

From the Flower to Madness: The Ontology of the Actor in the Work of Suzuki Tadashi

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## Abstract

In modern and contemporary Japanese contact with the Western world, intercultural concerns focus on ideas of unity as opposed to universality. Reading Suzuki Tadashi's work in light of various Japanese discourses on subjectivity (from traditional theatre, from war-time political discourse, from analytical philosophy, and from post-war discourse) suggests ways in which the distinct construction of the subject leads, in turn, to conceptions of difference that diverge from Western models. These notions of discourse emerge through the trope of madness, through the animal energy of Suzuki's actors, and through the utilization of Western texts. These elements generate an assimilative interculturalism, focused on the individual body, that maintains rather than decreases notions of difference.

Keywords: Japanese theatre, subjectivity, Tadashi Suzuki, actor, philosophy

Several female nurses push men in wheelchairs around a sparsely decorated stage suggestive of a mental hospital. Bits of Western classics mix with fragments of other texts and paralinguistic grunts in a mad, fractured world.

These elements –fragments of texts, noticeable gender dynamics, madness, experimentation with language – are common in Suzuki Tadashi’s work. Leaving aside for now the gender dynamics and disability politics, which deserve their own careful consideration, why would intercultural theatre take this mad, fragmented form? The answer to this question lies in the status of the actor as an individual, subjective presence on stage—and understanding this status requires a discussion of Japanese notions of subjectivity. To know who the actor might be is to know what constitutes a ‘who’ in this intercultural context.

The idea of intercultural interaction is actually built into many notions of Japanese subjectivity—but this is an interculturalism built on mutually constitutive notions of uniqueness and unity rather than a contrast between the universal and the particular. Japanese ideas of unity and unique identities in relation to the world emerge in separate forms in *nō* theatre (as one of the nominal roots of many contemporary staging practices), *shutaisei* (a contested and politicized type of subjectivity), and *kokutai* (a much debated type of nationalism focused on the body of the nation) which are discussed within Zengakuren National Students Federation (founded 1948) – an organization that served as a bellwether for the state of avant-garde theatre in Japan.

Peter Eckersall’s provocative historicizing of the political ‘space’ that shaped and was shaped by the *angura* movement (Japanese underground theatre in the 1960s and 70s) explicitly avoids overlaying Western theoretical modes and he concludes that

While critiques of hybridity and appropriation in theatre offer complex political problems for scholars, it is also clear that *angura*’s use of hybrid forms has a radical political

context [...] By their move to consider Japanese cultural memory from a sense of interconnectedness rather than breach, angura artists expressed a willingness to reconsider Japanese cultural totality including factors such as the war and Japanese aggression that had been excised from the more fragmented historical view (Eckersall 2006, p. 57).

He applies this totality primarily to *intracultural* elements within Japan, but a broader philosophical and theatrical contextualization of post-*shingeki* theatre suggests that the same sort of unity or interconnectedness is at stake in intercultural relations as well. While they might be related, a discourse of interconnectivity / unity and fracture / uniqueness is not synonymous with a discourse of the universal and particular.

What follows are four different treatments of subjectivity from an array of fields and a consideration of how Suzuki Tadashi's theatre has reacted to these subjectivities. None of these discussions is 'representative' of a field nor do they come close to exhausting the range of discussions within Japan. I chose them precisely because of their eclectic diversity as a means of demonstrating what concepts are the subject of debate during the post-*shingeki* era. While this sampling only provides a limited range of possible sides to this debate, it does credibly establish the basic parameters of the philosophical questions with which any intercultural Japanese theatre must grapple. In other words, while the discussions below do not speak for the entirety of their fields, they do participate in core debates from those fields. Each of the discourses below presents ways in which the individual can be established and ways in which this individuality is related to a unified whole. At times this relationship is mildly antagonistic, while at others the unity and individuality are mutually constitutive.

### **Zeami and the Flower: Non-Homogenous Harmony**

While Suzuki Tadashi has experimented directly with *nō* techniques (even building a *nō* inspired theatre and directing a *nō* play), generally he created new styles that had spiritual, aesthetic, or formal resonances with tradition rather than participating in what would become a thriving industry of staging *nō* and Kabuki adaptations of Western classics. That being said, the elements of *nō* in his work are often muted and almost always secondary to other aesthetics concerns. Nonetheless, his own theoretical writing and analysis of his method suggests a connection to the ontology of the self in *nō*.

In Zeami Motokiyo's (1363-1443) explanation of *nō*, the production is harmonious if each actor plays his own role to the best of his ability according to the tone set by a lead actor.<sup>1</sup> Zeami says that actors have two duties: to 'work to perfect their individual skills and to create the impression of a truly successful and complete performance [in which] the various skills of all the performers must be properly harmonized together' (Zeami, p. 163).

Several things are rather immediately apparent in what Zeami says. While Zeami's description of the various roles within *nō* is extremely precise, connoisseurs are attuned to the subtle variations between performers playing identical roles, even though said performers had been trained in the role by their predecessors. There is absolutely a place for skilled individuals to shine within Zeami's theatrical world. Zeami discusses individual skill with the metaphor of a flower that grows and blossoms at different stages in an actor's life. The individuality of each actor's 'flower' is influenced by the actor's age, by his body, by his training, and by his temperament. Zeami is clear that all of these factors must be respected if the flower is to be the best it can be. Distinctiveness is important in *nō*.

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<sup>1</sup> While the story of Zeami's client-patron relationships with various Shoguns is interesting, Zeami's precise political allegiances have little bearing on the work of the post-shingeki directors. Readers interested in a richer historical contextualization should begin with Thomas Rimer's work.

While the individuality of the actor matters, Zeami does give overall guidance for the place of this individual within a larger framework. Firstly, all actors pass through the same developmental stages, albeit in different ways. All actors should observe the same general set of rules. All this individual skill should be working toward the creation of harmony and balance. Zeami says that performances must be ‘properly’ harmonized, implying a limited range of ways they might fit together. Elsewhere he discusses finding the beauty even in coarseness –the harmony of the world is not homogeneity or lack of variety, it is, instead, like musical harmony, the creation of a more beautiful whole from a variety of distinct parts. These distinct parts retain their distinctness even as they become part of the whole.

So, from Zeami, in what (for him at least) passes as a straightforward declaration, we have distinct individuals with their own skill sets coming together to create some sort of harmony in a nonhomogeneous world that has a unity dependent on the distinctiveness of each individual. Of course Zeami is one *nō* artist and *nō* is one of many theatrical traditions in Japan. This is not the only traditional way to think of the actor and the world in Japanese theatre, but Zeami’s argument about unity is one which was familiar to theatre audiences and practitioners in the post-*shingeki* era, and thus one possible piece of a discussion about subjectivity on the intercultural stage –albeit one that only establishes the idea that actors on stage are distinct from one another even as they participate in a unity.

### **Wartime Selves: Body of the Nation, Body of the Self**

This question of the place of the individual is echoed and altered in the political sphere, which provides another piece of the same discussion. Of course, the idea of *kokutai* – the body of Japan / Japan as body – embodied in the emperor, shifted over time, and other discourses on nationalism, like *nihonjinron* (the idea of Japan’s fundamental uniqueness) emerged.

Official discourses on national identity like the 1937 *Cardinal Principles of National Polity* (*Kokutai No Hongi*) and the 1890 *Imperial Rescript on Education* were designed to promote a national identity –and a particular kind of nationalism. Both these works were culturally and behaviorally oriented, discussing what was appropriate and inappropriate for Japanese citizens. Kokutai originated in the Tokugawa era and was a loose set of ideas about the direct descent of the Japanese from Amaterasu (the sun goddess). In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars like Katō Hiroyuki and Fukuzawa Yukichi debated the relationship of *kokutai* to Japan’s lack of progress relative to the West. By the Taisho Democracy in 1911 *kokutai* had become associated with the anti-socialist form it took through the war years, insisting on the right to private property.<sup>2</sup> Essentially Japan had the right to defend its borders, and this right extended, by proxy, to the idea that each citizen could protect the borders of his own property.

Despite this insistence on private property, *kokutai* was better at applying the idea of individuality or self to the nation than it was to individuals within the nation: Japan was unique, agentic, and unified, whereas the Japanese were part of this larger body. Japan had a sovereign right to rule its own land and had specific borders –both geographically and culturally – that separated it from the rest of the world. Kokutai implied a unity – a situation where the individual body and the national body were interchangeable (and thus the private rights of the individual ought to be protected in the same way that national sovereignty must be protected). The official legal status of *kokutai* (secured by The Peace Preservation Law of 1925 and following amendments), however, ensured that discussions of the individual body must interact with the

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<sup>2</sup> There is, of course, a narrative about Japan’s fraught relationship with both the U.S. and, more importantly, Russia during this period with provides a different sort of justification for official proclamations on the nature of private property in Japan. It is worth drawing a distinction between an analysis of the political motivation of a given idea and its social (and later theatrical) ramifications.

idea of a national body. The body became a marker of individual and nation simultaneously, with the relationship between these two constantly being redefined.

Like Zeami's work, ideas of *kokutai* focus simultaneously on the individual and on the individual as part of a unified group. Yoshikuni Igarashi notes that the body became the sight of memory and political action after the war in part because bodies had been so carefully regulated before the war (to say nothing of the damage done to bodies during the war). In this notion, the individual subject is not important except as a reflection of the all-important individuality of Japan itself. This is a model of subjection as subjectivity, where to be subject to Japan was to enact a modified form of indirect subjectivity. Yoshikuni discusses new forms of calisthenics that became popular during the war, including one in which the workout was conducted to the slogan 'Bei-Ei-geki-metsu (destroy, perish America and England)' (Yoshikuni, 2000, p. 49). Unlike Zeami where the unity of performance was created through the harmony of disparate elements, *kokutai* was often a system in which the route to subjectivity led through the abrogation of individuality in favor of group cohesion. In both cases unity was key –and in both cases the body played a critical role. Neither case provides us a theory of a psychologized individuality.

### **Pre-war Japanese Philosophy: Being, Nothingness, and the Unified Field**

Both Zeami's work and discourses surrounding *kokutai* imply some manner of performance –the individual performing to create a whole or the individual performing to reinforce a position within the whole. Philosophical writing on the self enters from a different angle, searching for the preconditions of being, but reinforces the need to determine the relationship of one individual to a whole. Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945), credited with founding the Kyoto School of philosophy, made it his life's work to translate Western analytical philosophy



into Japanese terms, to critique this philosophy, and to offer his own concise contributions to both philosophy broadly and ‘Japanese Philosophy’ (a concept which is closely tied to the Kyoto School). Despite the government’s use of many of Nishida’s writings for various political purposes, his own political stance has remained the subject of debate. At a time when scholars were extremely active politically, Nishida seemed reticent to voice extensive political opinions – such were not the grounds for the analytical philosophy with which he was engaging.

In Nishida’s words

The real world is where things work on one another [...] Now, a thing can work on others only by self-denial [...] But if things working on one another make up one world in this manner, it means they lose their being things to become parts of the world [...] It means then they make up an unreal world because there is no more plurality in there. The real world should not be likewise. It should always be one and plural at the same time. Each thing should never lose its individuality even if it works on others and others work on it to make up relations. The real world should not only be self-identical but also self-contradictory (Nishida, K, 1949, P. 165).

If objects are only legible when they work on each other – when their contrasts with other objects are their important feature – then, Nishida argues, they lose their independent existence. He postulates the existence of a negative void – an empty field – against which objects may be defined. His dialectic is between nothingness and being, not between two beings. As such, all being shares a similar relationship to nothingness (and is self-identical) but is markedly different

from other portions of this being (self-contradictory). Difference, then, does not interrupt the unity of the field, because the field exists in contrast to nothingness.

By taking nothingness as the starting point, Nishida Kitaro's theory actually allows for radical variation between objects in the field. Individual difference is not a marker of a difference in kind, because identity is drawn from the dialectical tension with nothingness, not a contrast to other individuals in the field. This position simultaneously leaves open space for variation in identities and decreases the importance of these distinctions. The unity implied here is not the harmony of Zeami's work nor the homogeneity of *kokutai*. It is, however, different again from the self / other distinctions that hold sway in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Nishida does not pursue questions of the precise bearing of this theory on individual subjectivity, but his ideas were widely circulated during an era when identity was a primary concern.

### ***Shutaisei*: Post-war Active Subjectivities**

In the rush to figure out what had led Japan into the war, discussions of *shutaisei* (one of several words translated as subjectivity) proliferated. Japanese scholars (and the general public) wondered how responsibility for the war should be parceled out, which, in turn, led to questions of individuality and collectivity. This discourse often combined performative, philosophical, and political notions of self. Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) was one of the leading scholars in the post-war era who dedicated a large portion of his career to the exploration of concepts of *shutaisei* (subjectivity) as related to the rebuilding of Japan. He advocated active participation in political processes, although, as with many scholars, his war-time statements tainted the reception of his later work.

His arguments link individual autonomy and democratic political consciousness and he goes on to define the individual as an active force. In some of his earlier work (1946) Maruyama

states that the project of 'people's rights' 'was from the beginning connected with theories about 'national rights' [...] thus in the struggle for liberalism the question of the individual's conscience never became a significant factor in determining his freedom' (Maruyama, M, 1966, p. 5). Unlike European nationalism, which Maruyama characterizes as having ceded its moral function to individual groups within the nation after the major religious struggles after the Reformation, the Japanese nation, in its ultra-nationalist phase took on a moral component. Indeed, while 'ultra' remains the preferred translated prefix, 'super' in the sense of 'supernatural' might be more apt, given that Maruyama is talking about a form of nationalism that assimilated most aspects of individuals' lives into itself. The conflation of nation and morality left no room for a differentiation between public and private spheres, and thus no room for 'private' subjectivity. 'Private Life' was the subject of public scrutiny because all subjects were first and foremost subjects of Japan and of the emperor. There is no moral code outside of the nation to which it is subject. This is the negative form of subjectivity that Maruyama claims comes out of the dangerous ultra-nationalism of pre-war Japan.

So for Maruyama, early twentieth century Japanese subjectivity was subsumed entirely by the nation, to the detriment of Japan and its people, but the association with the abrogation of potential subject positions and violence was not his only issue with the formation of Japanese subjectivity. In his later work, Maruyama was particularly concerned with what he perceived of as Marxists' inability to explain how the process of creation / formation (*hassei ron*) related to the idea of essence (*honshitsu ron*).<sup>3</sup> Maruyama saw his version of *shutaisei* as a way of bridging between essence / being and the idea of a novel genesis of new historical moments. By inserting a subjective position into history, Maruyama was able to maintain the unbroken totality

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of Maruyama's complete works in context, see Kersten (1996)

of history but still account for the appearance of novel moments within it. Individual perception, the only way to analyze the historical event, might note breaks, but to understand the breaks the individual also had to perceive the totality of history. An active, value-driven individual could stand against the state and rewrite both the present and history thereby creating substantive changes in the material conditions of society. While *shukansei* (主観性) actually refers to the ontological nature of subjectivity, it is *shutaisei* (主体性) that is actually debated throughout the period. The shift of one syllable in *shutaisei* implies a subject taking action, and this new term (along with Maruyama's articulation of the subject's place in history) emphasizes the idea of an active, if not always physically active, subject who can change history. The subject has to be distinct from the state and the nation, while at the same time taking an active role in reshaping state and nation.

The same themes present in Nishida's work emerge here, albeit in a more politicized form – individuality is, in some fashion, related to totality or unity –in Murayama's case individuality interrupts and reconstructs the unity of history while fracturing and restructuring the unity of the nation-state. It is the active engagement with historical processes which promotes individual consciousness as well: the individual, history, and the nation are intertwined, albeit not fully mutually constitutive. Rather than an empty field or a preexisting ideal world. Murayama's (post-war) individual emerges from the field of historical progress.

The shift in Maruyama's analysis of the subject also indicates the freshness and contentiousness of this idea during the period. By the rise of post-*shingeki* theatre, there were a multitude of possible conceptions of the self, each of which is different from Western subjectivity (which was certainly also a familiar mode in Japan given the widespread circulation and translation of Western philosophy enacted by the Kyoto School and others).

In the above materials there are five different conceptions of the self – Zeami's individual working to create a unified world, *kokutai*'s individual as part of the larger body of Japan (which has its own identity), Nishida's individual emerging from a field of nothingness, and Murayama's active individual re-perceiving the world. In each of these cases, unity is a key element of debate, and each model presents a dramatically different way of understanding this unity. In all but Nishida's abstract analytical philosophy, the body of the individual becomes a proving ground for the philosophy.

### **Suzuki's Theatre**

The above constellation of notions of subjectivity provides us a series of question we can ask when examining the performance of subjectivity within Suzuki Tadashi's intercultural work. To what extent are these subjects active or passive? To what extent are they constituted by or constitutive of the group? What is the relationship between perception and subjectivity? To what extent does relationship to other subject matter? To what extent is the world in which these subjects move harmonious? To what extent is it homogenous? All these questions have immediate political resonances in Japan, and each also directly impacts any notion of the intercultural. The bodies on stage are performing / enacting / embodying / resisting the intercultural –to understand the interaction between two objects requires an understanding of the individual objects.

The post-war directors answered these questions in various ways, but the trope of madness and fracturing, the idea of energy devoted to existence, and elaborations of the mind / body relationship emerge as proving grounds for these various treatments of subjectivity on stage—all, of course, localized in the body of the actor. For Suzuki, individuality –particularly as expressed through mad characters – is created by an examination of the dire conditions of the

world, but it is also a lens through which a unique viewpoint can be established. While the intercultural elements of the post-*shingeki* directors' work are immediately obvious in the discussion below, the specific constructions of unity and the individual within this era of theatre radically shifts the possibilities of interculturalism, a point that I will address more fully in my conclusion.

While a relatively small percentage Suzuki's work since the 1966 formation of his first company was video recorded, he has written extensively about his practice. The Toga Festival in Japan continues, often reviving older productions. Both SCOT (The Suzuki Company of Toga) and ISCOT (The International Suzuki Company) continue their training and performances. Numerous current and former members of Suzuki's various groups offer courses in variations of 'The Suzuki Method,' despite Suzuki's own skepticism that he has produced any consistent 'method.' My own analysis of and encounters with Suzuki's training have been of this degree of remove, and my encounter with his productions has been mediated through print and video.

The idea of the importance of an individual perspective in establishing the world (as seen in Maruyama's work) emerges strongly in the trope of madness, particularly in Suzuki's production featuring Kayoko Shiraishi (who was part of Suzuki's companies from 1967-1989), which focus on the odd kaleidoscopic world as seen through her eyes: 'Usually an insane person is my main character; basically, the structure of my theatre is that a person with excessive illusions sits alone in a room in a real time, sometimes accompanied by an assistant. And the texts of Euripides and Shakespeare possess him or her' (Suzuki 2010, p. 196). He also remarks that he looks at humanity like Freud, in terms of individual consciousness, clarifying with a distinctive understanding of Freud 'In one body, there exist various levels of consciousness.

While you are doing one thing, you can think of others, be on different levels of reality. To my mind, that's what makes humanity dramatically interesting' (Ibid).

The individual is deeply divided internally (an idea which is not explored as deeply in Japanese philosophy as it is in Western), and divided from the rest of the world by a distinctive viewpoint. The degree of distinctiveness is defined as madness in this context, but, at the same moment, it is celebrated –there is a beauty and a harmony in the way the mad, divided individual sees the world. The divisions in the world seem to be produced by the distinct viewpoint of a divided self, which curiously makes the 'foreign' material no more or less different than any other aspect of the fractured, mad perspective to which we are treated (and in this way echoes the idea of difference found in Nishida's work). This is not a world fractured by competing global forces, but rather a world whose diverse, sometimes terrifying, beauty can best be seen from a distinctive individual vantage point.

On the other hand, the beauty of Suzuki's productions does not diminish the fact that individual subjectivity has emerged from interactions with negative aspects of the world. Suzuki claims that 'nothing can ever happen beyond a human scale [...] the only way you can achieve anything at all is by constantly confronting yourself with a sense of poverty and wretchedness' (Bogart, 1995, p. 85). This is a radical notion of individuality. Suzuki argues for individual agency that results from confronting the worst aspects of the world. Instead of a perfect nation creating individuals in its image (as with *kokutai*), a deeply flawed world creates individuals who, in turn, seek to create something else (the active individual in political processes as with Maruyama).

By the same token, the nation can have no meaning until it is perceived on the human scale –the individual creates and is created by the world. While the overarching *mise en scène*

might be a product of the mental processes of individual characters, these processes are eventually related to ‘achieving’ something –to taking action. Suzuki’s theatre is not simply a celebration of the creation / recreation of individual subjectivity, but a question about the actions this fractured subjectivity might take in the world. This physical aspect of individuality can be seen in Suzuki’s various training methods which focus intensely on each individual experiencing his / her own body as a means of sharpening consciousness both of the body and of the world surrounding the body. The well-documented, rigorous movements, particularly those involving the feet and legs, do not vary from person to person, but this routinization is not the reduplication of an ideal subject, but, instead a routine process that leads to an active subject.

The active individual visible in Suzuki’s training and theories is also visible in the content of his productions. For example, in *Clytemnestra* (an adaptation of several variations of the house of Atreus legends which was performed in various locations from 1983-1987 and survives as a published script and a grainy video) Suzuki greatly expands the trial scene (relative to *The Eumenides*), including a memory portion where Clytemnestra and Agamemnon explain themselves. Tyndareos implores Apollo and Athena to put Electra and Orestes to death, but the final moments of the play consist of Orestes and Electra taking responsibility for their actions and allowing the ghost of Clytemnestra to kill them. Suzuki presents and then removes the possibility of divine intervention or judgement. The humans confront their own worst selves and choose to pay a heavy price for it. Orestes argues that, even though Apollo has proclaimed banishment to be an appropriate punishment.

Suzuki notes that this play follows his *The Trojan Women* ‘conceived in a traditional [Japanese] style’ and *The Bacchae* ‘developed in a Western style’ (Suzuki, 1986, p. 122). He says that Clytemnestra is an ‘attempt –[..]hard to express in words – to break through those other



styles and create a play that shows the relationship between them.’ He argues that both Greece and Japan looked for ‘a god who does not actually exist [who will] spurt forth nonsense as a theatrical reality that pleases an audience’ and that such a desire suggests a society ‘rapidly approaching decadence’ (Ibid). The point Suzuki is making here is not ‘intercultural’ in the sense that this term is deployed in Western analysis. His concern is with the nature of the similarity – not the existence of similarity. To return to Nishida’s work, objects in the field draw their distinction from nothingness, not from difference between themselves. The nihilistic force against which the subjectivity of the characters in this play is formed is, in fact, the desire for a higher, external power to provide shape and form to the notion of subjectivity.

Admittedly, Electra and Orestes’s declaration of their own independent subjectivity leads directly to their deaths, so this individuality is not necessarily a point of celebration – Clytemnestra’s ghost stares vacantly out over the audience instead of celebrating or mourning these deaths, suggesting that no cosmic balance has been restored. This play becomes very human. Two *people*, sans national modifiers, attempt to claim personal responsibility for what they have done and die. The possibility of this being part of a perfect larger plan is suggested and then specifically foreclosed. It would be relatively easy to consider this to be Suzuki’s statement about a universal human condition, which would lead to an argument of interculturalism as a force which highlights those elements of society that, like Barba’s pre-expressive, exist before cultural differentiation. That move, however, ignores the fact that the philosophical context, specifically Nishida’s work, in which Suzuki is working allows for a different notion of similarity and unity. While questions of universality may be usefully applied, another pertinent question in this context is what fills the philosophical space of ‘nothingness’ against which a

dialectical tension might form. This is not about the differences between cultures, but about those forces which are antithetical to the existence of these cultures.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of focusing on the construction of self independently from contrasts with other selves emerges in Suzuki's discussion of the animal energy devoted to existence. The intense physical aspects of Suzuki's training strip away the actor's preconceived notions of being and acting: the actor is left with a body and that body's connection to the earth. The actor can then attempt to reach a core of energy that is the precondition of a separation between being and nothingness. Paul Allain neatly summarises Suzuki's various comments on the objectification of the self, noting that the performer is 'principally in dialogue with [himself] rather than another object or character [Suzuki says that] 'The Impulse to act springs from constantly feeling the impossibility of being oneself'' (Allain 2002, 122). The actor is not imitating another self or some abstract notion of self-hood. Rather the actor is treating himself as the object of exploration through which the self might emerge. Subject and object reflect back in on one another with the subject's perception of the world being the only way the object can be understood even when the object in question is the self. What we see on stage is often the desperate attempt (and failure) of a person to make sense of perception through her own embodied experience.

Suzuki actually makes the madness of the world and the individual into mutually constitutive elements (not unlike being and nothingness in Nishida's work or history and the individual in Maruyama's work): the foreign scripts that possess the mad individual at once provide a distinctive voice and highlight the struggle to express individuality. Rather than individuals constructing a harmonious world, he / she is constructed by a non-harmonious one,

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<sup>4</sup> These questions are substantially different from those posed by scholars exploring the issue of subjectivity in relationship to Western notions of universality. For two critics wrestling with issues of Suzuki's "universalism" in interesting ways see Allain (2002) and Brandon (1990).

which he /she in turn shapes: the intercultural elements of Suzuki's theatre are part of the process of differentiation and unity that form the basis for Suzuki's world. It is only the simultaneous separation and connection of individual and world that allows for growth.

## **Conclusions**

Why use intercultural elements to explore subjectivity, particularly given that Suzuki specifically discusses a Japanese body and subjectivity in his work? One of the core tensions in Western modernity surrounds its relationship to the universality of Enlightenment rationality—European modernity is at once the assumption of universal principles and the rejection of these principles (at least by postmodernity), both of which can be seen in colonial and neocolonial processes. Western criticism of Japanese intercultural theatre has tended to debate the existence of the universal. The universal presents a different model of the wholeness of the world than the Japanese discourses presented above.

The intercultural is a vital component of both identity and theatre debates. Deguchi Norio was the first to direct all of Shakespeare's plays in Japan. He articulates the relationship between Shakespeare and Japan in a particularly nuanced fashion.

For me, making it 'Japanese' is not the ultimate aim. The important thing is to find a place where I and the text can converge. [...] 'Making it Japanese' is already about marking a border where exoticism begins. But I think exoticism is partly due to the ignorance of other nations. [...] today's Japan is only partly traditional Japan. {...} It means that 'Japanese Shakespeare' production cannot be recognized unless we simplify our Japaneseness. I don't think that is universalization; Japanization is simply a paritucularlization (Deguchi, 2010, p. 183).

This enigmatic passage recognizes the multiplicity of cultures in play. In doing so it specifically rejects the idea of the universal and the particular in favor of a contextualized individuality. What makes Shakespeare legible to Deguchi in the modern Japanese context is precisely its interaction with the individual voice. Finding the connection to the 'I' in Shakespeare allows these performances to unify all the traditional, modern, Western, and Eastern elements present in modern Japan.

The difficulty of the passage lies in the fact that it requires us to step outside of the logics of universalism (and resistances to the same) of Western interculturalism. As postcolonial critique has well established, the idea of the universal contains a built-in teleology. Certain cultures are further along the path that all cultures share. The universal is also at odds with the particular, and intercultural theatre can be a bridge between them. Either something belongs to the universal and can be understood through a process of translation or, less often, something belongs to the local and can then be maintained as a sort of artifact within a production. This leads to logics like Pavis' hourglass where source and target cultures are translated into one another through the language of theatre. At its best, Western intercultural theatre is a reminder of the things that do unite humanity in a time when dangerous fractures are emerging around the globe. This same impulse, however, can also be read as a desire to commodify and contain difference. To be clear, these are the struggles that Western heuristics have posed for Western intercultural theatre –these are the problems with which Western intercultural theatre must contend.

It is perhaps not surprising, given Western intercultural theatre's relationship with postmodernism that there is only limited space for the actor as individual within this system: The actor as universalizable body, the actor as transmitter of message –but seldom the psychological

realism of modernist theatre in the West. Works like *Harlem Duets* – an adaptation of *Othello* set in Harlem in three different periods – which may or may not be considered as intercultural theatre – have posed obvious challenges to the universal impulses of the big names in Western intercultural practices by placing racially-marked bodies in contrast to universal ideals. Again, the universal and the particular are at odds in the Western system, and, in the case of *Harlem Duets*, this conflict is played out in literal bodies.

If we replace the logics of universalism with the logics of unity –this whole set of debates changes. Unity from an empty field allows for infinite variation of its subjects, although it requires active agentic subjects to continually recreate and reposition this unity. Unity that comes from the top-down, as seen in Zeami's work or in *kokutai* similarly must be able to account for (or remove) differentiation amongst the bodies it unifies. In either case, ideas from other cultures can, in fact, enter into this unity without disrupting it or losing their foreignness. This sort of interculturalism can maintain difference without violating unity or creating false homogeneity. Again, as Japan's fraught history with Westernization suggests, this is not an easy, straightforward, or always-accepted process, but it is a process that differs substantially from the processes of cross-cultural translation implied by Western intercultural theories. This idea of unity accounts for the reticence of Japanese directors to spell out the intercultural nature of their projects explicitly. The adoption and adaptation of Western materials is not a conflict between 'own' and 'foreign' or between universal and local. It is, to borrow Deguchi's word a 'particularization' of material that belongs within the same, differentiated unity as any other material. It must be digested by the individual and then related back to the world.

As for the actor in this sphere, in order to see an agentic subject in relationship to the world, there must be some differentiation or division within the subject, between subjects, or

between subject and the world. Fracturing is predicated on the possibility of unity: it cannot be broken if it was never whole. Curiously then, as Yukio Ninagawa notes, Japan, a nation that has long rejected the selfish individualism of the West, has a long period of theatrical experimentation that accentuates (if not always positively) questions of individuality (Ninagawa, 2010, p. 211).

What then, is the place of this distinctive form of interculturalism in the next project of Japanese theatre, given that many of the debates over the subject's place in philosophies of nationalism from the 1930s onwards have subsided in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? While Suzuki leaves his mark on contemporary Japanese theatre, it is the next generation like the vernacular plays of Oriza Hirata's Contemporary Colloquial Theatre, the Robot-Human Theatre Project, or Tadashi Kawamura's T Factory that are poised to tackle this new question. If notions of subjectivity are key to understanding the intercultural interactions of contemporary Japanese theatre, what happens to these notions when some of the subjects on stage are non-human? What other types of identities might be included in any possible unities? Are non-humans forming the new intercultural frontier? These questions, emerging as they do from an examination of the distinct concepts presented in Japanese theatre theory, diverge noticeably from the concerns of much Western scholarship and suggest new avenues of research.

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