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Performances of Masculinity in Angura Theatre:

Suzuki Tadashi on the Actress and Satô Makoto's
Abe Sada's Dogs^[1]

Introduction: Koshimaki Osen—Angura Theatre's Transgressive Heroine

The little theatre movement, more commonly known as *angura* (underground) theatre, rose to prominence in Japan during the 1960s and 1970s in denial of the existing modern and new theatre movements. Representative *angura* theatre groups include Suzuki Tadashi's Waseda Shôgekijô (Waseda Little Theatre, 1966), which grew out of Jiyû Butai (Free Stage, 1961), Kara Jûrô's Jôkyô Gekijô (Situation Theatre, 1962), also known as Aka Tendo (Red Tent performances began in 1967), Terayama Shûji's Tenjô Sajiki (1967), and Satô Matoko's Engeki Sentâ 68/71 (Theatre Center 68/71, originally formed as Theatre Center 68 in 1968), otherwise known as Kuro Tendo (Black Tent performances began in 1970). Expressing the rebelliousness of Japanese youth against postwar civil society, these theatre groups at times engaged in scandalous and anarchistic forms of counter-culture that spilled from the arts and culture pages of the newspapers to enliven page three.

In 1968, Hijikata Tatsumi, adopting the name *ankoku butô* (literally, 'dance of darkness') from 1956 for his original performance style, and having already staged a unique form of dance expression that explored sexuality with *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colours; title borrowed from Mishima Yukio's novel) in 1959, performed *Hijikata Tatsumi to nihonjin – nikutai no hanran* (Hijikata Tatsumi and the Japanese – Rebellion of the Body), which had a tremendous impact on the theatre of Terayama Shûji and Kara Jûrô, among others. The avant-garde arts at the time were seeking to reinstate the body and disrupt the order of modern civil society, particularly the institutions, canons, and discourses surrounding sexuality. The keyword was the 'body' and transgressive sexual expression was everywhere in film, theatre, and performance art. Kara Jûrô's *Tokkenteki nikutai-ron* (Essays on the Privileged Body, 1968) was, as the title suggests, a manifesto aimed at reinstating the actor's body. Never failing to provoke its audiences, Kara Jûrô's Situation Theatre embraced the outlandish appearance of

unconventional performers such as Maro Akaji and Yotsuya Simon who personified the 'privileged body.'

Yokoo Tadanori, designer of the poster for the Situation Theatre's 1966 open-air performance of *Koshimaki Osen – bôkyaku-hen* (Petticoat Osen – The Forgotten Chapter) staged at the temporary Haikagura Theatre in the days before their Red Tent performances, described his own sensational theatregoing experience in the following terms:

Koshimaki Osen was not so much theatre as an incident. The theatrical space literally spilled off the stage, with a stark naked Osen up a tree way up on the hill. Police in patrol cars tried to stop the performance, but things only escalated with Kara Jûrô getting together with Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, Hijikata Tatsumi and others in the audience swinging a large sake bottle. There was Kara Jûrô, reality merging with unreality, singing out to the police, 'Why don't ya'll hurry on home and XXXX the missus ...'

Witnessing this play, or rather incident, unfolding before me, I could physically feel the process of art transforming into something criminal and vice versa. For them theatre was without beginning or end. Their very existence was theatre. (Yokoo 1978: np) [2]

People today still talk about the Situation Theatre's legendary Red Tent performances from 1967 centring on Tokyo's Shinjuku district (Senda 1976: 136-138). The Red Tent was like some sort of premodern relic popping up all over Shinjuku, then in the process of changing into an ultramodern city at least in appearance. The Red Tent symbolised the brilliant Kabuki- esque theatrics of Kara Jûrô, who was a self-styled latter-day *kawaramono* (literally 'riverbed person'), a pejorative term meaning 'beggar' used for Kabuki actors during the Edo period.

The *Koshimaki Osen* series of provocative performances, whose very title the likes of which had never before been seen in the history of modern Japanese drama, matched perfectly the feeling of a return to the womb that the Red Tent inspired, pushing home 'the Feminine Principle' that served as the banner of their rebellion. Kara Jûrô himself commented that the Red Tent 'feels like a kind of womb covered in blood. And it's octagonal shape. Something tells me the womb is probably octagon-shaped' (Kara 1980: 402-3).

Reflecting back on the *angura* theatre movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the critic Senda Akihiko observes that, 'Many of the plays were centred around the group's heroine actress and stressed vivid images of women.' Senda cites the radical women played by Ri Reisen, the star actress of Kara Jûrô's Situation Theatre, as a typical example. Ri Reisen's radical transgressiveness was rooted also in her outsider status in Japan as a *zainichi* Korean woman. The production that gave voice to this fact, *Ni-to monogatari* (A Tale of Two Cities, 1972), first performed on the Sogang University

campus in Seoul with South Korea under martial law, chillingly illuminates the invisible histories of alienated people living out of sight in Seoul and Tokyo.

Focusing on Suzuki Tadashi and Satô Makoto, two of the charismatic male leaders of the 60s and 70s little theatre movement, this essay asks what the significance was for them of representing transgressive heroines comparable to the Situation Theatre's Ri Reisen on stage. I look firstly at both Suzuki and Satô's discourses on the actress, before moving on to examine Satô's 1975 play *Abe Sada's Dogs*.

Suzuki Tadashi on the Actress

As leader and director of the Waseda Little Theatre, Suzuki Tadashi had a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve through the medium of theatre. Suzuki theorised his ideas and established an actor training method focused on the actor's corporeality. Under his guidance, the Waseda Little Theatre had a great impact on contemporary Japanese theatre, building their own theatre space in a remote village far removed from Tokyo in opposition to the Tokyo-centred social and cultural structure, and using this space to organise international theatre festivals.

The 1970 performance of *Gekiteki naru mono wo megutte II* (On The Dramatic Passions II) featured the actress Shiraishi Kayoko, who overwhelmed audiences with her intense performances. These performances earned Shiraishi the moniker 'the Mad Actress' and together with the Situation Theatre's Ri Reisen, she became one of the *angura* theatre movement's leading actresses. The critic Senda Akihiko notes that, 'Both Kara and Suzuki were continually breaking new ground in theatre under the banner of the vivid performances of their lead actresses.'

In this sense, the women played by Ri Reisen and Shiraishi Kayoko were not so much real women as ideologised, or extreme, images of women entrusted with the dreams of men (playwrights/directors) intent on giving reality a good shake. To elaborate further, these heroines were new theatrically strategic symbols, or weapons, devised by male playwrights and directors intent on pressuring society, *using circuitry other than political ideology*. (Senda 1997: 381; my emphasis)

Although not entirely clear what Senda means by 'circuitry other than political ideology,' if he was thinking that representations of the heroine could be separated from political ideology, I would suggest that political ideology is also at work in his criticism. As Senda points out, these heroines are the 'theatrically strategic symbols' or 'weapons' of men, a fact that itself conceals a powerful politics. His criticism lacks an analysis from the critical perspective of gender, which would go one step further, and inquire into the intersections of power through which the 'theatrically strategic symbols' or 'weapons' of these male playwrights and directors are established and the meanings they produce.

Suzuki Tadashi and Shiraishi Kayoko were not husband and wife, unlike Kara Jûrô and Ri Reisen. Their relationship was more in the classical director-actress hierarchical mould in the sense that it was the male director who took charge of the intellectual, analytical and integrative directing role, while the actress was charged with exploring the dramatic though corporeal expression. The fact that he was not a playwright allowed Suzuki the freedom to create a collage of lines and scenes taken from a variety of classical texts by the likes of Samuel Becket, Izumi Kyôka and Tsuruya Nanboku, and focus purely on exploring the dramatic through the actress's expression of her own corporeality. In exposing the irrationality and pathos of oppression that lurked unbroken from the pre-war to the postwar in a Japanese society continually in pursuit of rational modern systems of production, Suzuki signified Shiraishi's bodily movement, in which she gravitated intensively downward, as the ultimate dramatic expression.

Suzuki has himself written eloquently about Shiraishi's acting and her corporeal sense as an actress. For instance, he has referred to her acting as 'the manifestation of a latent energy she possessed, normally never fully extended, as a power of concentration over her whole body resulting from being placed in a given relational structure.' Suzuki described this situation as the 'combustion of betrayed life' (cited in Kawamizu 1996: 200). Suzuki saw her acting as the expression of 'an attempt to evoke and manifest a latent carnal sense common to all Japanese' that has been discarded in Japan's modernisation, and he considered the actor's body, and in particular the actress's body, to be 'a repository for a sense and rhythm [once] common to the Japanese community' (Kawamizu 1996: 199).

Kawamizu Mihoko, in a paper entitled 'The Dramatic Woman/Shiraishi Kayoko – Images of the Actress in *Angura* Theatre,' presents a superb critical examination of the way in which Suzuki Tadashi and Watanabe Tamotsu's discourses regarding *On the Dramatic Passions II* perceive the body and performance of the actress in the *angura* theatre movement.

Kawamizu, whose critical perspective and inquiry is one of the most pointed critiques to date of Suzuki Tadashi's discourses on theatre, argues that 'For [Suzuki], the performance of the actress, or rather Shiraishi Kayoko, was a tool with which to critically bring to light a corporeality controlled by the institution of male 'rational' corporeality/logos, which is itself an illusion' (Kawamizu, 1996: 200).

Suzuki Tadashi's tendency in his discourses on theatre and the actress is to reduce the relation between woman and man to the sexual dichotomy of female/male. He characteristically approaches theatre, acting, and the body in terms of binary oppositions, dividing the Masculine Principle and the Feminine Principle between male and female in a way that places the analytical in opposition to intuition and instinct, and the rational in opposition to pathos. For example, he associates the 'corpulence of emotion' with the feminine and the 'violence of logic' with the masculine, and declares that 'the female performer tends to be both more sensitive and

more faithful to the carnal physiology that forms the basis of acting' (Cited in Kawamizu, 1996: 199).

Both Suzuki and Watanabe see in Shiraishi's performances the uncovering, manifesting, and reliving of the 'pathos of the unhappy woman in Japan,' which they conceptualise as essential and universal. Their critical discourses represent 'a renewed institutionalisation' of the actress's body, and can be viewed as constructions of the actress's body, which is 'made up by men and fills a chasm capable of harbouring the irrationality of pathos and madness' (Kawamizu, 1996: 200). Suzuki and Watanabe's critical discourses share 'a directionality that deifies Shiraishi Kayoko's body as a place filled with 'emotional,' 'irrational,' and 'archetypal' power' (Kawamizu, 1996: 205).

Suzuki and Watanabe ended up replicating their own image of women when they sought to confer meaning centred on Shiraishi Kayoko's body. The image of women they replicate is also an historical view of Japan. They project a view of history in which women in Japan, having been betrayed, lived unhappy lives and lived hysteria, and they read Shiraishi Kayoko along this axis. (Kawamizu, 1996: 206)

Missing from these critical discourses is the 'radiant face' of the actress who performed the madness and irrational frenziness. Suzuki and Watanabe disregard her subjectivity and ultimately fail to see Shiraishi Kayoko for herself.

The sexual dichotomy in Suzuki's discourses on the actress is most plainly set forth in an essay entitled 'The New Actress' (in Suzuki 1973a: 159-166). In this essay, Suzuki develops his arguments with quotes from film director Michelangelo Antonioni, who believed 'It's best not to teach an actress anything,' and Mori Ôgai, whose opinion was that 'A woman who can tell her husband's underwear from that of another man is splendidly educated' (Suzuki, 1973a: 160-161). Suzuki persistently asserts that the actress herself need not be involved in discussions about the script's interpretation and the ideology of the work, nor partake in any intellectual conceptualising (Suzuki, 1973a: 160). While subscribing to the well-worn discourse that 'it's enough to be physically aware of what's going on,' Suzuki claims that Shiraishi Kayoko's 'innate instinct for telling what her body is and isn't receptive to is unnaturally developed,' and that this is a requisite for being an actress (Suzuki, 1973a: 162-163). Nor is he disapproving of the 'fast-moving directors' who practice the doctrine that 'you don't know a woman until you sleep with her' in order to truly communicate with their actresses (Suzuki, 1973a: 161). In short, Suzuki makes no attempt to critique the privileged position of male film and stage directors who wholly objectify the actress.

Suzuki Tadashi on Abe Sada's Narrative

Suzuki uses Abe Sada in his writing as a means of reinforcing his arguments (Suzuki 1973a; 1994: 233-261). Infamous for having strangled her lover Ishida Kichizô and cut off his penis in 1936, Abe Sada continues to be a popular subject of poetry, books, and

films in postwar Japan. Films that deal with the subject include Tanaka Noboru's Nikkatsu Roman Porno *Jitsuroku Abe Sada* (A Woman Called Abe Sada, 1975), Ôshima Nagisa's *Ai no koriida* (In the Realm of the Senses, 1976), and the film version of Watanabe Junichi's best-selling novel *Shitsurakuen* (A Lost Paradise; serialized in the *Nikkei Shinbun*, 1995-96) directed by Morita Yoshimitsu (*Lost Paradise*, 1997). Apparently no woman ignites male sexual fantasies quite like Abe Sada. She is often portrayed romantically as the liberated woman free from sexual taboos, or as the sadistic castrating femme fatale who severs her lovers' penises. She is the 'bad woman' in possession of a sexually transgressive power. While Suzuki has never put Abe Sada on stage, he uses her testimony and narrative as material for substantiating his theorising of the actress.

Commenting on perceived 'idiosyncrasies in the narrative' of Abe Sada's testimony in the minutes to her preliminary hearing, Suzuki assesses that 'Her words appear to have kept remarkably to the facts' (Suzuki, 1973a: 266). Her testimony is 'extremely specific, and has the charm of something composed solely of physiological sensorial memories' (Suzuki, 1973a: 269). According to Suzuki, Abe Sada keeps from ideally or abstractly conceptualising her own experiences in her testimony, and also manages to avoid giving in to everyday commonsense and the language of inherited value systems. This is made possible, for one, by the fact that her 'thinking is developed while always sticking to concrete/sensory situations, and is not so much rational as affective and emotional' (Suzuki, 1973a: 271). Suzuki argues that her astounding narrative 'just happens to be conferred by the fact that Abe Sada is a woman completely without an awareness approaching the concept of a subject.'

Suzuki's assertive hypothesis on Abe Sada shares with his views on the acting of Shiraishi Kayoko a disregard for the female subject in that he completely refuses to acknowledge the existence of a subjective consciousness in a woman testifying about a crime. Furthermore, he generalises this expression of a personal experience that was so difficult for Abe Sada to verbalise by saying that her 'words touch on a universal pathos in the form of a dynamis present in the depths of Man' (Suzuki, 1973a: 276). Suzuki claims, in what is all but a tautology, that this was made possible 'precisely because they are narrated for the most part as words of the body' (Suzuki, 1973a: 276).

In Suzuki's conceptualisation of what he calls 'words of the body' resides an unsubstantiated essentialising discourse that fails to critically examine the concept of the female body most deeply and firmly institutionalised in language, and which endlessly constructs a 'universal pathos' of the feminine. For instance, Suzuki claims that:

One might even say that the power of her words/narrative is mediated by a sexual rhythm of the body supported by libido. Her words/narrative mediated by this rhythm are elevated to the level of an emotional posturing that attempts at one stroke to sublimate the contradiction

between the instinctive urges of Man and an environment that suppresses those urges. (Suzuki, 1973a: 277)

Admittedly the Abe Sada incident, being of a sexual nature involving sexual play in the carnal relations between lovers culminating in murder and castration, lends itself to representation as 'an act governed by a physiology peculiar to women.' However, Suzuki, who sees in Abe Sada 'the existential archetype of the actress,' expands the sexual context for the actress, and reduces the rhythms of the female body to this sexualised context. He ends up repeatedly stressing the need for the actress to procure 'a rhythm of the body that can only be experienced as a certain form of madness—a madness where one is obsessed with one's self' (Suzuki, 1973a: 280).

Suzuki and Satô's Discussion on the Actress in *Dôjidai Engeki*

The viewpoint that regards Abe Sada as an archetype of the actress and positions the significance of actresses of this mould in relation to problems existing in Japan's social structure surfaces once more in Suzuki and Satô's 1973 dialogue for the quarterly journal *Dôjidai Engeki* (Contemporary Theatre, Suzuki 1973b: 131). Suzuki talks again about the existence of the Masculine Principle and the Feminine Principle in theatre, which he assigns respectively to the director and the actor. He points to the impasse in contemporary civil society caused by 'patriarchy (the Masculine Principle),' and expresses hope in the capacity of the actress, within a cultural context dominated by 'non-physical language' and the 'non-physical male world,' to 'help us manifest the true popular verbleness that we have lost' (Suzuki, 1973b: 128). The most salient point of their discussion is Satô's allusion to the fact that Suzuki's sexual dichotomy is itself both symptomatic of and one of the problems with modernistic discourses.

Satô: Theatrically speaking, modern theatre makes use of this false bottom. It's as if the Feminine Principle has been deftly incorporated as a substructure, and then over that has been forcibly grafted a non-feminine abstract logic. The different meanings produced as a result are, in fact, what make analogising possible. We tend to confer a certain universality on the actress, perceiving her, for instance, as some sort of popular existence. But this is because the stage—and this might be because we're looking at things with our male gaze—is essentially a place where the individuality of the actress's body stands out. In this respect, it remains extremely unclear as to how we should balance the comprehensiveness that goes with this sense of commonality against something like the individuality of the female body. (Suzuki 1973b: 128)

Satô, in contrast to Suzuki, at least shows an awareness of the need to question the negotiations and relationality deeply incongruous with the individuality that either gets pushed aside or otherwise brought to the fore albeit in a different light, when femininity and masculinity are universalised in this way. I refer particularly to the individuality and verbleness of the female body, or female subjectivity, which has been entrusted with and burdened by this universality. Also, regarding the representation of women as the

‘devilish woman,’ for instance, Satô acknowledges the reality that, ‘Women are, on the one hand, being increasingly privileged as the ‘devilish woman,’ while at the same time being effaced’ (Suzuki 1973b: 129). The framework of language and thought that privileges these women—the actress, the devilish woman, the whore, the fateful woman—through discrimination is deeply rooted.

Also included in the feature issue on the actress in the journal *Dôjidai Engeki* was a round table discussion ‘Zadankai: joyû-ron no tame no bunkashi’ (A Cultural History for Theorizing the Actress) between Imao Tetsuya, Kogarimai Ken, and Saeki Ryûkô, in which they demonstrate a common understanding of the performer as prostitute, in reference to premodern Kabuki actors (Imao et al., 1973: 25-34). They agree, for instance, that *onnagata* (male actors who play female roles) without experience as a male prostitute were no good (Imao et al., 1973: 28). Imao continues:

Theatre always had a certain kind of vulgarity of which death was also a part, and it was the actors who bore this role. Now we have truly excellent bourgeois actresses and actors who lack the elements of sex and death. But they’re so boring to watch. Take the [soft porn] actress Tanaka Mari, for instance, she’s just too upbeat. But then you have [striptease artist] Ichijô Sayuri who, in contrast to Tanaka Mari, has slowly faded out of the picture while the court cases have been going on. It’s like she’s vanished into the night. (Imao et al., 1973: 32)

Imao goes on to comment that, ‘Strippers have something that makes them more than just pieces of meat. The difference, I think, is their sluttiness.’ Kogarimai backs this up by saying, ‘Actresses probably need a bit of sluttiness to begin with’ (Imao et al., 1973: 33). In short, they repeatedly emphasise that sluttiness is essentially required in an actress. Around the same period, the monthly journal *Shingeki* (New Theatre) ran a feature issue on the stripper, which included Satô Makoto’s ‘Gankyû-shaburi’ (Eyeball Sucking), a novel essay looking at the relation between actress and stripper (Satô 1979: 25-39).

While Satô’s stance on the actress is not all that different from the others, he does appear to eschew naturalising/essentialising the categories ‘woman,’ ‘actress,’ ‘stripper.’ This is evident also from the fact that in his own musings on the actress, Satô considers the stripper alongside women in other occupations (Satô 1979: 33-34). For example, he considers the stripper’s familiar gesticulations and calling out to get the crowd going as being no different from a tour bus guide or a salesperson at a local store. And yet Satô also thinks that the look of a ‘lost child’ that (he feels) the stripper inadvertently reveals to the lighting technician and other staff is no different from the absentmindedly distracted expression of the factory girl who knows her work inside out. Juxtaposing the working conditions of the stripper with those of the female factory worker involves a distancing effect of sorts. At the same time, Satô also finds himself being ‘embarrassed’ by this, and feeling ‘regret.’ In other words, Satô does not privilege or universalise the ‘womanity’ of women in the way Suzuki does. Rather, he appears

to be liberated from a privileging or apotheosising point of view, although, interestingly, he is also aware of himself feeling disheartened by the deromanticisation he partakes in.

Satô Makoto's Abe Sada's Dogs: Her Castrating Power is Her Subversive Power?

I would now like to shift focus from Suzuki Tadashi to Satô Makoto, the leading playwright and director at the Black Tent Theatre, which advocated theatre as both revolution and activism. His aversion to the patriarchy and familial collectivity seen in the leaders of other theatre groups led him to give his group the businesslike name 'Theatre Center 68/69,' which was the precursor to the Black Tent. Satô has described his motivation at the time as being to 'thoroughly explore the subjectivity and sociality of the actor in his relations with those social structures that have neither colour nor warmth' (Satô in Senda 1983: 264). He has also been critical of Suzuki Tadashi's discourses on the actress. Using the personage of Abe Sada applied also by Suzuki as suitable material for his theorising of the actress, Satô Makoto wrote and staged *Kigeki Abe Sada* (Abe Sada: A Comedy, 1973; later reworked as *Abe Sada's Dogs*, 1975), as the first of a trilogy of plays known collectively as *Kigeki Shôwa no sekai* (The World of Comedic Shôwa, 1975). [3]

The critic Senda Akihiko is full of praise for *The World of Comedic Shôwa*, commenting that, 'One can state emphatically that this was a remarkable dramatic play, one of the outstanding works of late, all but worthy of being described as 'lofty'' (Senda, 1976: 179).

This trilogy aimed to *recapitulate, without sentiment or romanticism, the tragic gap between the people and the revolution in Shôwa history* standing at the 50th year of Shôwa with an awareness so sober as to be *dispassionate*, while primarily engaging the emperor system. This was, as it were, the point of Satô Makoto's unique Shôwa history told from the perspective of a dispassionate 'comedy.' We were here able to share a new type of contemporary historical drama constituted only by the multiplicity of the 'essence of things,' whose makeup and sensitivity differs completely from so-called conventional 'new theatre'-esque everyday realism and historicism.

In *Abe Sada's Dogs* for example, driven along by the nostalgic melody of Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (the effect being truly wonderful), the Shôwa period, which eventually passed without even the passion of Abe Sada, as *the epitome of the masses*, laying a finger on the Emperor (the play ends with the Shôwa Emperor dying a peaceful death!), is established amid the cold fact of the 'absence of revolution.' (Senda, 1976: 180-181, emphasis added)

Senda Akihiko also talks about the vivid portrayal in Satô's play of the heroine Abe Sada, or *atashi* as she calls herself using the feminine personal pronoun for 'I':

As a 'wind-up writer' ([editor and critic] Tsuno Kaitarô's description of Satô) with a very critical mind, Satô Makoto likes to depict not real men of flesh and blood but symbolic men. ... In *Abe Sada's Dogs*, Abe Sada, who in 1936 strangled her lover and walked around with his severed penis, is reborn as *atashi* (played by Arai Jun). *Atashi* thus assumes *the dual symbolism of being* both the transgressive woman who cut off 'my man's thingy' and part of the masses that would never turn a blade on 'our honoured Emperor.'

The heroines that Satô Makoto portrays with dollish charm stand at the point where the sensibility of the urbane writer given to decadence and eroticism competes subtly with the unimpassioned eye of social criticism that keeps this in check. *While Satô Makoto's heroines do not give off the strong disruptive energy of the women moulded by Kara Jûrô and Suzuki Tadashi, they do have much in common in terms of the ideologised image of woman born from male sentiment.* (Senda in *Gendai Nihon* 1997: 383; my emphasis).

As leading playwright and director at the Black Tent, Satô Makoto wanted to practice theatre as activism and revolution in Brechtian fashion. His plays create critical discourses directed towards a postwar world that appears to be but is not discontinuous with Shôwa modernity, or rather, towards the true identity of that which continually causes the revolution to abort, asking 'Why did the revolution did not take hold in Japan?' The plays are threaded through masterfully with intellectual, analytical, and critical perspectives. They are allegorical plays critiquing the modernity of Shôwa, though one wonders what the morality is driving at when the heroine of the allegory is *atashi*, aka Abe Sada. In particular, we need to examine closely in relation to the constructions of gender/sexuality, both the 'awareness so sober as to be dispassionate' noted by Senda that is fixated on the 'absence of revolution,' and the representation of the heroine imbued with a 'dual symbolism' as the epitome of the masses who are transgressive sexually but not institutionally.

Abe Sada's Dogs is set in 1936 with the imperial capital under martial law following the February 26 Incident. A slide projector is used to displays the words: 'In the imperial capital, women became pregnant one after another' (Satô 1976:16). The action takes place on the streets of the peculiarly named Safety Razor Township, as well as in a holding room for expectant mothers and on the showboat 'Singapore' moored on the Sumida River, which operates as a drinking hole cum brothel. The keeper of order in Safety Razor Township is a photographer who uses his camera as a replicating device to reproduce stability in the township. The Photographer's hegemony is threatened by Chitose Shôchikubai, the son of the proprietor of the holding room for expectant mothers, and also by *atashi*. Shôchikubai, who has just returned from time spent in Paris, is suicidal and conceals a pistol in a purple wrapping cloth (*furoshiki*). The heroine *atashi*, aka Abe Sada, carries around her 'man's thingy' also wrapped in a purple wrapping cloth. The story develops around how these two

identical wrapping cloths—one concealing a gun, the other concealing a severed penis—end up getting swapped. The main focus of the play is thus on whether the castrating power of 'Abe Sada' will be used to subvert the established order as a result of the gun, which represents the danger of revolutionary violence, passing into the hands of *atashi* who would then be armed, so to speak, as the 'true revolutionary,' or whether the Photographer, as keeper of Safety Razor Township, will use her sexual castrating power to maintain the status quo. [4]

At the 2005 AAS conference held in Chicago, Christine Marran gave a very interesting paper entitled 'So Bad She's Good: The Masochist's Heroine in Postwar Japan,' in which she critiques *Abe Sada's Dogs* as glorifying neither the heroine's act of castration performed as part of sadistic sexual play nor the masochism of the man who is her willing participant (Marran 2005). This is contrasted with Ôshima Nagisa, who portrays these acts as anti-establishment behaviour signalling a withdrawal from dominant society. As Marran points out, perversion does not in itself constitute an act of rebellion. Marran argues that the masochistic sexual behaviour of the male protagonists in *In the Realm of the Senses* and *A Lost Paradise* is not merely passive, with both Ôshima and Watanabe Junichi reading agency and subjectivity into the male protagonists' willingness to turn their backs on the social system and actively participate in sexual play with sadistic women, and appraising this as rebellion against civil society. On the contrary, says Marran, Ôshima and Watanabe are clearly seen to glorify and romanticise not only the sexually transgressive woman Abe Sada, but also the masochistic sexual behaviour of her male partner.

As both Marran and David G. Goodman keenly observe, the male masochism depicted by Satô is, by contrast, treated as a predisposition that promotes one's transformation into a dog submissive to the military system of emperor-system fascism.

Will you lap up my pee for me? Will you wear a collar and go wherever I go? And will you obey my whim whenever I feel the urge? (Satô 1976: 113)

For *atashi* a dog means a sex slave. When her caressing hand touches Shôchikubai's backside, which has sprouted a tail, she 'is startled ... recoiling with a look of terror.' A metaphorical dog was what *atashi* wanted, but Shôchikubai ends up turning into a real dog. (Goodman, 1983: 180)

As Goodman also accurately points out, Abe Sada's allure as a femme fatale in search of a sexually obedient dog is used for supporting, reinforcing, and ultimately reproducing the status quo.

The process by which the Photographer neutralizes the danger presented by *atashi* and in fact ends up using her, involves her in a secret ceremony of death and rebirth that symbolizes and ensures the historical

duration of Safety Razor Township, aka Japan. As with the Daijôsai ceremony signifying the continuance of the emperor system and commencing with the man who will be emperor getting down on his hands and knees in front of the emperor's spirit (a goddess?) and howling, the ceremony for ensuring the duration of the status quo in Safety Razor Township ruled by the Photographer also commences with howling. The Photographer, having been shot, howls like a real dog, *tennô heika banzai!* – Long Live the Emperor! – and holds out the chain of the collar around his neck to *atashi*. In this way he pays homage to the goddess that enables his death and rebirth. ... She is no longer merely *atashi*. Nor is she the anonymous sexual eccentric that Ôshima Nagisa portrays. Nor the Abe Sada who could embody the opposing pole to power through placing sensuality above all else. *Atashi is the Abe Sada who represents the ultimate expression of female sensuality and plays an essential role in the secret ceremony for reproducing the transhistorical status quo that ensures the historical duration of the emperor system, or rather Japan.* (Goodman, 1983: 192; emphasis added)

In many postwar Japanese narratives, Abe Sada is romanticised as the revolutionary transgressive woman. However, when one considers the context upon which Satô Makoto sets his critical sights, namely, the masochism of emperor-system fascism, the representation of Abe Sada in Satô's play necessarily becomes ambivalent. After all, glorifying the transgressiveness of a femme fatale who possesses the power to castrate is no easy matter. Moreover, the men seduced by Abe Sada and turned into obedient dogs of the system by means of masochistic pleasure are antithetical to the anti-establishment rebel that Ôshima glorifies.

I agree with Marran that the play 'treats male masochism as the libidinal fantasmatic supporting masculine totalitarian politics, not as disrupting them,' and 'counters any notion that masochistic desire displaces patriarchal relations suggesting rather that it is fundamental to such a structure especially in its exaggerated form in militarism.' Regarding Satô's portrayal of the transgressive heroine, however, I hesitate to agree with Marran's conclusion that, 'even Satô Makoto, like so many postwar writers, cannot resist fetishising the transgressive woman and treating the sexual female figure as that counter-hegemonic figure par excellence—a woman who is so bad that she is good.'

While Abe Sada is certainly portrayed as a transgressive heroine in Satô's play, she is not romanticised or idealised as she has been in other films and narratives. The sexual female figure in the play is also treated as the heroine despite her transgressiveness, opening her up for exploitation by the Photographer in the interests of maintaining the militaristic system. Her 'perversion' works to reproduce many faithful dog-like soldiers who sacrifice themselves to the fascistic system through their masochistic sexual fantasies. Satô makes impressive use of the Brechtian alienation effect in depicting the

transgressive heroine, who neither understands the power structure and dominant ideologies nor is aware of her potential to castrate (subvert) the system.

Atashi is provocatively attractive yet not subversive when she says, 'It was my man's thingy that I cut off. It wasn't the Emperor's' (Satô 1976: 12). By denying that she severed the emperor's penis, she dares to hint at the very (im)possibility of severing this revered member, although her admission seems to reveal an ambivalence of sorts. Satô Makoto has commented that the Japanese imperialist/militarist machine itself produces a kind of masochistic pleasure. In *Abe Sada's Dogs*, his depiction of the transgressive heroine in parallel with the militarist machine suggests that she might work in complicity to produce this masochistic pleasure. The title of the play, however, reveals Satô's critical focus to be more on those male masochists who would gladly give up their subjectivity and masculinity, as he explains:

This is just my impression, but from the word 'Shôwa' I feel an intense masochism, which I perceive as manifesting naturally. I was aware of this as a main theme particularly with *Abe Sada's Dogs*. ... German fascism has a sadistic element about it. Militarism under the emperor system is different from Nazism in that it's extremely masochistic. (Satô in Senda 1983: 276).

Treating the militarism of the emperor system as more masochistic than sadistic, or more maternal/feminine than masculine, does not necessarily entail the possibility of disrupting the construction and representation of gender based on the sexual dichotomy. Rather, there appears to be a kind of dichotomous and orientalist representation of gender at work in this intuitive view of Satô's that reads Japanese fascism as maternal/feminine in contrast to the masculinity of Western fascism. If so, we need to look at what is performatively constructed by this play in which Satô critiques both the 'sensuality' of *atashi*, aka Abe Sada, who is complicit in the reproduction of this system, and the masochism of the men loyal to the system.

One of the reasons why Satô wanted some critical distance from the transgressive heroine was his questioning of the absence during the Shôwa period of major counter-hegemonic attempts to subvert the fanatic system. Another reason, not explicitly represented, was perhaps his desire to place far greater focus on the construction of male rather than female subjectivity when envisaging subversion. Of course, this does not mean that the male revolutionary subject is specifically represented in *Abe Sada's Dogs*. Rather, the men who yield to the emperor-system fascism of the 1930s are represented in the play as obedient dogs caught up in the military system. In short, this play examines the failure of these men who submit to emperor-system fascism and the victory of the anti-revolution from the perspective of male masochism, introducing sexual representation as a representational strategy.

We need to problematise Satô's imparting of a sense of allegory through his embodying and symbolising of Abe Sada as 'the ultimate expression of female sensuality,' who

'plays an essential role in the secret ceremony for reproducing the transhistorical status quo,' as Goodman points out. Viewing the militaristic system of emperor-system fascism as masochistic, Satô critically constructs Abe Sada's transgressive, subversive, and castrating power, not as institutionally subversive, but as complicit in reproducing and reinforcing this system, and consequently as the 'ultimate expression of female sensuality,' depriving men of their subjectivity and manliness. I would suggest that rather than simply pointing out, as Senda does, that Satô Makoto's heroine is 'the ideologised image of woman born from male sentiment,' we need to look closely at the performative effect of this ideologisation from the critical perspective of gender.

Brecht's Deromanticisation and Benjamin's Historical Materialism

Satô's critical focus reminds me of the hero of one of Brecht's early plays, *Drums in the Night* (1922). Andreas Kragler is a soldier who has turned his back on the class struggle and returned to his comfortable petit bourgeois life with his fiancée ('despite her betrayal of him and being 'damaged goods'[]', as Brecht notes in his postscript to the play, Brecht 1968: 5). Abe Sada, like the anti-heroic hero of Brecht's play, is similarly deromanticised in Satô's work.

To fully grasp Satô Makoto's unimpassioned critique of both the abortion of the possibility of revolution in the modern nation state of Japan and the 'sterility' of the Shôwa period, we need also to consider the critical element in Brecht's play directed towards the petit bourgeois hero, who Satô himself mentions in the postscript to the published version of *Abe Sada's Dogs* (Satô 1976: 211). At the end of the play, Kragler challenges the audience, who have become absorbed in the performance, shouting 'Don't stare so romantically!' while smashing a drum against a paper moon used as a stage prop to reveal that it is only made of paper (Brecht 1968: 166). With his representation of Abe Sada, Satô attempts something approaching Brecht's portrayal of the petit bourgeois hero Kragler, who defends his apathy by saying, 'the pig returns to the pig pen' (Brecht 1968: 166).

Atashi's admission in Satô's play that, 'It was my man's thingy that I cut off. It wasn't the Emperor's,' comes across as the rough equivalent of 'the pig returns to the pig pen.' Conversely, this line, which implicitly touches on the treasonous possibility of castrating the 'Son of Heaven' (*tenshi*), could be read as expressing the rebelliousness of the masses (women) at the bottom of the social pile. Fellow playwright and director Ôta Shôgo has criticised this representation of Abe Sada, stating emphatically, 'That's a line you'd never hear Abe Sada say' (Ôta 1975: 178-179). Ôta also dismisses the swapping of the penis for a gun in the middle of play as a cheap ploy (Ôta 1975: 179).

Had Suzuki Tadashi directed his own play about Abe Sada, he would probably have condensed for the stage her narrative that appears 'to have kept remarkably to the facts,' with as few changes as possible. In other words, given the chance, Suzuki (and Ôta) would likely have focused on staging universal symbolic representations of the people and the feminine by probing deeply into Abe Sada's popular consciousness and female sexuality.

Satô Makoto's interest, however, lies elsewhere. To decipher his objectives one needs to look both to Brecht and to Walter Benjamin, who opened the door of the dramatic arts for Satô.

When one thinks about the 'sterility' of the Shôwa period in terms of allowing the revolution to be aborted, the methodology of *Abe Sada's Dogs* appears to be deeply linked to Benjamin's discourse when he derides the image of man who drains himself through debauchery, 'expending his energy' (and as a result becoming impotent), as not being the true revolutionary materialist (Goodman, 1983: 176-177). [5]

Satô quotes the following passage from 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' as the epigraph to his play:

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the 'eternal' image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. (Benjamin, 1968: 262)

However, we should not forget that Benjamin goes on in the third and final sentence of this paragraph to further elaborate his view of history and his revolutionary comprehension of the past that intervenes in the present:

The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called 'Once upon a time' in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history. (Benjamin, 1968: 262)

Of course, the words 'whore,' 'bordello,' and 'man enough to blast open' are not Benjamin's unique expressions, but metaphors often relied on by male writers when discussing the power to disrupt the continuum of history. Rather than taking these common metaphors at face value, however, we need to keep in mind that even 'the most fantastically critical, counter-hegemonic playwrights' (Marran, 2005) and writers are not free from gender-biased conceptions of subversion. Satô Makoto is still very different from filmmakers, such as Ôshima Nagisa, who are quick to romanticise and glorify the sexually dominant woman and her masochistic lover in order to serve their imaginings of an anti-authoritarian, anti-imperialist Japanese masculinity.

Satô and the Black Tent's revolutionary theatre was an attempt to critically re-examine the history of *yokusan taisei* (literally, the totalitarian political system in support of the emperor) whose establishment could not be fully resisted before and during the war. This approach was fuelled by an awareness of the need to confront this system in which the pre-war (the past) still had dominance in the postwar. Grounded in the reality of the 1960s and 1970s, this was an attempt to blast open the absence of revolution, or

the continuum of the illusion of a transhistorical Japanese character. In this sense, it was a revolutionary attempt to overcome reality through the negative medium of the anti-revolutionary past. Thus, the revolutionary left's tradition of envisaging the true revolutionary as masculine, as evident in the above quote from Benjamin, is seen to be carried on in counter-culture movements such as *angura* theatre by the men of the new left from the 60s to 70s, who were at the same time dispassionately aware of the revolutionary subject's absence in Shōwa history.

Goodman observes that Satō Makoto, in his trilogy of plays *The World of Comedic Shōwa*, tries to be the man that Benjamin describes as 'man enough to blast open the continuum of history' (Goodman, 1983: 168). Goodman, who is sympathetic to Satō Makoto and his work, and participated with Satō in the alternative theatre activities of the Black Tent, is not being ironic here. He and Satō sincerely imagined the revolution as taking place in Japan. For them the 'true revolutionary subject' could only be envisioned as antithetical to those men who yield to the status quo like obedient dogs. Not that this male revolutionary subject should be specifically represented in *Abe Sada's Dogs*. This would be counterproductive as a form of theatrical expression. Rather than putting a revolutionary hero on stage and presenting a self-contained drama, *Abe Sada's Dogs* is revolutionary in the sense that it provides a dispassionate critical representation of the past without romanticising, and encourages the audience to confront the reality they are living in the now. This revolutionary act is, metaphorically speaking, a performance of masculinity in which the playwright/director/critic Satō and Goodman employ the 'energy' used by Benjamin's (male) historical materialist to blast open the continuum of history.

Emperor-system fascism, which Satō views as being extremely masochistic, is itself critically represented by identifying the men's lack of resistance to this system with their sexual masochism. Also, *atashi's* sexual allure and castrating power is represented as transgressive 'female sensuality' rather than as a subversive force. In contrast, the construction of the subversive revolutionary subject who is 'man enough' to blast open the masochistic maternal/feminine system is accomplished performatively.

In *Abe Sada's Dog*, the defeat of both male masochism and female sensuality is implied as an allegorical ideal. Male and female sexuality, appearing to have deviated sexually, is used and recycled by the system. The result is a performative act in which the emperor-system fascism of the Shōwa period and the victory of the anti-revolution are explained, this being directly connected to the proposition of Brecht and Benjamin's critical materialist. The deromanticisation of both the male masochist and the sexually libertine 'bad woman'/femme fatale is thus linked in *Abe Sada's Dog* to the construction of the critical materialist/male revolutionary subject as the playwright's unseen performative desire.

In Place of a Conclusion

This short essay could not possibly hope to cover the entire spectrum of theatre performances and discourses concerning the 1960s and 1970s *angura* little theatre movement from the critical perspective of gender and sexuality. Rather than touching on the diverse theatre groups and discourses of their leaders, I have chosen to examine only Suzuki Tadashi and Satô Makoto on the basis of their discourses on the actress and one of Satô's plays. While Suzuki and Satô differ greatly in terms of theatrical practice, they (and numerous other male intellectuals) share an uncommon interest in Abe Sada and her bizarre crime perpetrated during the early Shôwa period of the 1930s. Comparing Suzuki and Satô on their portrayal of Abe Sada is impossible since Suzuki has never adapted the Abe Sada incident for the stage. However, in terms of analysing their respective discourses on the actress and dramatisation of the 'bad woman,' there is, as argued above, obvious significance in linking Suzuki's citing of Abe Sada to bolster his discourses on the actress with Satô's actual staging of a play based on the Abe Sada incident, which equally fascinated him despite his critical stance on Suzuki's discourses and methods.

Suzuki's discourses on the actress were intended to critique Japanese modernisation through the medium of theatre. However, the essentialist sexual dichotomy underlying his approach prevents him from questioning the workings of power that are involved in the institutionalisation of gender/sexuality and deeply rooted in language and the body. Perceiving in Abe Sada's narrative sexual rhythms of the female body very different from rational analysis, and essentialising/universalising this as the Feminine Principle does not go beyond the framework of modern knowledge, but instead constructs male spirituality in binary opposition to female corporeality. In this sense, Suzuki's discourses may themselves be seen as performances in the construction of masculinity.

Satô, meanwhile, shows a critical awareness of discourses on the actress grounded in the essentialist sexual dichotomy, and his examination of the masochism of men who yield to emperor-system fascism eschews any glorification of Abe Sada's transgressiveness. The result is that *Abe Sada's Dogs* depicts subversive impotence as the masochism of men who yield to emperor-system fascism, in an allegorical style that produces an alienation effect, in reference to Brecht and Benjamin. If, as argued above, one takes into account Satô's assumption that emperor system fascism is masochistic, or maternal/feminine, the defeat of male masochism represented in this allegorical play can be read as a yearning for the true revolutionary subject as the construction of masculinity in the performative.

In *Abe Sada's Dogs*, Satô stays firmly focused on the historical failure of the male masochists, turned into obedient dogs of the system, by using feminine sexual transgressivity in the reproduction of emperor-system fascism, not as a dangerous subversive force, but as a tool that literally castrates men, and by exposing male masochism to be literally impotent, having submitted to the status quo in a way that

negates any subversive potential. In short, subversive impotence is tied to male masochism, establishing a schematic in which male masochism is equated with sexual impotence, which is in turn equated with subversive impotence. Although a brilliant critical allegory, this fact reveals the construction of subjectivity and masculinity to which Satô's Black Tent aspired in their revolutionary theatre. Of course, not all of the Black Tent's theatre performances construct the true revolutionary subject as masculine. Nevertheless, through critically examining representations of gender/sexuality focusing on *Abe Sada's Dogs*, it is still possible to identify, in a theatre movement whose *raison d'être* was to sharply criticise the historical realities of the consolidation of emperor-system fascism and the failure of the revolution in Japanese modernity, performances of masculinity that carry on the revolutionary left's tradition of envisaging the true revolutionary subject as masculine.

Notes

[1] This essay is to be included in a book that examines other important *angura* theatre groups in order to reach an overall critical assessment of this cultural movement through gendering their productions and theatre criticism about them.

[2] The section is cited in Senda Akihiko's bibliographical essay on Kara Jûrô in *Kara Jûrô zenshû* (The Complete Works of Kara Jûrô, vol.1, Tokyo: Tôjusha, 1980): 398. David G. Goodman has done pioneering critical work on *angura* theatre posters (see *Angura: Posters of the Japanese Avant-Garde*, 1999). The reader is also referred to Vera Mackie's essay in this issue of *Performance Paradigm*.

[3] The trilogy comprises Satô's *Abe Sada no inu* (*Abe Sada's Dogs*, 1975, *Kigeki Abe Sada* [Abe Sada: A Comedy], 1973), *Kinema to kaijin* (*Cinema and the Monster*, 1976), *Buranki-goroshi Shanhai no haru* (*The Killing of Blanqui, Spring in Shanghai*, 1979).

[4] For an in-depth analysis see Goodman, David G. 'Fukusei no higi/nureba toshite no daijôsai – *Abe Sada no inu*' (The Secret Ceremony of Reproduction/The Daijôsai Ceremony as a Sex Scene: *Abe Sada's Dogs*) in *Fujisan mieta – Satô Makoto ni okeru kakumei no engeki* (Mt. Fuji Perceived: The Revolutionary Theatre of Satoh Makoto, Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1983): 170.

[5] Goodman, 1983: 176-177. Goodman observes that: 'The showboat Singapore lies at anchor in the Sumida River. The showboat Singapore is the latest of the boats bound for Utopia, which have appeared in virtually all of Satô's plays since *Ismene*. ... Naturally, the captain of the showboat Singapore is the Photographer. *He makes those who dream of Utopia ride the showboat and expend their energy*. He does this because those who dream of Utopia, the geographical expression for salvation/revolution, are dangerous elements that threaten the order of his domain, Safety Razor Township. This danger must be neutralized. A showboat that promises to carry you to 'Singapore' while not moving an inch achieves this brilliantly. *In this way, even those who are man enough to blast open the continuum of history end up being drained by the whore, to borrow from Benjamin.*' (my emphasis)

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Editorial Note

Performance Paradigm issues 1 to 9 were reformatted and repaginated as part of the journal's upgrade in 2018. Earlier versions are viewable via Wayback Machine:

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