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Edo Muric

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ABSTRACT

Shuji Terayama war ein berühmter japanischer Filmemacher und Dramatiker, dessen Arbeit sehr stark die japanische *angura* (underground) Theaterszene beeinflusste, aber auch die weitere Popkultur Japans. Seine radikale Methoden hat er nicht nur in seiner Theaterpraxis eingebaut, sondern auch in vielen Schriften, wo er eine kohärente Theatertheorie formulierte, die wesentliche Verwandtschaft zu den Theorien Artauds und auch Brechts aufzeigt. Die Stellen wo die Theorien voneinander abweichen nimmt diese Arbeit unter die Lupe. Weiter sind die politische und soziologische Hintergründe Terayamas Werk analysiert, und in einen richtigen Kontext gestellt. Äußerst psychologische Herangehensweise von einigen Terayama Kommentatoren wird kritisiert, vor allem weil solche Meinungen oft eine apolitische Natur Terayamas voraussetzen. Das kommt teilweise aus einer falschen Dichotomie, die psychologische Investition des Authors und die politische und gesellschaftlich auswirkende Handlung gegenüberstellt.

Diese Arbeit versucht zu zeigen, dass bei Terayama ein freudianisches Potenzial (japanische Variante von Ödipus Komplex heißt Ajase) grundsätzlich vorhanden ist um eine starke gesellschaftliche Kritik zu üben. Dabei ist das Potenzial der Ideologie von Psychologie und ihre Auswirkungen nicht zu trennen.

In diesem Kontext werden auch feministische und andere progressive Auseinandersetzungen Terayamas besprochen, und ein fester Zusammenhang zwischen seine Theatertheorie und Politik gestellt. Wie bei Brecht, handelt sich hier um eine vollkommene und in sich geschlossene Denkart. Terayamas Radikalität in der Hinsicht, schafft ein Potenzial für Revolution, nicht nur in Theaterpraxis, oder Politik, sondern auf der Ebene der Gesellschaft. Um die These zu bekräftigen, ein bisher missachteter Zusammenhang zwischen Terayamas Werk und solchen politisch und ideologisch fruchtbaren historischen Kunstbewegungen, wie etwa japanische Gotik und Ero-Guro-Nansensu, wird analysiert.

BIOGRAPHY

Edo Muric was Born in Montenegro in 1982. He studied theater and film at the University of Vienna Instiute for Theater Film and Media Studies, as well as the Vienna University of Technology, where he acquired specialisations in software and information engineering and media informatics. In the area of theater studies his interest lies in the subject of Asian performative arts. Besides publishing papers on Japanese underground theatre and Thai cinema, he also tackled postmodern theory in the context of the European post-structuralism.

ETERNAL AVANT-GARD: THE THEATER OF SHUJI TERAYAMA

Dedicated to the 30th anniversary of Terayama's death.

while an ant
toiled from the dahlia
to the ash tray
I was forming
a beautiful lie

(tanka poem by Shuji Terayama¹)

¹ Shuji Terayama: *Kaleidoscope: Selected Tanka of Shuji Terayama* translated by Kozue Uzawa and Amelia Fielden, Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 2008.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Description

The year 2013 marks the 30th anniversary of the death of Shuji Terayama, one of the most controversial artists of the Japanese postwar period. He was a dramatist who dominated Japanese avant-garde during the 1960s and 1970s, and left a strong mark on the general and popular culture of Japan.

The fact that many things about him were larger than life, and although an artist who never identified with the idea of authorship, his artistic persona was perhaps too overwhelming and colourful to allow a thorough analysis of his work in the context of particular artistic movements and genres. Most of what was written so far about Terayama puts him in a category of his own. When analysed, he is usually compared to other auteurs, but not to particular aesthetics or genres. When there are attempts to put him in the context of a larger picture, the furthest it is travelled, and this is especially true for non-Japanese studies of Terayama, is to put him in the context of a larger Japanese culture (in a rather anthropological sense), with its preprepared politics and ideology, when, if anything, he should be seen more consciously in the context of Japanese art, rather than culture.

On the other hand, his own political inclinations are usually denied and explained away, or at best seen in the context of trends and opportunism, rather than deep convictions. The reason for this is precisely because he is evaluated against the rough monolithic landscape of the widest possible cultural stereotypes.

This comes both from Japanese, as well as the Western sources. Political is either conflated with psychological, or with a narrow cultural scheme. And this is applied to many Japanese artists. So in that sense, the novelist and dramatist Yukio Mishima, who attempted a failed *coup d'etat* in 1971 after which he committed a public suicide, is seen not as a political persona but either as psychologically naive or insane (depending on who is commenting). Terayama, on the other hand, is seen not as a radical artist who sincerely tried to change the society, in spite (or even because) of his unorthodox approach to the separation of fiction from reality, but as someone who was enthralled by his deep psychological needs (which is the main theme of the seminal 2005 Terayama book by Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei).

His involvement with the elements of Japanese tradition and culture are, therefore, often not seen as critical arguments but as merely nostalgic. His interest in gender issues and the ideology of performance are seen as incidental or totally ignored, while his involvement in political discourse is interpreted as apolitical or opportunistic. And when it comes to his experiments with artistic expression, the judgement is sometimes even harsher. For example, American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum labels him and Fernando Arrabal, an artist whose work influenced Terayama, as programmatic post-surrealist "poseurs"².

One of Terayama's long-term associates and artistic collaborators, Henrikk Morisaki, is correct when he says that Terayama does not belong to the Japanese New Wave, even though he was indeed involved with the artists and the institutions of the movement³. But the reasons were not strictly formal – he appeared a decade too late - but also aesthetic: the movement was too much of the New-Wave and he was too much of an avant-gardist, to be a genuine part of it. Terayama was more in line with conditionally New Wave artists, such as Akio Jissoji or Toshio Matsumoto, than the likes of Nagisa Oshima and Masahiro Shinoda.

But this does not mean that Terayama was a rebel without a cause or program, that he was always rejecting the status quo and the current trends for the sake of being different. In fact, he not only worked closely with one of the most important New Wave directors, Masahiro Shinoda (as a screenwriter), he also collaborated with TOHO, which is one of the most mainstream, most commercial film studios in Japan. On those occasions he was capable of curbing his rebelliousness for the chance to work on large collaborative processes⁴. That, however, does not contradict his general artistic inclinations which were (even in the most experimental of his theatre works) highly collaborative.

The aim of this text is to counter some of the unfitting conclusions in regards to the above aspects of the work of this highly important Japanese artist, and to offer a slightly different picture in regards to the nature and the impact of his art.

1.2 Objectives and Methods

This work will use textual and visual analysis, comparative methods and art-historical approach in order to clarify some aspects of Terayama's work and try to show that if seen independently from

2 Jonathan Rosenbaum: "Cinematic Obsessions (The Gang of Four and Santa Sangre)", in: JonathanRosenbaum.com, <http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=7428> (10.10. 2013)

3 Laurent Tenzer: "Interview with Henrikk Morisake", in: Eiga Gogo, <http://eigagogo.free.fr/en/interview-henrikk-morisaki.php> (10.10. 2013)

4 Ibid.

the anthropological schematics of Japanese culture⁵, Terayama's art is not only highly political, but also radically focused on the potential for societal change.

Trough showing his more than incidental relation to the past artistic movements, such as *ero-guro-nansensu*, or his long lasting association with the feminist dramatist Rio Kishida, we will paint a different image of Terayama, one which relates to the politics and ideologies associated with these movements.

In the year of major revival of his theatre works, museum exhibitions, blu-ray and DVD re-issuing of his most important films, and generally reawakened media attention, not only in Japan but also in Europe and the US, it is even more important to try to understand Terayama more thoroughly, to try to resolve misconceptions which come even from his supporters.

These misconceptions, it will be shown, come in large part from a strict auteur-based, as opposed to genre-based, approach to Terayama. For example, Robert T. Rolf and John Kinsey Gillespie wrongfully try to understand the reasons behind Terayama's interest in Dr. Caligari, by interpreting it trough a rather far-fetched scheme related to the auteur-association with Antonin Artaud⁶, even though a more straight-forward approach trough the genre conventions of *ero-guro-nansensu* would provide them with a more plausible answer and explain some of its ideological significance. This begs a question: If we take a radically different road in regards to analysing Terayama, how many possible misconceptions and analytical dead ends of this kind are we going to encounter?

Then there is the psychologisation of Terayama, as exemplified by Sorgenfrei's uncritical approach to the *nihonjinron*-centric⁷ potentials of the Ajase Complex⁸ focused interpretation of Terayama's art. This text will not deny the psychological behind Terayama's work, but it will not surrender to exclusivity in regards to this very issue (psychology vs. ideology), because there are threads of different possibilities and explanations to take into account. What if Terayama's "deep psychological needs" are simultaneously his deep political views? What if psychological is actually a part of his ideology? Is it possible, contrary to what Sorgenfrei implies in her book, that Terayama was not trying to resolve Freudian psychological complexes trough his art, but to criticise the concept, or even to instrumentalise it for his own ideological ends? He wouldn't be unique in that sense, for we also have these themes in the works of the late-New Wave directors such as Akio Jissoji and Toshio Matsumoto, whose films directly tackle and get into an argument with psychological normativity of Freudianism and its crucial ideological implications.

5 Not to mention the fact that a large number of his artistic influences were European.

6 Robert T. Rolf, John Kinsey Gillespie: *Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1992, p. 233

7 Japanese exceptionalism.

8 Japanese variation of Oedipus complex.

In order to answer these questions, we will look at Terayama's plays (video recordings, as well as textual translations), films and above all, his very important writings in the field of theatre theory. We will see that his interest in ideological and societal implications of theatre and performance were, although post-modern, neither less radical than Artaud's nor less politically inclined than Brecht's.

This work will take several analytic approaches, including theatre-theoretical, art-historian, gender, feminist and Marxist.

1.3 Composition

The working part of the thesis is divided in seven chapters. They chapters are composed thematically, so that the reader can have a systematic insight in various aspects which are considered. Yet all chapters contribute to the posed questions in equally important extent.

After the introductory chapter we get to the discussion of the historic and socio-political moment in which Terayama and other similar Japanese artists created their work. This is important, since it underlines the substance of the various archetypes which appear in his and related works, and is therefore a key for understanding them.

In chapter 3 there is a presentation of Terayama's basic political philosophy, put in the context of how the audience perceived his plays. It outlines the political background of his theatre theory, and explains the way he conceived theatre as a potentially democratic and emancipatory art form.

In chapter 4, we discuss Terayama's interest in gender and liberation politics, as well as performance. The claims that the Ajase psychoanalytic theory, as examined in context of his biography, was more important than Terayama's politics, are being contested by analysing some of the aspects of his most important plays and films.

This chapter is augmented by a short digression into the discourse of psychology vs. ideology, and how it has been shaping the socio-political atmosphere of recent history.

In chapter 5 we furthermore add to the ideological interest of Terayama's art by putting him in the context of the ero-guro-nansensu movement, not only trough aesthetic influences but also trough the intentions and the politics of the movement.

2 POLITICS IN CONTEXT

In order to better understand the implications of Terayama's art, as well as the directions he was taking in both his cinematic and theatrical endeavours, we need to put him in the perspective of Japanese society of the mid post-war period. This is crucial because much of his art is extremely weary of that context, in spite of the fact that today we have various contradicting opinions on what exactly his political position was or if he had any at all worth mentioning.

Even if we subscribe to the notion that Terayama, unlike most of his *angura*⁹ theatre contemporaries, was essentially apolitical, or avoided direct political engagement in his life and art, as does Carol Fischer Sorgenfrei¹⁰, it is still hard to overlook the fact that in some concrete instances he did tackle political issues head on¹¹. Our job, however, should not be to try to appropriate Terayama for a partisan left or right cause, since that wouldn't make sense in the light of what is known about him. Neither is he to be understood as an equal opportunity jester, disliked by both the left and the right and engaged in politics only as far as it made sense to, what some would describe as, his “powerful psychological needs”¹². This later characterisation borders dangerously with a too convenient psychologisation and explaining away of Terayama's more questionable moments.

To understand the complexity of Terayama's politics, we need to understand the wider context of Japanese art scene of the time, which not only gave birth of the movements such as the Japanese New Wave in cinema, but also boosted the underground theatre scene, as well, giving it a badly needed international attention. This period is also the period of the birth of (what we today know as) uniquely idiosyncratic modern Japanese pop-culture.

2.1 Times of Political Instability

The context of the 1960s and 1970s Japan is the one of political chaos and turmoil. The catalyst of instability, like in much of the rest of the industrial world, was the War in Vietnam, which was as

9 *Angura* means "underground" and is directly based on the Japanese transliteration of the English word.

10 Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts: The Avant-garde Theatre of Terayama Shūji and Postwar Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2005, p. 43.

11 Sorgenfrei acknowledges that Terayama did speak at student protests (Ibid., p. 42), but in her opinion, it was just a formal offering of support to youth rebellion. She cites examples of where Terayama was critical of some leftwing rebellious movements as a proof that he was largely apolitical (but not rightwing?). Furthermore, she is of opinion that his contradictory relations to contemporary politics speak more of “powerful psychological needs” (Ibid., p. 47.). Terayama's excesses, even the ones which resembled politics, were, therefore, merely psychological.

12 Ibid., p. 47.

protested in Japan, as much as in the Western countries. Developing and growing by a familiar scenario, the student protests transformed into a more general discomfort with the national government.

There were two distinguished sides of the protests. One leftist, organised around the Japanese Communist Party, which was later to give birth to the terrorist group United Red Army. The other is the nationalistic movement as exemplified by the people such as Yukio Mishima. Both of these groups imploded in the early 1970s.

United Red Army performed some spectacular acts of terrorism, even implicating itself in international disputes, by granting support and volunteers to the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation) and participating in a terrorist action in Tel Aviv. However, by 1971 it was all over¹³.



Figure 1: Emperor Tomato Ketchup

On the right side of the spectrum, internationally established novelist and dramatist Yukio Mishima committed a public suicide (a *seppuku* ritual involving a voluntary decapitation by an assistant), as a protest, as well as an attempt to start a coup against the government, in order to reinstate the authority of the Emperor. Mishima's failed *coup d'etat* was interpreted in many different ways. It is worth mentioning that like Terayama, Mishima was also not well understood. He was an opponent of the Vietnam War and Japanese government's tacit support for it, similarly to the people on the left. On the other hand, he was a proponent of the Imperial Japan and traditional *bushido* values, with an exception that he considered the World War II Japanese fascism an aberration and an abominable appropriation of those values.

In light of such contradictory stances, it happens, as is the case with Terayama, that some people tend to explain away portions of someone's actions as a result of psychology or psychological needs

13 Aileen Gallagher: *The Japanese Red Army*, New York: The Rosen Publishing Group 2003, p. 47-53.

and to rob them of the genuine political. In that respect, Mishima's fascism supposedly came from his homosexuality¹⁴, similarly to how Terayama was supposedly rebellious because of the complicated relationship with his mother¹⁵.

2.2 The Emperor Tomato Ketchup

In 1971, around the time of these events, Terayama created what was probably the most controversial work of his career, the experimental film *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*¹⁶. Everything about it, the style, the presentation, the performances and possible political interpretations had a potential to be considered either scandalous or suspect by both the left and the right. With this film, which appeared in the midst of the revolutionary chaos of Mishima and the United Red Army, Terayama presented an absurd caricature of the society and the revolutionaries themselves. The highly surreal film paints a revolution which is being orchestrated by small children, who proceed to violently overthrow the rule of the grown-ups. What it seemingly results into is a version of a carnevalistic chaos with a farcical strain of a dadaistic lack of meaningfulness.

The initial controversy came from the depiction of simulated sexual orgies between the children overlords and the defeated adults, as well as torture and other forms of humiliation¹⁷.

What this, by implication, is a political statement and interpretation and is



Figure 2: *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*

14 Matthew Chozick: "Queering Mishima's Suicide as a Crisis of Language", in: electronic journal of japanese studies, <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/discussionpapers/2007/Chozick.html> (10.10. 2013)

15 Sorgenfrei, *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 47.

16 *Tomato Ketchup Kôtei*, D: Shûji Terayama, Japan 1971

17 Steven C. Ridgely: *Japanese Counterculture: The Antiestablishment Art of Terayama Shuji*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2011, p. 43-44.

18 Ibid., p. 44.

But there are more potential dimensions to interpret the work. If Terayama was gently mocking the childishness of the student protests, while also romanticising it (a justification which could have been extorted under a public pressure), then *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup* should indeed be seen as a powerful blow to the left political cause.

If, on the other hand, Terayama was mocking the other side, the one exemplified by Mishima¹⁹, then it would give the film a totally new meaning.

The third option is that he was mocking the both sides. In that case, we should perhaps take into account the opinion that Terayama was actually seeking an easy way out of a complicated political setting. But then we may ask a valid question: Why not just avoid the political trappings altogether? Then, there is the reference to tomato ketchup, perhaps an anti-capitalist/consumerist caricaturing of the increasing Americanisation of the Japanese society. But even that should be seen in a specific context. Japanese anti-American sentiments at the time, in some flavours in which they existed, worked as a concrete critique of the Japanese government. They were an instance of the anti-establishment politics which was targeting the Japanese leadership, since it was the US government which, out of real-political reasons, supported or ignored reactionary movements in Japan, in exchange for its support for its own actions in Vietnam. This made criticism of America a parcel of the criticism of Japanese society itself.

Hence, the character of the Emperor Tomato Ketchup himself, who features prominently in the film, may be seen as a unification, or a monstrous combination of the two: an indulgent childish emperor for the neoliberal consumerist future.

But there are several sound reasons why we should pay more attention to this analysis, instead of the knee-jerk labelling of the film as a critique of the revolutionary impulses, which to Terayama supposedly appeared as a mindless children's *coup d'etat*. First, it is the fact that Terayama already engaged in satirical criticism of Americanisation of culture and capitalistic consumerism, in more direct ways, most notably in his experimental play *Our Age Comes Riding on a Circus Elephant* (1969)²⁰.

19 Just as Mishima was trying to do with his restoration of the power of the Emperor, the child revolutionaries also enthrone one of their own.

20 *Jidai wa sakasu no zo ni notte*, (Tenjo Sajiki), D: Shuji Terayama, 1969.



Figure 3: *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets*

The other reason is the fact that in the same year he made *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, Terayama also wrote and directed another film which was more than obviously supportive of not just any revolution but (again) a children's revolution. An angry agit-prop musical, titled *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets*²¹, was not merely promoting student protests, it was advising children to abandon school and parents, leave their homes and form protest groups. Child rebellion, which may have been interpreted as mockery in the former film, was presented as an imperative in the latter. Can this apparent change of heart be seen as a trendy appropriation of the contemporary popular culture, which traded in rebellion and protests? Sure. Can this film be seen as a *mea culpa* or as merely paying lip-service to the popular causes and moods, a demagoguery feeding on youth dissatisfaction, in a way totally contradicting all the satirical potential of *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*? Possibly.

The primary reason why we should refrain from drawing such conclusions is because Terayama's child rebellion was far from a popular gimmickry, but actually a reality. In fact, much of his Tenjo Sajiki theatre troupe was consisting of children who listened to Terayama's sermons, which he also expressed in his radio broadcasts, and who eventually appeared at his door and joined the troupe. It includes most of his closest associates, such as Henrikk Morisaki²².

Many of the young actors who appear in the film were also part of the protest movement. In parts of the film they express genuine dissatisfaction, based on their own real-life experiences. Their protests, however, were not turned against specific political positions and powers but towards the concept of family and parenthood itself.

21 *Sho o suteyo machi e deyau*, D: Shuji Terayama, Japan 1971

22 Tenzer: *Interview with Henrikk Morisaki*

The possibility of Terayama's sympathies for the protesters, even if he depicted them as grotesque and chaotic, shines a different light on the politics of *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, as well. In fact, it opens up a third option for interpretation. Could it be that his child revolutionaries are both fools and geniuses, losers and winners, villains and heroes, and that application of crude left-right dichotomies on his art is more than inadequate? Can his objection to them on the pragmatically political level coexist with a provocative adoration on a “spiritual” level?

Furthermore, does their monstrosity eventually redeem their actions, because of how transformational it is? And is the redemption moral and in accordance with reality, or is it more poetic and applicable only to the level of fiction (like a poetic justice)?

These are concerns which appear regularly in all of Terayama's work, both before and after the film in question. They are important especially in regards to Terayama's preoccupation with fiction and reality. Where does one begin and where does the other end? How is possible to navigate the moral imperatives of one and the other and can poetic morality be replicated on the level of the concrete?²³

He was not alone in dealing with these ideas, for in a certain form, they were also a preoccupation of Mishima²⁴, who wondered about the dissolution of interior and exterior, mind and physicality, which he believed is artificially separated by language²⁵. Later we will see how important this same problem was to Terayama, especially in his theatrical work in which he tried to liberate theatre from the dictatorship of text and destroy the line between fiction and reality. But in order to better understand these relations, the murderous youth archetype, as seen in Terayama's art, but also in the many instances of the modern Japanese culture, needs some more looking into.

Since the birth of the Japanese New Wave, an archetype of a monstrous rebellious youth has been very dominant in Japanese culture and popular imagination. Not only Mishima, but also Nobel

23 Commenting on Mishima's public suicide, Terayama avoided to criticise it on a direct political level, even though it would be an easy thing to do in regards to the circumstances even for a supposedly apolitical Terayama. He only criticised what he saw as not enough theatricality in the way Mishima took his own life. Mishima “should have died at cherry blossom time”. (Sorgenfrei, *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 43.)

24 This is a question posed by Yukio Mishima as well. In his novel *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace With the Sea* (1963) horrible murder of a well-meaning innocent man is presented as morally ambiguous, or at least with hints at admiration for the murderers. The murder is committed by a group of spoiled children who despise the way the sailor rejected his dreams and gave in to the social expectations of a settled grownup life. A child rebellion, an attack on pragmatism of the real life circumstances, clashes (in the name of fantasy and refusal to commit) with the facts of the reality itself. Without any attempt to shy away from their brutal monstrosity and chilliness of the murder, the novel still presents it as a sort of a spiritually pure act.

This is a possible key for approaching Terayama's stance on the child rebellion of *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, which is in many ways similar. And it wouldn't be a stretch, since the monstrous youthful murderer has been an established archetype of the Japanese pop-culture. The purity of the act is not in the act itself but in the way it provokes a response, an awakening in the victim and the society.

25 Chozik: *Queering Mishima's Suicide*

prize winner Kenzaburo Oe²⁶ in literature, and then the entire group of film-makers such as Akio Jissoji, Nagisa Oshima or Masahiro Shinoda (with whom Terayama collaborated as a screenwriter many times), nurtured the said archetype. Soon it was taken up by the various manga authors, such as Osamu Tezuka, and Mitsuteru Yokoyama, as well as the members of the feminist Year 24 Group, such as Keiko Takemiya and Moto Hagio. What all these have in common is the depiction of youth as dangerous and explosive, transformational and radical, and eventually monstrous. Even though it was based on a specifically post-war youth dissatisfaction, its impact survived in contemporary manga, anime and film and in a way shaped the entire Japanese popular culture to this day²⁷.

2.3 Funeral Parade of Roses and the monstrous youth archetype

This archetype's connection to Japanese avant-garde, of which Terayama was a part, is the most apparent when we consider it in the light of a film without which Terayama would probably be unable to finance the German co-production of *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, because it almost single-handedly opened the door for the Japanese avant-garde cinema in the West.

The said door was opened by Toshio Matsumoto with his most famous film *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969)²⁸, which was produced by ATG (Art Theatre Guild), the same group which produced many of Terayama's own films, as well as the ones of the aforementioned New Wave film-makers. Until that crucial moment in 1969, Japanese cinema in the West was mostly associated with Akira Kurosawa and samurai epics, with film-makers who dealt with more modern concerns of the Japanese society, such as Yasujiro Ozu, only being in the process of discovery. The mutual influence of Terayama's previous plays (such as *La Marie-vision*²⁹) on this film, and the film's subsequent influence on Terayama's later work, but also its help in promoting the rest of the

26 Oe's novel *Nip the Buds, Shoot the Kids* (1958), which he wrote when he was 23, tells a story about a struggle between fifteen teenage boys and cruel peasants in a village struck by plague.

27 A good example is the seminal anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) (*Shin seiki evangerion*, D: Hideaki Anno, Japan 1995-96), about a group of powerful teenagers who defend the world from alien monsters. Also the film *Conversations* (2010) by Tetsuya Nakashima (*Kokuhaku*, D: Tetsuy Nakashima, Japan 2010), which was Japanese official selection for the Academy Awards. It tells about a schoolboy who murders the small child of his teacher, which in turn causes the woman's awakening and revenge. All these examples criticise nostalgic (politically reactionary) views of childhood.

28 *Bara no soretsu*, D: Toshio Matsumoto, Japan 1969.

29 *La Marie vision* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1968.

Japanese avant-garde cinema abroad, is indisputable³⁰. The cinematic style is almost identical to *The Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, made two years later.

Matsumoto's film is part-documentary (with authentic accounts from the 1960s Tokyo gay scene), part fictional re-telling of *Oedipus Rex*, with one important difference. The incestuous relationship in the story is not between son and mother, but a homosexual one between the son and the father. The story tells of how they meet unknowingly at the heart of Tokyo's gay district, and soon become lovers. Gradually it is revealed that the father left family when the son was just a child. As the events unfolded, the son murdered his mother and her lover, left home and became a cross-dresser, which is another reason why his father failed to recognise him. The tragedy at the end of the film,



Figure 4: *Nanami: Inferno of First Love*

when all the things are revealed and the son kills his father and gauges his own eyes (as in the original play), speaks about the more-dimensional power and the monstrous archetype of the youth. His ability to kill is only secondary to his other, more dangerous weapon, which makes him even more monstrous, and at the same time more spiritually pure. It is the ambivalent, uncontrollable power of his sexuality itself.

We will see that these are the themes which apply in much of Terayama's work, as well. In his own screenplay for a film by Susumu Hani, *Nanami: The Inferno of First Love*³¹, which was made in 1968, shortly before *Funeral Parade of Roses*, we get a variation on a similar theme. The film deals with the sexual anxiety of a virginal young man named Shun, who is unable to have sex with his girlfriend. Simultaneously, however, his unusual friendship with a small girl is noticed by the authorities, who in turn suspect him of paedophilia and send him to a psychiatric treatment. It turns

30 The film made such strong echoes in the West, that it noticeably influenced Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*.

31 *Hatsukoi: Jigoku-hen*, D: Susumu Hani, Japan 1968.

out that Shun has a repressed memory of child sexual abuse of his own, which was perpetrated by his foster father.

Even in this sparse description of the film's plot we recognise the theme of sexuality as an ambivalent transformative power: first the one of the child abuser himself. And then also the one of the victim himself, whose victimhood resulted in a lacking sexual confidence. This is put against a social backdrop which portrays wider problems of the young people of the 1960s Japan, who were coming to Tokyo in order to find work, only to find various dead-ends and generally face inability of progress and emancipation. In the same vein, Shun's girlfriend, unable to support herself, ends up in explicit S&M pornographic industry. Shun's attempts to re-establish contact with her, amidst the violence of the criminal people who are responsible for the girl's humiliation, eventually cost him his life. Sexuality is, therefore, again seen as a setting of profound change and disruption.

Childhood and youth presented not as innocent and isolated but as part and a creation of a corrupt world, is what dominates most of Terayama's work, not only this film. This idea became a part of a pattern of the 1960s and 1970s Japanese popular culture. But a distinction has to be made. The rebellious youth is not the one of early New Wave films, in which the young protagonists are usually protesting their victimhood in the light of the post-war societal changes. The young rebels of the avant-garde and popular culture are themselves villainous and dangerous. They rebel against the idea of innocence and purity of youth itself. They mock the nostalgia for the idyllic pre-war society and old values, which were therapeutically dominating the post-war period of the Japanese social discourse. The young killers in Mishima's early novels know that their youth is what will protect them from legal punishment. The same way of reasoning and satirical critique appears in 2010 film *Confessions*. Those who reject the falsity of that innocence are then usually women (fighting at the forefront against the patriarchal structures), which is a substantial element of many Terayama's works.

3 POLITICS OF REALITY vs. FICTION

3.1 Dramaturgy of History

In his book *The Labyrinth and the Dead Sea: My Theatre*, as partially translated by Carol Fischer Sorgenfrei, Terayama narrates an enigmatic (possibly apocryphal) anecdote which supposedly took place after one of his performances:

“After a performance, I came out into the lobby where a middle-aged Dutch woman was waiting to see me. She politely inquired, “What is Hans doing now?” I responded, “Who do you mean by Hans?” “Hans Buruma, my husband,” she said. As she explained it, Hans Buruma was once in charge of mail delivery at the Amsterdam Central Post Office. Three years before, he had attended Heretics (Jashumon), a guest production from Tokyo presented by my theatre troupe at the Mickery Theatre. Just after the play began, two men masked in black leaped down into the audience area, grabbed her husband by the arms, and forcibly dragged up him onto the stage. Once on-stage, Hans was dressed in a costume and made up, and before he knew it, he had become a character in the play. At least two times during the course of the play, she clearly saw her husband joining other characters who together pulled the ropes. He seemed to be enjoying himself. But when the play was over, Hans never returned to his seat in the audience. The wife waited for two hours, then went to the dressing room, but the members of the company had already returned to the hotel. That night, Hans failed to come home. After two more nights, he still hadn’t returned. By then, the company had left Holland and moved on to West Germany. She thought he had joined the company, that “they hired Hans for his acting skill.” She thought, “My husband is in the play.” Now, after three years had passed, she was pleading with me, “Please give me back my husband.” I had to tell her that I had never heard this story before. Neither I nor anyone in the company knew a middle-aged Dutchman named Hans Buruma. There was no evidence indicating that such a person had been with us during the past three years. When I told her that I didn’t know him, she was on the verge of tears. “Then where is Hans?” she asked. Three years ago—One middle-aged male post-office delivery worker evaporated into our play. In this case, we cannot distinguish where the

*drama ends and reality begins. The phrases “Hans disappeared into the play” and “Hans disappeared while in the play” are virtually synonymous.”*³²

We can only speculate on the truthfulness of the above story. Terayama was not a stranger to exaggerations and creating flamboyant self-narratives. It is somewhat apparent, however, that the truthfulness of it is contested in the story itself. Terayama acknowledges that he didn't know anyone by the name of Hans Buruma and then invokes the possibility of the incident being based on a potential of mixture of drama and reality. The anecdote may also be a joke and a pun on the name of Ian Buruma, an Anglo-Dutch writer and journalist who has been especially interested in Asian art and culture and also occasionally wrote about Terayama.

In the opening paragraphs of the same text Terayama writes that if someone asked him what his favourite play was, he would reply it was “History”³³. Not “history” as a narration of epic poems “celebrating victories over revolutionaries”, “restoration of national unity” and “revival of the past”. He believes that history has its inherent dramaturgy, which has nothing to do with the aforementioned grand narratives, but with characters themselves. Terayama sees characters as the primary elements of dramaturgy. Implicitly, applied to history itself, when a society refuses to designate actual people with the titles of “characters”, it takes away their agency.

A “character”, according to Terayama, is a “truly unique or distinctive individual”³⁴. But he does not merely make a paradigmatic link between a free democratic society and performance/theatre, he is actually defining dramaturgy of theatre in the terms of historical reality.

In other words, under oppression and authoritarianism a history can have no dramatic values. But it can acquire them through the power of imagination. In that way, imagination opens our eyes to the reality of the fact that the world is organised by chance occurrences. By asserting this, Terayama is implying that the randomness of the chance events actually represents the dramaturgy of reality. But it is also the dramaturgy of theatre, because the distinction between truth and reality moves towards non-existence, the more free society we live in. This blurred transition line is also the reason why theatre, according to Terayama, has an impacting potential for social change, as exemplified by the Hans Buruma anecdote.

³² Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 265.

³³ Ibid., p. 263.

³⁴ Ibid.

3.2 Violent Theatre

Since his death in 1983 there have not not been that many notable discussion of Terayama in the West. In North America the place most associated with him is the University of Hawaii, probably due to the strong Japanese presence. In Europe today a revival has just begun in past several years and for the occasion of the 2013 anniversary of his death.

Yet Terayama visited both North America and Europe many times over the decades. At that time he produced plays and directed films which even had European co-producers.

His presence in Europe was not without scandal, though. In what can be seen as an act of German post-war ideological confusion, in October 1972 his tour was criticised from many sides. Bild carried an article under the title “Pest from Japan” (Seuche aus Japan)³⁵, while other papers protested with words such as “Not Language but Scandal” and “Noise and Smoke”, which Terayama himself read as an ironic reference to a poem by Goethe³⁶.

In the centre of the scandal was a Berlin critic Roland H. Wiegstein, who together with his wife tried to leave the staging of *Heretics*³⁷ before the play had ended. However, during the performance all the exit doors leading out of the theatre were supposedly guarded by rude black-clad actors who prevented people from leaving. The incident soon escalated into violence.

In the sea of alarmist criticism there was one lone dissenting voice, in the form of a Der Spiegel editorial titled “Hitler war besser” (Hitler was Better).

The article gives the following description of some of the things which were going on in the play:

“Schwarze Schergen mit langen Prügeln kujonieren den Gast, der im finstren Theater mühselig einen Sitzplatz suchen muß; rasselnder Beat betäubt ihn alsbald, und künstlicher Rauch reizt ihm die Augen. So terrorisiert, bekommt er Szenen zu sehen, in denen gleichfalls Leute terrorisiert werden: Von den Schergen wie Marionetten dirigiert und drangsaliert, stürzen die Bühnen-Figuren in wüste Not.

Ein Groteskmensch schleppt dazu ein abgeschnittenes Riesenohr umher, ein anderer hätschelt seinen Regenschirm, junge Weiber winden sich in

35 “Hitler war besser”, Der Spiegel, Issue 44, 23. October 1972 <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-42787578.html> (10.09.2012)

36 Sorgenfrei: Unspeakable Acts, p. 270.

37 *Joshumon* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1971.

Schlingen, träumerisch geht eine Schöne einem Huhn ans Leben, und eine Alte, eine Wanduhr auf dem Rücken, tappert gichtisch durchs Inferno. ³⁸

The editorial goes on to criticise Roland. H. Wiegenstein's reaction as a "misunderstanding" of something which was "meant as a game". It also tries to analyse the symbolism behind the particular figures in the play. The black-clad figures, stemming from *kurokos*, the puppet-masters of the traditional Japanese *bunraku*-theatre are part of the mechanism of power and manipulation. Preventing the audience from leaving the theatre and the violence which erupted afterwards is a perfect testament of their *modus operandi*.

Then there is the figure of the "man with the ear", who personifies the old isolated Japan, always trying to hear the inputs from the West, as well as the mother figure with a chronometer, the strict guardian of the strong family structure.

The editorial finds some strong political points in the play, calling it an "Appeal for Revolution". In something which can be seen as the reversal of the Hans Buruma episode, the actors free themselves from the shackles of the play. The director, mirroring a revolutionary society itself, is therefore hoping to spill those sentiments of freedom into the reality. They start leaving the stage and talking with the audience, shouting in Japanese and saying a few words in German: "Scheiße!", „Scheiß-Theater“, „Scheiß-Europa“ and „Glottzt nicht so exotisch!“.

But isn't this just a shock-theatre, a calculated routine for the creation of controversial headlines?

There is an argument in favour of a critique of the theatre in which fiction and reality become blurred through shock tactics. Slavoj Žižek criticises it through the prism of the psycho-analytical approach:

"In contemporary art, we encounter often brutal attempts to 'return to the real', to remind the spectator (or reader) that he is perceiving a fiction, to awaken him from the sweet dream. This gesture has two main forms which, although opposed, amount to the same. In literature or cinema, there are (especially in post-modern texts) self-reflexive reminders that what we are watching is a mere fiction, like the actors on screen addressing directly us as spectators, thus ruining the illusion of the autonomous space of the narrative fiction, or the writer directly intervening into the narrative through ironic comments; in theatre, there are occasional brutal events which awaken us to the reality of the stage (like slaughtering a chicken on

38 Der Spiegel, 23. October, 1972

stage). Instead of conferring on these gestures a kind of Brechtian dignity, perceiving them as versions of extraneation, one should rather denounce them for what they are: the exact opposite of what they claim to be - escapes from the Real, desperate attempts to avoid the real of the illusion itself, the Real that emerges in the guise of an illusory spectacle. ”³⁹

But Terayama's art cannot be lumped together with the “slaughtering of chicken” kind of performances⁴⁰ because in his art the distinction between the fiction and reality is meant as illusory from the outset. Therefore, his art does not and cannot work strictly within such dichotomy.

Of course, he does make a distinction between fiction and reality, because that is the default position from which we all start, but in order for one to become the other, the distinction itself has to be destroyed. Therefore, Terayama's dramaturgy is not about fiction being interrupted by reality (which would make it deserving of the general criticism in the line of the one given by Žižek), but about reality being interrupted by fiction (a revolutionary outburst, a rally in the streets). The truth is a continuation of appearances, not its vice versa. And in practice, there is no distinction between the signifier and the signified.

Further proof that Terayama meant to interrupt the reality with fiction and not the opposite is how his later plays tended to be performed out in the open, sometimes without permission by the police and with a flagrant intention to cause a stir. In that regard the same *Der Spiegel* article quotes his famous statement:

“Hitlers Nazismus habe zwar Schiffbruch erlitten, aber als eine Art Straßentheater war er erfolgreicher als Wagners Opern.”⁴¹

The transformational political potential of theatre, which we realise now Terayama saw as something ambivalent and progressive only in relation to the “power of imagination” and its inversion of the progressive dynamism, is only there if there are “characters” within the discourse of history - unique agents of progress, or free individuals.

The most important point, however, is that there is no meaningful distinction between “the theatre” and the societal theatre, which makes their blurred area of transition the most effective mechanism of transformation.

39 Slavoj Žižek: “How to Read Lacan”, in: *lacan.com* <http://www.lacan.com/zizhowto.html> (10.09. 2013).

40 Although incidentally, there is a moment of chicken slaughter in *Heretics*.

41 *Der Spiegel*, 23. October, 1972

“Hitler Was Better”, is merely meaning “more effective”, because he brought his narrative to the streets and from there to the entire country. Nazism can indeed be seen as a performance act (with all the elements a performance act entails, including costumes, choreography and dramaturgy) in which there is an interaction between the performers and the audience, for mutual benefits.

Regarding the *Heretics* incident, Terayama actually replied to his critics. In the aftermath of the incident he took part in a debate with Wiegenstein, Forum Theatre director, Klaus Hauser and several newspaper reporters⁴². On that occasion Terayama articulated the “theory of the audience”, which he claimed was a cornerstone of his Tenjo Sajiki troupe's theatre theory. According to him, the violence which took place in Berlin was unavoidable and was explained by a part of the theory's mechanism which replicated itself in all other places where the play was staged, including Novi Sad (Yugoslavia), where it resulted in “bloodshed”.

Wiegenstein did not object to the principle of interaction between the audience and the performers but he did have concerns about the use of violence by the performers against the members of the audience. Terayama replied that violence, as a means of expression taking place between the performers, cannot create a communication with the audience, unless the audience is subjected to it as well. It is part of the evaluation of causes and effects, which is strongly related to where the subject is, inside or outside of the play. Unless we understand it directly, Terayama implies, we are doomed to be no more than policemen who are outside the play trying to pass judgement on policemen inside the play. In his book he further claims that a comparative “dramatical” event to the incident in his play were the “events which led to the massacres of Fürstenfeldbruck“, at the Munich Olympics, which took place earlier that same year. In other words, his point was that protesting against the inconvenient „violence“ during a play and not against the geopolitical manipulations which lead to the violence of the international terrorism, for example, is an act of hypocrisy.

3.3 „The Theory of the Audience“ vs. „The Theatre of Cruelty“

There are parallels to be made between Terayama and Antonin Artaud, whom he cited as one of his most important influences. Just like Jean Genet, Albert Camus or Heiner Müller, Terayama is a heir to Artaud, whom he mentioned often in his writings. The fact is, however that he may be the one of Artaud's successors who made an even more coherent attempt at evolution of the original

⁴² The details are described in Part II of Sorgenfrei's book *Unspeakable Acts*.

concept of the Theatre of Cruelty. But whereas Artaud's aim was to clarify the perception, wake-up the inner reaction of the audience and shatter the illusory reality of signs and language which surrounds us, Terayama was trying the opposite. Not only was his theatre about more than perception (it was about transformation), he also didn't want to shed the masks but to put them on. It is the mask, the performance which is the instigator of the process of transformation, and it surely works at the expense of the clarity of perception.

So while we may notice superficial similarities between Terayama's and Artaud's approaches, theory of audience achieves the “democratic” transformation not by shedding the performance from theatre, as Artaud tried to do, but by making the audience part of the play and turning the performers into the audience. This is not in order to uncover the true nature of a symbol-less society which lurks under the surface, but to release both the audience (from their reality) and the performers (from their fiction). That is why theory of the audience is a theatre of liberation, while Artaud's approach can be interpreted as further enclosure.

By getting us rid of the symbols we return to the “natural” state of pain. Artaud wanted audiences to find in the theatre not an area for escaping from the world, but the realisation of their worst nightmares and deepest fears. He therefore tried to provoke conditions that would force the release of primitive instinctive actions he believed were hidden from the civilised society, beneath the mask which is hiding all human behaviour. He invoked the impulses of irrationality that could be stimulated by suffering and pain and argued that elements of theatricality should be used to increase a sense of violence, and disorientation in the audience.

Artaud's concept of cruelty was not sadistic. He wanted to stimulate what was honest and true and the cruelty he envisaged required a rigour and determination that was necessary if performers and audiences were to confront and experience the dark and terrifying responses that lay at the heart of each human being.

But such regression is not necessarily liberating. On the contrary, it confines us to the level of instincts and pain, which is beneath the level of intellect. Therefore Terayama attempted the opposite of that. In order to improve the agency of the subject, he went so far as to invent and re-invent not only his own persona, but also the events surrounding him, as well as the people around him. His life and performance became indistinguishable.

Žižek makes another general point which is especially applicable to Terayama in this sense:

"What this means is that the emotions I perform through the mask (false persona) that I adopt can in a strange way be more authentic and truthful than what I really feel in myself. When I construct a false image of myself

*which stands for me in a virtual community in which I participate (in sexual games, for example, a shy man often assumes the screen persona of an attractive promiscuous woman), the emotions I feel and feign as part of my screen persona are not simply false: although (what I experience as) my true self does not feel them, they are nonetheless in a sense true. "*⁴³

To refer to Terayama's tanka poem which opens this text, the author is creating a "beautiful lie" which consists of putting on a mask of an ant who is leading a torturous existence, by trying to move from a dahlia to an ash tray. Unlike Artaud, Terayama is not reaching for the torturous reality, but creating a fictional one for himself. The concept of Artaud's cruelty itself is very distinctive from what Terayama understood by it. *Zankoku no bi*⁴⁴ (beautiful cruelty) is not a pretend cruelty. It is an act which exists within a context in which aesthetic is not separate from the concrete reality. In other words, the signifier is not a separate category from the signified. A performance and reality are one and the same. Cruelty is beautiful not because it is aesthetic, but because everything else is.

43 Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*.

44 A Japanese aesthetic concept with long history, which Terayama adopted in his work.

4 ESCAPE ROUTES IN TERAYAMA'S NARRATIVES

4.1 Representation of Women

Terayama is today regarded as a national treasure in Japan. A poet, a dramatist, a film-maker, a celebrity in his own right. With his experimental theatre troupe Tenjo Sajiki he created some of the most influential productions of the *angura* theatre.

But in many respects he was also somewhat of an outcast, a “freakish” presence in the Japanese theatre scene during the 60s and the 70s. While on the one hand, his mastery of poetry made him one of the most beloved Japanese poets of his time, his subsequent abandonment of *tanka* poetry and dedication to experimental theatre, with his circus-like theatre troupe, and to film, made him controversial in many respects. And even today some of his legacy is disputed, such as his reliance on the threatening, even monstrous, female stereotype. Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei attributes this to the misogynistic attitudes of the traditional Japanese art and culture.⁴⁵ In his defence, she explained such imagery with the post-modern nature of his work, which she links directly to the mechanisms of the *carnavalesque* aesthetics, as introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin⁴⁶. While such defence is sincere, in further text we will see that it isn't adequate, whereas it will be argued that such supposedly “misogynistic” imagery was actually one of the most potent feminist formulations in all of his oeuvre, and that the archetype of a circus freak, both literal and metaphorical, was an important model of liberation and social emancipation in Terayama's art.

The construct of a demonic, freakish, bizarre circus image of a woman, almost always central to his film and theatre, has to be approached through the lens of a wider interest of all of Terayama's oeuvre, namely the imagery of flamboyance, circus and carnival. Despite its significance within the conservative Japanese tradition, his depiction of monstrosity was in fact a platform for discussing the ideas of feminist emancipation.

Thus, Terayama's outlook was politically radical. It resulted in the stereotype of female monstrosity being appropriated by that radicalism and, through a mixture of the popular culture and tradition, turned into its opposite. Although Terayama cited Federico Fellini as one of his influences⁴⁷, the

45 Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei: „Deadly Love: Mothers, Whores and Other Demonic Females in Japanese Theatre“, in: *Contemporary Theatre Review. Volume 1. Issue 2*, London: Routledge 1994, p. 77-84.

46 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 168-169.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

carnavalesque of Terayama is in many respects very different from the one of Fellini and in opposition to what Bakhtin had in mind.

4.2 Carnavalesque-grotesque Body Dichotomy

In order to understand how, we need to examine the deficiency of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of carnivalesque and its natural supplement, a grotesque body. According to Bakhtin, a carnival, in which social hierarchies are profaned and overturned, is a social institution and serves as a means of cultural and political change⁴⁸. The cynical irony of a carnival, its bizarre humour, its laughing at the official rituals, at the normative and socially accepted, through excesses and chaos doesn't necessarily have to be anti-ideological. Slavoj Žižek's assessment in this respect is that such ironic distance is what serves the ideology of „normalcy“: “An ideological identification exerts a true hold on us precisely when we maintain an awareness that we are not fully identical to it, that there is a rich human person beneath it”⁴⁹. Grotesque, circus-like representations of social mores, of power structures are therefore not necessarily a progressive force in art.

These examples show us that carnivalesque, which rendered in Lacanian terms we can identify as „jouissance“, stands for politically disengaged, reactionary and conservative in the sense that the entire society is presented as fallible and grotesque. Hence, there is no point in doing anything else but embracing the societal bitter-sweet ugliness and more conveniently, the system's corruption.

But in the case of Terayama, who also used carnivalesque imagery, we note a political criticism, especially evident in the carnival–grotesque body dichotomy. In other words, contrary to Bakhtin, Terayama puts carnivalesque and grotesque body in opposition one to another. In his play *Our Age Comes Riding on a Circus Elephant* (1969), Terayama links carnivalesque with capitalistic excesses of the America during the Vietnam-war. It presents caricatured segments of the American popular culture literally as a circus act. Another famous example of him attacking the notion of carnivalesque is in his film, *Emperor Tomato Ketchup* (1971), in which he links the excessive capitalist-consumerist indulgence, represented by an infantile child rebellion, with the reactionary patriarchy of the revived Japanese post-imperial nationalism (targeting the support such political movements were getting from the US in the 60s and 70s).

48 Mikhail Bakhtin: “Rabelais and His World”, diss. Gorki Institute of World Literature Moscow 1946, p. 10.

49 Slavoj Žižek: *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso 1997, p. 20-21.

On the other hand, grotesque body in Terayama's art always serves as a progressive force. In order to confront the reactionary power of the carnival, the grotesque body needs to be aggressive, which automatically distinguishes it from the *grotesque* of Bakhtin.

4.3 The Mother as a Circus Freak/ Another Female Personality

Terayama's most famous film, *Pastoral: To Die in the Country* (1974)⁵⁰, by many regarded as highly autobiographical, presents us with a quintessential example of how such dichotomy works. The life of a village in the impoverished Aomori prefecture, as seen through the eyes of an adolescent boy, is ruled by a dichotomy of the separation of the village itself (with its mysterious spirituality and mountain shrines), on one hand, and a simple travelling circus at the outskirts, on the other. That the meddling mobs of villagers and their colourful religious processions are linked to carnivalesque is emphasized by the fact that all of them, including the boy protagonist, wear carnival paint on their faces. The imagery of the circus in *Pastoral*, however, is sensual and erotic, not in a symbolic or caricatured, but in an explicit and grotesque way.



Figure 5: *Pastoral: Circus sex-orgy*

The boy's first exposure to the travelling circus is a shocking, although non-traumatic, event. Behind the circus tent the boy witnesses a sex-orgy, which shocks him to the extent that he quickly runs back home. On his next visit to the circus he meets a "fat lady", who is actually a woman in an inflatable costume. In order for the lady's grotesque body to get inflated, the costume needs to be

50 *Den-en ni shisu*, D: Shūji Terayama, Japan 1974

pumped by another person, which in effect results in the woman's sexual arousal. Needless to say, the boy readily gives a hand, which seems to be his first introduction to female sexuality.

A similar, but semantically opposite, image of female sexuality is found in films of Federico Fellini. In many of them there is an episode of the protagonist boy's first encounter with sexuality through a contact with sexual, fertile and sometimes corpulent women. In *Amarcord* (1973)⁵¹, there are several such figures. In one episode the boy's face gets pressed against the enormous breasts of a corpulent lady who is teasing him. But that is as far as it gets.

Far from being controversial, such constructs of female sexuality in Fellini's films have something cosy, non-threatening, and motherly about them. The central premise of *Amarcord*, which, like *Pastoral*, is set in a small conservative town, is in part dealing with the 16-year old boy's fascination with Gradisca, a local woman who embodies stereotypical female mystique and is regarded as immoral by the community. In the end, the threatening sexuality of Gradisca, and by implication all female sexuality, especially in the context of being a danger to an innocent boy, is de-constructed and re-shaped as maternal and benevolent: Gradisca finds happiness in a marriage to a local carabinieri, and her seductive sexuality is seen simply as a distorted way an adolescent interprets what are essentially attributes of one's future wife and mother.



Figure 6: *Pastoral*: Inflating as a quasy sexual encounter.

In contrast to Fellini, Terayama presents female sexuality as anything but motherly and mothers as anything but good and non-threatening. In fact, Terayama was infamous for not only presenting most of his mother characters as domineering and evil, but often monstrous, physically grotesque

51 *Amarcord*, D: Federico Fellini, Italy, France 1973

circus freaks, which is one of the main reasons why such images are sometimes contested by Terayama's critics as misogynistic.

4.4 Ajase and women

We cannot avoid to allude to the fact that Terayama had a very complicated relationship with his own psychologically disturbed mother, who was asserting control over his life until his death in 1983, when he was just 46 years old. In fact, in spite of the negativity of mother characters in all of his work, his life was marked by a more than strong devotion to his mother. And while his calls for young people to abandon their parents resulted in many of them actually doing it and some even arriving at his doorstep and joining Tenjo Sajiki, his own mother was deeply involved in all his decisions and at some point caused the end of his marriage by an alleged attempted murder of him and his newly wedded wife⁵².

Even so, their closeness didn't stop and grew even more. And it is a paradox that is baffling to this day, and not many were able to give a satisfying explanation for it. The answer is potentially non-trivial. For Terayama these two sides were not separate. He advocated the blurring of boundaries between life and art. He even adopted some of the *Tenjo Sajiki* members as his siblings, and put his mother directly at the centre of some of his art projects.

Sorgenfrei suggests a psychoanalytical solution and implies that he was maybe suffering from the Japanese mother-centred form of Oedipus Complex, called *Ajase*⁵³. Indeed, there are many indications which support this, including the abandonment by his mother when he was just a boy and later reconciliation during his early adulthood.

The myth about Ajase reads much like a standard Terayama play. It was taken as a basis for the psychoanalytical concept, first proposed by Heisaku Kosawa in 1932, who personally visited Sigmund Freud in 19 Berggasse in Vienna and submitted to him a paper on the subject. The title of the paper was „Two kinds of guilt feelings, the Ajase complex“⁵⁴.

Based on a Buddhist legend, the idea proposes that the Japanese (males) are psychologically peculiar and different from other nations insofar as that they are prone to have oral dependency towards their mothers, as well as to repress the resentment (hate) at the mother. Another characteristic of the complex is the guilt feeling felt by the Japanese male after subsequently being

⁵² Sorgenfrei, *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 41.

⁵³ Sorgenfrei, *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 61-62.

⁵⁴ K. Okonogi: "Japanese psychoanalysis and the Ajase complex (Kosawa)", in: *Psychoter Psychosom*, 1979;31(1-4):350-6.

forgiven by their mothers, which invokes a need for a restitution for having negative emotions in the first place. Kosawa's main point was to emphasize the difference between this kind of guilt feeling and the one which comes with the Oedipus complex, which on the other hand comes from the fear of castration⁵⁵.

The story of the birth and life of prince Ajase (with contains much similarities to *Oedipus Rex*) is summarised in the following:

Bimbisara was the childless King of Magadha. The king wished to have a child and decided to visit a fortune teller to inquire whether he eventually would ever have a child. He was promised a child within three more years, after a hermit's death. He was told that the hermit would be reborn as the king's son. However, the King could not wait that long! So he asked the hermit to come over to his palace. But he refused the King's wish. The King was then furious and killed him. When the hermit was dying, he reiterated that he would be reborn as the King's child and added "Some day, the son will kill the King." On that very moment Queen Vaidehi became pregnant and the King was very pleased. When another fortune teller was called, he again predicted the Queen will deliver a son who will kill the King.

Bewildered with the mixture of joy for having a son and worries over his own future, the King talked about his concerns with Queen Vaidehi. They planned together the Queen's delivery from the top of a tower, so that the child would die falling to the ground. The child was delivered from the top of a tower and fell down. But he survived, having only broken his small finger, the fifth one. The boy was afterwards nicknamed "Prince Broken Finger."

About that time there was a man, Devadatta, who was a cousin of Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism. This Devadatta was violently jealous of Shakyamuni's faith and fortune, so he decided to kill Shakfa to take over his wealth and to become himself the Buddha. He challenged Ajase to do likewise with the old King: "I shall become the new Buddha and you will become the new King." Ajase protested, claiming to be very grateful to his father. However, Devadatta argued: "You are not indebted to your father since he had your mother delivering you from the top of a tower

55 Ibid.

in order to kill you; look at your broken finger!” (“Onisho-en” means in Japanese both “broken finger” and “prebirth resentment”).

Ajase confirmed with a governmental minister the story of his birth and then decided to follow Devadatta’s suggestion by confining the King without any food, expecting that he would die of starvation and Ajase would then become King. But after seven days of confinement, father was still well and active. Ajase learned then , that the Queen Vaidehi had secretly been feeding the King everyday. Ajase became furious and almost killed his mother with his sword. A governmental minister stopped him saying: “A King’s son killed his father to become a King but I have never heard of a King killing his own mother!” So Ajase ordered instead some subordinates to confine his mother. Ajase became King after killing his father and was then ready to fully fulfil his pleasures. But he regretted having killed father and developed a severe, foul-smelling skin rash. No one could approach him because of the pestilence. His mother and his subordinates took care of him but the rash became worse. One minister suggested that Ajase should go with him to visit Shakya, the Buddha. Ajase then heard a voice from the sky saying: “Follow his advice and go to Shakya to get your salvation. I feel sorry for you!” The voice added: “I am your father.” Ajase then felt more distressed and passed out.

Ajase thought that not even Shakya would forgive him for having killed his father. But Shakya argued: “If you the King are guilty and deserve punishment, then all the respected ‘minor’ Buddhas of the world would also have to be punished, since your father became a King only because of his generous contributions to Buddhas. Your father would not have ever become King without our acceptance of his generous gifts; if we had not received them, you would not have had to kill him since he would not have been the King. Hence, if you are guilty for killing your father, then all of us, all the Buddhas, are also guilty. If Buddhas, who are suspected, are not being punished, there is then no reason for you along to be punished.” Ajase felt better after hearing Shakya’s words and said: “No fine trees grow in nature from bad trees, but in my case I find a fine tree growing from a bad

tree.” Ajase then became a faithful believer. After that Devadatta failed in his attempt to kill Shakya and fell into Hell.⁵⁶

As we have said, it has been pointed out that Terayama's life shares similarities with the life of Ajase and that the reason why his plays were so popular at the time may have been because he was openly expressing the innermost psychological secrets which other people dared not to, but craved for⁵⁷. The similar elements were the absence of father, mother's abandonment because of a man, son's resentment for the mother and a disfiguring disease which eventually brings the mother and the son together.

Sorgenfrei calls the resemblance between Terayama and Ajase "uncanny"⁵⁸. As a young child Terayama lost his father during the war and was later abandoned by his mother when he was nine. The mother left the town in order to work at a US military base, leaving him with some relatives. As a result, Terayama felt strong hatred for his mother during his teenage years.

After Terayama got ill during his early adulthood (acquiring a chronic disease which would later cost him his life), his mother returned and started caring for him. That move by his mother transformed their relationship into one of strong co-dependence.

Sorgenfrei implies a lack of balance between Terayama's own life (dedication to his mother) and the monstrous mother archetype of his plays and films. She explains it by his inability to resolve the Ajase complex⁵⁹ which made him "pathologically mother-centred"⁶⁰.

Problematic representation of mothers, but also of other female characters, older and younger, are therefore seen by her as "Terayama's search for normative male identity and gendered social role outside the house"⁶¹. The complex exists because of the lacking male role model in the family.

But if the alternative guide into male adulthood, a sexually mature woman, who may be a mother or a powerful "sorceress/goddess", whose devotion was previously desired, but later seen as suffocating and threatening is rejected, instead of embraced (as Ajase did) the complex remains unresolved.

The trouble with Sorgenfrei's interpretation, setting aside her general over-reliance on biographism, is troubled by inconsistencies. The primary one is that according to what we know of Terayama's life, and as we have already mentioned, his personal relationship with his mother during his

56 Ramon Ganzarain: The Ajase Complex and Various Types of Guilt (lecture made on 20th of January 2006 on the Institute for Psychiatry & Behavioral Medicine, the USF College of Medicine), in Carter-Jenkins Center, www.thecjc.org/pdf/ajase.pdf (10.10. 2013).

57 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Act*, p. 62.

58 Ibid.

59 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 67.

60 Ibid, p. 74.

61 Ibid., p. 67.

adulthood was good (although at times riddled by his mother's excessive behaviour), which in itself indicated a resolved Ajase.

Where it was seemingly not resolved was in his fiction. Thus, unresolved complex resulted in a problematic view of women which permeated Terayama's work, but which was also in accordance with the general attitudes of the Japanese post-war pop-cultural representation of women, especially young women (*shojo*), who were regularly presented as both vampiric and seductive, but above all exotic and mysterious and certainly as *the other*.

It is important to note that although accepting that Terayama was playing within this conservative gendered space, Sorgenfrei does not accuse Terayama of misogyny. In fact, she points out that some of his works reject patriarchal order, such as his first major play, *The Hunchback of Aomori* (1967)⁶². Her explanations for this range from adequate to not very strong, however. For example,



Figure 7: *The Hunchback of Aomori* performed by Tenjo Sajiki in 1983.

she moves directly from the archetype of monstrous mother to sexually seductive *shojo*, as if one can easily explain the other.

Sorgenfrei's interpretation seems unsatisfactory, since it still designates the role of a woman in Terayama's fiction as an element, a "Tarkovskian" puzzle piece which serves to complete male's inner existence. A woman is therefore still a peripheral symbol, an important one, but still a symbol, so much needed on a boy's path to adulthood. In other words, Terayama is not seen by her as a feminist, let alone a radical one.

⁶² *Aomori ken no semushi otoko* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1967.

Rei Sadakari, on the other hand, tries to contest the claims of Terayama's misogyny in a different way and presents a rather structured picture, which is not dependent on psychoanalytical reading or mere ambivalence towards the issue of feminism. Her reading also makes place for a more central position of women in Terayama's fiction.

For that purpose she identifies two classes of female characters in Terayama's work: a "fatherless girl" and a "domineering mother"⁶³.

A fatherless girl is a woman who is not yet a mother. She is "fatherless" because she lives in freedom from male domination, which goes hand in hand with subsequent marriage and motherhood. This archetype is related to the *shojo* model, the one already identified by Sorgenfrei, but is more complex.

Figuratively speaking, the moment fatherless girl's status changes, she is transformed into an evil domineering mother who becomes dark and monstrous. This moment marks the beginning of her mortality. In other words, female existence is dominated by a big transition in a woman's life, which marks the beginning of her adulthood, leading up to her death. It is a moment when a female person becomes a stereotypical woman, in the context of a patriarchal society. This is the domineering mother, a dangerous sorceress.

By identifying this dichotomy, Sadakari presents two ideas of which only the former is favoured by Terayama. It is the fatherless girl which he supposedly sympathises with, whether because of her sexual immaturity, pure not because of being virginal (on the contrary), but because it exists outside of the societal context (outside of the signifier/signified dynamics). It is a fantastic sexuality which exists at the level of the subjective. It gets corrupted by finally being put in a societal context of an oppressive marriage, dedicated sacrifice of motherhood (madonna) and the socially accepted archetype of a mature sexual teacher who leads a boy into adulthood (benevolent whore).

These elements eventually participate in the creation of the domineering mother. In other words, fatherless girl is a female who is "right here", who is "me" and part of "my subjectivity". The domineering mother, on the other hand, is a "woman". She is ultimately *the other* than "me".

The fatherless girl is best understood on the example of Terayama's play *Bluebeard's Castle* (1968)⁶⁴, which was not a direct adaptation of the folk-tale or the version by Charles Perrault, but was based on Bela Bartok's (music) and Bela Balacz (libretto) opera *Bluebeard's Castle* (*A kékszakállú herceg vára*, 1911-1917). Sadakari presents the play as an

63 Rei Sadakari: "Fatherless Girl and Domineering Mother: Terayama Shuji's Portrayal of Women", dipl. University of Hawai'i Honolulu 2004, p. 5.

64 *Aohigeko no shiro* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1968.

ideal illustration of Terayama's concept of the life force of fatherless girl being opposed by the marriage as part of the adulthood, which represents and effectively serves as a symbol of death⁶⁵. What Sadakari does not identify, however, is the archetype which we shall call the „transformed mother“. In effect, it is a re-awakened, resurrected and remade-as-a-subject fatherless girl. As we shall see, such transformation is crucial to much of Terayama's work and invaluable in solving the paradox of his relationship with his own mother.

4.5 Transformed mother

Transformation of a mother character happens on many occasions in several of Terayama's works. In *Pastoral*, there is an episode about a woman who gives birth to an illegitimate child, to the scorn of the entire village. Then she is forced by the village to drown her own child, which eventually drives her crazy. After returning to Aomori, months later, she is a different, sexually liberated and significantly transformed woman. And unlike Fellini's sexual yet benevolent motherly women, her teasing sexuality is anything but non-threatening. At some point she seduces and violently rapes the



Figure 8: *Laura* (1974): Threatening female sexuality.

protagonist boy inside of a temple. A similar situation occurs in Terayama's 1979 short film *Grass Labyrinth* (1979)⁶⁶.

Another instance of the transformation of a mother is presented in the play *The Hunchback of Aomori*. In it we get two categories of “freakishness”. One being Matsu, a vengeful mother, and the

⁶⁵ Sadakari: *Fatherless girl*, p. 64-66.

⁶⁶ *Kusa meikyu*, D: Shuji Terayama, Japan/France, 1979.

other being her hunchback son, Taisho, a “freak of nature” born as a result of rape, with whom she reunites after 30 years. This is the instance where Terayama deals with the sensuality of a *grotesque body* most directly. In one scene Matsu orders the servants to massage Taisho's hump, which in turn causes sexual arousal. Later it is reported that she had incestuous sex with him at the same place where she was raped as a young girl, and we find out that Taisho's hump was a result of her cursing him before he was born.

This rejection of motherhood by performing an act of incest is what helps her overpower the patriarchal oppression of the family. It is the family in which she was working as a servant when her master raped her and forced her to abandon the child. Like in *Pastoral*, where we have the corrupt village vs. the mysterious circus, here we again have a drama played out as a confrontation between the *carnavalesque* and the *grotesque*, between the corrupt society and an individual.

Maybe the most obvious realisation of the idea of a violent femininity being directly linked to feminism is in Terayama's short film *Laura* (1974)⁶⁷. The film shows a stage act where three aggressive, sexually intimidating female “predators”, literally exhibited like circus animals, are shouting at the cinema audience. They mock a certain kind of sexually explicit art cinema which objectifies women and, in their words, only serves the perverts who sit at the back seats and watch these films just for the female nudity. In an interesting diegetic interruption, the women grab one young male audience member, who they accuse of being such kind of a pervert, strip him naked and violently sexually abuse him. These women are assertive, active, sexual and anything but timid or motherly. Their monstrous transformation serves their emancipation in a most direct way.

But the truest transformation of a mother character takes place in *Poison Boy* (1968)⁶⁸, which of all Terayama's plays is the most ignored, misrepresented and readily dismissed by Sorgenfrei⁶⁹, even though it presents the essence of Terayama's mother complex in its most coherent self.

67 *Laura*, D: Shūji Terayama, Japan 1974

68 *Shintokumaru* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terrayama, W: Shuji Terayama, Rio Kishida, 1978.

69 Sorgenfrei, *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 151.



Figure 9: The motive of the snake-woman, such as the one featuring in "Poison Boy", depicted on one of Terayama's photos.

In that musical play, based on several previous *bunraku* and *kabuki* versions, developed by Terayama and a famous feminist avant-garde playwright, Rio Kishida, the mother character is a sinister circus attraction, a "snake-woman", who marries a widower after seducing him with her hypnotic yet terrifying sideshow number. The woman brings a son with her and subsequently schemes against her husband's own son in order to make her son his sole inheritor. The husband's son is convinced that his step-mother possesses mysterious powers of transformation. He believes that she and his female teacher are one and the same person. At the same time, she becomes an object of his secret desires.

The step mother has an incestuous desire for him, as well, but it is conflicted with her objectives of replacing the boy with her own son, and is therefore kept hidden. Eventually, she blinds and "poisons" him with leprosy, after which he is forced to leave home and wander.

Years later, the boy returns home and tries to infect the woman's son, as a revenge for what she did to him. Instead, in a Ajase-like resolution, he is confronted with the woman herself, which ends not only in reconciliation and the admittance of her love and desire for him but also in a darkly wild sexual embrace between the boy and his step-mother, a sequence of abstract symbolism, characterised in the stage directions as "everything falls into the labyrinth of the womb"⁷⁰.

Sorgenfrei dismisses the play in part because she does not approve of the "animalistic" and "vampiric" changes Terayama and Kishida made to the stepmother character, in contrast to the

⁷⁰ Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Act*, p. 150.

traditional versions of the play, where the stepmother is not an evil sorceress but a noble sacrificing hero. The motive for poisoning her stepson is because she wanted to prevent her other stepson (not her own son) from killing him. Making him blind and ill was supposed to be the best protection for him. When she reveals her incestuous desires and embraces the boy at the end of the play, it is not genuine. She does so in order to provoke the boy's father to kill her, since only her blood (thanks to an astrological significance) can cure the boy of both the blindness and leprosy. In the traditional version, the mother is therefore both a sacrificing madonna and a whore.

Such convenient nostalgic paternalism is abhorred and does not belong in the much darker portrayal of the characters by Terayama and Kishida. In their version, there is a more profound character conflict. By sexually embracing her step-son, even though her maternal instinct should dictate that she takes side of her own son, and by committing a real act of incest, the snake-woman rejects her role as a mother, the sole thing which was the driving force behind her ruthlessness in the first place. Her road of liberation, from a carnivalesque sideshow victim to a liberated female, would not be possible without her grotesque nature, exemplified by her incestuous desire for her step-son.

The snake-woman, previously imprisoned by a patriarchal marriage, literally turned into a slave, trapped in a system of performing the game of mysterious female otherness (as a circus sideshow), then enslaved and sexually repressed by motherhood, which turned her into a monstrous domineering mother, is finally liberated through the act of sexual reconciliation with her victimised stepson.

If this resembles Ajase narrative, it is insofar as it changes the focus and overturns the subjectivity of the typical Ajase protagonists. Archetypal Ajase mother is therefore the subjective centre of the story, not merely an element, or a symbolic puzzle piece on a boy's subjective journey into adulthood. The mother is transformed and takes back the steering wheel. Her sexuality abandons the societal context and starts to live again, similarly to how fatherless girl was standing for life, in contrast to domineering mother's mortality.

The popularity of *Poison Boy* has been very strong in Japan. After his death, the Terayama version became the dominant interpretation of the story, with such internationally famed theatre directors as Yukio Ninagawa taking the helm and mega popular young actors such as Tatsuya Fujiwara playing the titular character.

Rio Kishida, who co-wrote the play with Terayama, was one of his long time associates, who was also active in Tenjo Sajiki. The proof that her radical feminist sentiments found a natural ground in Terayama's work is the fact that the pair collaborated on some of the most important Terayama projects. She co-wrote his seminal short film *The Grass Labyrinth* (1979), which compresses all

major Terayama themes, also his final feature film *Farewell to the Ark* (1984)⁷¹, a loose adaptation of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*). Most importantly, Kishida and Terayama co-wrote his experimental city play *Knock* (1975)⁷².

After Terayama's death Kishida went on to have a rich artistic career, creating her own avant-garde feminist plays and collaborating on other film projects. She wrote the screenplay for the film *Summer Vacation* (1988)⁷³, adaptation of the famous manga *The Heart of Thomas* (Thomas no shinzo, 1973-1975) which started the female oriented *shounen-ai/boizu rabu*⁷⁴ genre. The manga was written by Moto Hagio, a female manga author who was one of the founding member of the Year 24 Group. The movement, which started in the early seventies, also known as Forty-Niners (because of the year the founding members were born), revolutionised the *shojo* manga genre by actually making women the authors of the girls manga, previously mostly made by men. Apart from formal innovations which influenced the entire manga industry⁷⁵, Forty-Niners also revolutionised manga science-fiction in general, by increasingly colouring it with feminist fabulation⁷⁶.

Another important Forty-Niner was Keiko Takemiya, who also worked both in *shounen-ai* and *science fiction*. An interesting link between Terayama and these authors is that all of them are interested in the issues of gender and gender performance, yet they come from different positions. While still experimenting (in a post-modern manner) with the traditional formulations, Terayama and Kishida present femininity in its non-nostalgic form, based on rejecting the normative and the constructs which try either to domesticate it or to distance it through making it *the other*.

On the other hand, Hagio and Takemiya visit the stereotypically male world of hard science-fiction by rendering it through a stereotypically feminine lens either through the style of drawing (cute figures, decorative ornamentation) or the emotional sensibility of the stories themselves sometimes contrasting the style with the substance.

Even when they are not creating stories about women, but exclusively male characters (such as the boy-love ones), they still genderise them, which is a way to disrupt the gender normative, either in culture (disruption of the genderised genre order) or society.

71 *Saraba hakobune*, D: Shuji Terayama, Japan, 1984.

72 *Knock* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, W: Shuji Terayama, Rio Kishida, 1975.

73 *1999 – Nen no natsu yasumi*, D: Shushike Kaneko, Japan 1988.

74 *Shounen-ai* (boy love) is a Western Japanese-language name for the genre *boizu rabu* of BL (short for boy's love). The genre features idealised romantic love between boys.

75 Paul Gravett: *Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics*, New York: Harper Design 2004, p. 79.

76 Akiko Abihara: "Japan's Feminist Fabulation", in: genders.org http://www.genders.org/g36/g36_ebihara.html (10.10.2013)

4.6 La Marie-vision

That Terayama was indeed interested in the issues of gender performance even a couple of decades before Judith Butler started her gender-performance theory, is not only visible in the way he played



Figure 10: A poster for a 2013 revival of *La Marie-vision* in New York.

with casting choices (most leading female characters in the plays were played by male actors) but also through the themes of one of his most famous (proto-queer) plays, *La Marie-vision* (1967), which was especially noticed in the West (it had a revival in New York as recently as in May 2013).

The central character of the play is Marie, a campy gay transvestite (not a transgendered person, therefore a "he"), who keeps his adopted son, Kin'ya, in a closely controlled space, isolated from the outside world and lets him out only to catch butterflies. During that time, Marie is in a company of young sailors and engages in various beauty treatments.

Over the course of the play we learn about his grudge with Katsuko, the boy's biological mother, who was a young waitress in the inn where Marie was growing up as a feminine boy, dreaming of

one day becoming a woman. Jealous of his beauty, Katsuko sneaked into Marie's bed and started to sexually stimulate him. The very next moment she alarmed everyone in the house to show them Marie's observable erection, while making a point that he is a freak who will never be a woman. Marie's revenge for the humiliation by Katsuko was more than cruel. He hired a man to rape her. After she became pregnant, she died while giving birth to Kin'ya. But Marie's revenge was not complete. His final goal was to turn Kin'ya into a gay boy.

Embarrassed perhaps by such politically incorrect depiction of a homosexual character, Sorgenfrei surprisingly denies that *La Marie-vision* has anything specific to say about homosexuality⁷⁷ or gender nonconformity. To her, Marie is just another instance of a domineering mother, an archetype which was already played by male actors, this time only made more obviously male.

The most controversial idea presented in the play is perhaps that Marie, with a proto-female (therefore normatively unnatural freakish and grotesque) body, is able to at least briefly enjoy heterosexual sex and that his insistence on becoming a girl and being gay is therefore not caused by genetic predestination but by his resolved choice, or the idea that it would be possible to turn Kin'ya gay as well.

But that is just another instance of Terayama's uncompromising radicalism. To him, homosexuality and other metaphorical forms of “freakishness” have to be instrumentalised as means of emancipation, as opposed to mere benevolent “disorders”. Like feminism, homosexuality too has to become dangerous in order to be transforming. And Marie's subsequent attempt to turn Kin'ya into a gay boy, by trying to seduce him with another boy in drag, is part of this radicalism. Sexual and social liberation is for Terayama clearly not possible by its “normalisation” or nostalgic appropriation by the traditional culture, the way Yukio Mishima connected it to the body cult of *Bushido*. Those are all appropriations by the system's corruption (note the phenomena such as homonationalism, as described by Jasbir Puar⁷⁸). Similarly, in regards to a feminist identity, in choosing between a “mother-goddess” and (what Žižek calls) the “traumatic-subversive-creative-explosive power of feminine subjectivity”⁷⁹ (a perfect description for the transformed mother), Terayama obviously prefers the latter.

77 Sorgenfrei, *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 93.

78 Jasbir Puar: *Terrorist Assemblages. Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham: Duke University Press 2007, p.2.

79 Slavoj Žižek: “The Antinomies of Tolerant Reason”, in: lacan dot com, <http://www.lacan.com/zizarchives.htm> (05. 09. 2012)

All these ideas about transformed women bring us to a possible interpretation which reconciles Terayama's private life (devotion to his mother) and the fictional representation of monstrous domineering mother archetype. Reconsidering the grotesque circus-like femininity as radical emancipation, begs a conclusion that Terayama's stance towards his own mother may have actually

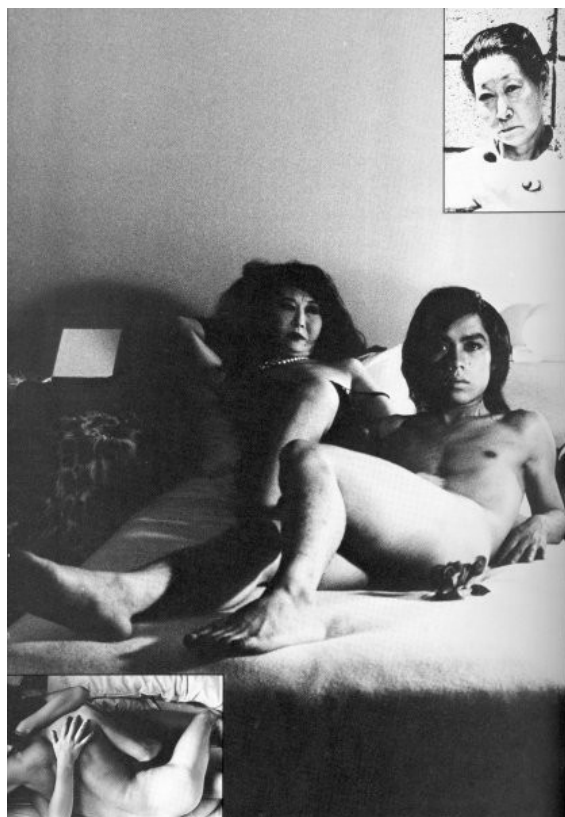


Figure 11: One of nude photos featuring Terayama's mother and his adopted brother Henrikku Morisaki, made by Shuji Terayama.

been in line with what he preached in his art in a more serious way. The contradiction in regards to the Ajase complex interpretation by Sörgenfrei, whereas it seemed as if the complex was resolved in Terayama's life but not in his art, is explained by a more plausible notion: Terayama's closeness to his mother was not part of a complex but based on a genuine understanding for the "monstrous" women, while the representation of the archetype in his art was provocatively subversive, but not negative.

But in any case, he might have seen his mother as a victim of a patriarchal society of the post-war Japan. Left to her own devices, like many Japanese women at the time, she was forced to work at the American military base (possibly as a prostitute) in order to support herself and her child.

Her later excesses, dominance over her son, like the dominance exerted by the freakish women of Terayama's art, might have been understood by him as her transformation, her emancipatory rejection of the role and the circumstances which made her compromise her dignity in a

surrounding excessively cruel to women. Perhaps he believed that her rejection of motherhood, however vicious and destructive, was a deserved radical response aimed at the normative society, even though he was its primary victim. The important thing to remember is that the fact that some elements of his life, such as this one, appeared and got discussed in his art, does not necessarily mean that he was processing psychological issues and complexes. We have already seen, and we will discuss it some more in later part of this text, that Terayama consciously mixed fiction and reality. It was part of his drama theory, part of the idea of transformational potential carried by performance. In this sense Sadakari, after analysing some statements and a series of semi-erotic photos Terayama made, which featured his own mother and his adopted brother Henrikku Morisaki (see Figure 12), points out that Terayama might have even been open to the idea of incest.⁸⁰ If true it would have been the ultimate form of mixing reality and fiction, that Terayama was able to conceive.

The only good “mother” in life and art is therefore a transformed, monstrous freak, a snake-seductress, an incestuous rapist, a transvestite... In other words, a creature which is not a mother at all, yet like young Marie from *La Marie-vision* (the purest of Terayama's fatherless girls), stubbornly resolved to one day transform into a „real“ woman.

⁸⁰ Sadakari: *Fatherless Girl*, p. 57.

5 DISCOURSE: ART AND PSYCHOLOGY

The question about whether Terayama created art in order to fulfil his psychological needs (psychology shaping ideology) or made art which was primarily ideological and either incidentally or by choice related to psychology, is an important one. As we have seen, the radical acts by people such as Yukio Mishima were dulled by claims that he was inspired not by an idea for an actual political change but by inner needs or insanity. He was supposedly not fighting for *Bushido* values because of ideological reasons but because he connected them to his own homosexuality.

What is political protest and what is an act of lunacy? As we have seen, Terayama has frequently been designated as apolitical. This is usually not meant as a critique, but as an explication of his less savoury acts. His disruptiveness, the violent and darkly sexual visuals, the real violence used in his performances and supposedly misogynistic imagery, all these things are looked at through a lens of his preoccupation with Oedipal themes, and therefore explained away as inner, psychological expressions or "needs", which, therefore cannot carry a political value. It is also important to note that most of these interpretations come from a particular, probably in itself distinctly political, perspective. As far as it approaches Terayama from a position of admiration, it also tries to reconcile his radicalism with that political perspective, by defusing it and situating him in a less dangerous zone of apolitical.

But not only the Western, largely American, discourse would make Terayama and other controversial artists seem more benign than they may have been. When Mishima attempted a coup, ending the failure with his own public suicide, his actions were described as madness by the Japanese government – not in a sense of it being a metaphorical description, but a literal one. The Japanese Prime Minister, in particular, directly questioned Mishima's sanity, while Susan Napier wrote that although he was so deeply involved in politics, Mishima was apolitical because he didn't understand any of it⁸¹. Not even the fact that Mishima was a personal friend of the Emperor whom he attempted to re-empower through the coup, was able to afford him the title of a genuine radical political activist.

5.1 Politics or insanity?

Let us first examine how this perceived irreconcilable breach between political and psychological plays itself in more general situations, the ones which are directly dependent on a distinction

81 Chozick: *Queering Mishima*

between psychology and political ideology, which were also fairly controversial in that respect. It would be absurd to argue that psychologisation of artists such as Terayama (though in a lesser extent Mishima) is comparable to these cases. Our point, however, is to show that in practice, where this question played a role, the decisions to de-politicise have in themselves been highly political.

There have been many examples in 20th century. But some of the most striking ones are more recent. Not all of them have had the same motive.

During the time of the Soviet Union, psychiatry was sometimes used as a part of the state apparatus for dealing with dissidents. In cases when people committed subversive act, which included trips abroad, possessions of banned books, participation in protests, generally failing to agree with current party politics or promotion of religious views, people were officially diagnosed with different kinds of mental disorders and subsequently institutionalised⁸². In disproportionate numbers the targets of this practice were artists⁸³.

Echoes of this have been present in the treatment of Bradley Manning, a whistle-blower who was sentenced in 2013 for disclosing thousands of secret correspondences of the US military. In 2010, when he was arrested and charged on several accounts, among others, for espionage and aiding the enemy, Manning's solicitor, David E. Coombs, had to go out of his way to correct the false media reports, started by the Associated Press, which claimed that he questioned his client's sanity⁸⁴. The reports were corrected, but their implications were too seductive to be ignored. Manning, a young trans-woman, a private who questioned not only his sexuality but also his gender, was not seen any more as a highly politically motivated radical activist, or even a naive idealist, but a psychologically damaged individual whose actions were personified, weak and spiteful retributions against the abusiveness of his immediate surrounding.

While this may have been seen as helpful in achieving a reduced sentence after the guilty verdict, politically they keep safe the image of the US as an ideal democracy, a country in which, unless motivate by money, only foolish and crazy would think of confronting the political system. In other words, there is no such thing as political dissidence in America. While material interest is acknowledged as a valid reason, reformism can only be a delusion, in that sense.

82 Paul Chodoff: "Ethical conflicts in psychiatry: the Soviet Union vs. the U.S.", in: *Psychiatric Services* vol. 36, No. 9., September 1 1985.

83 Viktor Nekipelov, Valeriya Novodvorskaya, Yuli Daniel, Alexander Esenin-Volpin (the son of Sergei Esenin), Valery Tarsis, Joseph Brodsky, Viktor Rafalsky, were all writers and poets who were at some point institutionalised and declared insane because of their dissenting political activism (which was also mirrored in their work).

84 Jason Ditz: "Bradley Manning's Lawyer Never Questioned His Sanity", in: *antiwar.com*, <http://news.antiwar.com/2010/09/02/bradley-mannings-lawyer-never-questioned-his-sanity/> (10.10. 2013)

Not only states and groups have been involved in psychologist political activism and ideology. Theodor Adorno wrote the following about fascism and authoritarianism (a statement which is relevant to the treatment of Mishima's fascist activism):

Totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together. In its downfall the subject negates everything which is not of its own kind. The opposites of the strong man and the compliant youth merge in an order which asserts unalloyed the male principle of domination. In making all without exception, even supposed subjects, its objects, this principle becomes totally passive, virtually feminine.⁸⁵

In a similar fashion, but this time focusing on the way media orchestrate and lead the masses, Paul Virilio gave a similarly problematic account⁸⁶ of the 1989 Tian'anmen square massacre. After acknowledging that it indeed did take place, he implied that it was basically a media war between students who demanded to be on live TV, while the state fought equally, by broadcasting "recorded" footage of the protests. According to Virilio, the protest grew (and eventually ended in a massacre) because of the media attention which lured an ever increasing number of student to the square. They were aware of the "political importance" of the "presence of fifteen hundred journalists in Beijing", the students "colluded" with their far-away television viewers in the West by using slogans which evoked to them relatable ideas: the French Revolution and symbols of freedom, such as the Statue of Liberty.

Virilio speaks of the protests in the context of a "garizzon", of "citizen soldiers". The clash between the Chinese state and them is a clash of a government against the onslaught, a "siege" of the intoxicating western media which caused the students to react in order to fulfil the desires and revolutionary fantasies of the Western television viewers.

Needless to say, Virilio never deals with the reasons and the political motivation behind the protests. Either they are theatrical and abstract (a "collusion" between people of two sides of the screen), or they are not there to begin with. The protests and the massacre are caused by a flawed psychological dynamic (narcissism?) on all sides of the equation⁸⁷.

85 Andrew Hewitt: *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1996, p. 59.

86 John Armitage: *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*, New York: Sage Publications 2000, p. 66.

87 That is perhaps why the only place where he does refer to the actual motives and demands of the protesting students, he puts the word "democracy" in inverted commas.

Another good example is the case around Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian mass murderer who perpetrated the Utoya massacre in 2011 in which he gunned down 77 people. Attempts to label him insane, even though he was highly politically literate and an author of a 1500 pages long ideological manifesto, were answered by Simon Baron-Cohen, one of the world's leading neuropsychiatrists, who explained that Breivik might have had a pre-disposition to cruelty, but that it was his political beliefs which brought him to the point of committing the massacre:

Decades of research underscore the importance both of early childhood emotional experience and of genetic factors that have far-reaching effects on an adult's empathy levels. Advances in neuroscience now enable us to delineate the "empathy circuit" (a network of brain regions) with much more precision. Low affective empathy is necessary to explain Breivik's behaviour. But low affective empathy is not sufficient to explain such cruelty, because there are people with low affective empathy who do not go on to commit such acts.

Low affective empathy is the precondition for cruelty, interacting with other factors. In Breivik's case, his deeply held (and frightening) ideological convictions may have been one extra ingredient in the deadly mix.⁸⁸

In other words, political and psychological can exist side by side and actually reinforce one another. The fact that something may have been psychological does not mean that it wasn't also determined by the politics or wasn't consciously political.

Applying these conclusions to Terayama, we get to a third solution to the question of Terayama's psychology vs. ideology. Why not both? Does Terayama with psychological needs necessarily have to exclude Terayama lead by ideology? After all, he was active during a time in which artists criticised nationalistic direction the society was taking, in which Japanese exceptionalism (*nihonjinron*) yet again played an immense political role. Many of those artists (such as Akio Jissoji, or Toshio Matsumoto) tackled psychoanalysis in a most direct yet deconstructive way because they were critical of those movements, not because they were consoling in them. They were aware that a big part of the repertoire of all reactionary and politically conservative

⁸⁸ Simon Baron-Cohen: "Anders Breivik: cold and calculating, yes – but insane?", in: The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/dec/01/anders-breivik> (10.10. 2013)

movements is to rely on "mentality" and "inherent psychology", in order to justify certain ideological positions, starting with rejection of basic progressive ideas, to a creation of a political thought which puts one's own views on the side of reality and reason, while the opposite position can only be seen as irrational.

6 MANIFESTO

In a hand-full of pages in 1976, Terayama outlined the essence of his theatre theory in his so-called *Manifesto*⁸⁹. He also wrote about it in more details in his book *Labyrinth and the Dead Sea*, which was partially translated by Sorgenfrei and appears as such as part of her book *Unspeakable Acts*⁹⁰.

These writings represent the most concise articulations of the concerns he had in regards to theatre, which not only show that his approach was highly conscious but also very political, and that it was an idea of change which came from theatrical ideas which were meant as a means of shaping the subjective psychological experience of the audience. There are no hints, on the other hand, that he believed psychology was supposed to shape the theatre, so that it could supposedly fulfil some psychological needs.

Since one of the purposes of this text, besides the posed questions at the beginning, is to introduce Terayama to a wider academic audience, in the circles where there wasn't as of yet enough exposure to his work, it could be valuable to analyse his manifesto point by point, and to do it in the context of his other written theoretical texts, as well as his practical work. The clarity and structure of the Manifesto and other texts offers a unique opportunity to analyse and comment on it in a similarly transparent way. It will also present us with a chance to compare his work to the European theatre theories, especially the most obviously comparable ones, such as Bertold Brecht's *epic theatre* and Antonin Artaud's *theatre of cruelty*, both of which were indispensable in this context. IN such way we will be able to point out the places where they meet and diverge from each other.

6.1 Audience (paradoxical actors)

Terayama's relation to audience was as political as Brecht's. Like Brecht, he saw a great potential in the ability of the theatre to expose the artifice of the reality, to show that reality is constructed, just as the theatre was, which in turn made it changeable.

In the case of Brecht, however, this reality is to be exposed as such by the way of distancing the audience from the play, especially on the emotional level, which is to be accomplished by the so-called *distancing effect* (*Verfremdungseffekt* or V-effect). Not only the audience is to be distanced from the play, but the actors as well. Going by the methods of Brecht, the elements to work with in

89 Shuji Terayama: „Manifesto by Shuji Terayama“, in *The Drama Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4, *New Performances and Manifestos*, (Dec. 1975), p. 84-87.

90 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 262-314.

order to accomplish this are: avoiding dramatic points in the narrative, going out of character (not only breaking the „fourth wall“ but also reverting to the actor's real life persona), destroying the illusion of not being seen by the audience, directly speaking to them, etc.

By the description of these and other features of the epic theatre, and by observing a typical Terayama play, we may find many similarities between the two. All the above elements and many other Brechtian strategies are present in most of Terayama's work as well. In his manifesto he points out, however that:

The relationship between „those who observe“ and those „who are observed“ must be a shared experience.

At the same time the audience must have „a face“, must be able to declare itself as such, so that an individual must find that his or her identity is an encounter.⁹¹

There may be some controversy about who should be the active carrier of the V-effect in Brecht's theatre - the performers or the audience - or in other words, what is the type of responsibility distribution in the matters of achieving a performance which can be critically observed by the audience and in that way avoid emotional manipulation and other undesirable things opposed by the epic theatre. Is it *homogeneous*: both the performers and the audience (who are not passive) share the same responsibility for the clarity of observation of the performance? Or is it *heterogeneous*: Both the audience and the performers have an active role to play, but their roles are distinctive and work in the way of completing each other? In such scenario the role of the audience is to critically examine the play from a distanced position in order to be able to recognise the constructs and the falsities of representation.

In the case of Terayama, however, there is more clarity to this dilemma, even though we cannot say that the responsibilities are totally homogeneous. But in his theatre the roles of the audience and the performers in the context of the performance itself, are indeed homogeneous in some way. Namely, the performers and the audience are both involved in the performance, not only as fictional characters, but also as themselves. Where he insists that the audience must have „a face“, Terayama is pushing the communication-radicalism of Brecht's epic theatre to a higher level. The audience is not only to be able to observe objectively, and in that way secure its own integrity and sovereignty in the light of the performance, it also has to have a representation within the play. Not the one which bases itself on the identification with the characters (which would make it the arch-opposite

⁹¹ Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 84-85.

to the very basic idea of epic theatre), but a literal one, which involves a participation of the audience members themselves in the play. And finally, not only is there a privilege of the performer to be able to take on a fictional identity (perform a role), in Terayama's theatre the audience is also allowed to get into a role within the play.

This interplay between the two sides is to serve the most important objective of Terayama's theatre, which is „the encounter“.

„However, this encounter is a sterile one unless it alters the inner world of all participants.“⁹² This statement, especially the part which invokes „altering the inner world“ brings the theatre theory of Terayama closer to his acknowledged influence, Antonin Artaud, whose approach is in many ways an opposite to Brecht's epic theatre

Where the imbalance between the audience and the performers is more pronounced than elsewhere is in Terayama's stated goal and purpose of the performance and the performers being in trying to „alter“ the audience, to take them away from a secure position: „There is no longer any form of expression that requires us to be visitors at the zoo, observers confined to a safety island.“⁹³ By comparing the classical form of theatre, where the audience is a passive observer, to a zoo visit, Terayama implies that such „observational“ form of participation not only does not require an expression on the part of the audience (so it could establish a communication on equal footing), it effectively denies and forbids it⁹⁴.

Some of these elements clearly set Terayama apart from Brecht, even though their stated goals (providing clarity) may be similar. The most obvious difference is in the fact that Brecht's audience member is to be engaged intellectually, be provided with circumstances which let him see through the falsity and the constructs. This approach presupposes that there is a true reality behind that construct, a one which should be discovered by the mutual cooperation between the performers (using the V-effect) and the audience (engaging themselves intellectually). Or at least that a current construct of reality can be changed into a different, more appropriate one.

Artaud also puts trust in the existence of a true reality behind the construct. In opposition to Brecht's Marxist-humanist interpretation of the reality, Artaud's is more Nietzschean. It is a brutally chaotic reality which, according to him, underlines all of our existence.⁹⁵ In opposition to Brecht, Artaud sought to remove all distances between the audience and the performance and to „bring the audience into a direct contact with the „dangers of life“⁹⁶ Like Terayama, Artaud wanted to expose

92 Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 84-85.

93 Ibid.

94 The metaphor seems to be even more apt in the light of the fact that communications with animals in a typical zoo usually have very limited prospects, on top of being discouraged or banned.

95 Lee Jamieson: *Antonin Artaud: From Theory to Practice*, London: Greenwich Exchange 2007, p. 21-22.

96 Ibid., p. 23

the audience, to put them in an unsafe position, to trap and transform them. Even though his and Brecht's visions seem so distant, their stated goals are still the same. The transparency, the acknowledgement of reality, or at least of its illusory nature.

Unlike both of them, Terayama was never preoccupied with uncovering reality. That is why he does not prioritise intellectual dialogue between the audience and the performers. He is opposed to Brechtian dialectic to the point of excluding engagement with any political discourse in the play itself (at least when it comes to his manifesto): „This „representation“ of the audience in and by the actors' play must, however, be set as wide apart from politics as the opposite shores of the Mediterranean.“⁹⁷ He strongly diverges from Artaud, in spite of the superficial similarities, since his interaction, exposure of the audience and putting it in an unsafe position does not aim at making them aware of a brutal underlying reality of existence. In encountering the fact that reality is a construct, Terayama does not seek some „true“ reality underneath (which doesn't mean he does not believe it exists). He chooses not to engage with it, since he does not see any purpose in doing so. Instead, convinced by the power of the illusion itself⁹⁸, he chose to „construct“ a new layer of reality, to use the illusory nature of the way we observe the world for bettering of our existence.

In encountering such nature, Brecht wants to let us know that it can be changed. Artaud wants to bring us into a position to see behind it, to feel the true „brutal“ reality, even though he did acknowledge that the reality was a consensus and that there is no meaningful difference between a dream and our everyday perception. Terayama, however, uses performance in order to change the reality as it is perceived, irrespective of what a „true“ reality may consist of, or whether it is brutal or not. Terayama's interest lies in the following dilemma: If reality is a construct, why not using it to create a more fitting construct on top of it?

6.2 Actor (paradoxical performer)

Even though for the sake of convenience we have been using the term „performance“ in regards to the purpose and the role of actors in Terayama's theatre theory, that is not strictly the purpose he designated them with. According to him, an actor is not supposed to be a mere performer or to be one at all.

⁹⁷ Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 84-85.

⁹⁸ The use of the words „illusion“ and „illusory nature“ are not meant in the context of the classical notion of illusionist theater, but in the context of the radical power of stage and every-day performances which can create new illusions on top of other illusions and therefore transform a society.

We could question the sensibility of such notion. But first, we should take in account that this is not meant in a straight-forward way. Let us see what exactly Terayama wrote about it in his manifesto:

The actor's function is neither „to be observed“ nor „to be on display“ but rather „to instigate“ and „to draw in“ the others.

The first step in „acting“ is to create a deadlock relationship with the audience.

In order to give meaning to his stage presence, the actor must be able to invent his own language. In order to express a magical situation, he must possess the power, for instance, *to jump without feet*.⁹⁹

This apparent marginalising of the importance of performance or acting itself, which he puts in inverted commas, makes Terayama's theatre theory radically unique. But then, we get to a question about the coherence of such idea, especially in the light of his insistence on a heightened role of the audience, which is supposed to directly take part in the play. In other words, how is it possible that the audience is joining in the performance, while the actual actors are not performing at all, but „instigating“, „deadlocking“ and „creating magical situations“?

In order to answer this question, we need to yet again look at the theory in its basic holistic form, that is to see it as what Terayama was implementing it for – namely as a means of societal change. In order to be able to flatten (even out) the relationship between the performance (performers) and the audience, a play has to be understood as a continuation of reality, but with an important extension. It is to be a place where all the usual dynamics of everyday interactions come to their extreme.

Staged theatre does not have a unique importance in this regard. Such definition of theatre can include many different kinds of public gatherings where the dynamics are brought to an extreme. Political manifestations, public protests, demonstrations and riots hold significant similarities with what Terayama understands under the term „theatre“¹⁰⁰. The relation is also bi-directional. Not only are political gatherings, demonstrations and riots theatrical, Terayama's theatre, on the other hand, unmistakably includes and appropriates some of the crucial features of these collective social activities.

Nowhere is this mutual link as pronounced as in the relation between the actors and the audience. Applying his original terminology, and putting it in this new context, we may say that Terayama's

99 Terayama: Manifesto, p. 84-85.

100 We have seen a confirmation of this thesis with his "Hitler was better" statement in Germany.

theatre, like any of the public gatherings mentioned above, is consisted of „instigators“, who try to „deadlock“ the audience, while at the same time give the audience a politically significant (rather than political) voice.

In that sense, the role of the actor is to perpetuate the drama, not to reproduce a role. Terayama even cites Roland Barthes, where he stated that the role of the actor on stage is actually a metaphorical one¹⁰¹. The theatre is therefore not a place where the reality is reproduced, but (and that is the main difference between everyday performance and theatrical performance), it is a place where the everyday reality becomes enhanced with meaning, which comes from it being observed by an audience.

In other words, theatre becomes a metaphor of reality, a place where a change becomes possible because it is where the reality itself is put under a microscope. New layers upon layers of performance are not there to obfuscate and make us blind to reality, but to transform, without making any attempts to find out the "authentic", that one which is supposed to be underneath the illusion. In Terayama's direct words, „Theatre is chaos.“¹⁰² This, however, makes more sense if understood as meaning „Theatre creates chaos“.

The actor, however, should not try to identify with the „object represented“¹⁰³, which is a Brechtian proposition. What he/she has to do is stimulate a relationship of flattened hierarchy between the audience and the actors, to make it communal and mutual. The creation of such relationship represents Terayama's understanding of „dramaturgy“. It is yet another striking echo of Brecht in what is essentially an Artaudian theatre theory.

Another important way of seeing Terayama's treatment of actors is in his insistence on the relativism of performance itself, which basically encourages an establishing of a link between performance on stage and the performativity of the everyday life. Totally unrelated to later developments in theatre theory, Terayama was setting up a precursor of what will later be known as the theory of performance, as presented by Judith Butler. By being negated on stage, Terayama's performance is actually being extended to everywhere else.

6.3 Theatre

¹⁰¹ Terayama: Manifesto, p. 84-85.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

The theatre is neither a set of facilities nor a building. It is the „ideology“ of a place where dramatic encounters are created.¹⁰⁴

This notion has a twofold purpose. One is the practical purpose of an idea of actually performing theatre in various locations, especially streets, which were invaluable for much of Terayama's repertoire. The other has to do with the implementation of the theatrical itself, a creation of opportunity for it to spread itself everywhere and in that way make a vast impact.

Terayama's is critical of the idea of theatres which are confined to actual places. The notion of a "theatre building“, as in a designated place for theatre performances, is to him a part of a non-aggression pact made in order to disarm the power of performance. In that sense he writes: „The price of potatoes was severed from Hamlet's agony by a boundary line called a „theatre“.“¹⁰⁵

This sentence strikes right in the middle of the issue. Theatre building, as a separate place, confines drama to the area of fantasy, it makes it a place of escape from reality, so that it can make the audience forget it, rather than question it. For Terayama such role of theatres is problematic and the separation itself deeply ideological. This in turn reaffirms the importance of Terayama's program of trying to dissolve the boundaries between reality and fantasy. These thoughts of Terayama's can be interpreted as echoes of Marxist ideas, different, but not less radical than the ones of Brecht.

Terayama is also rejecting another relatively prevalent idea, namely that theatre buildings started with the invention of drama. He understands that the essence of drama actually preceded theatre (both in a general sense of Terayama's understanding of drama as "History" and the theatre-practical one). The emergence of theatres had, in fact, a negative function, basically, a one which was supposed to imprison the „drama“ (and "History"), confine it to a designated place, take away the "dramaturgy"¹⁰⁶, and put it in a harmless context, so that it can't change anything. His criticism of conventional theatre goes even further:

The „theatre building“ is drama's prison. We know that drama is trapped in the building because imprisoned dramaturgy attempts its revolutions only inside that facility.¹⁰⁷

This critique is damning because it criticises the world of theatrical developments for its preoccupations with advancing the form merely for the sake of art. And even if the purpose of a

104 Ibid., p. 86.

105 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 287.

106 As understood in the context of Historical and societal change (which we discussed earlier).

107 Ibid.

particular theatrical play was revolutionary, by confining it physically within the theatrical space, it remains on the level of theory and can never change anything, because it does not come in contact, does not possess the „encounter“, which is at least as important a component for creating a true functional theatre, as any theoretical basis.

In order to explain this, Terayama uses universities as examples of facilities with their own rules and hierarchies, which can sometimes become closed and actively curb the potential of what their purpose is (namely enlightenment). Not because a university is a place which is not enlightened (on the contrary), but because it keeps itself apart, serves as an exception, as opposed to a rule.

(...) „university“ imprisons all that is truly „university-like“ by imposing a prison-like isolation through the use of concrete buildings and spatial arrangements that fence it off from social life. In a similar way, the isolating character of the theatre's stage, audience seats, dressing rooms, and traditional architecture imprisons all that is truly „theatrical“. ¹⁰⁸

Not only is Terayama in this way attributing a significant importance to street theatre, in a way he also gives primacy to it in relation to the conventional one. One of the most precious maxims Terayama leans on when it comes to street as a space of performance is the following quotation from Bernard Rudofsky:

“At all times, and long before people's actions and emotions were exhibited against payments on the stage, the street itself has been the great world theatre. Drama and comedy, both spontaneous and contrived, were supplied by daily life.” ¹⁰⁹

Rudofsky bases his views on the fact that theatres, as we know them, evolved from street events, which were imitating funerals, weddings and public executions ¹¹⁰.

In presenting the case for the credibility of Rudofsky's theory of street theatre, Terayama investigates the plans and designs of what is deemed the “first modern European theatre”, Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, designed by the architects, Andrea Palladio and Vincenzo Scamozzi ¹¹¹. The

108 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Act*, p. 287.

109 *Unspeakable Acts*, 292

110 By needing working mechanism for hanging (trap doors and cranes), could public executions had been the most direct precursors of the first wooden stages, which were constructed on streets.

111 *Ibid.*

construction of the part of the building where the stage is set is designed to look like a street intersection.

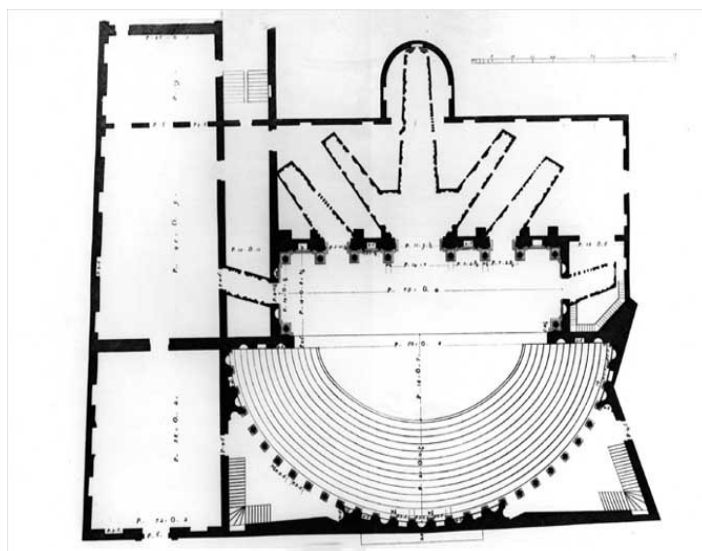


Figure 12: Original drawing of Teatro Olimpico, made by Scamozzi.

At the front of the stage are five portals for the actors, which were built like city gates. Five other streets are radiating out from the innermost part of the stage. The audience enters the stage by passing through a labyrinth of two more streets.

According to Terayama, who again cites Rudofsky, the point of the design was to create a clear association between a theatre and a street, and (for Terayama even more crucially) vice versa¹¹².

However, he does concede that the efficiency of the purpose of Teatro Olimpico as an actual street theatre is limited at best and actually inadequate. The main reason for this is because the streets stop short of entering the auditorium, which would provide for a true, (direct) interaction between the performers and the audience. Still, he finds the form remarkable because of how it changes the conventional idea of a street - a space of every-day life into a space of performance.

Through these ideas Terayama creates a link (an “identification”) between reality and the nature of every-day life, which he purposefully does not call “reality”, a term which time and again has to be contested as something automatically opposite of fiction, if we are to accept Terayama's theatre theory in general.

Drama, according to it, is therefore not to be an exhibition of reproduced human interactions by trained stand-ins, but rather something that created an opportunity for encounters between passers-by. It is a profound understanding of drama insofar as it manages to provide it with a direct transformational purpose.

¹¹² Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 292.

6.4 City theatre

Terayama made a crucial distinction between *street theatre* and *city theatre*, regarding them not only as separate genres, but as separate forms of theatrical expression.

“Doing street theatre involves performing a pre-existing play outdoors rather than in a theatre, so essentially, it is not “separate drama” or “alternative drama”¹¹³.

In order to emphasize the point, he mentions an example involving the puppet theatre of Peter Schumann, who uses puppets which are constructed in real-life scale and performs with them in the street¹¹⁴. But in the terms of audience experience, it is the same kind of “indoors” theatre as usual. And although it may not assume a clear performance-audience division, there is still an intended separation between the two.

To understand the full nature of what Terayama implies, we should start from a position that a city theatre (as opposed to street theatre) does not actually depend on the place where it is performed. In theory, a city theatre can also be performed inside of a theatre building, as long as it does not treat the theatre building and the stage as intended for the conventional purpose. Accordingly, a city theatre cannot be performed in every street. Festive plazas, squares, streets where cars are banned on Sundays, pedestrian promenades, cannot be the locations of city theatre. The reason is because such streets are preordained as quasi stages in their own right. They serve a purpose of public fantasy where, in Terayama's words, “all incidents are digested and turned into fiction”¹¹⁵.

Another crucial difference between city theatre and street theatre is the way the audience is involved. Any play can be street theatre if it is performed on the street. But it cannot be called a city theatre if its completion is only in the hands of the actors.

The theory of the theatre is also that of the urban community and its topography. (...) „The place“ is not just a geographical occasion. It is also a

¹¹³ Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 293

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

historically rooted structure dependent upon specific, indigenous traditions.¹¹⁶

This general definition of space, implying a space of performance, but not only that, comes really close to the theory of heterotopias by Michel Foucault¹¹⁷.

But in regards to what constitutes a theatrical space, Terayama goes even further. His theatre does not even have to be about space. It can take place outside of the context of spatiality itself, or at least within a highly modified idea of space. In fact, for Terayama the theatre itself is a process of deconstruction or even negation of space, a sort of an anti-space or, in his own words, theatre as a „space without contours“¹¹⁸.

In Terayama's play *Letters to the Blind*¹¹⁹, this idea was examined to its full potential¹²⁰. The "invisible" play was performed in complete darkness. In the absence of any visibility, which was able to completely negate the importance of performance as we know it (in line with Terayama's general stance), it was the darkness itself which he was able to appropriate as a theatrical space. But not just any space, but a negated one, a space without contours¹²¹.

Concerning *Letters to the Blind*, Steven Clark implies that Terayama's motives for performing the play in such way (total darkness during performance contradicted standard safety measures and was not easy to obtain from organisers), were not purely aesthetic, but lead by an intention to create a situation in which his performers would break the law, to "enter that realm of conspiracy where art stakes a greater claim to authority than state legislators and their police forces."¹²²

116 Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 86.

117 „First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.“

Michel Foucault: "Of other spaces, heterotopias", in: foucault.info
<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en.html> (10.10. 2013)

118 Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 86.

119 *Mojin shokan* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1973.

120 *Manifesto*

121 Terayama's insistance on the term "space without contours" relates to Gilles Deleuze's philosophical idea of "body without organs". The term "body without organs" comes from Antonin Artaud, whose theories inspired Deleuze's philosophy.

122 Steven Clark: "The Internationalization of Experimental Theatre", in David Jortner, Keiko McDonald, Kevin J. Wetmore Jr.: *Modern Japanese Theater and Performance*, Lanham: Lexington Books 2006, p. 115.

But for Terayama space can be negated in other ways too. One of the important motives in many of his plays and films is the idea of a labyrinth. One of his plays, *The Opium War*¹²³, used a labyrinth as theatrical space:

The play is born out of the audience's own search for the exit. The trapped audience, searching for the exit, was a symbolic metonymy for the labyrinth, equivalent to the audience's search for the characters in a stageless theatre.¹²⁴

In other words, the labyrinth imposes itself on the audience in such way that their attempts to escape become the drama. In that case the relation with the space is such that it becomes internalised. In such way it, again, loses its contours and becomes something else, moves to a different category of perception.

In the following invaluable descriptive passage Ian Buruma outlines his own perception of the play's performance in Amsterdam's Mickery Theatre in regards to the location of the theatre area itself, as well as the space of the performance:

Terayama's new play was called *Opium War*. It had been raining on the day I went to see it. The streets were glistening in the moonlight, and misty drizzle formed yellow cones under the old-fashioned street lamps. The Tenjo Sajiki took full advantage of the Mickery; all the rooms were used, as well as the courtyard round the back of the theatre. An actor in Chinese costume stood outside, softly strumming a guitar. Another actor, with an evil leer, stood in a corner of the courtyard, stroking the blue-green feathers of a rooster. A girl in a silk dress appeared, beckoning us to come in. She had a candle in her right hand and led us through a long, dark passage, at the head of which I could hear people singing, as well as what sounded vaguely like fairground music: an electric bass guitar and an organ.

Inside was a world I had never seen before. I cannot remember what the story was, or even whether there was a story. We were swept along in Terayama's play, from room to room. Sometimes the rooms were lit, sometimes they were dark. An actor's face would be revealed quite

123 *Ahen senso* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1972.

124 Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 86.

suddenly by the light of a match, and then disappear. There was a slave market, with naked girls and handsome pimps; there was an opium den, thick with incense and smoke; there was a ritual killing of a chicken. Men were dressed as gorgeous women, and women were dressed as men. In one room a girl in a sailor suit was bent over a chair and was having her bottom spanked in slow motion by a man wearing a top hat. A ventriloquist in bone-white make-up was sticking pins into a replica of himself. There were huge pictures of Japanese comic-book figures on the walls; there were street signs in Chinese and Japanese; there were circus posters of fat ladies, snake charmers and freaks.

Weird rock music and scratchy songs from the 1930s formed a constant musical background to the actors' words, which nobody understood: the words were pure sound, just as the Chinese characters on the walls were pure design. In the end we found ourselves in one large room, which was like a fantastic brothel, filled with girls, midgets, opium-smokers, dandies and drag queens. The music was delirious, the singing mesmerizing. And then, in an instant, it was over: the actors and actresses were gone, the scenery had come crashing down and lay in piles on the floor, the lights came on, and the Mickery Theatre was no more than a large, messy warehouse. The smell of incense lingered a bit longer, and my ears were still ringing from the sounds of music and text. Walking home on the wet Amsterdam streets, along the rank-smelling canals, the images danced on in my mind.¹²⁵

The passage describes a paradox of the space (in the context of performance) being an illusory concept. It demonstrates the transformational potential of performance in regards to the establishment of regulated space and territoriality.

In July 2013 the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo¹²⁶ opened an exhibition commemorating the 30th anniversary of Terayama's death. The exhibition is named after one of

125 Ian Buruma: "Introduction", in Ian Buruma: *The Missionary and the Libertine: Love and War in East and West*, New York: Random House 1996.

126 The exhibition is closing in October 2013: <http://www.watarium.co.jp/exhibition/1307terayama/index.html>

Terayama's most ambitious projects, a city play titled *Knock* (or *Invitation to Knock*) and includes lots of information on documents in regards to his other projects as well.



Figure 13: Knock being performed in the streets of Sugunami in 1975.

Knock was envisioned as more of a happening than a play, although Terayama was not content on settling with either of these characterisations¹²⁷. For thirty hours, starting with 3 pm on April 19 1975, Sugunami district of the city of Tokyo was turned into a performance stage where the assembled audience were given maps to guide them through 19 separate performances:

Some of these were rehearsed, some impromptu — all required audience participation. It began things with 1,000 leaflets placed in 1,000 copies of that morning's Asahi Shimbun newspaper, each one asking by way of an introduction, "Are you happy with your current reality?" (...)

Other performances included "Letter play" — a set of instructions that promised if followed they would change the lives of those involved. "Map exchanger" had audience members exchange their residency certificates for a map of the area. "Family Relay Broadcast" saw cameras film and broadcast the life of a family to televisions outside where passers-by stood and watched curiously — a strange precursor to today's reality television. "Audience in Search of the Theatre" had a tour guide abandon the spectators, leaving them to wander the streets aimlessly, while the

¹²⁷ Stuart Munro: "Shuji Terayama's underground public stage", in Japan Times
<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2013/09/04/arts/shuji-terayamas-underground-public-stage/#.UkrTiGcYw5w>
(10.10.2013)

conclusion of the 30-hour marathon would see everyone simply disappear and leave Suginami as the final performance “Moving Out (Epilogue).”¹²⁸

The performance was designed in cooperation with the feminist author Rio Kishida who we mentioned earlier. It famously caused disruption and scandalous involvement of police when the residents of Suginami protested the intrusion into their everyday lives.¹²⁹

According to Robert T. Rolfe, the performance is in part an experiment in negating the idea of authorship, which was constantly being undermined by Tenjo Sajiki. According to him it came naturally from the troupe's systematic reduction of the importance of text, as opposed to the performance itself¹³⁰. Yet, even *Knock* had a textual basis, which was mostly written and compiled from other sources by Kishida herself.

6.5 Text as "paper theatre": Essence precedes existence?

First and foremost, theatre must be severed from literature. To do so we must purge theatre of the Play.¹³¹

Why don't we challenge the statement 'in every case, script precedes performance' whenever it is uttered?¹³²

Terayama's views on theatrical text are unorthodox and at times surprising. On one hand, he is critical of the insistence of staying true to, or basing the performance around the idea of text, which he sees as an attempt to elevate the performance on the level of literature, by strongly linking it to the "dramatic script"¹³³. On the other hand, his insistence on detaching drama from text has a more substantial reasoning behind it.

In his writings Terayama used an interesting analogy when criticising the dependence of the performance on text. He asked if anyone would bother with drama only to "inspect the scene of the

128 Ibid.

129 Robert T. Rolfe, John K. Gillespie: *Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1992, p. 234.

130 Ibid., p. 234.

131 Terayama: *Manifesto*, p. 86.

132 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 300.

133 Ibid., p. 301.

crime"¹³⁴. In this context, the scene of the crime is the dramatic text, while the performance is merely an inspection, eternally linked to the text, and is making no sense in the absence of it, or when seen in isolation. As such, dramatic performance loses all the power which Terayama would like to attribute to it, including the ability to transform, and create new forms of encounter.

Terayama acknowledged some deficiencies of the analogy. Some of them have been pointed out to him several times¹³⁵, such as the fact that some performances do not treat text as a Gospel and engage in a critical or even negative evaluation of it. Seen as such, a performance seems to be much more than a mere "inspection of a scene of crime".

But Terayama still maintained his criticism by basing it on what seemed to him as ideological roots of the precedence of text. In his words it is a "perverse condition" of the idea that essence precedes existence. It prevents theatre from being a primarily existentialist venture, by forcing the viewer to deal with a text (even more so in critically re-evaluating performances) instead of existence. "... our drama is based on the self-evident truth that the function of theatre is not to struggle with the script, but to struggle with reality"¹³⁶.

An analogy made by Grotowski, which likened theatrical script to a scalpel which enables us to "open ourselves, to transcend ourselves, to find what is hidden within us and to make the act of encountering the others" is made void by Terayama's playful change of the word "theatrical script" with the word "Jack the Ripper"¹³⁷.

Terayama's aims become more apparent when he refers to the biblical bases of the "essence precedes existence" doctrine, which may be a key to better understanding his opposition. He does not dispute that in the beginning there was *The Word*. But to him such word was not necessarily a written one, and for him the existentialist evaluation of the Bible was certainly unrelated to the problem of translating a dramatic text into a performance¹³⁸. To him, "the word" means *language*, as opposed to *writing*.

But as always with Terayama, there is a twist. Rejecting the precedence or general importance of text does not mean that text is unnecessary. As we have seen on the example of Terayama's and Kishida's *Knock*, even the all-encompassing city plays, which are based largely on improvisation and chance encounters, have use of some kind of written instructions. But when he says that a

134 Ibid.

135 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 301

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid.

dramatic text still has a role to play, he does not mean those instructions, which he calls "temporary texts" or "performance scripts"¹³⁹, but proper written plays.

To this position he comes through an analysis of reading the text and watching a performance of Fernando Arrabal's *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* (*L'Architecte et l'Empereur d'Assyrie*, 1967). For Terayama reading the play was part of a mental performance which is a totally different thing from watching it. Thus, text is not irrelevant since it contributes to a "paper theatre" which takes place in our minds while we read the theatrical text. In fact, it can be so important as to carry more significance than the performance itself. Therefore, Terayama's reading of the Arrabal text made the subsequent viewing of the play redundant¹⁴⁰. What it also means is that for Terayama there is no limit to what theatre can be made of, reminding us yet again about the radical essence of his theatre theory.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 302-303.

7 ERO GURO NANSENSU

In order to create a more coherent picture of the place of Terayama within the Japanese art tradition, taking in mind that he belonged to a post-modern, partly pop-cultural scenery, we should put him at the centre (not alone, however) of the birth of what we today regard as the uniquely idiosyncratic modern Japanese pop-culture, with phenomena such as manga, anime, stylised violence, horror films, erotica and video games. This is also important if we are to take a closer look at the implications of the use of the aesthetic elements such as sex and violence, both in Terayama's oeuvre, but also in a wider context. Such examination will serve a more substantial comparison between Japanese and European outlooks when it comes to the use of these elements in



Figure 14: Tenjo Sajiki's poster for *Shintoku-maru* (Poison Boy) by Tadanori Yokoo

genre fiction.

Sexuality is an almost universally present element in all of Terayama's work. It appears in many forms, and with various applications. To make a more general point, in Terayama's art we may find sexual elements for most sexual tastes, and then some. He depicts sexual moments in various ways, from gentle bathtub caressing in the play *Le-Marie Vision*, to (stylised) rape in films such as *The Grass Labyrinth* and *Pastoral*, as well as the depiction of incest in the play *The Hunchback of Aomori*. Most frequently he shows sex in combination with violence, or as a forced intercourse. In

many cases the participants in the sexual activity, often women, have demonic and monstrous qualities. Good examples are the various mother characters in the plays *Poison Boy*, *The Hunchback of Aomori*, as well as the more general mature female characters in *Pastoral* and *The Grass Labyrinth*.

As we have already noted, in *Poison Boy* the mother figure is a so-called “serpent woman” who the titular protagonist's father buys in a circus, in order to make her his wife and a mother to his son. Her demonic qualities, symbolised in her snake dance and possession of supernatural abilities of transformation and witchcraft, are the reason behind the scheme to kill her husband's son, so that her own son may inherit him. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that she manages to “poison” the boy with plague and make him blind, a strong sexual tension combined with fear and dread takes place between her and her victim and culminates in a reconciliatory sexual intercourse. The demonic becomes erotic, but with quite different priorities.

As we have seen earlier, monstrous and demonic in Terayama's art are not necessarily evil, or at least not evil at the meta level. Whatsoever, in his terminology, monstrous is emancipatory as well as radical¹⁴¹. Now we can also add “sexual” to the equation. More precisely, it is corporeality which is the primary source of emancipation. This is completely in compliance with the fact that Terayama was foremost a dramatist, which means that corporeality played one of the central roles in his thought.

There are, however, other sources of sexual-violent-demonic trinity, which would be of more valid importance in regards to this. We need to examine it in the light of a wider tradition of Japanese art before and after Terayama. It is the *ero-guro-nansensu* movement, which came to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s, as a derivative of (and a reaction to) the Japanese Gothic literature.

As much as it stands as a criticism of the Japanese Gothic, the movement is also interesting when examined in the light of its differences in regards to the European Gothic novel, as well as what can probably serve as the closest European counterpart of *ero-guro-nansensu*, the post-Kafka European body horror, which we will examine later.

The most banal difference between the two is that the former involves ghost stories, while the latter involves gore and fixation on the body. A more substantial distinction sees Gothic story as finding the danger in gendered sexual act itself, while *ero-guro-nansensu* finding a pleasure in it. It is important to distinguish it from the general *zankoku no bi* (aesthetic of cruelty).

Ero-guro-nansensu involves gore, violence, demonic and horror representation of body, which can be sexualised, but sometimes only presented as desirable and erotic, or neither. One thing which binds all *ero-guro-nansensu* art, however, is the grotesque.

¹⁴¹ See chapter *Escape Routes in Terayama's Narratives*.

Grotesque also holds a special place in Terayama's art, but that is not the only reason why his work may be characterised as *neo-Gothic* and especially as its later derivative, the *neo-ero-guro-nansensu*. The themes, the aesthetic elements, the philosophy and the genre elements of these two popular genres are all dominating most of his work, starting with the posters for his plays, to the more substantial elements.

7.1 European vs. Japanese Gothic

In order to understand the importance of the influence of the Japanese Gothic and the *ero-guro-nansensu* on Terayama and many other post war Japanese artists, we need to put the criticism of European and Japanese Gothic, as well as European body horror, in a critical discourse. In regards to the European Gothic, there certainly is a distinction between the early works, which established some basic genre elements, and the later practice which implemented new ideological conventions. According to David Punter and Glennis Byron, there are strong gender delineations in the genre:

“women characters tend to be objectified victims, their bodies, like the Gothic structures, representations of the barriers between inside and outside that are to be broached by the transgressive male.”¹⁴²

Though we have to concede that Gothic novel often features female characters in conflict with patriarchal power, it is not a transcendence of the patriarchal discourse which leads them ahead and eventually resolves the central conflict, but a societal re-establishment and exoneration, as opposed to acceptance of difference and opposition to the norm.

There is also another line of criticism in regards to the European Gothic, which was developed by Elisabeth R. Napier, who suggests an intrinsic banality of the genre. According to her, Gothic literature is “a standardized, absolutely formulaic system of creating a certain kind of atmosphere in which a reader's sensibility towards fear and terror is exercised in predictable ways”.¹⁴³ This criticism is not reserved only for the modern Gothic fiction, but also for the majority of the works from the later 19th and early 20th century Gothic.

¹⁴² David Punter, Byron Glennis: *The Gothic*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2005, p. 278

¹⁴³ Elisabeth R. Napier: *The Failure of Gothic: Problems of Disjunction in an Eighteenth-Century Literary Form*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1987, p. 29

Not everyone is that ready to dismiss the genre, however. According to Eve K. Sedgwick, whose views of the Gothic are rather ambivalent, Gothic fiction is in many ways a precursor of Freudian psychoanalysis, or that on the level of subtext it favours individual psychology in the context of family¹⁴⁴. Her inquiry leads to a conclusion that Gothic, by presenting an idea of a protagonist who encounters terrible surreal power or adversary, is actually a metaphor for a personal struggle with suppressed thoughts and emotions¹⁴⁵. This implies that Gothic served a particular social function. In order to protect oneself from forbidden repressed desires, one is to personify them and mark as the Other. According to Sedgwick, this is already present in the inaugural work of Gothic fiction, Marry Shelley's *Frankenstein*¹⁴⁶, where complicated relation between Doctor Frankenstein and his monster, who is haunting and chasing him all over the world, stands for the repression of subconscious homosexual desire, which, when acknowledged on the level of conscious, cannot go away any more.

But even though it emerged as such, by the very virtue of it dealing with all kinds of “unspeakable” things, Gothic literature was still able to stimulate confrontational and subversive discourses in regards to social norms, especially by the time it was entertained by such authors as Oscar Wilde¹⁴⁷. Japanese Gothic novel, on the other hand, seems to have had a more coherent and stabile structural and ideological formulation. Inaugural work¹⁴⁸ of Japanese Gothic is Ueda Akinari's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain (Ugetsu Monogatari)*, first published in 1776¹⁴⁹. This work is also notable because all of the elements it uses are present in the subsequent genre works, including Terayama's Gothic plays, such as *Poison Boy* and *The Hunchback of Aomori*.

144 E.K. Sedgwick: *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, p. 83-96

145 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky: *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, New York: Arno 1980, p. 9-15

146 Sedgwick: *Between Men*, p. 83-96

147 „A story, Gothic in its own right, from Beverley Nichols' twentieth-century autobiography, *Father Figure*, will illustrate the particular comic, educative, and terrorizing potential that the Gothic novel and the “unspeakable” had realized by the first decades of this century. Nichols' middle-class parents had a higher-class male friend who rouged, acted effeminate, and would to a knowing observer have seemed from the first glance to be telegraphing his homosexuality. The elder Nicholsons, reactionary but unworldly, saw none of this. They were simply delighted that their friend took such a keen interest in their young son. One night, though, Beverley's father came into the boy's room drunk and found him with a copy of *Dorian Gray* -- a present from the friend. The father nearly choked. He hurled the book at his son. He spat on it over and over, frothing at the mouth. Finally he began ripping the book to shreds -- with his teeth.

Beverly was terrified and puzzled: why was his father so angry? The father couldn't believe he didn't know, but finally the boy's obvious puzzlement convinced him. “What did Wilde do?” The father couldn't utter the words that would explain it. Instead, he stole into the bedroom again at daybreak, and left a slip of paper on which he had written down, he said, the man's crime. As his father left, Beverley, now delirious with anticipation, tiptoed across the room to where the paper lay. On it was written: “ILLUM CRIMEN HORRIBILE QUOD NON NOMINANDUM EST.”
See Ibid., 95

148Proto-Gothic elements are already present in much older Japanese book, the early 11th century novel *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu.

149Some of the stories have been adapted as films, most notably *Ugetsu* (1953) by Kenji Mizoguchi.

Like European Gothic, Japanese variant also serves to warn the society from the loss of social values. But there is an important difference which has to be taken into account: While European Gothic links these values to a suppression of individual's subconscious thoughts and repressed sexual desires, Japanese Gothic deals with the suppression and critique of the societal/collective malaises which may bring misfortune to an individual. In other words, it is not inward, but outward looking.

What they both share, however, is the centrality of female characters. In Japanese Gothic, these archetypal characters are called *onryō*¹⁵⁰. They are usually vengeful ghosts or other monstrous manifestations of (mostly) women, who were wronged in some way, usually resulting in their death. This is often the reason why *onryō* seek retribution against the living who wronged them¹⁵¹.



Figure 15: *Ugetsu Monogatari* (*The Tale of Ugetsu*), a still from the film adaptation by Kenji Mizoguchi.

What *onryō* character stands for is the concept of *on*¹⁵², which is understood as an underlying morality, a social contract, based on assumed obligation and trust (from a lover, parent, child, mentor or a one's socially superior). The breach of the underlying *on* is what releases the anger of *onryō*. Therefore, like the ghosts of European Gothic, *onryō* becomes a metaphor for suppressed danger which (when awakened) can become unstoppable and highly destructive. As we have already noted, in Japanese case it is about the repression of societal evil, while in the European psychoanalytic context, the evil is situated within the subconsciousness of the individual. And while

150 Michiko Iwasaka, Barre Toelken: *Ghosts and the Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends*, Logan: Utah State University Press 1994, p. 16.

151 See *Escape Routes in Terayama's Narratives*.

152 Ibid., p. 16.

Japanese model is on the side of the individual and can often serve as strong social critique, there is nothing in it which is directly subversive, apart from the obvious fact that, like European Gothic, it deals with the “monstrous” and “unspeakable”, which may make it “dangerous” by automatism. Even if it is the status quo which it tries to protect by being critical of the society, rather than individual psychology of the family dynamic, it is still there to stabilise and reaffirm a static moral order.

Another problematic element of Japanese Gothic fiction is the figure of women, which, destined to be seen as victims within the context of the breached *on*, are usually the ones who become *onryō*. As a result, the image of a monstrous demonic woman is so ubiquitous in Japanese popular culture today, that it comes to be regarded as a major genre staple of the so called J-horror films¹⁵³..

It is also important to note that modern use of the Japanese Gothic female archetype became arguably more misogynistic over the time, because of the historic development of the genre itself, which increasingly exchanged literal and metaphysical monstrosity with psychological one. This, according to Ada Lovelace, has ideological reactionary reasons which had to do with the late 19th to early 20th century exposure of Japanese culture to the Western influences:

... the early modern era (of Gothic fiction), dominated by the works of Izumi Kyōka and Junichirō Tanizaki, shifts from physical monstrosity to abnormal psychology in women. As Western ideology seeps into Japanese tradition, the monstrous woman manifests in textual hauntings that afflict the narrative to represent masculine anxieties. The beautiful and alluringly dangerous women present in the texts of Kyōka and Tanizaki conceptualise the modernisation of woman’s role in society under Western influence as her restricted feudal predecessor is left behind. Likewise, Japanese cultural values are also under threat of being cast aside or overshadowed.¹⁵⁴

Therefore, from being about the breach of *on*, modern and pre-modern Japanese Gothic transformed into a problematic cultural manifestation of the views of women and tradition. What is even more important, and will be referred to in later text, is that it gradually became inward oriented, or in other words Freudian (much like its European counterpart), rather than outward looking as it was before.

153 Some of the most popular Japanese horror films from the 1990s and 2000s employ the archetype: *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998), *Ju-on* (Takashi Shimizu, 2002) and similar.

154 Ada Lovelace: “Ghostly and Monstrous Manifestations of Women: Edo to Contemporary”, in: *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, http://irishgothic horrorjournal.homestead.com/Jwomen.html#anchor_18 (15. 05. 2013)

7.2 Ero-guro-nansensu: historical roots

At this point, however, we will leave those considerations aside and focus on a different structure which helps Terayama and similar avant-garde artists to appropriate Gothic fiction, as well as to undermine its basic ideological concerns. We will also try to further support the thesis that, although derived from the Japanese Gothic, *ero-guro-nansensu* was in many ways more a reaction to it than a straight-forward extension, a protest against the increasing psychologisation of the popular culture, which came together with the right-wing movements of the early 20th century Japan. Another purpose of further analysis is to try to establish a firmer (more than casual) link between Terayama and *ero-guro-nansensu*, which hasn't been done before, and to show why it may be very important.



Figure 16: Muzan-e (Bloody Prints), ukiyo-e (prints) made in 1860s by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi.

But what exactly is *ero-guro-nansensu*? How does it differ from the Gothic proper?

The roots of the movement come from the late Edo (Tokugawa) period and were especially strong within the entire Meiji period. First *ero-guro-nansensu* themed work appeared as *ukiyo-e* prints¹⁵⁵, by the artists such as Katsushika Hokusai, Utagawa Toyokuni and Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, who, among other things, used to illustrate macabre stories of suicide and murder, usually directly inspired by actual detective reports of the time. *Ukiyo-e* prints also often depicted erotic themes. A good reference point for comparison with something similar in Europe would be the Grand Guignol aesthetic of the late 19th century French theatre coupled with the erotic illustrations by the Austrian artist Franz von Bayros. But *ero-guro-nansensu* was not only about tableaux.

In the 1920s and 1930s, *ero-guro-nansensu* became especially prominent in literature, foremost in detective fiction. Another strong source, which further enriched the macabre basis of the genre, was the Weimar silent cinema, especially the expressionist films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*¹⁵⁶ (Robert Wiene, 1920) and *Metropolis*¹⁵⁷ (Fritz Lang, 1927), and to a lesser extent *Nosferatu*¹⁵⁸ (F.W. Murnau, 1922). According to Ian Buruma, one of the best and most important Japanese films of the period, Kinugasa Teinosuke's *Page of Madness*¹⁵⁹, which he directly links to the wider *ero-guro-nansensu* mood of the time, owed much to *Caligari*¹⁶⁰.

The impact the former two films left on the wider Japanese popular culture is so great, that we could draw a clear line between them and most of the subsequent *ero-guro-nansensu*, on the one hand, and proto cyber-punk Japanese science fiction of the post-war era, on the other. And even if we ignore their common expressionist roots, these films have found a natural co-existence foremost within the *ero-guro nansensu* movement, which served as a catalyst of new possibilities. According to Robert Matthews, there is a strong link between *Shin seinen*, avant-garde detective fiction (influenced by *Caligari*), and early science fiction (influenced by *Metropolis*) in Japan¹⁶¹. The popular authors who worked in these genres, such as Edogawa Rampo, Yumeno Kyusaku and Uno

155 Ukiyo-e is a traditional method of wood printing of the Tokugawa period, which depicted scenes from everyday life. When discovered by the Western artists, the style became the main source of Japonism. See Rupert Richard Arrowsmith: "The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System", *Modernism/modernity*, Volume 18, Number 1, January 2011.

156 *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari*, D: Robert Wiene, Germany 1920.

157 *Metropolis*, D: Fritz Lang, Germany 1927.

158 *Nosferatu*, D: F. W. Murnau, Germany 1922.

159 *Kuruta ichipeiji*, D: Kinugasa Teinosuke, Japan 1926.

160 Ian Buruma: *Inventing Japan, 1853-1964*, New York: The Modern Library 2003, p. 67-68.

161 Robert Matthews: *Japanese Science Fiction*, New York: Routledge 1989, p. 13

Yuza, were all part of the *ero-guro-nansensu* movement¹⁶². In other words, larger specifics of the contemporary Japanese pop-culture would be unthinkable without the influence of the genre¹⁶³. As of Terayama himself, he was not only sharing a strong enthusiasm for *Caligari* with the 1930s and modern *ero-guro-nansensu* artists, it strongly influenced all of his work and resulted in his early play *Dr. Galigari's Crime*¹⁶⁴, which stands as one of the foundations of his art. It touches upon the themes of the film, but typically for Terayama, explores other potentials until the point of non-recognition. Oblivious to the much more plausible *ero-guro-nansensu* connection, in the introduction to the book *Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays*, Robert T. Rolf finds a different, less substantial link between Terayama and Caligari, namely Antonin Artaud's, seminal 1958 text (undoubtedly important to Terayama), called *The Theatre and the Plague*¹⁶⁵. Unconnected to the *Caligari* film, the text mentions a small town of Cagliari (note the different writing) in Sardinia¹⁶⁶. Perhaps conscious of the lack of plausibility of the connection and a need to explain Terayama's interest in Caligari, the author misquotes the name of the town from the Artaud text as "Caligari". This stretched attempt to create a link there where it is hardly possible, shows us how important it is to study and analyse Terayama's interests in the context of movements and genres, rather than as strictly through auteur lens, as it is usually the case.

7.3 Ero-guro politics

As we have seen, the moment *ero-guro-nansensu* movement was established and originally flourished, late 1920s to early 1930s, is comparable to the post World War I Weimar decadence, of which a crucial part was the German silent cinema itself. Buruma describes the situation as follows:

In some instances, the similarities with Berlin were more than coincidental. Painters and cartoonists did pictures à la George Grosz. Directors of the New Theatre put on plays by Hauptmann and Maeterlinck and studied Max Reinhardt and Stanislavsky. Dada, expressionism, cubism, constructivism,

162 Miri Nakamura: "Horror and machines in prewar Japan". In Chris Bolton; Istvan Csicsery-Ronay jr, Takayuki Tatsumi: *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2007, p. 3-26.

163 The most important modern direct representative of the style, illustrator Suehiro Maruo, often uses the motives from Caligari in much of his work.

164 *Garigari hakase no hanzai* (Tenjo Sajiki play), D: Shuji Terayama, 1969.

165 Rolf: *Alternative Japanese Drama*, p. 233.

166 The Artaud text begins with the sentence: "The archives of the little town of Cagliari, in Sardinia, contain the account of an astonishing historical fact." See Antonin Artaud: *The Theater and its Double*, New York: Grove Press 1958, p. 15.

new sobriety: All had had their day in Japan--more than a day, in fact, since trends tend to stick around a lot longer there than in their countries of origin. Novelists looked to Europe, too. Tanizaki Junichiro adopted the style of fin-de-siècle French decadence.¹⁶⁷

Like the Weimar expressionist movement, *ero-guro-nansensu* questioned taboos and expressed bold new ideas. The formal end of both these movements parallel each other. While the rise of the Nazi party in Germany put an end to the Weimar expressionism, condemning its artistic output as unacceptable, the art which was created under the umbrella of *ero-guro-nansensu*¹⁶⁸, as well as most of the instances of the popular culture which were related to the themes of perversion (*hentai*) were suppressed by the late 1930s Japanese government, only to re-emerge after the war¹⁶⁹.

The reason why *ero-guro-nansensu*, although obviously derived from it, can be seen as a critique of the increasingly inward-looking Japanese Gothic is because not only does it totally disregard *on* (complete rejection of the societal contract is evident even in the name of the movement: erotic-grotesque-nonsense), it also undermines its psychoanalytical potentialities as well.

The imagery of *ero-guro-nansensu* is blatant and direct. There are no concerns for their subconscious importance or potential. Since formally, *ero-guro-nansensu* is there to visualise a whole range of erotic fantasies and/or to satisfy curiosity in regards to the grotesque and macabre, without any moral constraints or concerns, within it the subconscious and conscious become blurred and irrelevant.

This, as well as the dream-like quality of much of it, may seem that *ero-guro-nansensu* resembled European surrealism, which started at about the same time. Yet there is a difference. While surrealism tried to resolve the contradictory conditions of dreams and reality, *ero-guro-nansensu* was closer to Dadaism¹⁷⁰, in the sense that its main focus was on the nonsensical. Another big difference between *ero-guro-nansensu* and surrealism, as well as Dadaism, is that the former is highly dependant on corporeality, while the latter are concerned with ideas and symbolism. To put it in banal terms, surrealism and Dadaism are concerned with the mind, while *ero-guro-nansensu* focuses on the body. By being closely related to sexuality, it moves freely through Freudian territory, without really paying attention to psychoanalytical concepts. In aesthetic terms, *ero-guro-nansensu*

167 Buruma: *Inventing Japan*, p. 67.

168It is important to distinguish between the general relatively popular phenomenon of *ero-guro-nansensu*, which puts more emphasis on *hentai* (sexual perversion), and the more serious, influential works, which are neither necessarily pornographic nor violent.

169 Mark McLelland: "A Short History of 'Hentai'", from *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/mccllland.html> (15. 05. 2013)

170Unlike Dadaism, *ero-guro-nansensu* was not directly a political movement and bourgeois.

differs from these other movements because it is foremost expressionistic, again, similarly to how the art of the Weimar decadence was.

The historical moment *ero-guro-nansensu* appeared at, played a significant role in its development, since it was the period when nationalistic *nihonjinron*¹⁷¹ psychoanalysis, (as exemplified by the exceptional re-structuring of Oedipus into the Ajase complex by the psychoanalyst Kosawa Heisaku) gained its prominence in Japan. By being oblivious to subconscious, and equally dealing with the matters of sexuality and perversion, in a sense it worked as a critique of psychoanalysis itself, especially in *ero-guro-nansensu* literature. But let us not take this as an obvious given.

There were many political applications of *ero-guro-nansensu* which were especially prominent in the prose of one of the earliest and the most significant representatives of the genre, Edogawa Rampo¹⁷², who, like most of the *ero-guro-nansensu* artists, moved on both sides of a blurred line between the Gothic proper and *ero-guro-nansensu* itself. According to Jim Reichert, his novels were rich with a “complicated engagement with contemporaneous systems of literary, political, social and scientific signification.”¹⁷³

What Rampo's stories, which similar to the work of Terayama involved a menagerie of “freak” characters, mostly tried to destabilise was the notion of “being normal”, both in scientific Darwinian terms, as well as on the level of literary convention and dominant ideological interpretative potential.

In the 1920s and 1930s work of another highly important Gothic/*ero-guro-nansensu* writer, Yumeno Kyusaku, the author of the seminal 1930 Gothic/*ero-guro* novel *Dogura Magura* (*Dogra Magra*), we have elements of science-fiction, as well as a sharp critique of machines, technology and science, strongly influenced by *Metropolis*. In his letter to a fellow writer Saburo Koga, which he wrote shortly after the publication of *Dogura Magura*, Kyusaku declares:

Science disregarded all things that were sacred, beautiful, and mysterious.... It investigated these mysteries to their cores and laughed at the fact that they were just calculations that can be reduced to electronic functions. It thoroughly analysed people's religious beliefs and declared that they were just egotistical expressions

171 *Nihonjinron* is the concept of Japanese exceptionalism. See Peter N. Dale: *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, Kent: Croom Helm Limited, 1986, p. 16.

172 The professional name of the author Taro Hirai was derived from the Japanese language transliteration of the name Edgar Allan Poe.

173 Jim Reichert: “Deviance and Social Darwinism in Edogawa Rampo's Erotic-Grotesque Thriller *Kotō no oni*“, *Journal of Japanese Studies* Volume 27, Number 1, Winter 2001, p. 113-141.

governed by +/-0 (plus minus zero) logic.... Religion is a fraud. Art is self-centred
And love is nothing but a sex drive. It proclaimed this and was delighted.¹⁷⁴

The last part of the statement is especially interesting in the light of the fact that Yumeno wrote his most famous novel while studying psychoanalysis for ten years at the Kyushu Imperial University's mental institute¹⁷⁵. His objection to the view of humans as Darwinian and Freudian automations, however, is prevalent in the book.

Another important aspect, which was especially emphasized in the 1988 film adaptation of the novel¹⁷⁶, directed by one of the most important Japanese avant-garde artists Toshio Matsumoto, was the critique of the so-called *classical narrative* (both as literary mechanism and a metaphor for ideology¹⁷⁷: A pair of manipulative doctors (yet again modelled on Dr. Caligari) put the protagonist of the novel in a mental hospital because they believe he killed his fiancé. Three reasons are cited: the psychoanalytical (in spite of the love for her, he couldn't free himself from the subconscious, which told him to kill her), Darwinian (he is a descendent of another wife murderer, therefore he has it in his genes) and ideological (the story of the perpetuating tragedy is written on a holy scroll of text, and its contents are canonical). The psychoanalytical is shown to be strongly influenced by the Darwinian and the ideological, which is the main instance by which Yumeno and Matsumoto criticise the idea of humans as Darwinian/Freudian automations.



Figure 17: *Dogura magura* (Toshio Matsumoto, 1988), a still from the film adaptation of Kyuusaku Yumeno's 1930 novel.

174 Miri Nakamura: "Horror and machines in prewar Japan". In Chris Bolton; Istvan Csicsery-Ronay jr, Takayuki Tatsumi: *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2007. p. 3–26

175 Nakamura: *Horror and Machines*, p. 3-26.

176 *Dogura magura*, D: Toshio Matsumoto, Japan 1988.

177Also a very crucial concept to Terayama's theater theory. See Terayama Manifesto.

The elements of *ero-guro-nansensu* are in the themes of the erasure of the body/mind dichotomy, in the depiction of the murder itself, as well as the final realisation that the protagonist of the novel isn't even born yet, but that he is actually still an embryo in his mother's womb. This ironic twist is a further critique of psychoanalytical and scientific narratives as self-perpetuating myths with foremost ideological functions.

The criticism of the Darwinian/Freudian notions of humans as robotic automations, central to the work of *ero-guro-nansensu* authors such as Rampo and Kyusaku, which was so successfully incorporated into the early-to-modern Japanese science-fiction (through the influence of *Metropolis*¹⁷⁸), were additionally supported by the popularity of Marxist theories, for example the ones of the art theoretician and cinema and photography pioneer, Takaho Itagaki, who in 1929 claimed that “machines are ... a gift from God that promises the happiness of the proletariat”¹⁷⁹. His Marxist Utopia is the one where actual automations - the robots - would make the life easier for (through the forces of capitalism) unwilling automations - the human workers.

7.4 Ero-guro-nansensu vs. body horror

Another interesting comparison could be made between *ero-guro-nansensu* and the Western body-horror fiction, which was shaped equally by Franz Kafka's 1915 novella *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915), the Catholic basis of Marshall McLuhan's theories and the Freudian influences in the work of the film-maker David Cronenberg. The reason to make a comparison is because the work of some modern Japanese directors who dwell in the genre conventions (such as Takashi Miike or Shinya Tsukamoto), which have been influenced by *ero-guro-nansensu* or *zankoku no bi* (aesthetics of cruelty), are often mistakenly referred to as body-horror.

While body-horror expresses a dread of misappropriation and misplacement of body parts (perversion), which comes from the automatic nature of the body itself, coupled with the automatic nature of the subconscious¹⁸⁰, *ero-guro-nansensu*, totally oblivious to the Freudian implications,

178 The “father of manga” Osamu Tezuka made an unofficial loose re-telling of *Metropolis* in a form of a 1949 manga, *Metropolisu*. Modern animated series and manga *Ghost in the Shell*, *Kokaku kidotai* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), prominently deal with the ideas of humans as automations. Robots in general are ubiquitous element of Japanese science-fiction, featuring as a separate genre called *mecha*. See Mark Gilson: “A Brief History of Japanese Robophilia“, *Leonardo*, Volume 31, Number 5, 1998, p. 367–369

179 Nakamura: “Horror and Machines in Prewar Japan”

180 Medium as a message, when applied to human body creates a danger of losing the subjecthood, if body, by being misappropriated, becomes the message itself. In other words, corporality (the Real) is in danger to overshadow the ego subject. In most of the films of David Cronenberg, which were famously informed by McLuhan, the mechanism of Kafka's protagonist's symbolic physical change in *The Metamorphosis*, caused by a psychological change, is turned upside-down.

not only explores and embraces all kinds of sexual perversions (object-fetish, bestiality, alternative sexualities, transgenderism, corpophilia), it also explores and eroticises physical abnormalities, bodies which go through transformation due to illness and other changes.

In Terayama's plays there are several instances in which this is the case. In *The Hunchback of Aomori*, the titular character is shown engaging in sexual acts with several other characters. In these acts, his physical condition is central. In *Poison Boy*, the protagonist of the story, who is suffering from disfiguring plague, has a climactic sexual intercourse with his demonic step-mother. In the play *Le Marie vision*, the cross-dressing leading character Marie lightly embraces her man-to-woman transformation, making a point that it is the psychological transformation that matters, not the physical one (the outward is consisting of many disguises which are irrelevant to the lonely individual who is already "inside his grave")¹⁸¹. That is why physical cannot be dangerous. And afterwards, In Marie's own words, after being asked does it matter to her that people call her a pervert:



Figure 18: *Hunchback of Aomori*, a 1983 Tenjo Sajiki performance featuring Akihito Miwa.

MARIE: Oh, yes. It seems that the people of the world say that I'm unnatural; that I'm a fake; that I go against the will of God. But it's those very same people who think nothing of planting flower seeds in a garden... ten-cents-a-bag seed that have nothing at all to do with God. But they don't consider this defiling nature. No, there is nothing in the world that is of any real worth in its natural state!¹⁸²

181 Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 216.

182 Ibid., 216

The above words represent the opposite of the ideology behind the European body-horror. They are also a logical implication of Terayama's theatre theory, displaying fully its revolutionary potentials. His view that reality should be changed and reinvented by a simple game of pretending is clear about the fact that you cannot go about it by first changing the physical reality, which in turn is supposed to change the inner. The physical can be changed, and has to be changed. But unlike for McLuhan and Cronenberg, it is still irrelevant because physical, even if it could change the inner (which is besides the point), in itself still cannot change the symbolic reality of the dominant discourse.

But neither can the inner change the physical. For Terayama, the agency of change, totally overriding the Cartesian philosophy, is situated neither in the body nor in the mind. It resides in the context of the non-territorial. Or to put it in terms of theatre theory, for Terayama, a play resides neither in the dramatic text, nor in the performance¹⁸³ (which is another dilemma of the European thought, simply overridden by Terayama). It exists in the encounter (the contact) between the actors and the audience, which Keiko Courdy calls a “triangle structure”. “Terayama activates the puppet, the puppet tries to make contact or provoke an encounter with the audience, and, if everything works, the audience somehow manifests that the encounter took place.”¹⁸⁴

Like Artaud, Terayama also gave a special importance to the subject of plague as a metaphor, which can also support the idea that for him, unlike the artists and the philosophers related to the Western body-horror, the plague is not physical but symbolic. The power of plague for Artaud was that it can uncover the inner, the ugly reality behind the surface of the society, by facing it with the world of sharpened senses, of human strength and physicality, as opposed to the world of two-faced malice of the world of ideas. Plague, being physically destructive, is in other words a “reality-check”.

For Terayama, plague is not, nor does it function, within the realm of the physical at all. Instead, it is part of the symbolic itself (family, religion, state). A plague is, for example, a rumour which follows an outsider in order to destroy him. That is why, according to Terayama, “outcasts” go on the stage, freed of the rumours, and through acting and looking differently point towards the plague within the society¹⁸⁵. The stage, in this respect, is a place of spiritual cleansing.

183 Shuji Terayama: *Manifesto*, 84-87.

184 Stanca Scholz-Cionca, Samuel L. Leiter: *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage, Antonin Artaud's Influence on Terayama Shuji* by Keiko Courdy, Leiden: Brill 2000, p. 267.

185 Ibid., 261

7.5 Terayama and Suehiro Maruo

In the course of further research of the more substantial links between Terayama and *ero-guro-nansensu*¹⁸⁶, something which (as we have already noted) was not yet sufficiently acknowledged or otherwise not recognised as important, there was a chance to uncover a photo made by Terayama, which contains a detail which was rather important to the development of modern *ero-guro-nansensu*, insofar as it inspired one of the leading representatives of the genre today.

More than of any other contemporary artist, the work of one of the most famous *neo-ero-guro-nansensu* artists and comic book illustrators, Suehiro Maruo, is today considered almost a synonym for the genre. While his work includes the usual elements of the genre, such as the references to Caligari and Nosferatu, dark grotesque/sexual imagery, umeyo-e motives and the work of Edogawa Rampo, his work stands out from other contemporary *ero-guro* artists, such as Takato Yamamoto (who aestheticises the style by combining *ero-guro-nansensu* with *art nouveau*) or Junji Ito (who emphasizes the potential for disgust at his illustrations and focuses on modern J-horror Gothic themes). Maruo's work, on the other hand, uses the imagery of the popular culture and combines it with the Japanese cultural nostalgia, in addition to the themes of the plague, physical abnormality and similar. In other words, his work strongly resembles the work of Shuji Terayama, not only visually but also thematically.

Maruo, who left home with 15 and dedicated himself to grotesque art, becoming a full fledged manga artist by 24, is a typical Terayamaesque artist, almost a model Tenjo Sajiki runaway artist, even though he was never directly involved with the group or Terayama himself, gaining prominence only after Terayama's death and after the troupe was disbanded. But Maruo's artistic beginnings and most of the rest of his work were strongly inspired the imagery of Tenjo Sajiki, such as the posters, as created by Tadanori Yokoo, but above all Terayama's photography and general sense of aesthetics, especially his use of costume design and the illustrations by Kazuichi Hanawa, himself a renown *ero-guro-nansensu* artist, above all his work on Terayama's film *Pastoral*.

The illustration by Hanazawa which features in one of Terayama's photos (see fig. 20), but also in the famous circus scene in *Pastoral*, is a direct inspiration for the look of Maruo's seminal character Midori from the comic book *Mr Arashi's Amazing Freak Show*, aka *The Camellia Girl* (Shojo tsubaki, 1984).

186 Being such a popular movement, some general influence of *ero-guro-nansensu* on Terayama is to expect.



*Figure 19: A photo by Terayama featuring an illustration of a snake girl, by Kazuichi Hanazawa. The same picture appears in the circus scene in Terayama's film *Pastoral: To Die in the Country* (1974). This picture is one of the main inspirations for Suehiro Maruo's seminal comic *Mr. Arashis's Amazing Freak Show*, which was published in 1984.*

Maruo also worked with Ikenoshita, a contemporary avant-garde theatrical troupe which has been performing a great number of Terayama plays over the past 15 years. Their collaboration on the designs of the posters for the plays made by Maruo, was exclusively Terayama related.

But this is not the only thing which connects them. The thematic similarities are even more important than the aesthetic ones. Both of these artists are preoccupied with the classical problem of Japanese culture, the one which concerns the innocence and childhood. Both Terayama and Maruo seem to have contempt for the archetypal cultural solution to it, which tries to find the answer in nostalgia. And while these two artists are far from being unique in this respect (Yukio Mishima was even more radically involved with these themes), their approach is very similar. Instead of existentialism of Mishima or Kenzaburo Oe, or even one Hideaki Anno, both Maruo and Terayama give us post-modernnnnnn imago soaked oked nostalgia ghia which is ironic and tradition which is radically undermined. Both of these artists question the body-based existentialism by depicting it as "abnormal", masked, transformed, not what it seems to be. Both artists share a contempt for the cultural nostalgia of the society which tries to present an illusory myth of the innocence of childhood, which serves as a reactionary discourse of the politically controversial times.

This all-encompassing philosophical stance of Terayama is also basically the main staple of the *ero-guro-nansensu* movement and its application's and derivatives in not only Terayama's work, but also in the works of other Japanese artists informed by it.

That *ero-guro-nansensu* as such evoked political controversy because of these very reasons can be attested by the case of *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, Terayama's most controversial film.



Figure 20: Midori, the orphaned girl, the protagonist of *Mr. Arashi's Amazing Freak Show* by Suehiro Maruo.

When the film, as well as the related radio drama, *Adult Hunting* (1960), premiered, as we have mentioned earlier, there were protests from many sides. Unquestionably, they drew strong criticism from the left as being caricatures of the student protests. But by far more serious critique came from the conservative circles. The aspect of the narrative portraying young political and sexual revolutionaries in a romantic way was seen as dangerous for obvious reasons. But the words the critics chose in order to damn Terayama was "tero, ero, guro"¹⁸⁷, which translates into "terrorist, erotic, grotesque". This not only links Terayama most obviously to the *ero-guro-nansensu* movement, it also attaches him to its radical political potentials.

That *ero-guro-nansensu* tends to appear in reactionary political moments, speaks further of how inseparable it is from general Japanese political art of the 20th century.

187 Ridgely: *Japanese Counterculture*, p. 44.

8 CONCLUSION

This text tried to present a slightly different picture of Shuji Terayama, one of the leading avant-garde dramatists of the post-war period in Japan. While it is true that his political beliefs were elusive, and probably too nuanced at the time of clear political affiliations (1960s), we have seen that even openly political artists and activists, such as Yukio Mishima who tried to stage a coup, were still denied political agency, most probably because they were too radical, too "third option" or too all-encompassing, at a time of clear political divisions and tense partisanship. Terayama's revolution would entail the entire spectrum, not only the government, which is probably why he fell out of scope of the conventional politics in 1960s and 1970s.

Some of the rejection of Terayama's politics may come from a bias towards him, in the sense that if real, they would be hard to accept, or would make him a political opportunist, rather than someone with acceptable political views. Similarly to him, Mishima's politics are possibly rejected because it would be hard to reconcile a beloved novelist and artisan of Japanese language with fascist ideology. One of the two needs to be proclaimed a pretension.

On the other hand, Terayama's preoccupation with psychological issues gave some of the analysts of his work a reason to consider him an overtly psychologically-focused, in the sense that all of his drama takes place on the level of family dynamic, but not on the level of society, which again made it apolitical. Such stance rejects possibility that his art can be both about psychology and ideology at the same time. Or that political art which considers the themes of Freudian *nihonjinron* (nationalistic) psychoanalysis, which was either political in itself, or understood as political, is unavoidable, especially from the left-leaning position in a struggle against conservative values and nationalistic surges during the 20th century Japanese history.

Terayama's appropriation of the Ajase myth and seemingly contradictory examination of the complex may not necessarily be the result of unsolved psychological issues in relation to his mother but more in line with a service to gender issues, which we have seen he was involved in both in cooperation with the feminist avant-garde dramatist Kishida Rio and on his own. The mirroring between his life and his art may had to do with his general view of the theatre - as a source of societal change, which could influence political reality precisely by extending itself and occupying the reality until the point where there is no meaningful distinction between what is real and what is fictional, whereas the transformation and change come from one being able to shape the other.

Decades before Judith Butler, he played with the ideas of gender performance and clearly identified the relation between performance in general and theatrical performance, which in turn corresponded to his wider theatre theory.

Also his reluctance to succumb to the supremacy of text had strong ideological reasons.

In fact, far from being an apolitical provocateur, Terayama's preoccupation with the ideological potential of theatre was neither less nor more radical than the one of Brecht. The goals of democratisation, of giving the voice to the audience (not only through proper identification but through direct participation), of all the potentials such theatre would carry were commonly shared by both these dramatists. Unlike Artaud, who was interested in uncovering the truth, and leaving it to the audience to do with it what they want, Terayama (like Brecht) was not above agitprop. But to him the truth was secondary to direct empowerment.

In the end, Terayama has just casually been linked to the famous Japanese *ero-guro-nansensu* movement of the 1920s and 1930s, which was a sort of the Japanese answer to the Weimar Expressionism. But his art is basically built on it. The complicated politics of the movement is what he inherits and further develops.

His elusiveness may also have to do with the fact that he was constantly looking ahead, always dealing with new forms of expression and representation of ideas. This is the reason why Japanese theatre critic Akihiko Senda called his work "eternal avant-garde"¹⁸⁸, adding that his aim was to create "a revolution of reality that would not depend on politics".

We should add however, that not depending on politics in Terayama's sense meant a total defeat of it, not by establishing an apolitical reality, but by changing the rules of the political game so extremely, so that it would not let the powers of the authority dictate the measures of the revolutionary struggle.

¹⁸⁸ Sorgenfrei: *Unspeakable Acts*, p. 21.

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