development. In 1904 Tsubouchi published the first theoretical work about Japanese opera, the *Shingakugekiron* (Theory of the New Music Drama), in which he envisioned original Japanese operas free from imitation of foreign models and inspired by Japanese tradition. As an example of his theory he wrote the libretto for *Tokoyami* (Eternal Darkness, music by Tōgi Tetteki), whose performance was the first sponsored by the Bungei Kyōkai. The first opera greeted by Japanese critics as a successful fulfillment of Tsubouchi's ideal was *Hagoromo* (The Feather Robe, 1908, inspired by the

homonymous *nō* play, music by Komatsu Kōsaku). In addition, Osanai Kaoru arranged and staged *Chikai no hoshi* (The Star of the Oath, music by Yamada Kōsaku).

The opening in 1911 of the Teikoku Gekijō (Imperial Theatre, often called Teigeki) with an opera department (begun in 1912) under the direction of the Italian Giovanni Vittorio Rossi offered new hopes for a development of opera in Japan. The reality, on the contrary, remained rather modest. Only single acts, or abridged versions of light operas, were performed between plays in the fashion of typical *kabuki* programming. The director of the opera department was actually a ballet master who had been primarily active in the field of operetta in London. In his tenure from 1912 to 1916 he produced only some light opera/operettas such as Donizetti's *La Figlia del Reggimento* and Planquette's *Les Cloches de Corneville*. The production of serious classical opera at the Imperial Theatre was still far from being commercially and artistically viable; an enormous effort would have been necessary to support the development of singers and orchestras, not to mention audiences.

The task of popularizing operatic music and arias was accomplished by the popular theatres in Asakusa between 1916 and 1920, when up to three theatres at a time were playing "opera," that is, a variety of mostly western-looking plays with music and songs. Together with operetta, selected parts of the famous classical operas were also popularized through the Asakusa stages.

The next important event in the history of classical opera was the nineteen day visit in 1919 of the Russian Opera from Vladivostok for nineteen days at the Imperial Theatre. For the first time Japanese audiences could witness fully staged productions of such works as *Aida*, *Carmen*, *La Traviata*, *Tosca*, and *Boris Godunov*, with a singer of the caliber of the world famous soprano Bulskaja. The great success of these foreign guests inspired several more attempts to organize Japanese performances of opera, but with sparse results.

Eventually, a series of radio programs of western music directed by Iba Takashi between 1927 and 1930—during which fifteen operas were broadcast with accurate introductions and with enormous audience success—helped greatly in creating an atmosphere in which the first important Japanese opera company was founded by the tenor Fujiwara Yoshie in 1934.

The Fujiwara Kagekidan (Fujiwara Opera Company) has survived to the present time as probably the most important producer and promoter of serious opera—in spite of the many financial problems that have plagued its life as well as those of other opera companies such as the Nagato Miho Gekidan and the Nikikai Opera Company.

Despite the great progress in the diffusion of opera and in the level of artistry during recent decades, there is still no opera house in any of the big cities in Japan. The various companies must rent a theatre or a suitable hall for their performances.

In the post-war era a great number of the world's best opera ensembles have visited Tokyo, where every year at least one or two such groups usually perform to sold-out houses.

The Takarazuka Revue Company

A special place in the history of Japanese popular musical entertainment is occupied by the Takarazuka Revue Company, which for three quarters of a century has been a most successful and unique phenomenon in the Japanese performing arts world. The present average of four troupes of about one hundred performers each, all consisting of unmarried women, performing almost constantly in enormous theatres in Takarazuka (located in the Kyoto-Osaka area) and Tokyo, and on tour all over Japan, gives an idea of the scale of this enterprise.[2]

The founder, Kobayashi Ichizō (1873-1957), had started his all-girl company in 1914 with the hope that it would evolve into a uniquely Japanese form of grand opera for large, popular audiences. His efforts were always directed at providing morally unobjectionable and financially affordable theatre entertainment for the average Japanese family. A very successful industrialist who also eventually climbed the political ladder, becoming Minister of Commerce and Industry, Kobayashi was a man of many large-scale initiatives, such as creating the "Terminal Culture;" that is, commercial development of terminals with huge restaurants, department stores, and mass entertainments near the new railroad lines he had planned; he founded, moreover, Tōhō Films, of which he was the president (Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* and the popular

Godzilla films were produced under his leadership). His genius for meeting the needs of the Japanese populace also guided him in changing a small, quiet town, Takarazuka, into a busy entertainment center, with a famous music school and a three-thousand-seat Grand Theatre. He eventually adapted his dream of grand opera to the reality of a more popular, extremely successful, and unique synthesis of revue/operetta/musical theatre which over the decades won an important share of popular entertainment throughout the entire country.

Kobayashi was the founder and the soul of the famous Music School—a convent-like training ground for thousands of Takarazuka performers, which became a legend among Japan's teenage girls, and is still highly respected and much in demand. He personally set the strict rules for the *seito* (students, the name all Takarazuka girls share, even after they reach stardom) and made sure they would be closely observed, thus maintaining a deserved reputation of high moral standards and thorough dedication.[3]

As a first step towards the establishment of his school, Kobayashi put together the Takarazuka Shōtakai (Takarazuka Chorus), a group of sixteen girls aged twelve to sixteen who gave their first concert in 1913. It soon became the Takarazuka Shōjo-Kageki Yōsei Kai (Girls Opera Training Society), which debuted as an entertainment for the Takarazuka spa in 1914. This naive show concocted of fairy tale operettas and dances is now considered the first official performance of the Takarazuka girls.

During the early years the girls performed rather childish adaptations of nursery tales, such as *Urashima Tarō*, and cut-and-paste stories from foreign sources, many of which were prepared by Kobayashi himself. Their success was based on the charm of innocence and inexperience, which exercised a surprisingly magnetic attraction on steadily growing audiences.

Additions of theatre professionals to the staff of the School resulted in a profound change in the training, which produced accomplished performers ready for more ambitious programs. The great successes in the Osaka-Kyoto region were extended to the capital, with performances at the Imperial Theatre in 1918.

In 1919 the Shōjo-Kageki Yōsei Kai became the Takarazuka Ongaku Kageki Gakkō (Takarazuka Music Opera School), which has served to the present time—under the simpler name of Music School—as the only training ground for girls who aspire to become stars in the Takarazuka company. In 1923 the upper age of the girls admitted to the school was changed from fifteen to nineteen, thus making possible the transition from basically childish programs to adult and professional-looking shows.

In 1924 Kobayashi built in Takarazuka the largest theatre in the Orient, the Daigekijō or Grand Theatre, seating three thousand (the previous largest theatre in Japan had been the Imperial Theatre, seating sixteen hundred). Soon the need for new programming was felt, and the writer-director Kishida Tatsuya was sent abroad for inspiration. He came back in 1927 with the idea of adapting the French revue. The first show in the new style was *Mon Paris*, a series of numbers tied together by the trip of a honeymoon couple stopping in exotic places such as India, Egypt, Shanghai and, of course, Paris. The chorus line now counted eighty girls, scenery and costumes were lavish and sparkling, and the splendidly glossy French-style revue—tamed by a typical Takarazuka sense of family style decency—conquered the fantasy and hearts of innumerable full houses. A new era for the Takarazuka *à la Parisienne* had begun.

The 1930 trip of Shirai Tetsuō to New York, London, and Paris brought to Takarazuka the latest techniques of Broadway musicals. The result was a stunning success of the revue *Parisette* which shared with enormous audiences in all major Japanese cities the lessons learnt from such masters as Maurice Chevalier, Josephine Baker, and the Ziegfield shows; however, nudity and sex were conspicuous by their absence. While never relinquishing the principles of popular family entertainment the Takarazuka company created a formula that has been the source of constant success: an eclectic composite of romantic musical comedy and revue, a mixture of western and Japanese themes and styles, with a heavy emphasis on dance, large-scale choreography with the participation of enormous chorus lines, glitter and gorgeous costumes, and all the trimmings that today are usually identified with the Las Vegas style—minus an emphasis on sex, which is carefully avoided and substituted by a subtler eroticism.

The building in 1934 of the new Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre, which was followed during the next decade by new theatres in Yokohama, Kyoto, Nagoya, Shizuoka, and Hiroshima seemed for a while to establish Takarazuka as a kind of national popular theatre of Japan, a dream shattered by the war.

Success was not limited to Japan. Pre-World War II tours abroad, both to Europe and America, were greeted with general enthusiasm except for the New York performances during a time of political tension preceding the beginning of the conflict between the two countries.[4]

The war in China and World War II saw the company entertaining the Japanese soldiers in Asia and at home with patriotic productions exalting the war effort. The company dropped the word "girls" (*shōjo*) from its name and became the Takarazuka Kageki, (literally Takarazuka Opera), a misleading but official name which is reflected in the logos including the English initials TOC, for Takarazuka Opera Company.

As soon as the war ended the Grand Theatre in Takarazuka was soon repaired; it reopened in 1946. The Takarazuka Theatre in Tokyo, on the contrary, was taken over by the occupation authorities who turned it into a G.I. entertainment center until 1955, when it reopened as the Tokyo center for Takarazuka revues.

The success of the post-war revues was immense, probably because they provided a bright moment of escape in a particularly hard time. A Takarazuka style *Carmen* had an enthusiastic reception, and was followed by a series of hits, among which those worth remembering include a spectacular *Gubijin* (The Beautiful Gu, 1951, located in imperial China) and *Genji Monogatari* (The Tale of Genji, 1952). The repertory of the Takarazuka revues shows that there is hardly any area of successful world drama, novel, opera, operetta, ballet, musical comedy, and so on which has not been adapted for the Takarazuka stage, from *Hamlet* to *Tristan and Isolde*, from *Turandot* to *The Arabian Nights*, from *Coppelia* to *The Merry Widow*, from *West Side Story* to *Carousel* and so forth, to the recent (1987) *Me and My Girl* and a version of the Dracula story.[5]

In 1958 Emperor Hirohito and the imperial family attended a Takarazuka benefit performance, and starting in the late fifties a number of foreign dignitaries, including royal

personages, visited the Takarazuka shows during their stay in Japan. Coveted official recognition of the artistry reached by Takarazuka performers was achieved in 1958, when for the first time the prestigious Purple Ribbon Medal of Merit (Shijuhōshō) and the Fine Arts Festival Prize (Geijutsusaishō) were awarded to Takarazuka stars. Many other important awards were earned in the following years. Recognition came also in the form of favorable reviews by major world critics on the occasion of successful tours abroad, for example during the recent performances at Radio City Hall in New York City (1989).

Kobayashi Ichizō died in 1958. To ensure the continuity of his company after his death—despite the enormous production expenses and the relatively low cost of tickets—Kobayashi placed the fiscal responsibility for the school and the productions in the hands of the trustees of the prosperous Hankyū railway system, who always have taken good care of the Takarazuka Company's finances.

At Kobayashi's funeral over three hundred artists filled the stage of the Grand Theatre in Takarazuka, and admirers in the thousands honored the man who had pursued the dream of making theatrical entertainment available to everyone. His dream, however, reached only a section of the general population. Apart from a small percentage, the audiences of the Takarazuka revues have become almost exclusively female, the majority of whom are very young.[6] The typical Takarazuka fan has become almost a synonym for a dreamy teenage girl, infatuated with the glossy fantasy-world of an *otokoyaku* star (an actress playing male roles), and romantically sharing the ideals of the Takarazuka girls, *kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushiku* (be pure, be right, be beautiful).

Revue, Operetta, Miscellaneous Entertainments

The great success of the Takarazuka revues did not long remain without competition.[7] Only three years after the first performance of the Takarazuka girls, the Tōkyō Shōjo Kageki (Tokyo Girls Opera, later renamed the Osaka Girls Opera, abbreviated as OSK) started its performances about six months before the Tokyo debut of the Takarazuka company. In 1928,

the powerful Shōchiku organization joined the field with the Shōchiku Kageki Dan (Shōchiku Opera Company, usually abbreviated as SKD), which, until World War II, was almost as successful as the Takarazuka. It was characterized by sophisticated dances and lavishly decorated stages, with liberal use of the latest mechanical technology for special effects. After World War II, however, only Takarazuka succeeded in recapturing a wide following, while OSK and SKD reduced their activity to three or four programs a year. The SKD used to perform, until its closing in 1982, at the Kokusai Gekijō in Asakusa, catering to an audience mostly of adults of both sexes from mixed social backgrounds, very different from Takarazuka's audiences swarming with teenage girls from upper and middle class families. Since 1982 the SKD has given some performances at the Kabukiza and other Tokyo theatres; it has been, however, recently inactive because of financial problems.

The efforts of ballet master Rossi at the Imperial Theatre resulted in the production of western operettas performed by Japanese artists between 1912 and 1916. When the Opera Department was closed, Rossi tried to continue the production of operettas at a small Theatre, the Royal-kan; after two years, however, he had to give up, and went back to London.

Very successful, on the contrary, was the so-called Asakusa Opera (1919-1923), performed at up to four Asakusa theatres at the same time with programs changing every ten days. Broad concessions to popular taste produced a genre which is difficult to define, but which certainly made the arias of famous operettas and classical operas well known all over Japan.

The epoch of the Asakusa Opera was brought to a sudden end by the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, which destroyed the theatres. For a while Asakusa was dormant as a theatrical center, until a revue theatre, the Casino Folly (Kajino Fōri), opened in 1929. It introduced to Japan a popularized and magnified night club-style revue based on low comedy and the sex-appeal of scantily clad girls. The most remarkable comedian of this genre was Enoken (Enomoto Ken'ichi, 1904-1970), who became very famous, while the erotic shows found a very large following, largely because of their escapist values for depression audiences. Enoken later joined the Tōhō company and was part of the development of the Nichigeki

Dancing Team (NCT), which made the new theatre, Nihon Gekijō (usually called Nichigeki, built in 1933), famous because of the popular Nichigeki Shows, partly inspired by the presentations at the glamorous Radio City Music Hall of New York.

After World War II Enoken's effort to revive the revue were unsuccessful. For a while the large popular adult audience was preoccupied by strip shows, which developed a following disproportionate to that of any other country; at one point, they were seriously considered by Japanese theatre historians as a significant chapter in the history of the nation's popular entertainment. The major centers of such sex shows were the Teito Theatre in Shinjuku and the Nichigeki Music Hall in Yūrakuchō.

Butō *and the Phenomenon of Circularity*

Among the contemporary Japanese contributions to theatrical arts a post-modern dance genre, *butō*,[8] deserves a brief mention because of its international influence which goes beyond the field of dance. The pioneers of *butō* are Ono Kazuo, who is still (1989) active as the grand old man of *butō*, and an avant-garde dancer, Hijikata Tatsumi (who died in 1986 at 57 years of age). In the late fifties they created a new type of dance which had its roots in Hijikata's dadaistic and surrealistic experiments, and in a need to express in a subversive manner the feeling of anguish and terror experienced during the wartime destruction of Japan. There are some common characteristics in the variety of *butō* artists and companies: the intensity of training, the surrealistic and hallucinatory atmosphere of unconventional, overcontrolled, and mostly slow movements, near-naked bodies painted white, shaved heads, rolled-upwards eyes, wide-open mouths, and the presentation of several spectacular outdoor pieces, such as the one performed by the Dai Rakuda Kan company, in which the dancers are lowered by ropes from high above while expressing a slow unfolding from a fetal position.

Butō, like the achievements of Suzuki Tadashi in the formation of actors, presents an example of the phenomenon of "circularity" in present-day Japanese performing arts. Educated by western teachers who had been deeply impressed

and influenced by the classical theatre arts of Japan, young Japanese artists trained in western performing arts, while at the same time "rediscovering" the treasures of their own traditions. The most creative artists went back to the sources of their Japanese training, but only *after* the western experience had left an indelible mark on them.

Some results of the new synthesis are of the highest caliber and allow the hope that, in general, the encounter between East and West may become an important factor in the improvement of the performing arts during the next century.[9]

NOTES

[1]Komiya, *Japanese Music and Drama in the Meiji Era*, 499.

[2]Berlin, *Takarazuka: A History and Descriptive Analysis of the All-Female Japanese Performance Company*, is the major source for this subject in English.

[3]*Ibid.*, Appendix 3, 327-328, provides a translation of the regulations for *seito* entering the organization.

[4]*Ibid.*, Appendix 1, 311-312, provides a list of tours abroad.

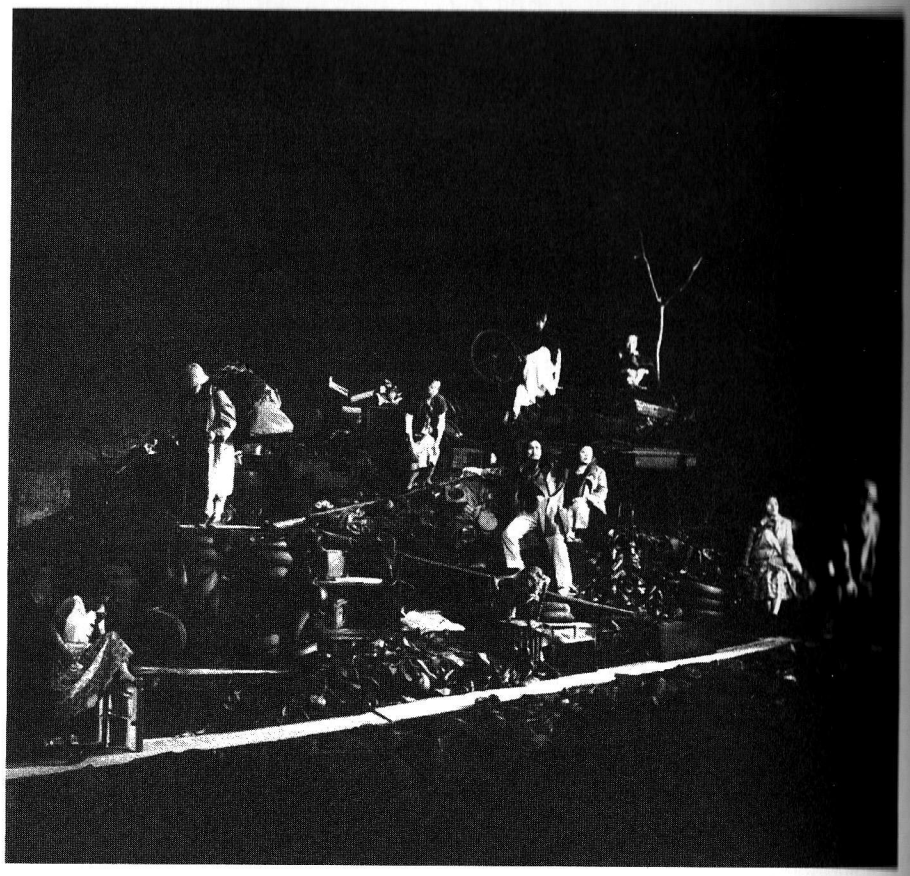
[5]*Ibid.*, Appendix 4, Table 4, 329-344, provides a list of plays based on western sources and other familiar material.

[6]*Ibid.*, Appendix 2, 313-326, provides a survey of fans and audiences.

[7]*Ibid.*, 128-129.

[8]Vicki Sanders, "Dancing and the Dark Soul of Japan: An Aesthetic Analysis of *Butō*," 148-162 and Maria Pia D'Orazi, "Kazuo Ohno: Alle radici del Butō," 121-148.

[9]Ortolani, "Il teatro occidentale alla ricerca dell'energia profonda, «rilassata e composita» dell'oriente", 192-194.



Ōta Shōgo, *The Earth Station*, directed by Ōta Shōgo, Tenkei gekijō, January 1985.
(Courtesy of Ōta Mitsuko)

THE EARTH STATION

ŌTA SHŌGO

TRANSLATED BY MARI BOYD

Ōta Shōgo (1939–2007) was a playwright and director as well as a central figure in the *angura* counterculture of the 1960s to the mid-1970s. His career can be divided into three periods. During the first, between 1962 and 1968, he tried working in new *shingeki* theater companies but was not satisfied with the quality of their art.

During his second and major period, from 1968 to 1988, Ōta developed his theater of divestiture through his work as a playwright, director, and head of the Tenkei Theater Company (Gekidan tenkei gekijō, Theater of Transformation). In 1977, he produced the nō-inspired *Tale of Komachi Told by the Wind* (*Komachi fūden*), which makes startling use of silence and stillness and won the prestigious Kishida Drama Prize. In 1981, he produced *The Water Station* (*Mizu no eki*), his seminal play, epitomizing divestiture, and for its performance his company received the Kinokuniya Theater Award in the group category. Ōta led the Tenkei Theater on international tours of *The Tale of Komachi Told by the Wind* and *The Water Station* to Europe, North America, Australia, and South Korea.

In his third period from 1990 to 2007, Ōta became a prominent social force in the arts world, providing emerging artists with venues to showcase their art. He served as the artistic director of the Fujisawa Civic Theater in Kanagawa Prefecture, as vice president of the Japan Playwrights Association, and as a professor at the Kyoto University of Art and Design and the chief editor of its periodical, *Performing Arts*.

The Earth Station is the second of Ōta's groundbreaking works in quietude. In this play, only the Daughters of the Wind actually deliver lines. The other figures remain silent throughout and move at a pace of roughly six and a half

feet every five minutes. The free-verse score provides the actors with psychophysical tasks through which silence becomes living presence.

Scenes

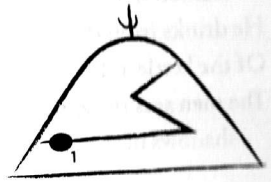
1. A Girl
2. A Man Looking at a Tree
3. Two Men
4. One of Three
5. A Flask
6. Four Eyes
7. A Woman in Labor
8. An Empty Can
9. A Burial
10. Two Mouths
11. An Interlude
12. A Man and a Woman
13. Distant Thunder

Characters

GIRL
MAN WHO LOOKS AT A TREE
MAN (A)
MAN (B)
MAN WITH A HUGE LOAD ON HIS BACK
WAITING WOMAN
WOMAN IN LABOR
FIRST HUSBAND
FIRST WIFE
WOMAN WITH AN IRON
OLD WOMAN
SECOND HUSBAND
SECOND WIFE
SISTER
BOY
DAUGHTER OF THE WIND (A)
DAUGHTER OF THE WIND (B)
DAUGHTER OF THE WIND (C)
MAN
WOMAN
MAN WHO TAKES COVER
ANOTHER WOMAN

Main Action	Minor Action 1	Minor Action 2	Sound

SCENE 1. A GIRL



1. girl

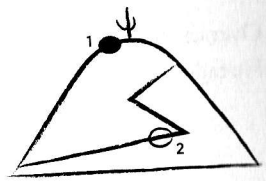
SATIE, "GYMNOPÉDIE, NO. 3"

With the dark mountain
in the background
Along the mountain
path alone
A girl walks
In the obscure light
Toward an obscure destination
Carrying three bags

The girl walks

Stopping
The girl's gaze shifts
Crawls up to the dark
mountaintop

SCENE 2. A MAN LOOKING AT A TREE



1. man looking at tree
2. girl

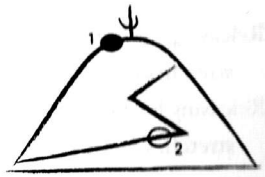
In a shaft of light
On the top of the mountain
of debris
A single tree and a lone man

At a stunted tree with frail
branches
The man looks
As if at a towering big tree

Still dark
Up the mid-slope of the mountain

Main Action	Minor Action 1	Minor Action 2
With his baggage on his back	Climb the shadows of two men	
The man lies down		
The reclining man daydreams Of a breeze passing by the towering trunk		
Then looking at the stunted tree He drinks from the spout Of the kettle at his side The man sees the approaching shadows of the two men	The two men approach the mountaintop	
From the cheek of the man looking at the tree Fades the breeze by the towering trunk		
Arising The man regards the watching eyes	Looking for a place to rest The men look around	
Casting a distant look At the stunted tree where no wind blows The man departs		
Over the mountain He fades		
	Walking along the mountain path The girl stops	

Main Action	Minor Action 1	Minor Action 2	Sound
	SCENE 3. TWO MEN		
Lowering his baggage man (b) sits down On the upturned furniture Protruding from the junk pile Man (a) sits down beside man (b)			
	By the path The girl sits down		
Their shoulders touch			
Man (b) inches away Man (a) slides into the space left by man (b)			
Shifting his weight man (b) moves away			
Man (a) senses the rock Man (b) feels the rock			
Man (b) quietly Without being noticed Shifts back to his original position			
Their shoulders touch			
With the widening perspective before them their eyes Graze over the mountain of debris Then turn to the far distance			
With bated breath Man (a) waits for man (b)'s reaction In the direction of man (b)'s gaze Man (a) looks and on to the view again			

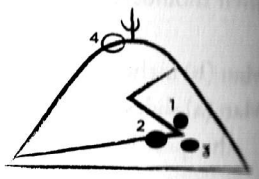


1. two men
2. girl

The look on their faces as they
confront each other

Releasing his breath man (b)
stretches out his legs
Releasing his breath man (a)
stretches out his legs

SCENE 4. ONE OF THREE



1. waiting woman
2. girl
3. man with a huge load
4. two men

SATIE, "GYMNOPÉDIE, NO. 3"

The girl
Takes out children's playthings
From her luggage
Dolls music boxes and toys

Looking fondly at each
one by one
She throws them away
into the junk pile

On top of a car half-protruding
From the rubble
A woman waits

Sunken in the junk
A man with a huge load on his back
Is lying down

Watching the girl from behind
the waiting woman stands
Near the man with a huge load
the girl discards
Music boxes and dolls

From the playthings
Tearing her eyes away standing up
The girl walks off

Following the girl with
their eyes
The waiting woman the man
with the huge load

From a dark crevice in
the rubble appear
A woman's bare legs hands
neck
And face contorted with
labor pains

The girl walks by the
suffering woman

The girl's faltering steps

The woman breathing heavily

Stopping the girl steps
From the path onto the junk

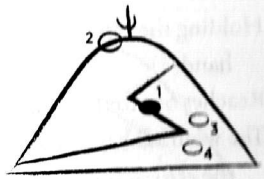
The woman senses the
girl's presence

The woman's hand
stretches out
To the girl's flask

The girl clasps the flask tight
Reaching out the woman
looks up
The girl looks into her eyes

Her eyes and hands move
away from the flask

SCENE 5. A FLASK



1. woman giving birth
and girl
2. two men
3. waiting woman
4. man with a huge load

Hirata Oriza, *Tokyo Notes*, directed by Hirata Oriza, Seinendan, March 1998. (Photograph by Aoki Tsukasa)

TOKYO NOTES

HIRATA ORIZA

TRANSLATED BY M. CODY POULTON

Born in Tokyo in 1962, Hirata Oriza is one of Japan's leading playwrights and directors. His first book was an account of an around-the-world trip he made by bicycle while still a high-school student. He began writing plays for his theater company, Seinendan, in his first year at International Christian University, and as an undergraduate, he spent a year in Korea in the 1980s, signaling an abiding interest in Korean language and culture that began long before it became fashionable in Japan. His sympathies for the Korean people are reflected in his first major play, *Citizens of Seoul* (*Seoul shimin*, 1991), which is set in 1910, the year of Korea's annexation by Japan. With its restrained focus on the everyday lives and conversations of ordinary people, this work was one of the first of what critics called the "quiet dramas" (*shizuka na geki*), which marked a shift in the 1990s away from the boisterous and festive nature of 1980s Japanese theater toward a new, sober realism. Hirata, however, prefers to call his new dramatic style "contemporary colloquial theater." Since the early 1990s, Hirata's plays have been performed abroad, and many of his works have been translated into several foreign languages. He has also collaborated with Korean, Chinese, French, and Belgian directors and theater companies in productions of his work. A prolific writer and critic of contemporary social problems and cultural policy, Hirata also has been active in academic and political spheres.

As its title suggests, the play excerpted here, his most famous work (it was awarded the Kishida Kunio Award in 1995) is an homage to Ozu Yasujirō's classic film *Tokyo Story* (*Tōkyō monogatari*, 1953), about an elderly couple who go to Tokyo to visit their children. Like Ozu, Hirata is interested in the

dissolution of the Japanese family, traditionally considered the microcosm of Japanese society as a whole. Here, however, the parents are absent, and we are presented with an awkward reunion of the children and their spouses in the lobby of a Tokyo art gallery that is exhibiting the works of Jan Vermeer, which have been rescued from a war-torn Europe. Written in 1994 but set ten years in the future, the work is a commentary on Japan's dubious role in international affairs. At the same time, like Vermeer's paintings, the work is both a manifesto and a wry critique of the realist impulse.

Characters

AKIYAMA SHINYA, the eldest of the Akiyamas
TOKIKO, Shinya's wife
YUMI, the second eldest
YŪJI, the third eldest
YOSHIE, YŪJI's wife
IKUE, the second youngest
SHIGEO, the youngest
HIRAYAMA EMIKO, curator
MITSUHASHI MIYUKI, donor of paintings
ONO KUNIKO, lawyer
SAITŌ YOSHIO, friend of MITSUHASHI's
KUSHIMOTO TERUO, curator
KINOSHITA TAKASHI
NOSAKA HARUKO
HASHIZUME MIKIO
TERANISHI RIKA
ISHIDA EISUKE
SUDA NAO
MIZUKAMI FUMIKO, college student
WAKITA YURIKO, college student

Note: The numbers assigned to each scene are guides for rehearsal and otherwise have no special function or meaning.

Time: May 2004.
Place: The lobby of an art gallery.

A corridor leads directly from stage left to the exhibition rooms. Upstage right is a staircase leading to a mezzanine. The staircase rises in the direction of stage left. The stage area is probably in one corner of the gallery building, a small space connecting the ground and second floors.

Three sofas (A, B, C), *seating three persons each, are arranged on the stage perpendicular to the audience. In this script, each seat is referred to as* 1, 2, 3, *starting from upstage. Farther upstage is another sofa* (D), *set parallel to the audience. The seats are referred to as* 1, 2, 3 *from stage right to stage left. Cylindrical ashtrays are set between seats* A3 *and* B3 *and between seats* C1 *and* D3. *Beside* D1 *is a wastepaper basket in a matching design and a magazine rack.*

Although not on stage, a toilet is located offstage down the corridor leading to the exhibition rooms. Apparently, there is a vending machine located at the top of the stairs.[1]

YOSHIE: You know Yuji won't buy any toys for Tarō with batteries.
YUMI: How come?

3.1.2

YOSHIE: If the toy needs batteries, then it stops working when the battery runs out, and then the kid won't play with it.

(ISHIDA, EISUKE, *and* SUDA NAO *enter from stage right.*)

YUMI: Ah.
YOSHIE: But kids like stuff that moves.

ISHIDA (*Entering*): Yeah, but—

YUMI: How old's Tarō? Three?

SUDA (*Entering*): Uh huh.

YOSHIE: Three and a half.

ISHIDA (*Entering*): But monks drink. They always have.

YUMI: Ah. Well, then.

SUDA (*Entering*): I know that.

YOSHIE: Yeah.

ISHIDA: So, it's not exactly a lie, right?

1. This scene starts at the end of 3.1.1, after a conversation in which Yumi tells her sister-in-law Yoshie about her father's aversion to battery-operated toothbrushes.

(YOSHIE *moves to* A1.)

YUMI: So, Tarō's in kindergarten already.
YOSHIE: Yep.

YUMI: Did you see the photos?
His entrance ceremony.

YOSHIE: Yeah.
YUMI: Dad was so excited, you know.
YOSHIE: Sorry for making him come all the way to Tokyo.
YUMI: No problem. He's not busy.
YOSHIE: Really.
YUMI: Really. Time flies, eh?
YOSHIE: Will you come again next year, Yumi?
YUMI: Yeah, well, probably.

SUDA: Yeah, but it's too weird, that story.

ISHIDA: You're getting kinda red, you know.
SUDA: Huh?
ISHIDA: In the face. (*Sits at* C3, *facing stage left.*)
SUDA: Naw.
ISHIDA: You been drinking?
SUDA: 'Course not. (*Sits at* B3.)
ISHIDA: Oh.
SUDA: What're you talking about? We've been together all along.
ISHIDA: You're, uh, getting redder and redder.
SUDA: Oh shut up.
ISHIDA: Beet red.
SUDA: Shut up I say.
ISHIDA (*To* YUMI): She's red, isn't she.
YUMI: A bit, I guess.
ISHIDA: There you go.
SUDA: You're embarrassing me.

(*A long pause.*)
ISHIDA: Want a coffee?

SUDA: No thanks.
ISHIDA: OK.

YOSHIE: You'll be coming when? Around this time, May?
YUMI: Not sure. Maybe the summer.

YOSHIE: Ah.

YUMI: I'll come when the galleries are doing something good.

YOSHIE: Ah. I see.

YUMI: Why?

YOSHIE: Nothing special.

YUMI: What?

YOSHIE: Nothing. (*Looks at* SUDA.)
(*A long pause.*)

YOSHIE: Guess we'll be getting more pictures, eh. Lots of 'em.

YUMI: Uh huh.
(*A long pause.*)

YOSHIE: So long as Japan stays out of the war.

YUMI: Ah, yeah.

(ISHIDA *stands.*)

SUDA: Huh? You going?

ISHIDA: Just fooling. (*Sits.*)

SUDA: What're you doing?

ISHIDA: Nothin'. Not bad, eh? A place like this, for a change.

SUDA: Uh huh.

ISHIDA: You know, at night, I fly around in the plane, just looking. From the sky.

SUDA: Uh huh.

ISHIDA: It's pitch black, and all you can see are the searchlights going round and round.

SUDA (*Pausing*): You scared?
ISHIDA: Nah, not us.

SUDA: That so?

ISHIDA (*Twirling his arms around like searchlights*): Like this.
(*A long pause.*)
SUDA: What's that?
ISHIDA: The searchlights.

YOSHIE: I knew he was a crybaby, but I didn't know he hated corners.

YUMI: Huh?

YOSHIE: Yuji. Being a crybaby.

YUMI: Oh.

(*A long pause.*)

YUMI: Something happen with you and Yuji?

YOSHIE: No, we're fine.

SUDA: Thought you were a snail for a sec.

ISHIDA: Na.

(*A long pause.*)

ISHIDA: Wouldn't say it was pretty, mind you.

SUDA: Hm.

ISHIDA: You know, Berlin. It's a big city.

SUDA: Uh huh.

ISHIDA: All pitch black. Like everyone was holding their breath.

SUDA: Ah.

ISHIDA: Dead quiet.

SUDA: Uh huh.

ISHIDA: I fly round like this, just watching. But can't see anything, 'cause it's dark.

(*A long pause.*)

ISHIDA: They say air raids are scary. If you're on the ground, that is.

SUDA: Oh—

(*A long pause.*)

SUDA: Let's go.

3.1.3

ISHIDA: OK.

SUDA: . . .

ISHIDA (*Makes to stand*): What?

SUDA: Been sixty years exactly since Saint-Exupéry died, so I heard.

ISHIDA: Eh?

SUDA: Died in a plane over the Mediterranean, he did. In the war.

ISHIDA: Oh yeah. *Night Flight*, wasn't it? *Vol de nuit*.

SUDA (*Cutting in*): Read a lot about airplanes when you were away.

ISHIDA: *Vol de nuit*? or *Vol au vent*? Which was it now?

SUDA: "Love is to join, to share."

ISHIDA: What's that?

SUDA: That's what he said before he died.

ISHIDA: I ain't gonna die.

SUDA: . . .

ISHIDA: It's not like we're at war or anything.

SUDA: In that case, let me join you.

ISHIDA: . . .

SUDA: I'll join you.

ISHIDA: Sixty years?

SUDA: Uh huh.

ISHIDA: That's almost a life span.

SUDA (*Pausing briefly*): Uh huh.

ISHIDA (*A longer pause*): Sixty years, and humans aren't any better.

SUDA: . . .

ISHIDA: Dead loss, eh?

SUDA: Uh huh.

ISHIDA: Your face is red.

(*A long pause.*)

SUDA (*Stretches and lays her hands on* ISHIDA*'s lap*): A snail.

ISHIDA: Yup.

(SUDA *grinds her fists into his lap.*)

ISHIDA: Stoppit! That's an erogenous zone.

SUDA: Dummy.

(*A long pause.*)

SUDA: Let's go. (*Stands.*)

ISHIDA: OK. (*Pause. She also stands.*)

SUDA: Go to any art galleries in Berlin?

ISHIDA: Nope.

SUDA: How come?

ISHIDA (*Exiting*): There's a war on.

SUDA (*Exiting*): Didn't you just say you weren't at war?

ISHIDA (*Exiting*): Yeah, well, we're not fighting, but some folks are.

SUDA: Same thing, surely.

(*The two exit stage left.*)

3.2.1

A fifteen seconds' pause.

YOSHIE: I might not be able to see you next year, Yumi.

YUMI: Huh? How come?

YOSHIE: . . .

YUMI: Going somewhere, next year?

YOSHIE: I might not be able to see you again, ever.

YUMI: . . .

YOSHIE: He burst into tears the other day. Yūji.

YUMI: Huh?

YOSHIE: Said he'd fallen in love with another woman.

YUMI: Eh?—

YOSHIE: I was the one who wanted to cry.

YUMI (*Pausing*): Hm.

YOSHIE: I feel like my battery's run out.

YUMI (*Pausing*): But, there's Tarō to think about.

YOSHIE: . . .

YUMI: I'm really terrible these days. It's like I take pleasure in other people's misfortune.

YOSHIE: No, surely not.

YUMI: Oh well.

YOSHIE: I feel like I'm letting down your Mum and Dad.

YUMI: Hm?—

YOSHIE: They were so sweet to me.

YUMI: Don't you worry about my parents.

YOSHIE: No, I just can't help but thinking, what am I gonna say to them?

YUMI: Does Shinya know about this?

YOSHIE: No, I don't think so.

YUMI: That so?—

YOSHIE: I think—

YUMI: Uh huh.

(*A long pause.*)

YUMI: I'm feeling kind of hungry.

YOSHIE: Uh huh—

YUMI: You must be hungry too. You didn't have much for lunch.

YOSHIE: Yes.

YUMI: What d'you usually do for lunch?

YOSHIE: Uh, well—

YUMI: You eat alone, I bet.

YOSHIE: Well—yes.

YUMI: Aren't you lonely?

YOSHIE: I pack the lunches.

YUMI: Hm?—

YOSHIE: One for Yūji, one for Tarō, and one for myself.

YUMI: One for yourself too?

YOSHIE: Uh huh—

YUMI: To eat at home?

YOSHIE: Sometimes I go to the park.

YUMI: Ah—

YOSHIE: It's a nuisance making lunch just for yourself.

YUMI: Ah—

YOSHIE: Guess I'm just lazy.

YUMI: Um—

YOSHIE (*Pausing*): You know, we're a family, so it's better we all eat the same thing.

YUMI: Ah—

(IKUE *enters from stage right.*)

IKUE: I'm back.

YUMI: Ah—

YOSHIE (*Cutting in*): So, how was it?

IKUE: I've had my fill, I think.

YOSHIE: Uh huh.

IKUE: From now on, you can call me a connoisseur.

YUMI: A gourmand, more like it.

IKUE: Huh?—

YUMI: Gourmand. You know, food.

IKUE: Not.

YUMI: Shinya and the others are here.

IKUE: Yes, I saw them.

YUMI: Really—

IKUE: Said they'd be along in a minute. (*Sits at* A2.)

YUMI: Ah—

(*A long pause.*)

YUMI: What d'you do for lunch?

IKUE: Never skip it.

YUMI: D'you pack one, or eat out?

IKUE: Depends—

YOSHIE: A gourmand.

IKUE: Am not!

YUMI: D'you mean you pack lunch sometimes?

IKUE: Guess I don't.

(HIRAYAMA *and* ONO *enter from stage right.*)

HIRAYAMA: Hey, they're gone.

ONO: Uh huh.

HIRAYAMA: Wonder where they got to.

ONO: Probably still looking at the pictures.

HIRAYAMA: Ah.

ONO: Shall we go this way?

HIRAYAMA: Ah, yes. (*Starts walking to stage left.*) Does Ms. Mitsuhashi like paintings?

ONO: Well, I don't think she dislikes them. Why? You worried?

YUMI: Figures.

IKUE: What I mean is, sometimes I eat out, sometimes in the company canteen.

YUMI: The canteen can't be any good.

IKUE: It's not that bad, really.

YUMI: That so?

IKUE: It's quite good, actually. We have a lot of choice.

YOSHIE: What d'you do for lunch, Yumi?

YUMI: Me?

YOSHIE: Yeah—

YUMI: Well, I pack one, usually.

YOSHIE: Ah—

YUMI: You know, I used to make one for Dad, one for Shigeo, and one for myself. Three in all.

YOSHIE: Ah—

YUMI: Then, when Shigeo moved here, only had to make two. Whole lot easier.

YOSHIE: Uh huh—

YUMI: Shigeo and Dad have quite different tastes.

YOSHIE: Oh, I see.

YUMI: Uh huh.

IKUE (*Speaking at the same time as* YUMI): Dad likes oily stuff.

YOSHIE: Oh—

IKUE: Shigeo goes for something light.

YOSHIE: Surely it's the other way around.

IKUE: Uh uh, not our family.

YUMI: Yūji'll eat anything, right?

YOSHIE: Uh, yeah—

YUMI: Middle children aren't picky.

YOSHIE: Ah—

IKUE: That's right. I eat anything too.

YUMI: What about eggplants? You won't eat those.

HIRAYAMA: No, not exactly, but . . .

(HIRAYAMA *and* ONO *exit stage left.*)

IKUE: Ah—

YUMI: You eat 'em now?

IKUE: Well, it's not normal to eat eggplants.

YUMI: What're you talking about?

IKUE: Normal people don't eat purple food.

YUMI: You're too weird.

(*A long pause.*)

YUMI: So Shigeo moved to Tokyo, then Dad retired, so I figured I didn't have to make lunches anymore. It's like I was doing it for Dad and Shigeo, never for myself.

YOSHIE: But it wasn't like that, was it.

YUMI: No.

YOSHIE: Naturally.

YUMI: Still, I surprised myself.

YOSHIE: Hm?—

YUMI: I started fixing up some really fancy lunches. Just for myself.

IKUE: You always were a bit of a fuss-pot.

YOSHIE: She used to make lunches for you too, didn't she, Ikue.

IKUE: Not really. Mum was still in good shape then.

YOSHIE: That so.

IKUE: Uh huh—

YUMI: That's right.

IKUE (*Cutting in*): Mum was fast. At cooking, anything.

YUMI: I can be fast too, if I have to.

3.3.1

(HIRAYAMA *and* ONO *return from stage right.*)

ONO: Huh?

IKUE: Hey, you never could do the dishes and the cooking at the same time.

YUMI: Could so!

(*A long pause.*)

YOSHIE: I'm a lousy cook.

YUMI: Surely not.

YOSHIE: Really. I'm so disorganized.

YUMI: No kidding?

YOSHIE: Hey, Yumi, why don't you ask her, you know, about—?

YUMI: Huh?

YOSHIE: You know, what you said back there, when we were looking at the Vermeer.

YUMI: Ah—

IKUE: What? What?

HIRAYAMA: They're not here—

ONO: They'll be back, I guess.

HIRAYAMA: Yes, well—

ONO: Well, let's wait then.

HIRAYAMA: Yes—

ONO: Sorry. (*Sits at* C3.)

HIRAYAMA: Don't mention it. (*Sits at* B3.)

ONO: Nice work.

HIRAYAMA: Huh?

ONO: I mean, you must like what you do.

HIRAYAMA: Yes, well—

ONO: Been here long?

HIRAYAMA: Ever since I got out of graduate school.

ONO: Ah. (*Pause.*) Do any painting yourself?

HIRAYAMA: Uh, no, not at all.

ONO: Never tried?

HIRAYAMA: I just like looking at pictures.

ONO: Ah—

YOSHIE: I don't quite know how to explain it.

YUMI (*Cutting in*): Don't bother—

YOSHIE: You know, she's kind of technical, Yumi.

IKUE: Oh—

YUMI: Enough already—

YOSHIE (*To* HIRAYAMA): Uh, excuse me?

(*A long pause.*)

HIRAYAMA: Who, me?

YOSHIE: Yes—

HIRAYAMA: Yes?

YOSHIE: You work here, right?

HIRAYAMA: Yes.

YOSHIE: Is it OK to ask a question?

HIRAYAMA: Why, sure. Please.

YOSHIE: There you go—

YUMI: Yeah, but—

HIRAYAMA: Please. Not sure I can answer you, but—

YUMI: Um, well, is it true Vermeer had eleven kids?

HIRAYAMA: Huh?

YUMI: It's, uh, just something I read?

HIRAYAMA: Is that so?

YUMI: Yes—

IKUE (*Cutting in*): I'll say she's technical—

YOSHIE: That's not it—

HIRAYAMA: Sorry, but my specialty is contemporary art, so I'm not sure I can give you a good answer—

YUMI: Oh—

HIRAYAMA: I guess.

(*A long pause.*)

HIRAYAMA: What about you? D'you like pictures?

ONO: Uh, yes. Looking.

HIRAYAMA: I'm studying up on that right now. You know, Vermeer, etc.

YUMI: Uh, sorry.

HIRAYAMA: Not at all. We weren't expecting them. Fact is, I *am* a curator, I ought to be able to answer these questions.

YUMI: Ah. Lots of work for you, I guess.

HIRAYAMA: Yeah, well—

YOSHIE: Um, did they have cameras in those days?

HIRAYAMA: Huh?

YOSHIE: Cameras. Said on the plaque that they used them for painting.

HIRAYAMA: Oh, they weren't like our modern cameras. Just a lens, no film.

YOSHIE: Oh—

HIRAYAMA: As I say, I'm not an expert in this area, but I could call out somebody who is.

YUMI: No, please—

HIRAYAMA: There's a fellow called Kushimoto on staff who's an expert in that period. If you don't mind—

YUMI: No, really, please—

HIRAYAMA: Are you sure?

YUMI: Yes. (*Pause.*) But, they don't look like they were painted by somebody with eleven kids.

HIRAYAMA: Ah—

YUMI: They're supposed to be everyday scenes, but they seem strangely tranquil, don't you think?

HIRAYAMA: Now you mention it—

IKUE (*Cutting in*): Wow!

YUMI: Shut up.

HIRAYAMA: Not that I'm an expert—

YUMI: Uh huh—

HIRAYAMA: Did you notice the light from the windows?

YUMI: Yes—
HIRAYAMA: You can only see the spots where the light strikes, sort of highlighted.
YUMI: Yes.
HIRAYAMA: That's how he cuts out the world, maybe. From everyday life.
YUMI: Ah—
HIRAYAMA: Everything else is in shadow.
YUMI: Ah, yes—
HIRAYAMA: Anyway, that's my impression.
YUMI: Ah hah.
IKUE: Cool!
YUMI: Shut up, will you?
YOSHIE: She was talking about something more complicated earlier.
IKUE: Eh?—
HIRAYAMA (*Speaking at the same time as* IKUE): And what was that?
YUMI (*Cutting in*): Was not.
YOSHIE: Some kind of drafting method that transcended photographic realism, something like that.
IKUE: Wow!—
YUMI: Did not. I was reading it out from the guidebook, surely.
(*A long pause.*)
HIRAYAMA: You're family?
YUMI: Uh, yes. This one's actually my sister-in-law.
HIRAYAMA: Ah.
YUMI: Sorry for bothering you with such strange talk.
HIRAYAMA: Not at all. I learned a great deal.
YUMI: Not at all—

3.3.3

(YŪJI *returns from stage left.*)
YŪJI: Sorry to keep you waiting.
YUMI: Ah—
YOSHIE (*Cutting in*): Ah—
YŪJI: Shigeo not here?
YUMI: Not yet.
YOSHIE: What about Shinya and Tokiko?
YŪJI: Back in a sec. (*Sits at* D2.) Buying postcards.
(*A long pause.*)
YUMI (*To* HIRAYAMA): My brother.
HIRAYAMA: Ah—(*To* YŪJI.) Hello—
(YŪJI *nods.*)
YOSHIE (*Pausing briefly*): She was explaining the pictures.
YŪJI: Uh huh.
(HIRAYAMA *stands.*)
YUMI: Thank you very much.
HIRAYAMA: Not at all. (*Turns toward stage right.*)
YŪJI (*Pausing briefly*): How's Pop?

YUMI: Well, Dad's fine, but Mum, you know—

YŪJI: Ah—
YUMI: Her nerves.
YŪJI: Hm. Let's talk about that later.
YUMI: Really, we don't have to.
YŪJI: Why?
YUMI: We hardly ever have dinner together. You don't want to spoil it.
YŪJI: But surely we can't avoid the topic.
YUMI: Why not?

ONO: Well done.

HIRAYAMA: Not at all—

(SHINYA *and* TOKIKO *enter from stage left.*)

YŪJI: Ah!—

SHINYA: Shigeo not here?

YŪJI: Not yet—

SHINYA: What's he up to?—

YŪJI: No idea—

(YŪJI *stands and goes to* D1. SHINYA *and* TOKIKO *sit at* D2 *and* D3.)

YUMI: How're you and those corners now?

YŪJI: Huh?

YUMI: Corners. You're sitting in one.

YŪJI: Oh—

SHINYA: Now you mention it.

YŪJI: That was a long time ago.

YUMI: How 'bout Othello?

YŪJI: Nah, still can't stand the game.

IKUE: Hates dice, too.

YOSHIE: Oh—

YŪJI: Heard Mum's nerves are bad, eh?

SHINYA: Yeah.

YŪJI: You knew?

SHINYA: Well, *we* went back at New Year's.

YOSHIE: How was it?

TOKIKO: Good, I guess.

YOSHIE: Wasn't it.

TOKIKO: Uh huh.

YOSHIE: Good, eh? To look at pictures. Sometimes.

(HIRAYAMA *looks at* YUMI.)

HIRAYAMA: They're taking their time.

ONO: Uh huh.

HIRAYAMA: You've got other things to do, I suppose.

ONO: Not this afternoon. Nothing scheduled after this.

YŪJI: Oh, yeah—

HIRAYAMA: Ah.

YOSHIE: Sorry we didn't make it.

SHINYA: No, I didn't mean *that*.

YUMI: You're an only child, aren't you, Yoshie?—

YOSHIE: Yes, but (*To* TOKIKO) so are you. Right, Tokiko?

TOKIKO: Ah, but—

YOSHIE: Besides, my folks are in Tokyo.

SHINYA: You can make it this summer, can't you?

YŪJI: I guess.

SHINYA: Bring Tarō.

YŪJI: Yes.

YOSHIE (*Speaking at the same time*): Is Mum as bad as that?

YUMI: She's fine, really. Same as always.

YOSHIE: Really?

(*A long pause.*)

YUMI: Change the subject, shall we?

SHINYA (*Pausing briefly*): What subject was that?

YUMI: Nothing—

YŪJI (*Speaking at the same time*): We were talking about the folks. You know.

SHINYA: Oh—

YUMI: You know, we hardly ever see each other, like, so let's talk about something else.

YŪJI: Something else? Like what?

YUMI: Something fun. Like, where you went, what you saw.

YŪJI (*Pausing*): Nothing there. To talk about.

YUMI: Eh?—

YŪJI: Nothing's happening. Even in Tokyo.

YUMI: I'm not talking about Tokyo in particular—

SHINYA: Well, everybody's busy.

(*A long pause.*)

SHINYA: Kinda boring just talking about work.

YUMI: No, work's fine. Anything.

HIRAYAMA: Care for a coffee?

SHINYA (*Quickly*): That so?

ONO: Uh, no, I'm fine.

YUMI: Sure. We hardly ever see each other, so it's fine, isn't it? To talk about work, anything. Just so we know what everybody's up to.

HIRAYAMA: OK.

IKUE (*Quickly*): I write computer programs all day.

YUMI: Hm.

IKUE: That's it—

YUMI: . . .

YŪJI: Job, family, all the same, really—

YUMI: Is it, I wonder—

YŪJI: At least, when it comes to spoiling one's dinner.

IKUE: Sorry. We're not much of a family—

YOSHIE: No, really—

TOKIKO: But we envy you guys. Lots of brothers and sisters—

YOSHIE: Yes—

SHINYA (*Cutting in*): It's kinda hard to talk, you know, when you hardly ever see each other.

YŪJI: Yeah.

YOSHIE: No problem, really, if you talk only about fun stuff.

YUMI: Yeah.

YOSHIE (*Quickly*): If you just look at the spots where the light strikes.

YUMI: Ah—

IKUE: Everything else is pitch black.

YOSHIE: That's right.

IKUE: Is that what she meant earlier?

YOSHIE: No, something else, I think.

IKUE: Oh.

YOSHIE: Nothing.

SHINYA: What's all that about?

(YUMI *and* HIRAYAMA *exchange glances.*)

YUMI: Nothing.

YOSHIE: Yes.

(*A long pause.*)

YUMI: Ah, you know what? You should've seen Yoshie back there. Sneezed on the Vermeer.

YOSHIE: Not on the picture.

YUMI: Like this—"honk!"

YOSHIE: Did not!

YUMI: Isn't that how Yoshie sneezes? "Honk!"

YŪJI: Oh—

YOSHIE (*Cutting in*): Do not.

YUMI: What if you got spit on the picture?

HIRAYAMA: Ah, yes, well—

YUMI: That'd be awful, wouldn't it?

HIRAYAMA: We haven't run into that problem before—

YUMI: Ah—

(*A long pause.*)

IKUE: Yumi, why don't you ask her something more decent?—

4.1.1

(KUSHIMOTO *enters from stage right.*)

KUSHIMOTO: Huh, what're you up to?

HIRAYAMA: Ah, we were waiting for Ms. Mitsuhashi—

KUSHIMOTO: That heir to the collection, Ms. Mitsuhashi?

YUMI: Leave me alone. (*To* YOSHIE.) Right?

(YOSHIE *smiles.*)

TOKIKO: Nice blouse.

YOSHIE: Think so?

TOKIKO: Uh huh. Suits you.

YOSHIE: Thanks.

HIRAYAMA: Uh, uh, excuse me, this is Kushimoto, the gentleman I mentioned?

YUMI: Oh—

HIRAYAMA: He's an expert in Dutch painting.

YUMI: Oh. Yes—

HIRAYAMA: Please, go ahead, ask him anything.

YUMI: Why, uh—

KUSHIMOTO: Can I help?

HIRAYAMA: Yes—

KUSHIMOTO: So?

HIRAYAMA: So, no problem, really.

KUSHIMOTO: Look, the lawyers and tax accountants can be a bloody nuisance but you gotta play tough. The point is to make her donate the whole collection, lock, stock, and barrel.

HIRAYAMA: Uh, this is Ms. Ono. Their solicitor—

KUSHIMOTO: O-oh—

ONO: Ono.

KUSHIMOTO: Kushimoto. Curator.

ONO: Hi.

HIRAYAMA: She was here when you came for me, remember?

KUSHIMOTO: Oh. Was she?

HIRAYAMA: Yes.

KUSHIMOTO: Play tough, eh?—(*Hits his own head.*) What the hell—

ONO: Easy does it.

KUSHIMOTO: Same to you—

HIRAYAMA: Please—(*Urges* KUSHIMOTO *to sit down.*)

KUSHIMOTO: Well—(*Sits at* C1.)

HIRAYAMA: Please—

YUMI: Yes—

HIRAYAMA: She was asking about, uh, the camera obscura.

KUSHIMOTO: Ah—

HIRAYAMA: Nothing I know about.

YUMI (*Shifts in her seat to face stage right toward* KUSHIMOTO): Sorry.

KUSHIMOTO: Ah, not at all.

YUMI: . . .

KUSHIMOTO: So, what would you like to know?

YUMI: Uh, what should I say?

HIRAYAMA: The camera, tell her.

KUSHIMOTO: Ah, well. It's called a camera, but it's not like the cameras today, there's no film so, of course, no picture to develop.

YUMI: I see—

KUSHIMOTO: Just a box about this size—camera obscura means a dark box, y'see?—with a lens on front here, and you peer in here, and you can see the object here. The light comes in from this direction.

YUMI: . . .

KUSHIMOTO: Same as looking through the finder in our cameras. Twin lens reflex.

YUMI: But that's the same as just looking at it with the naked eye, surely.

KUSHIMOTO: Yes, but pictures make three-dimensional things two-dimensional, right?

YUMI: Yes—

KUSHIMOTO: So, the picture is distorted somewhat. Do you follow?

YUMI: Yes—

KUSHIMOTO: You project your picture through the lens, right? Then, what they did, I guess, was trace it.

YUMI: Oh, I see—

IKUE: Really, Yumi?

YUMI: Yes, I think so.

KUSHIMOTO: They could actually project images through the lens onto a flat surface, like a wall or a sheet of paper.

YUMI: Oh—

KUSHIMOTO: To look at things through a lens was really quite a feat in those days.

YUMI: . . .

KUSHIMOTO: The seventeenth century was, like, the beginning of the modern era. You had Galileo and his telescope, and the microscope, and, I mean, you could use a lens to look at things you couldn't see otherwise. All sorts of things, little things, the universe even. Well, that was the point of view on things—not like, say, God's perspective, but different. In any case, Holland was the center for the development of lenses back then. The Dutch philosopher Spinoza whiled away his time polishing lenses, speculating about God and the universe and all that. Just polishing his lenses like this, and when he looked through the lens it was like he could see the whole world. It was, well, rather a nice time to live, don't you think?

This section begins during KUSHIMOTO*'s speech, around "The Dutch philosopher Spinoza. . . ."*

(SHIGEO *enters from stage left during* KUSHIMOTO*'s speech.*)

TOKIKO: Ah, there you are!—

SHIGEO: Sorry—

SHINYA: Hey—

SHIGEO: Sorry I'm late.

TOKIKO: We just got here ourselves.

SHIGEO: Oh—

(*A pause.* KUSHIMOTO*'s speech ends.*)

YUMI: Well—

SHINYA: I see—

(*A pause. Everyone looks at* SHINYA.)

SHIGEO: Sorry I'm late.

YUMI: Sure are.

SHIGEO: Er—

IKUE (*Cutting in*): You're late! You're late!

SHIGEO: Sorry.

YUMI: We ate already. Full course, everything.

SHIGEO: You're kidding.

IKUE: Really! Really!

SHIGEO: What's with the girls? In a bad mood, eh?

(*There is nowhere for him to sit, so he seats himself on the wastepaper basket.*)

SHINYA: Well—I.

YUMI: What're you talking about? Girls—you sound like an old man.

IKUE: Old man!

SHIGEO: No, I'm not.

(KUSHIMOTO *looks at* HIRAYAMA, *who makes the V sign.* KUSHIMOTO *also makes the V sign back, but more modestly.*)

ONO: Quite something, isn't he?

HIRAYAMA: Well, he is the expert, after all.

ONO: Yes.

KUSHIMOTO: Not at all—

KUSHIMOTO: I'll go get some coffee.

HIRAYAMA: Ah, thanks.

KUSHIMOTO: Coffee OK?

ONO: Oh, uh, thanks.

KUSHIMOTO: What about you, Hirayama?

HIRAYAMA: Yes, please.

KUSHIMOTO: Right then.
(IKUE *touches* YOSHIE*'s shoulder.* YOSHIE *turns around.*)

YUMI: Typical.
SHIGEO: I miss something?
YOSHIE: Not really.

IKUE: Look at him! Always runs to Yoshie for help.

SHIGEO: Do not. Come off it.

IKUE: Don't spoil him, now.

YOSHIE: I won't.

SHIGEO: Why not?

SHINYA: Well. Shall we go?

SHIGEO: Going already?

SHINYA: After all, we were all waiting for you.

SHIGEO: Sorry.

SHINYA: How's work?

SHIGEO: Busy, busy.
SHINYA: Oh.
SHIGEO: That's why I was late today.
SHINYA: Glad to hear it—
TOKIKO (*Speaking at the same time*): He does look like a businessman now.
SHINYA: That so?
YŪJI (*Speaking at the same time*): Business good, I guess.
SHIGEO: Oh that reminds me, we're gonna make a part for your company.

YŪJI: Eh? What?
SHIGEO: Something for a guided missile.
(*Mimes with his arms a guided missile.*)
SHINYA: What's that? A bamboo shoot?
SHIGEO (*Miming again*): Something to go with a guided missile. Some kinda liquid crystal part for it or something.
YŪJI: Something, something. Still don't get what you're talking about.

YOSHIE: Having fun?
YUMI: Uh huh.

SHIGEO: But that's what it is.
YŪJI: Oh—
SHIGEO: But ya know, it's kinda sad. We're just a subcontractor.
YOSHIE: Eh?—
SHIGEO: What I mean is, all our workers are refugees from Russia and what have you.
YOSHIE: Ah—
SHIGEO: Making weapons to kill the folks back home.
TOKIKO: Ah—
YŪJI: Could be the other way round, though.
SHIGEO: Huh?
YŪJI: Maybe you're making weapons to protect them.
SHIGEO: Ah, well—
YŪJI: We're selling to both sides, so ya never know.
SHIGEO: Yeah, but it's like, ya know, a metaphor.
YŪJI: Metaphor? What the hell of?
SHIGEO: Well—

(YUMI *takes out her camera and walks toward stage right.*)
YUMI: Look this way. (*Takes a picture. To* HIRAYAMA.) Why don't you get in the picture?
HIRAYAMA: Uh, no, uh, I—

YUMI: *Please.*
HIRAYAMA: Well, shall I take one of you all?
YUMI: No, I took one already.
HIRAYAMA: I'll take one with you in it.
YUMI: No, I'm fine. (*Pause.*) Really.
HIRAYAMA: You sure?
YOSHIE: In that case, I'll take one of you two. (*Referring to* HIRAYAMA.)
YUMI: Uh—
YOSHIE: Allow me—
YUMI: Well. (*To* HIRAYAMA.) Please.
HIRAYAMA: Well then—(*Stands with* YUMI.)
YOSHIE: Here goes. (*Takes a picture.*)
HIRAYAMA: Thanks—
YUMI: Thanks—
(*A long pause.*)
YUMI: Shall we go?

YOSHIE: Uh huh—(*Stands.*)

SHINYA (*Speaking at the same time as* YOSHIE): OK—

YUMI: Let's go—

IKUE: OK.

YUMI: Thank you.

SHINYA: We're going.

SHIGEO: OK. (*Pause.*) Hey. I'm stuck.

TOKIKO: What're you doing?

SHIGEO: I'm stuck.
(*It appears he cannot disengage his buttocks from the litter basket.*)

TOKIKO: No kidding!
SHIGEO: Ah, I'm free.
IKUE: Wise up.
SHIGEO: Sorry.
SHINYA: Twit.

SHIGEO: Y'know, I once sat on the toilet with the seat up—got stuck. Thought I was gonna die.

HIRAYAMA: Don't mention it.

(KUSHIMOTO *returns with four cups.*)
KUSHIMOTO: Sorry to keep you waiting.

ONO: Thanks.

KUSHIMOTO: Here—

HIRAYAMA: Thanks—

SHINYA: Go on home, why don't you?
SHIGEO: Sorry.
YUMI: You're not going to war, are you?
SHIGEO: Nah, not into that.
YUMI: But everybody's going, these days.

YOSHIE (*Starting to exit*): Yeah.

YUMI (*Starting to exit*): Men seem to get a charge out of stuff like that.

YOSHIE (*Exiting*): Some do, don't they?

(*The six family members exit stage left.*)

4.1.3

(KUSHIMOTO *sits at* CI.)
HIRAYAMA: Quite the speech there.
KUSHIMOTO: Nah—
HIRAYAMA: These days, even the visitors are getting to be experts, so we really gotta know our stuff.
ONO: Ah—
HIRAYAMA: And these pictures came on us all of a sudden.
ONO: So, how many have you got now?
HIRAYAMA: Seventy-four, so far.
ONO: That many.
HIRAYAMA: Yes, we'd really like to put up the collection once it's been donated, but, well, it might be a while—
ONO: So I heard.
HIRAYAMA: Sorry about that.

ONO: Not at all. Well, can't do much about the war, eh?

HIRAYAMA: That's easy for you to say.

ONO: I guess—

KUSHIMOTO: I suppose one can't, after all.

(*A long pause.*)

HIRAYAMA: You were into that, weren't you, Mr. Kushimoto.

KUSHIMOTO: Hm?

HIRAYAMA (*Quickly*): Some antiwar movement. Before you came here.

KUSHIMOTO: Well, not much of a movement, really.

HIRAYAMA: Not involved anymore?

KUSHIMOTO: Nope. Washed my hands of it.

HIRAYAMA: But they're still at it, aren't they? Those guys out there.

KUSHIMOTO: Yeah, well—

(KINOSHITA *enters from stage right, and sits at* D1.)

HIRAYAMA: So, what about them?

KUSHIMOTO: Yeah, well, even those who are fighting can't tell friend from foe anymore.

ONO: I guess not—

HIRAYAMA: Oh, yeah—

ONO: It was real hot there for a while, wasn't it? The antiwar movement.

KUSHIMOTO: Yes.

ONO: You were part of it then, I suppose?

KUSHIMOTO: Yes, well, till about five years or so ago.

ONO: Ah—

KUSHIMOTO: Dropped out of it a bit early.

(*A long pause.*)

ONO: Yes, well, what with all the people, goods, and cash pouring in puts Japan in kind of an awkward place, doesn't it?

KUSHIMOTO: Place? Japan never took a position from the start.

ONO: Oh.

KUSHIMOTO: Yes, well, you know Kästner's story, "The Zoo Conference"?

HIRAYAMA: What? Oh, yes.

KUSHIMOTO: You know, there's this ostrich who sticks his head in the sand so he doesn't have to look at the mess the humans have got themselves into.

HIRAYAMA: Is there now?—

KUSHIMOTO: Strauss. The ostrich's name.

HIRAYAMA: Ah—

KUSHIMOTO: That ostrich is rather like an artist peering into an camera obscura, don't you think?

HIRAYAMA: Oh, really?

KUSHIMOTO: Like this. (*Mimes peering into a box.*) Only seeing what he wants to see, composed just the way he likes.

HIRAYAMA: Uh . . . huh—

(KINOSHITA *exits stage right.*)

KUSHIMOTO: Eh?—

ONO: Ah—

KUSHIMOTO: I mean, that's me.

HIRAYAMA: Huh?

KUSHIMOTO: I'm like the ostrich with his head in the sand.

HIRAYAMA: Oh, but if you were, then surely we're all like that.

KUSHIMOTO: Maybe that's the case. Still—

HIRAYAMA: Kind of serious today,
aren't you, Mr. Kushimoto?
KUSHIMOTO: I am?
HIRAYAMA: Yes—
KUSHIMOTO: Sorry.
HIRAYAMA: That's OK.
KUSHIMOTO: Sorry.
ONO: No, not at all.
HIRAYAMA: I'll go look.
ONO: Huh?
HIRAYAMA: For Ms. Mitsuhashi
and Mr. Saitō.
ONO: I'll join you.
HIRAYAMA: Better you stay here,
in case we miss each other.
KUSHIMOTO: Shall I go instead?
HIRAYAMA: No, I'll go. Besides,
you don't know them.
KUSHIMOTO: You're right.
HIRAYAMA: Back in a bit.
KUSHIMOTO: Uh huh.
HIRAYAMA: Keep her company.
KUSHIMOTO: Uh huh.
(HIRAYAMA *exits stage left.*)

4.1.4

KUSHIMOTO: You know, looking
at the universe through a telescope
doesn't mean the universe is looking
back at us.
ONO: . . . ?
KUSHIMOTO: The pictures to be
donated—how much are they
worth altogether?
ONO: Well, I guess that depends on
their evaluation.
KUSHIMOTO: Yes—
ONO: If they weren't given away,
the estate taxes would be in the
millions, I guess.
KUSHIMOTO: Ah—
ONO: But nobody's buying art
right now, to be frank with you.
KUSHIMOTO: And what's your cut
in this?
ONO: Huh?
KUSHIMOTO: How much do you
get out of this deal?
ONO: I'm on salary.
KUSHIMOTO: You know our director'd
do anything for good pictures.
ONO: What're you trying to say?
KUSHIMOTO: Not that I mean to
stir up anything. But, you know,
I just want to make sure that
everything's nice and clear.
ONO: You should watch what you say.

(KINOSHITA *enters from stage right
with a cup of coffee. He sits again at*
D1 *and drinks the coffee.*)

KUSHIMOTO: Sticking one's head in
the sand, trying not to see the world,
peering into a dark box, you know—
chances are if a person does stuff like
that, she'll get something in her
eye instead.
ONO: Uh—

(HASHIZUME *and* TERANISHI *enter
from stage left.*)

KUSHIMOTO (*Cutting in*): Ya can't
always see just what you wanta see.
ONO (*Quickly*): Uh, I think you'd
do well to be more careful
of what you say to a lawyer—

KUSHIMOTO: Just a warning, that's all.

HASHIZUME (*Entering*): That so?—

TERANISHI (*Entering*): Uh huh, well,
seems so.—

ONO: . . .

KUSHIMOTO: Ah, 'scuse me—an old acquaintance—

ONO: Go right ahead.

KUSHIMOTO: Sorry.

(ONO *takes out a memo pad and begins making notes.*)

HASHIZUME (*Entering*): Hm—

TERANISHI (*Entering*): Seems so, anyway.—

HASHIZUME (*To* KUSHIMOTO): Ah, hello.

KUSHIMOTO: My, my.

HASHIZUME: Well, hello—

KUSHIMOTO: Hey, you in Tokyo now?

HASHIZUME: Yeah—

KUSHIMOTO: Well—

HASHIZUME: Thought I might run into you here.

KUSHIMOTO: Well, you should've dropped into the office to see me.

HASHIZUME: Yeah, but, it wasn't like I had any business or anything—

KUSHIMOTO: Yeah, but, you know—

HASHIZUME: But—

HASHIZUME: Mr. Kushimoto—we were both in the antiwar movement.

TERANISHI: Ah. (*Sits at* AI.)

HASHIZUME: She's, uh, my fiancée.

KUSHIMOTO: Ah—

HASHIZUME: We're getting married this summer.

KUSHIMOTO: That so? Congratulations. (*Moves over to* BI.)

HASHIZUME: Thanks.

KUSHIMOTO: How's your Dad?

HASHIZUME: Ah, he died.

KUSHIMOTO: Oh.

HASHIZUME: Yeah—

KUSHIMOTO: Oh—

HASHIZUME: Sorry. That's why I went home.

KUSHIMOTO: Yes, ah, well—

HASHIZUME (*Cutting in*): Sorry I had to chuck it all, right in the middle.

KUSHIMOTO: No, fact is we all split up anyway. Would've been the same if you stayed.

HASHIZUME: Ah, well—

KUSHIMOTO: Yeah.

HASHIZUME: What about you, Mr. Kushimoto? Out of it now?

KUSHIMOTO: Yeah, well—

HASHIZUME: Is that so?—

KUSHIMOTO: What about you?

HASHIZUME: Same here.

KUSHIMOTO: Ain't easy, eh?

HASHIZUME: Uh uh.

KUSHIMOTO: Care for a coffee or something? In the office.

HASHIZUME: No, we're fine here.

KUSHIMOTO: Ya sure?

HASHIZUME: Uh, we're thinking of going back to Fukushima, once we're married.—

KUSHIMOTO: That so?

HASHIZUME: My Mum's hired somebody to look after the field Dad left, so, thought we'd take it over.

KUSHIMOTO: Not a bad idea.

HASHIZUME: Yeah, Mum told me I wouldn't get conscripted 'cause of the farm. Come home, she said.

KUSHIMOTO: Ah—

HASHIZUME: That's all they ever talk about now, back home, in the country.

KUSHIMOTO: Well, we hear the same thing. You know, businessmen will be the first to get conscripted and so on.

HASHIZUME: Kinda pathetic though, at my age, you know. But if it makes my mother happy. . . .

KUSHIMOTO: Well.

(HIRAYAMA, MITSUHASHI, *and* SAITŌ *enter from stage left.*)

ONO: Ah, found 'em, I see.

HIRAYAMA: Yeah, just over there.

MITSUHASHI: Sorry.

HIRAYAMA: Don't mention it.

MITSUHASHI: So, finished your business? (*Sits at* C2. SAITŌ *sits at* B2.)

ONO: Yes, well, more or less.
MITSUHASHI (*To* HIRAYAMA): Well, in that case, please take good care of the paintings.

HIRAYAMA: You sure? There's nothing else?

HASHIZUME: Yeah, well, she's into organic farming and stuff—
KUSHIMOTO: Hey, that's all right. Got a good reason, eh?—
TERANISHI: But, you see, it was kind of a hobby with me.
KUSHIMOTO: Send me something you've grown, will you?—
HASHIZUME: Sure—

4.2.1

KUSHIMOTO: What're they growing?
HASHIZUME: Quite a variety, I think. Cucumbers, potatoes—

KUSHIMOTO: Not bad—

TERANISHI: Come visit us.

KUSHIMOTO: Thanks, I'll do that. Go that way on business sometimes.

HASHIZUME: Do, please.

(KUSHIMOTO *shifts over to accommodate* SAITŌ *next to him.*)
(*A long pause.*)

HASHIZUME: Be seeing you, then.

KUSHIMOTO: Are you going?

MITSUHASHI: No—

HIRAYAMA: We *are* talking about quite a sum here. Sure you're not rushing into this—

MITSUHASHI: No sense hanging on to them.

HIRAYAMA: That may be so, but—

MITSUHASHI: Uh, please try to put up as many as you can.

HIRAYAMA: Yes, of course—

MITSUHASHI: It's good for the paintings to be seen.

HIRAYAMA: Yes.

MITSUHASHI: Well, thanks again.

HIRAYAMA: But—

ONO: Ah, I'll be in touch later about the paperwork.

HIRAYAMA: Yes, of course, but—
(*A long pause.*)

MITSUHASHI: Anything else?

HASHIZUME: Just thought I'd come say hello.

KUSHIMOTO: Well, thanks.

HASHIZUME: I'll be in touch.

KUSHIMOTO: Uh, yes.—Here, I'll give you one of my cards.
(*Offers him a business card.*)

HASHIZUME: Got a card even, eh?

KUSHIMOTO: You bet.

HASHIZUME: Maybe I should get some saying "Farmer."

KUSHIMOTO: Good idea—

HASHIZUME: I'll let you know when we move back home.
KUSHIMOTO: Please do.
HASHIZUME: Well, then—

KUSHIMOTO: I'll see you off.

HASHIZUME: Don't bother—

KUSHIMOTO: To the door, at least—

HASHIZUME: Sorry to catch you at work and all.

HIRAYAMA: Surely you needn't have to rush with this?

MITSUHASHI: When I saw the paintings here, I just felt like it.

HIRAYAMA: Yes, well—

KUSHIMOTO: Nah, this ain't work. Not at all.

HASHIZUME (*To* TERANISHI): C'mon—

(HASHIZUME *and* TERANISHI *exit stage left.*)

ONO: Your name's Kushimoto, right?

KUSHIMOTO: Hm?

ONO: Uh—

KUSHIMOTO: Yes.

ONO: What you were saying earlier, that you never know with people—

KUSHIMOTO: Hm?

ONO: That the universe isn't watching us through a telescope.

KUSHIMOTO: Did I say that?

ONO: Yes.

KUSHIMOTO (*Pausing briefly*): Yes, well, I guess I meant, if only we could all see ourselves. From a distance, I mean.

ONO: . . .

KUSHIMOTO: If you'll excuse me—

(*Exits stage left.*)

CURTAIN

ZŌ: How can you be so stupid? Didn't you learn anything in all those years of
ooling?
E: But . . .
ZŌ (*With a slap*): Listen up. That time, as you were crying, didn't you say: "It's
rtless, it's horrible, why must we part like this?" . . . Do you remember?
E (*Faintly nods*): . . .
Ō: I said in reply, "A parting like this must never happen again for the rest of
nity, because it's too heartless."
E (*Nods*): . . .
Ō: Did you hear my last words? "Please live out my share of life, too!"
E (*Nods vigorously*): . . .
Ō: That is why I am giving you life.
E: Giving me life?
Ō: That's right. I'm giving you life to have people remember that there were
ed tens of thousands of such heartless partings. Isn't the library where you work
a place to tell about such things?
E: Huh? . . .
Ō: It's your task to tell about the sad things, and the happy things, that human
gs have experienced. If you don't understand that, then I won't rely on a fat-
ed fool like you any longer. Give me someone else instead.
: Someone else?
Ō: My grandchild and great-grandchild.
r a short silence, MITSUE *slowly goes to the kitchen, and grips a knife. She looks at*
ZŌ *for a while, then picks up a burdock and begins to cut it into thin slices. Before*
she suddenly stops.)
: When will you come next?
: That's up to you.
(*Smiling for the first time in a long while*): We may not be able to meet for a
.
: . . .
ound of a motor tricycle is heard in the distance.)
: Oh no, I forgot to put in more firewood.
EZŌ *hurries away to the rear, stage right.* MITSUE *calls out toward his back.*)
: Papa, thank you.
e sound of the motor tricycle approaches, the curtain swiftly descends.)

CURTAIN

PART V

THE 1980S AND BEYOND

Japan's economy, society, and culture have seen such change over the past fifty years that the Japanese themselves typically speak of the decades as if they were generations. Thus groups like Kōkami Shōji's Third Stage (Daisan butai) and Kawamura Takeshi's Third Erotica (Daisan erotika) self-consciously signaled their membership in a "third" generation of theater artists in the 1980s. They were following the "first" generation of playwrights and directors, such as Kara Jūrō and Terayama Shūji, who changed the course of Japanese theater in the 1960s, and the "second," 1970s, generation of dramatists, like Tsuka Kōhei and Yamazaki Tetsu. Each "generation" staked out a different identity that was somehow unique to its own time. Nevertheless, we can find some general trends during this particularly turbulent period in contemporary Japanese history.

Since the 1980s, many of *angura*'s (the underground's) innovations in dramaturgy and performance—fragmented narratives; highly physical, metatheatrical, and presentational techniques of acting; and the use of alternative and unusual venues—have become part of mainstream contemporary theater. *Angura* may have lost energy as a countercultural movement in the 1970s as Japan's youth culture became less politicized and more conformist, but the theater grew in artistic influence even as it became more closely aligned with consumer culture. By the 1980s, as many as 300 so-called little theater groups were active in Tokyo alone,

1. Statistics from the 1980s and 2005 are from, respectively, Shichiji Eisuke, "The Mentality of the 1990s in Japanese Theater," in *Half a Century of Japanese Theater*, ed. Japan Playwrights Association (Tokyo: Kinokuniya shoten, 2000), 2:2; and Tadashi Uchino, "Japan's 'Ill-Fated' Theater Culture," in *Half a Century of Japanese Theater*, ed. Japan Playwrights Association (Tokyo: Kinokuniya shoten, 2007), 9:1.

by 2005, the number of such companies had swelled to 1,600.[1] Performances are typ
targeted to young audiences, often in their twenties. At the same time, "little theater"
onger seems an accurate term for many of these groups or productions. Noda Hideki
his Dream Idlers (Yume no yuminsha, 1976–1992), exemplars of 1980s Japanese the
on one occasion performed before more than 26,000 people in a single day, while
ector like Ninagawa Yukio typically stages popular long-run shows in theaters that
e more than 1,000. Many contemporary playwrights and actors are celebrities, writ
nd performing for not only the stage but television and film as well. Indeed, there
w a considerable crossover among the genres, as well as between the traditional and
ern theater. Kabuki actor Nakamura Kanzakurō XVIII (1955–2012) starred in mod
lays written by dramatists like Matsuo Suzuki and commissioned new kabuki plays
ntemporary playwrights like Noda Hideki, Watanabe Eri, and Kudō Kankurō. Even
eki, which seemed on the verge of demise with the deaths of pioneers like Senda
ya in 1994, Sugimura Haruko in 1997, and Takizawa Osamu in 2000, has won a sec
ife by commissioning plays from Betsuyaku Minoru, Hirata Oriza, and other con
orary "post-*shingeki*" playwrights. Theater, especially in Tokyo, has perhaps never
ed so healthy.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 1980S THEATER

dern times, theaters in Japan have had to rely almost exclusively on the box office
vate subscriptions for financial support (traditionally, only the nō theater received
l patronage), but in recent years, public funding for the performing arts has
considerably, despite the economic downturn of the past twenty years. The New
nal Theater, devoted exclusively to modern theater and opera, opened in Tokyo
7. (The National Theater was opened in 1966 to showcase traditional performing
n the same year, Suzuki Tadashi established—with considerable support from the
tural government—the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC), about an hour
f Tokyo by bullet train. Since the 1980s, organizations like the Saison Founda-
stablished 1987), the Japan Arts Fund (1990), and the Performing Arts Develop-
Project (1996) have helped promote international tours of Japanese performing
oups. Regional development under the Liberal Democratic Party during Japan's
nic boom years in the 1980s led to the building of many new theater and concert
ross Japan, a boom that lasted until the end of the twentieth century.
ough the history of modern Japanese theater, particularly since 1945, has been
lly a history of Tokyo theater, one notable trend since the 1980s has been the
of regional theater groups and playwrights. Suzue Toshirō, Matsuda Masataka,
chida Hideo have been based in Kyoto. After the triple disaster of March 11, 2011,
Toshiki abandoned his native Yokohama and moved to Kumamoto, far from the
f earthquakes and nuclear contamination. Hasegawa Kōji hails from, and still
practices theater in, Hirosaki, at the northern tip of Honshū. Still, some places, like Osaka, are facing hard times now as local governments begin to cut arts funding.

Other positive trends have been the increasing presence of women and minorities in the Japanese theater since the 1980s. The contribution of female playwrights to the contemporary Japanese theater is discussed in greater detail by Yoshie Inoue in this volume, and the groundbreaking work of women like Kishida Rio (1950–2003), Kisaragi Koharu (1956–2000), Nagai Ai (b. 1951), Watanabe Eri (b. 1955), and the collective of playwrights who call themselves Ichidō Rei, from the company Blue Bird (Aoi tori), bear noting here. (*Poison Boy*, which Kishida coauthored with Terayama Shūji, is translated in part IV.) Even though contemporary theater has not created a strong feminist discourse in Japan, the sheer number of female playwrights, as well as all- or mostly women troupes, active in Japanese theater since the 1980s, is indicative of an erosion of ingrained patriarchal structures. At the same time, the ethnic Korean presence, which had its origins in the theater, is growing throughout Japanese culture. For example, Tsuka Kōhei's impact on 1970s theater was followed by the work of other Korean *zainichi* (Japanese-born) playwrights, like Chong Wishing and Yū Miri, and directors for stage and screen, like Kim Sujin and Yang Sogil. There also has been increasing collaboration among Japanese and other Asian theater artists. Kishida Rio worked with the Singaporean director Ong-Keng Sen on productions of *King Lear* (1994) and a postcolonialist version of *Othello*, called *Desdemona*, in 1999. Playwright Hirata Oriza translated into Korean his own play, *Citizens of Seoul* (1989), about Japan's 1910 annexation of Korea, for a production in Seoul in 1993, and has since worked regularly with Korean playwrights and directors on joint productions.

Japanese theater has never seemed so vibrant or international. Mitani Kōki, heir to Inoue Hisashi for capturing mainstream audiences, has been immensely productive as a writer of comedies and musicals for stage, television, and screen. (The name of his company, Tokyo Sunshine Boys, is a tribute to his hero, Neil Simon.) Yet despite the enormous popular success of post-1980s playwrights like Mitani, Keralino Sandorovitch, and Matsuo Suzuki, many have bemoaned the triumph of mindless entertainment and the death of art in contemporary Japanese theater.[2] *Angura*'s promise in the 1960s for theater to enter the public discourse and be a voice for change failed to materialize as succeeding generations capitulated to the status quo, and the artists, in order to survive, needed more and more to pander to commercial imperatives. At the same time, Japanese society has become increasingly conformist, conservative, and isolationist. The worsening economy and the growing instability of Japanese politics have only exacerbated this general trend, which started in the early 1970s. Youthful energy and innocence, qualities typical of 1980s theater, hardly made up for a general lack of interest in social issues or the world beyond or for a chronic sense of historical amnesia.

2. Ōta Shōgo's comments on contemporary theater are in Yamaguchi Hiroko, "Japanese Drama from Late Shōwa to the Early 21st Century: Reflections of a Tumultuous Era," in *Half a Century of Japanese Theater*, ed. Japan Playwrights Association (Tokyo: Kinokuniya shoten, 2008), 10:1.

The superheated economic growth seen in the 1960s culminated in the boom economy of the 1980s, a time when Japan was (in the words of Ezra Vogel's best-selling book) "Number One" and seemingly could do no wrong.[3] It was a dreamlike decade, when the real estate value of metropolitan Tokyo exceeded that of the entire United States; easy money was made on the stock market; and life in Japan, especially in its capital, seemed like a nonstop party. All the members of this "third" generation of theater artists were born after the war, and very few had ever suffered real deprivation. The sense of festivity, prosperity, and entitlement, in sync with the global postmodernist sensibility of that time, informed the frenetic, noisy theater of playwrights like Kōkami Shōji (b. 1958) and Noda Hideki (b. 1955): light, speedy, ironic, narcissistic, and celebratory. The counterculture had split into numerous subcultures, and inspiration for creative works tended now to come more from new media like television, *manga* (comics), and anime (animation) than from any preexisting theatrical tradition, political stance, or life experience. Noda and the Takarazuka Revue (as we shall see in part VI) based their hit plays on popular graphic novels.

Although not directly involved with the theater culture of this period, two novelists and an artist, all named Murakami, have defined the aesthetic of the past few decades in Japan: Murakami Haruki (b. 1949), for a cool, hipster insouciance that barely masks a heartfelt quest for identity in narratives that confuse fantasy with reality; Murakami Ryū (b. 1952), for his portraits of the contemporary city as a dystopia, filled with crime and sadomasochistic sex; and Murakami Takashi (b. 1963), artist of the aesthetics of "Superflat," in which surface is everything and the categories separating high and popular cultures have collapsed. Allusions to pop culture and in-jokes, a nostalgia for innocence and childhood, an avoidance of psychological depth or "serious" issues, and yet occasional hints at more unsettling anxieties all lurk behind what Kara Jūrō called the "happiness syndrome" of Japanese theater in the 1980s.[4] At the same time that the contemporary theater critic Tadashi Uchino described Kōkami Shōji's landmark, the *Godot*-inspired play *Trailing a Sunset Like the Dawn* (*Asahi no yō na yūhi wo tsurete*, 1981) as "an easy distortion of Beckett's metaphysical 'nothing is to be done' principle into 'everything is OK as it is,'" he labeled Noda Hideki's work of this period as "a kind of subcultural Disneyland."[5] Meanwhile, other groups, like Kawamura Takeshi's Third Erotica, began to explore the darker side of middle-class Japanese anomie in such works as *Nippon Wars* (*Nippon sensō*, 1984). This rather dystopic view was perhaps more familiar to Westerners than to most Japanese: after all, 1980s Tokyo was the inspiration for the near-future cityscapes of Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* and William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*. But even those riding the crest of Japan's prosperity at the time knew that it had to end, and many felt a sense of spiritual emptiness at the bottom of the "Japanese economic miracle."

The 1980s were a turning point for both Japan and the world. The explosion of radioactive gases from the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in Ukraine in 1986 revived fears of a nuclear apocalypse. The death of Emperor Hirohito in 1989 coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and marked the end of an era, which some have called the "short twentieth century," for both the Japanese and the West. Soon thereafter, Japan's bubble economy burst, and the Soviet Union fell. The first Gulf War in 1991 marked the end of Cold War politics and the beginning of new, more chaotic global tensions. In 1990, a new religious cult, Aum Shinrikyō, entered candidates into the national election for the House of Representatives. Five years later and just two months after an earthquake devastated the Kobe region, this cult poisoned thousands of people with sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system.

CHANGES IN THE 1990S

Perhaps as a result, the Japanese have called the 1990s a "lost generation," and with continuing unemployment, increasing economic disparity, homelessness, and the dissolution of the old guarantees of lifetime careers, the first decade of the new millennium seemed to hold out little promise of improvement. Japan's population ages while the country is reluctant to accept immigrants; the national debt rises while the tax base decreases. As the country's economy sank into the long slide from which it has still not recovered, the news was—and remains—filled with bizarre crimes, indiscriminate murders, senseless suicides, shocking cases of domestic violence, family neglect, and school brutality.

The chief effect of these new economic and social stresses on Japan in regard to a new theatrical vision was a sudden return to realism and an attention to well-crafted, literate drama. It was as if Japan had woken up with a hangover after the long party of the bubble economy. One of the first playwrights to write in this vein was Iwamatsu Ryō (b. 1952), who has worked for some of Japan's finest and most popular actors. He first teamed up as a dramatist in the late 1980s with Emoto Akira and the Tokyo Battery Company (Tokyo kandenchi, established 1977), leaving this company in 1992 to become the playwright and director for Takenaka Naoto. Iwamatsu's desultory dramas have focused on the banal lives of feckless characters. *Futon and Daruma* (1988), one of his signature works, won the Kishida Kunio Award for best play of that year. Kara Jūrō compared Iwamatsu to a "perverted Kubota Mantarō," referring to Kishida's contemporary, a prewar dramatist of everyday lyricism.[6] Indeed, a kind of eerie realism verging on the absurd pervades the work of Iwamatsu and a number of other playwrights who began writing in this manner,

3. Ezra F. Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).
4. Quoted in Nishidō Kōjin, "Radicalism in the Theater of the 1980s," in *Half a Century of Japanese Theater*, ed. Japan Playwrights Association (Tokyo: Kinokuniya shoten, 2002), 4:8.
5. Tadashi Uchino, *Crucible Bodies: Postwar Japanese Performance from Brecht to the New Millennium* (Salt Lake City: Seagull Books, 2009), 87.
6. Quoted in Shichiji, "Mentality of the 1990s in Japanese Theater," 4.

including Suzue Toshirō, Matsuda Masataka, and Hirata Oriza. A stark contrast to the noisy, high-energy comedies that had become staples of 1980s Tokyo, such works were quickly dubbed "quiet theater." If the theater of Japan from the 1960s to the 1980s had been extravagant, exuberant, or even overwhelmed by its own unabashed inventiveness, much of the theater of the 1990s was turning out to be austere, minimalist, constrained, lacking in dramatic flourishes, and wary of making grand statements or attempting to use theater as a vehicle to push any ideological "message."

The most articulate spokesperson for this style of theater in the past two decades has been Hirata Oriza, who won the 1995 Kishida Kunio Award for *Tokyo Notes*, first performed the previous year and one of the works featured here. In his appropriately named collection of essays on theater, *Cities Do Not Need Festivities* (*Toshi ni wa shukusai wa iranai*, 1997), Hirata wrote:

> Most life has nothing whatever to do with what theater in the past has liked to portray but is grounded instead in quiet and uneventful moments. . . . We exist as human beings, and that in itself is amazing, even dramatic. Daily life contains all sorts of rich and complex elements: it can be entertaining, touching, funny, even stupid. What I want to do is distill from all those complicated elements an objective sense of time as it is lived—quietly—and directly reconstruct that on the stage.[7]

More than perhaps any dramatist of his generation, Hirata has a sense of his place in the history of Japanese theater and what makes his work different from what has come before it.

Some critics, however, have taken Hirata and his contemporaries to task for a conservatism that is both ideological and aesthetic. The characters in "quiet realist" plays avoid conflict, their motives remaining opaque sometimes even to themselves. In the avoidance of emotional display is also a reluctance to commit oneself to another person or ideal, which is indicative of the sense of disengagement that many Japanese now feel.

Something of this emotional detachment is also present in the theater's new dynamics in the current generation of playwrights and directors. The 1960s generation was characterized by a number of charismatic patriarchs—notably Kara Jūrō, Suzuki Tadashi, Terayama Shūji, and Hijikata Tatsumi—who gathered about them tribe-like troupes of younger enthusiasts eager to put into practice their masters' ideas. Typically, the "company style" of such theater was branded less by rigorous training or tradition than by the personality of their leader and creator. For most of the twentieth century, modern Japanese theater—with the notable exceptions of such mainstream companies as Asari Keita's Four Seasons Theater (Gekidan shiki) and the Takarazuka Revue—was characterized by its inspired amateurism. Playwrights and directors like Kara, Suzuki, and Noda Hideki were not

7. Hirata Oriza, *Toshi ni wa shukusai wa iranai* (Tokyo: Banseisha, 1997), 182.

HIRATA ORIZA

Actors need something on which to ground their delivery of dialogue. The basis for dialogue in *shingeki*, which tried to directly import modern Western theater, is a character's mental state and emotions. A *shingeki* actor interprets the script, finding sadness, for instance, and expressing the emotion of sadness. It was mainly this modernist approach that the emerging underground or little theater movement in and after 1960s opposed. It claimed that psychology and emotions are not the only driving forces for the way that humans speak. The key words for this movement are "body," "unconsciousness," "passion," "instinct." We can therefore see that the transition from *shingeki* to underground theater and little theater has been a transition from logos to pathos and eros.

On the other hand, one can say that the basis of traditional theater, like nō and *kyōgen*, is history. From the age of two or three, nō performers are drilled, without any logical explanations whatsoever, in movement, gesture, and voice projection. The basis of training in nō is that it is the way they've been doing it for six hundred years. That may sound preposterous, but it really is not. All ineffective forms of expression have been eliminated over the course of time, leaving only the present forms [*kata*] for movement and speech.

So I would say that the basis for traditional theater is ethos, or custom. Then what are the grounds for the new theater trend in 1990s? . . . The one thing that makes the new theater that appeared in the 1990s different from former trends is its consciousness of others and the surrounding environment. With only logos, pathos, or eros, we can envisage only one facet of human subjectivity. While we human beings speak as subjects, as individuals, what we say is also being dictated to us by our environment. How do we express ourselves under these circumstances? This focus, I think, has been one of the major achievements of 1990s theater.

FROM HIRATA ORIZA, "KYŪJŪ-NENDAI ENGEKI TO WA NANIKA?" (WHAT IS JAPANESE THEATER IN THE 1990S?), IN *ENGEKI NYŪMON (AN INTRODUCTION TO THEATER)* (TOKYO: KŌDANSHA, 1998), 183–85.

classically trained in established theater schools—such institutions are still a rarity in Japan—but typically were drawn to the theater in extracurricular club activities at university. So, too, was Hirata, but increasingly, even playwrights like Noda and Hirata are straying from the older tribal model of creating theater with their own companies toward a model of workshops and shifting casts of actors, new for every production. Some critics have seen in this new model a growing distrust of group dynamics and a reluctance to

HIRATA ORIZA

When we carry out the act of speaking, we do so all the while being implicitly aware of the extent to which the other person understands what we say, the size of the room, the number of people listening, the amount of ambient noise, and so on. So while we are expressing ourselves, we are also being dictated to by our environment. For an actor, the most important element of his environment is the other actor, but other elements like the set, lighting, and costume all come into play, determining the conditions under which the delivery of dialogue takes place.

FROM HIRATA ORIZA, *ENGI, ENSHUTSU* (*ACTING AND DIRECTING*) (TOKYO: KŌDANSHA, 2004), 133–34.

form close relationships in Japan, a remarkable trend in a society that traditionally has placed so much value on a sense of belonging.

The difficulty of social interaction and the prevalence of increasingly antisocial syndromes in Japan today—*otaku* (nerd) culture and *hikikomori* (shut-ins)—are treated in another work featured here, Sakate Yōji's *Attic* (*Yaneura*, 2002). Sakate has been one of the most politically active playwrights of his generation, not afraid to tackle contemporary social or political issues or to examine critically Japan's recent history. His works nonetheless are typical of the revival of well-written and well-wrought plays after a period in which performance was privileged over text. To that extent, Sakate and many of his contemporaries (Nagai Ai, among others) may signify the resurgence of ideals of drama as literature as well as the mirror of society that *shingeki* had espoused more than a half century earlier.

Not all significant works in the past two decades have been well-made plays, however. Japan's avant-garde has also given birth to various forms of physical theater in which spoken dialogue is attenuated or even absent, as in Ōta Shōgo's work. Many theater practitioners and critics have noted that one of the signal characteristics of modern culture in Japan is an estrangement of language from the body. Various styles of theater since the 1960s have attempted to address, if not resolve, a sense that contemporary Japanese are, mentally and physically, divided selves. Since the 1980s, this trend has produced a number of powerful and even violent performance styles that straddle the worlds of dance and multimedia performance art, such as Miyagi Satoshi's Ku Na'uka, Shimizu Shinjin's Theater of Deconstruction (Gekidan kaitaisha), the Kyoto-based collective Dumb Type, and the Osaka-based company Ishinha (Reformers' Group). Some feel that the future of Japanese theater can now be seen not so much in dialogue drama as in the world of dance, which in the past twenty years has departed from *butō* and is now attempting to capture the essence of what it is to be human in the technologized world today. The relationship of language to the body will always be a central theme and challenge for practitioners of live theater, and in the work of playwrights like Okada Toshiki, audiences in Japan and, increasingly, abroad can see the difficulties that we all face in negotiating body and soul.

M. CODY POULTON