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The Theatrical Fusion of Suzuki Tadashi

Yukihiro Goto

"I want to have my own particular forms and words," declared a 27-year-old theatre artist in 1966. He was Suzuki Tadashi, and he has since become one of the world's most innovative directors. Entering Waseda University in Tokyo in 1958, Suzuki began his theatrical career at a student drama club, the Waseda Free Stage (Waseda Jiyū Butai). His early work at that time followed the realistic style of mainstream *shingeki*, Japan's orthodox modern theatre, patterned after the European theatre of Ibsen and Stanislavski.

Suzuki began to challenge *shingeki* in 1961 when he, along with the playwright Betsuyaku Minoru and 12 amateur actors, founded the Free Stage (Jiyū Butai). By staging Betsuyaku's absurdist works influenced by Samuel Beckett, Suzuki sought an alternative form more relevant to the turbulent period of the 1960s. In 1966 the troupe was reorganized, changing its name to the Waseda Little Theatre (Waseda Shōgekijō). This is the name under which Suzuki's work became world famous.

Suzuki achieved his first monumental success in 1970 with the production of *On the Dramatic Passions II* (*Gekiteki naru mono o megutte II*), a collage of dramatic scenes ranging from Tsuruya Namboku IV's *kabuki* plays to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The work featured Shiraishi Kayoko, Suzuki's principal actress, whose explosive performance of the Mad-woman stunned the public. Two years later the collage play was brought to the Théâtre des Nations in Paris, where it held European audiences spellbound as well. Since then, Suzuki and his members have been invited on numerous occasions to perform in major European and American cities.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, Suzuki explored ideas and techniques of traditional Japanese theatre, such as *nō* and *kabuki*, in an attempt to create a new form of stage expression. He welded Western drama with a Japanese theatrical paradigm, formulated his actor-training system (known as the “Suzuki Method”), and built a farmhouse theatre complex in the small village of Toga located in the mountains of Toyama Prefecture.

Today Suzuki is acclaimed internationally for the power and beauty of his theatrical productions and for his innovative actor-training program. An increasing number of Western theatre people have recognized the importance of his ideas and techniques and have expressed their interest in them. In the United States, Suzuki has become something of a theatre guru; he has taught his theories and acting techniques at several institutions, including Julliard, the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, and the University of California at San Diego.

In this article I want to focus on Suzuki’s reframing of European classic plays within a Japanese theatrical paradigm, creating a unique synthesis of Japanese form with Western/modern content. Among such theatrical experiments, the three Greek adaptations—*The Trojan Women* (*Toroia no onna*; 1974), *The Bacchae* (*Bakkosu no shinjo*; 1978), and *Clytemnestra* (*Ōhi Kuritemunesutora*; 1983)—are most remarkable and can be regarded as representative works. The director clearly considers these plays extremely important. Over some 10 years he has revised and performed them on numerous occasions, and they have been critically acclaimed both in Japan and abroad.

Suzuki discovered the profound theatricality of tradition when he witnessed Kanze Hisao’s *nō* performance at the Théâtre des Nations Festival in Paris in 1972.

At that festival Suzuki made two important discoveries that later influenced his artistic activity. One was a new idea for a theatre design. The festival took place in the Théâtre Recamier, formerly a residential house, which French director Jean-Louis Barrault had converted into a temporary theatre. Suzuki, observing various performances in this small unorthodox playhouse, conceived the idea of “making use of a space where people had actually lived, a space filled with a history of actual human use” (Suzuki 1984, 116; trans. in Suzuki 1986, 70). This idea was to be realized in 1976 when Suzuki and the WLT moved to Toga village, where they converted a mountain farmhouse into a theatre building.

The other discovery was the rich tradition of Japanese performing arts, particularly that of *nō*. At the festival the honored *nō* actor Kanze Hisao performed an excerpt from *Dōjōji Temple* (*Dōjōji*) on an unusual stage. In Japan it is customary to give a *nō* performance only on a traditional *nō* stage, which has four pillars and a bridge. But Kanze had to perform on an “improper stage,” an elevated square platform with steps on

all four sides, with a playing space considerably narrowed by a large crowd of spectators. Yet it was precisely because of these unusual surroundings that Suzuki experienced the immense heritage of traditional performing arts. In a 1982 essay, “The Toga Festival” (“Toga fesutebaru ni tsuite”), the director recalls:

I had always seen *nō* performed in the traditional way; now watching a performance under these unusual circumstances, I was made to recognize its superb theatricality. The rigorous training that had tempered and shaped the body of the actor produced a brilliant liveliness on the stage, right down to the tiniest details of movement. The masks and costumes I knew so well sparkled in a new light. *Nō* in Paris was superb; the spectators were bewitched. For the first time I began to realize what Zeami meant when he spoke of *yūgen*, of stillness in a performance, or of the vision beyond sight (Suzuki 1984, 114; trans. in Suzuki 1986, 71–72).

The *nō* performance was a great revelation to Suzuki, who had previously been critical of traditional theatre. *Nō* and other traditional arts are basically performed in fundamentally the same way every time, according to scripts and choreography formalized several hundred years ago. For this reason, back in 1971 Suzuki had considered *nō* and *kabuki* to be hollow forms, no longer able to generate fresh energy (Suzuki 1973, 156–57).

But now, witnessing the power of tradition through a *nō* performance presented in an unconventional way, he modified this critical view. What Suzuki discovered was that “following the rules is not the only way to ensure a great performance. When a tradition can be successfully broken, the profundities of the *nō* can become all the more apparent” (Suzuki 1984, 115; trans. in Suzuki 1986, 72). This foreign experience gave the director enormous inspiration, opening to him the possibility of revitalizing techniques and attitudes of tradition within the context of contemporary theatre. This was to become the quintessence of Suzuki’s aesthetic, which continues today.

Suzuki’s experiences in France were very powerful ones, and upon returning to Japan, he put into practice the idea of integrating traditional expressiveness into Western plays. The first major work of this experimentation was the 1974 adaptation of Euripides’ *The Trojan Women*.

Around the time of this Greek production, Suzuki also developed a theory of why such experimentation would be necessary on the contemporary Japanese stage. The theory evolved around his new idea—the theatre as a reflection of socio-cultural conditions. In a panel discussion, “The Potential of Modern Theatre” (“Gendai engeki no kanōsei”), published in 1975, Suzuki describes the idea:

The theatre is but a single aspect of the general cultural situation. Therefore, the most important issue for today's theatre artists is to ask what problem Japan is facing in general. The theatre exists in close relation to the general state of Japanese culture and society, and we cannot avoid that issue in engaging in the theatre today. Or else, I believe, theatrical activities will have no significant meaning and function (Ōoka, Suzuki, and Nakamura 148).

The implications and effects of the new idea, theatre as a means of social commentary, are extensive. It is a drastic departure from the director's earlier vision.

From the mid- to late-1960s, the actor's performance was the most vital issue of the theatre, around which Suzuki's theory and practice evolved. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Suzuki challenged *shingeki's* Stanislavskian doctrine as a fallacy. For him, *shingeki's* fundamental yet crucial mistake was the priority of the written text; the modern theatre took for granted that all that was required of the actor was to bring forward the meaning authoritatively built into the text by the playwright. Instead, Suzuki was firmly convinced that the subjectivity of a theatrical event primarily resided in the actor because the event takes place between the actor and the spectator. From the director's standpoint, therefore, Suzuki argued it was the actor's acting, not the playtext, that should be the core of theatrical expression: "The actor is not an instrument of the play. He creates his own 'stage language' [*butai gengo*] by confronting the totality of his personal history and background with the play" (Qtd. in Senda 1970, 42). It was during this period that Suzuki and his actors began composing works through a collage method, the surrealist technique of *dépaysement*.

After 1972, however, Suzuki's theatre became more specifically a director's theatre. That is, Suzuki primarily controlled the process of play creation and determined the nature of the theatrical event. In an interview I conducted in January 1984, the director described the basic steps of the rehearsal/creative process since his return from France in 1972. It starts with his dramatic plans, including the selection of materials and the conception of structures, plot outlines, and themes. Using these preconceptions as a guideline and working with his actors, Suzuki develops the performance text, through adding and cutting lines, switching roles, and so forth. Thus, even in this rehearsal process the actor's creative role has not altogether diminished, since the collective creation still occupies a large portion of the rehearsal, albeit following Suzuki's dramatic plan. But the nature of the group's theatrical presentation is clearly controlled by and manifested through Suzuki. He adapts written texts for a spectacle of his own invention; he selects plays, takes them apart, and uses them as vehicles for expressing his own ideas. Suzuki refers to his dramaturgy as *honkadori*, which will be fully discussed in a moment.

The idea that the theatre is a social vehicle has also changed the content of Suzuki's dramatic production. In response to this idea, the director has explained, he decided to incorporate elements of traditional theatre into his work (Ōoka, Suzuki, and Nakamura 1975, 148). The decision reflected Suzuki's understanding of the current situation of Japanese theatre.

Suzuki feels that theatre in Japan as a whole lacks a solid ideology. Because each major form, *nō*, *kabuki*, and *shingeki*, remains aloof and in isolation, each has its own practice and its own deficiencies. In the 1975 discussion, he elaborates on this unique problem:

The theatrical conditions in Japan are rare, no equivalent is to be found in the West. In Japan we have various forms like *nō*, *kyōgen*, *kabuki*, *shingeki*, and avant-garde theatre. When the Royal Shakespeare Company does Shakespeare, they do not stage it in the traditional manner; they perform it as modern theatre. But in Japan the classics are not part of the modern theatre's normal repertory. Plays of Chikamatsu or Namboku are done in *kabuki*. Zeami is performed by *nō* actors.

The theatrical situation of Japan is that there are *kabuki*, *nō*, *shingeki*, and so on, and that spectators are divided among these forms, each of whom regards what they see as theatre. As a result, Japanese theatre as a whole is not presenting its comprehensive view on the socio-cultural state in Japan (Ōoka, Suzuki, Nakamura 148).

Because of the gaps among the theatrical forms, spectators continue to be treated like "customers pushed into a supermarket of various theatrical genres from Racine's tragedies to Brecht's epic drama, from Beckett to *kabuki*" (Suzuki 1980, 121) and cannot see what really relates to Japan. Hence, the current situation of Japanese theatre fails to effectively shed new light on social and cultural issues.

One possible way to solve this problem is to find a "rational ground" common to both traditional and modern theatrical forms. Later in the same discussion Suzuki states:

What is now most important is not to continue the prevailing conditions under which these forms exist in aloof isolation, each with a set of audiences of its own and each discussed from a theoretical perspective of its own. What is most important is to discover a rational ground that can be shared by all the forms. Without such experiments, the conditions will remain unchanged forever (Ōoka, Suzuki, and Nakamura 1975, 162).

Finding the rational ground has meant creating a new form of theatrical expression by revitalizing some of the traditional qualities that *shingeki* has disregarded. In the 1982 essay "The Toga Festival," Suzuki explains it this way:

Nō and *kabuki* are not usable as they are in the modern theatre. Yet these forms contain excellent concepts and spirit as well as great expressiveness of the body tempered through rigorous training. Those can be developed in the modern context. At the same time, under European influence, a new form of theatrical expressiveness has developed out of the fierce changes of our times.

Could not the old and new ways of thinking and feeling be unified in some form of theatrical expression? There must be a means to truly fuse them. . . . The modern theatre has detached itself from any influence of *nō* or *kabuki* because those forms are seen as merely old. I believe, however, that for a theatre of tomorrow, some elements should be chosen among all that has been discarded (Suzuki 1984, 118).

Suzuki's desire is not simply to return to the traditions of *nō* and *kabuki* but to reintroduce some of their essential concepts into the contemporary theatre. By doing so, he aims to fill the gap between traditional and modern theatre in Japan and establish a new contemporary form that will give "a social effect which extends beyond the theatre itself, giving it an impact on other cultural areas" (Suzuki 1982, 92). This, the director tells us, has been the major goal in his work since his return from France in 1972 (Suzuki 1984, 118).

Let me now turn to Suzuki's dramaturgy and staging methods to examine the traditional elements integrated in his Greek productions and the social issues which concern the director. The hallmark of Suzuki's Greek adaptations lies in the application of Japanese theatricality to various aspects of the production. He does not stage a Western play in the normal way that *shingeki* would (that is, staging it in the manner following European lines). Instead, the director composes and stages his own original piece by reconstructing a European play with the use of traditional techniques, notably an adaptation method, dramatic structure, actors' movements and gestures, and performance devices.

The Adaptation Method

Suzuki's adaptation technique is reminiscent of two kinds of compositional devices common to Japanese literature: *honkadori* and *sekai*. *Honkadori* (literally, "taking a foundation poem") is a technique of classical poetry; *sekai* (literally, "world") is basic to traditional drama.

In the process of preparing the playtext for his Greek production, Suzuki used the *honkadori* technique. He explains why his dramatic technique should be so named:

The works I stage do not use the same types of dramatic languages or materials. My works are composed of all kinds of dramatic ideas that

have remained and grown in my memory. Thus . . . *honkadori* may be a better name for my dramatic method. . . .

One authority on *honkadori* is Fujiwara no Teika. This [13th-century] court poet was thoroughly familiar with all forms of poetry and popular poems of his days, and I know only such an authority as he can talk of the true meaning of *honkadori*. . . . Therefore, I am not using the term *honkadori* in an authentic sense.

The reason I call my dramatic technique *honkadori* is that by using some familiar materials, I aim to destroy their known values and at the same time create totally original ones. To rephrase it with some exaggeration, my method is to fulfill two desires in one single operation—destroying old values and simultaneously establishing new values (Suzuki 1973, 229–31).

As partially explained in the above quotation, *honkadori* has been a standard compositional technique in classical Japanese poetry forms, including *waka* and *renga*, for many centuries. *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature* gives the following description:

Allusive variation. A later poet would take some diction and conception from an earlier “foundation poem” (*honka*) and vary it (*-tori*, *-dori*) with a new conception, perhaps making a spring poem of a summer foundation poem, or a love poem of a spring original. A major source of later poetry, it had various canons, such as avoidance of language from the most famous poems (Miner 1985, 277).

In short, in *honkadori* new poems are composed drawing on elements or images in existing well-known poems.

A good example of the *honkadori* method can be seen in the play-texts of *nō* drama. Many works of celebrated poets from ancient China and Japan are incorporated in *nō* plays. Zeami himself advises in his treatise *The Three Elements* (*Sandō*) that if a play’s subject matter concerns a famous place or a historic site, a well-known song or poem about the place should be incorporated into the text, and that the play should also include a quotation from a famous poetic source (Zeami 1984, 150). In Zeami’s *nō* play *The Pine Tree of Takasago* (*Takasago*), for instance, when the Old Man explains the auspicious Takasago pine, he is given a speech containing a passage from Ōe no Masafusa’s poem in the *Senzaishū* (1187). The quoted poem alludes to the ancient belief that severe frost makes the temple bell ring (Nippon 1976, 12).

Suzuki’s adaptation technique is equivalent to this compositional method of traditional Japanese poetry. Just as a traditional poet creates a new poem by drawing upon elements or images of a well-known existing poem, Suzuki composes his work by using an established, well-known

play or story (such as a Greek tragedy) as the “foundation poem.” The director describes the process of making the text for the 1974 production of *Trojan Women*:

When I decided to stage the *Trojan Women*, my first step was to eliminate from the text all terms that require special knowledge and leave only just enough for a modern audience to understand the basic situation of defeat in war which Euripides was trying to depict. What is left are the words that form the inner core of the play—words that best express the emotions of each character. In a sense, what is left are only the fragments in which the characters lay bare their real feelings. These fragments can be read by themselves and as such make a certain amount of sense. But in order to perform them in Japan today, to make them into modern theater, the various pieces had to be organized anew according to our own contemporary sensitivity. In other words I thought that they had to find their inevitable place within some form necessitated by these new conditions (Ōoka, Suzuki, and Nakamura 1975, 147; trans. in Hoff 1980, 46).

Suzuki says that he then incorporated those selected fragments of Euripides’ play along with additional materials, such as newly composed poetry and a popular song, prepared in part by the contemporary poet Ōoka Makoto (Ōoka, Suzuki, and Nakamura 1975, 147–48). Ōoka has explained this process:

The new parts I wrote are, for example, Cassandra’s long monologue and the conflict between Hecuba and Menelaus. Also, other various, long and short pieces of my poems and dialogues are included. We called these “bits.” Without having any idea where they would eventually be placed, I kept writing those pieces, naming them “Bit A,” “Bit B,” and so forth, and handed them to Suzuki. He then incorporated those bits with selected parts of the original Greek drama through the rehearsal process working with his actors (Ōoka 1974, 13).

By melding together familiar images of the Greek drama with new images of Ōoka’s poems, Suzuki brings forth new values out of the old values. *Trojan Women* presents a dramatic amalgam of past and present, or Western and Japanese elements. As explained by Suzuki,

What underlies the [1974] production of *Trojan Women* . . . is Euripides’ work. But it is structured in such a way that we see on stage an old man [an old woman in the 1977 revised version] feeble with age, driven from his burned-out home at the end of the Second World War, living through a phantasy of the legend of Troy. What takes place before the audience’s eyes passes beyond time and place; it is both the past and the present,



FIGURE 1. The actress Shiraishi Kayoko as Cassandra in the original production of *Trojan Women* (1974). (Photo: Suzuki Tadashi.)

both reality and fiction. Each of these elements is interlinked, each reverberates against the other (Suzuki 1974, 5; trans. in Hoff 1980, 44)

Suzuki followed a similar process in later productions of *The Bacchae* (1978) and *Clytemnestra* (1983) which, like *Trojan Women*, presented the dual visions of the past and the present, of ancient Greece and modern Japanese society. In the former play a group of political prisoners under a totalitarian regime fantasizes the story of Euripides' *Bacchae*, whereas in the latter the Orestes legend is recalled by a young Japanese man who has killed his mother. Suzuki refers to this adaptation process as *honkadori* and it indeed does resemble the compositional technique of classical Japanese poetry. With a Greek play as the foundation for his work, the director establishes new dramatic images that allude to familiar, known images of the original tragedy.

From another perspective, Suzuki's adaptation technique is similar to traditional drama's regular system of plotting and drawing upon known "worlds" (*sekai*) (Brandon 1985, 74). Suzuki's dramatic method can be explicated in terms of *sekai* as well. A *sekai* is a historically known situation, in which plays of both *kabuki* and *nō* could be created. *Sekai* was

particularly essential in *kabuki* plays. It was a standard practice for *kabuki* playwrights (*kabuki sakusha* or *kyōgen-zukuri*) to compose a new play by bringing together disparate known worlds into a new situation. Samuel L. Leiter in *Kabuki Encyclopedia* describes the method of *sekai*:

Playwrights commonly composed their works like a tapestry with the *sekai* as the woof and the plot as the warp. The number of *sekai* was fixed, being derived for history plays from such historical narratives as the *Ise Monogatari*, *Masakadoki*, *Hogen Heiji*, *Gikeiki*, *Taiheiki*, *Heike Monogatari*, and others. Their well-known characters and situations were borrowed by many playwrights. In the case of domestic plays, the worlds were generally chosen from famous [scandalous] incidents (1979, 343).

Since a world was already significant in legend or history, it provided *kabuki* playwrights with immediately acceptable dramatic motifs.

Scholars of Japanese theatre have identified a number of the well-known worlds and their characters used in *kabuki* plays. In English, Brandon cites some of those *sekai* and their main characters, such as the Heike World with defeated Heike generals Kagekiyo or Sanemori and famous Genji warriors like Minamoto no Yoshitsune, and the Soga World with the heroes Soga Gorō and his brother Soga Jūrō, who by legend in 1193 successfully avenged the murder of their father that had occurred some 20 years earlier (Brandon 1975, 25–26). In composing a new play, *kabuki* dramatists put together these disparate, known worlds and characters into a new situation.

Sekai also characterizes the dramaturgy of *nō*. When Zeami wrote the *nō* play *Well-Curb* (*Izutsu*), he incorporated the Narihira legend (love stories concerning Ariwara no Narihira, one of the six major poets of the Early Heian Period, 794–930) into events of his, Zeami's, contemporary life in the 14th century (Nippon 1976, 93).

Similarly, Suzuki's dramaturgy parallels the plotting system of *sekai*. His Greek plays are composed of characters and situations of famous legendary worlds doubled upon those of modern times. *Trojan Women* consists of two known worlds: the legendary Troy and the devastated world of Japan in the immediate post-WWII years. The ancient world of the Dionysian cult (the *Bacchae*) is mingled with the modern world of a totalitarian dictatorship in *Bacchae*. And *Clytemnestra* draws a parallel between the Orestes legend and the modern breakdown of the family. Suzuki's adaptation method bears a close resemblance to *sekai* and *honkadōri*, the two techniques combining to create new images out of familiar, well-established ones. His techniques clearly reflect traditional methods of composition. (COLOR PLATE 1)

Dramatic Structure

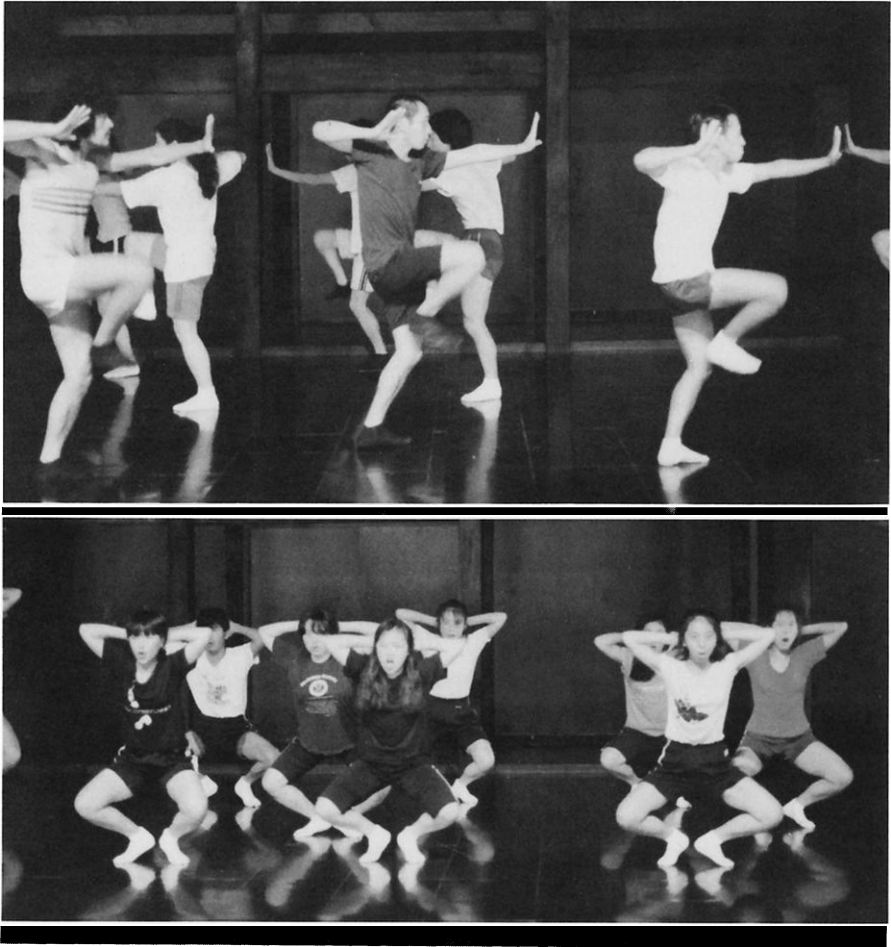
The classical mode also characterizes the structure of Suzuki's drama. A modern drama, like an Ibsen play or a typical play of *shingeki*, is temporally one-dimensional: it progresses in a linear mode of time. By contrast, premodern Japanese drama, especially a *nō* or *kabuki* play, is usually constructed in a doubled structure where action moves back and forth between different spatiotemporal dimensions.

A good example of the doubled structure can be observed in the *nō* drama where time and place of the present and of the past intermingle with one another. The archetypal *nō* play consists of two parts. In the first half, an event takes place in the present with a wandering priest meeting an unfamiliar person. In the second half, this person reenacts a past event: the stranger whom the priest has met reveals his true identity to be that of a ghost or spirit, relives his past before the priest, and then disappears. Left alone, the priest wonders if what he has witnessed is a dream or reality.

Like the archetypal *nō* play, Suzuki's Greek adaptations do not present a homogeneous temporal continuum as does a modern drama. He mixes two distinct spatiotemporal dimensions, both of which are equally legitimate and interact with one another in a more or less coherent manner. Time and space in his Greek plays travel between the events of the past (Greek legends) and those of contemporary times (new situations in which the legends are relocated). The structure of Suzuki's work has a strongly traditional quality, virtually identical to the doubled structure of a classic Japanese *nō* play.

Movement and Gesture

The influences of *nō* and *kabuki* can also be observed in movements and gestures in Suzuki's productions. His actors, like traditional performers, do not create roles in the manner of the Western realistic theatre or of *shingeki*. They do not impersonate; they simply "act." Certainly, the actor's personality emerges, but through the medium of the physicality gained through "Suzuki Method" training. As in traditional performance, the rich vocabulary of physical language interposes the personality of the individual actor and the role. However, while Suzuki's actors perform in a style reminiscent of *nō* and *kabuki* acting, they do not copy acting forms or patterns (*kata*) of traditional theatre. The movements and gestures of his actor and those of a traditional performer seem similar, because, explains Suzuki, they both draw upon the physicality of the Japanese as an agricultural people, such as feet planted in the earth



FIGURES 2 & 3. SCOT company members training under the “Suzuki Method” of disciplines. (Photo: Yukihiro Goto.)

(Brandon 1985, 74). The result of the Suzuki system, the corporeal language reminiscent of traditional theatre, is clearly manifested in his Greek productions.

Typically, *kata*-like movements are put into use in the roles of legendary characters or of those who belong to fictional reality (perhaps so as to convey the metaphysical nature of their existence). For instance, the Buddhist god Jizō (in *Trojan Women*) and the ghost of Clytemnestra (in *Clytemnestra*) slowly enter with sliding foot movements resembling the *nō* walk called *suriashi* that sustains an effortless glide.

In addition to the *nō*-like walk, Jizō stands virtually motionless on stage throughout an hour-and-a-half-long production. This type of stillness, although much shorter, characterizes the *nō* (and also *kabuki*) performance. One good example is the *i-guse* or sitting *kuse* of *nō*. In the climactic

scene of a play, the main actor (*shite*) usually performs a dance (*mai-guse*), accompanied by a passage chanted by a group of reciters (*ji-utai*). Occasionally, the performer sits motionless on the floor during this scene (*i-guse*). Motionless does not mean, however, that the actor is in relaxation. As Komparu Kunio explains, such stillness requires great physical as well as mental concentration by an actor, since he is to dance “only with his heart, going beyond the visual to attain infinite expression” (Komparu 1983, 41).

Fueda Uichirō has played the role of Jizō in numerous performances. We can find an idea parallel to Komparu’s view on the *i-guse* in Fukuda’s account of how he prepared and performed the deity:

One way I aimed to obtain concentration was to place as far away as possible the distant point that was the focus of my vision. In this timeless distance I imagined a single speck of light flowing as though from the eye of a needle. I might even call this beam of light a sort of *kami* (god). . . . Concentrated in this way, I had the feeling that my own awareness of my body and its internal sensations were sharpened to a fine edge of brilliance and purity like a sword.

The image of distance was more than that of physical distance. It was an infinite remoteness, positioned as a conceptual matter. The focus was the notion of God, of light. . . . I [kept] my gaze riveted in a transcendent attitude upon this single point at a distance despite other realities (the deaths and rape recounted in the play) that surrounded me as I stood there (Qtd. and trans. in Hoff 1984, 107).

In an attempt to convey the transcendent existence of the Buddhist god, Fueda has placed his focus on infinity, in a manner similar to a *nō* actor who strives to achieve “infinite expression” in stillness. The *nō*-like stillness is also observed in *Clytemnestra* in the roles of the Greek gods Apollo and Athena: while sitting on the chairs, the actors are posed statically for whole scenes.

In contrast to the transcendent, *nō*-like qualities seen in the roles of deities and spirits, dynamic, *kabuki*-like movements are given to more down-to-earth legendary characters, such as the *samurai*-like Greek warriors and the mad Pentheus. The Greek soldiers move in a manner similar to the bravura-style (*aragoto*) of *kabuki*. With each step, they walk deliberately, stretching their arms before their bodies and extending their legs forward. The *aragoto* style stresses the hero’s strength and valor, and Suzuki uses it to suggest the wild, excitable temperament of his Greek captors.

Another type of *kabuki*-like movement used in Suzuki’s work is a striking pose called *mie* (literally, “look and take”). At a climactic moment of a scene, a *kabuki* actor moves his head in a circular motion, and with a

sudden snap of the head, freezes in a dramatic tableau. *Mie* halts the action of the play and functions like a visual exclamation point. It is the culmination of a series of predetermined rhythmic movements and intensifies the essence of an emotion.

In *Trojan Women* a *mie*-like movement appears when the second Greek warrior kills a female Elder. Giving her the last sword slash, he momentarily “poses,” establishing the climax of the cruel execution. A *mie*-like technique is also used to convey the madness of Pentheus. When Dionysus casts a magic spell on him, Pentheus, uttering insane laughter, repeatedly moves his head in a circle, and then suddenly freezes with a piercing expression in his eyes. With the technique virtually identical to *mie*, Suzuki aims to make the actors (and the characters) appear larger in size, creating an exciting physical image.

Such movements and gestures as the hour-and-a-half stillness of Jizō, the vigorous walk of the Greek warriors, and the dynamic tableau of Pentheus can be traced to the relentless daily disciplines of the Suzuki Method. Like traditional performers, Suzuki’s actors are taught to perform with enormous physical (and psychological) power. Such physical expressiveness denotes the traditional quality of Suzuki’s work.

Performance Devices

Related closely to the gestures reminiscent of specific techniques of *nō* and *kabuki* acting, Suzuki’s Greek productions employ several performance devices that reinforce the physical language of the theatre. The essence of traditional performance is the total expression of physicality, a powerful image of the human body, through which the actor projects human character and feeling. Classical Japanese theatre has emphasized the actor’s presence on the stage and has contrived many supporting performance devices.

One such convention is a “full-frontal” performance style (*shōmen engi*). In the entire performance of *nō*, for instance, the *shite* performs almost always facing front. Similarly, leading *kabuki* actors frequently perform crucial scenes while directly facing toward the audience. In both cases, the actor’s physical expressions are too important for the spectator to miss.

Suzuki staged some scenes of his Greek plays in a similar manner. In *Trojan Women* the full-front performance takes place in the scene where Hecuba and Andromache lament over their misfortune. In a Western production or *shingeki*, Hecuba and Andromache, mother and her daughter-in-law, would be physically close to one another in the same plane and would almost always face each other when they talk, so as to convey their psychological relationships. In Suzuki’s staging, however, Hecuba sits

downstage and Andromache is placed upstage, and they play the entire scene full front, striving for the effects similar to those in traditional theatre. In *Bacchae* the frontal style characterizes a scene where Dionysus further manipulates the effeminate Pentheus. In all the trial scenes of *Clytemnestra* Orestes, Apollo, Athena, and the Furies remain facing full front despite heated arguments among them.

Similar to the full-front performance, another convention that emphasizes physical language and focuses the spectator's attention on the actor is a narrative performance style (*katari*). A single performer, directly facing the audience, narrates a lengthy story (usually a vivid description of past events). In *katari* the performer's vocal virtuosity is important. The *katari* artist practices the full use of the voice when telling the story. He holds and quickly releases the breath, shortens and prolongs vowels, and changes pitches and vocal qualities—from harsh and guttural to deep and resonating, and from low whimpering to overwhelming declamation. These vocal mannerisms create certain rhythmic tensions, which in turn stimulate spectators and involve them in the actor's performance.

Suzuki introduced a similar performance style into his Greek productions. *Trojan Women* contains two narrative scenes: Cassandra's opening monologue suggesting her madness and Hecuba's speech lamenting her grandchild's death. In *Bacchae* the Blind Man delivers a long descriptive story of the Theban women's Dionysian rite and the subsequent murder of Pentheus. *Clytemnestra* includes Clytemnestra's vivid report of her butchery of her husband. In all those scenes the actors do not simply tell the stories. They—by fully using their vocal registers, from whoops and guttural intoning to high-pitched staccato-monotone—strive to create dynamic, physical expressions of the words.

An onstage enactment of a murder is another form of physical language of traditional theatre. By convention the ancient Greek theatre avoided onstage murder scenes, but they are part of *kabuki* theatre, called *koroshi-ba* (murder scene). A *koroshi-ba* does not portray the brutality or gruesomeness of murder in a realistic manner; rather, its overall effect is aesthetic beauty. A murder sequence is highly stylized, almost dance-like, and performed to music. It may or may not have dialogue.

Two of Suzuki's Greek works use this staging convention. In *Trojan Women* a female Elder is killed by the second Greek warrior. The entire murder scene is enacted without dialogue in a series of choreographed, clean-cut, slow-motion movements, intensified by beats on a large drum. *Clytemnestra* presents a similar scene: Orestes murders Clytemnestra. In comparison to *Trojan Women*, this murder scene is less elaborate but still choreographed in deliberate movements without dialogue.

Dance is another important physical expression of classical performance. *Nô* is dance-drama. The *shite* performs a number of structured

dances called *mai*, a formal, contained type of dance that generally involves horizontal movements. *Kabuki* has a whole repertoire of dance plays (*shosagoto*) where a series of dramatic scenes are enacted through pantomimic dances (*furi*) or lively dances often involving leaping movements (*odori*).

Dance is also a trademark of any Suzuki production. In *Trojan Women* the Elders (chorus) perform in unison a rhythmic foot-stamping dance (*ashibyōshi*); Cassandra moves in side-stepping dance-like movements. In *Bacchae* a group of Thebans under Dionysian influence march in slow motion in an abstract, trance-dance procession. In the same play the Bacchantes of Death, violently jerking and twisting their bodies, dance like broken mechanical puppets out of control. The serving Maids in *Clytemnestra* enter and exit in a frenzied dance procession, moving sideways in a half-crouching position, twisting their heads and arms in grotesque gestures.

The musical accompaniment is a pervasive performance device that contributes to the physical language of traditional theatre. Songs and music not only set the mood of a scene but also frequently heighten acting by providing a frame of rhythm and form. The *nō* actor performs a dance to the musical accompaniment of the flute and drums, and often to the chanting of the chorus. In traditional *kabuki* plays, music of drums, flutes, bells, and three-stringed *shamisen* accompany each scene to set its emotional context. In dance plays, or dance scenes within dialogue plays, the *kabuki* actor deliberately makes his movements nonsynchronous to the structure, tempo, and phrasing of the music so as to create tension between dance and music.

In Suzuki's work as well, music and songs (although taped) play a significant role. The solemn bamboo-flute (*shakuhachi*) music establishes a spatiotemporal transition between Japan and ancient Troy. The ghost of Clytemnestra enters with electrically-manipulated, bizzare *nō* chanting and instrumental music. In addition, actors dance to pounding, deafening modern music in all dance scenes of the Greek adaptations, heightening the emotions of the scenes through their dynamic expressions of the body. The half-speed, pulsating modern version of the *kabuki* music "Kanjinchō" leads the Elders' foot-stamping dance in *Trojan Women*. The eerie tune of Perez Prado's "Voodoo Suite" accompanies the trance-dance procession of the Bacchae. In *Clytemnestra* the explosive punk-rock number, "Four Enclosed Walls," accentuates the grotesque dance of the Maids who serve human flesh.

Among numerous uses of music, perhaps the most significant comes at the end of a Suzuki production. Typically his plays conclude with a contemporary hit song whose exaggerated message and emotion reinforce or cynically comment on the play's themes.

Through all these methods Suzuki deliberately makes his productions "Japanese." Yet, at the same time, his work is not a slavish translation of tradition. Suzuki's plays also involve the particularly non-traditional quality of Japanese theatre. It is the "ideas" of drama or social criticism which the director has considered as the most crucial function of the contemporary theatre.

Social Commentary

The notion of "theatre of ideas" had not existed in Japan before the turn of the century, when modern practitioners began to follow European examples. Of course, some sort of social comment can be found even in traditional drama. For instance, certain *kyōgen* plays present a servant who outwits his lord master, which can be seen as satire on the *samurai* ruling class. *Kabuki*'s nineteenth century domestic plays (*kizewamono*) that depict the lower stratum of city life certainly showed social problems. Nevertheless social issues were not debated in traditional theatre. Theatre's primary function was to give the spectator aesthetic pleasure. The plots themselves were unimportant. Audiences went to (and still go to) the theatre to admire the technical skill of the actor, to be dazzled by color and movement. They did not go there to think new thoughts (Ernst 267).

On the other hand, the modern form of *shingeki* includes the thesis play or "social drama." *Shingeki* was modeled on the modern European theatre where a play is the principal medium through which the playwright expresses his view of the society. *Shingeki* traditionally regards the theatre as a means of reflecting social issues and educating the audience. Since the mid-1970s Suzuki has also amplified the notion of the theatre as a vehicle for social criticism, and his work presents what he regards as issues and problems of modern society, particularly that of Japan.

His theatre, however, is not a political theatre. Unlike Brecht, who presented facts, characters, and action in a certain juxtaposition to make the audience think and find answers to particular socio-political problems, Suzuki seldom outwardly speaks of issues and never advocates social change in an open manner. Rather, the messages of Suzuki's plays are usually allusive in nature, perhaps reflecting his native cultural context where implicit is preferred to explicit.

Suzuki's social commentary has universal bearing as well as particular relevance to modern Japanese society. His *Trojan Women* is a universal indictment of war. Suzuki explains in the program note to the 1974 production that the predicament of a people subjugated in war, merely awaiting the captors' decision, is international and relevant to modern times (Suzuki 1974, 5). Euripides is said to have written the tragedy in protest against the Greeks' massacre of the islanders of Melos in 416 BC,

and Suzuki reemphasizes his pacifist statement in the light of Japan's own war experience. The barbaric rape of Andromache and the murder of a female Elder by the *samurai*-Greek warriors reflect Japan's own wartime atrocities. The choral ode newly composed by Ōoka, "Drift human skins, like cucumber peelings," obviously makes a reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In addition, as suggested by Frank Hoff, the Young Girl's throwing the flower at the Buddhist god Jizō indicates Suzuki's strong criticism toward the emperor system and the nationalists who brought the Japanese into war and disaster (Hoff 1980, 48).

The *Bacchae* embodies the futile hopes and aspirations of a people oppressed by a totalitarian ruler. The play is "a nightmarish version but a brutal fact repeated ever since the beginning of political history—a moment of festive liberation cruelly crushed down by the despot" (*SCOT* 13). The political victims are deprived of their freedom, having nothing to wait for but their deaths. Dreaming of Euripides' story seems to be their only way to express vengeance. Thus, it can be said that Pentheus represents a despotic ruler while Dionysus appears as the prisoners' avenger and liberator. Yet, this is, after all, only their fantasy. Chilling reality comes in at the very end of the play: when the oppressed people have begun to think that their revels are ended, the totalitarian ruler (Pentheus) comes back and kills them.

Although Suzuki makes no specific reference to Japan, the story is virtually parallel to the political situation of the country in modern times. During World War II communists and pacifists were imprisoned and tortured by the police to change their ideologies. After the war, democracy and freedom of political ideology were instituted, but in the early 1950s communists were again attacked and purged from government posts and government corporations. The Red purge was even extended to the press and private industry.

Also, in *Clytemnestra* Suzuki finds a remarkable resemblance between ancient Greece and contemporary Japanese society. What he sees in the Orestes legend is "the destruction of the family" which bears particular relevance to Japan, where the incidence of serious family violence has increased in recent years (Suzuki 1983, 302). Examining the breakdown of the family (a fundamental unit of society), Suzuki depicts "something of the solitary state in which modern man now finds himself" (Suzuki 1984, 162; trans. in Suzuki 1986, 121). In contrast to Orestes in the Greek legend whose matricide is justified by the god Apollo, Suzuki's Orestes finds nothing to save him. The character's internal torments reflect the helpless situation of troubled modern man who finds himself in the midst of the disintegration of the family and the various problems associated with it, such as the generation gap, broken marriages, and family violence.

To assert the immediacy of those social issues in the spectator's own, everyday life, Suzuki concludes his Greek plays with a popular Japanese song. As Hoff notes, a contemporary song is ironic itself when employed in a Greek tragedy; however, what is more important is the song's basic message, which takes on a different meaning when used at the end of the play (Hoff 1980, 47-48). The director explains:

Many levels of experience happen simultaneously in our everyday life. Thus the same words can have different meanings, depending on the situation in which they are spoken. For instance, the meanings of a simple phrase like "life is hard" will differ considerably, depending on whether you are drinking with a girl or watching the Red Army marching in Lenin Square. . . . As a result, even trite phrases of popular songs can generate various meanings according to the situation in which the person finds himself. In my work I use popular songs like those of [the star singer] Mori Shin'ichi. I incorporate his phrases—like "sad, sad, ah, a woman sighs" or "I don't care what happens, just let it happen"—into a certain situation. . . . When I do this, the phrases really take on different, significant meanings (Suzuki and Nakamura 1977, 148).

To further clarify his explanation, let us look at the song "River of Fate" ("Sadame gawa") which concludes *Clytemnestra*. This sentimental song was very popular when the production was first mounted. The general message of the lyrics is that for a woman who has engaged in an illicit love affair, the last and perhaps only resort is death. However, used in the play's new dramatic context, the message can be taken to refer to the situation where a young man (Orestes), having committed matricide, finds himself awaiting his unknown yet bleak fate. The meaning of the song goes beyond its original situation. The words of the song can be understood as an ironic comment on the disintegration of the family in contemporary Japanese society.

Suzuki uses Western plays, Japanese dramatic and staging methods, and the statement of social issues as bridge-building strategies to close the gap between traditional and modern theatrical genres. He seeks to create compelling theatre, revitalizing tradition in the contemporary theatre not only through productions such as those discussed here but also through the creation of a new performing space.

In 1976 he and his troupe moved from Tokyo to the remote mountain village of Toga-mura, where they converted an old, abandoned farmhouse into a theatre structure which was later named the Toga Sambō. With the newly-named company SCOT (Suzuki Company of Toga), Suzuki's theatrical exploration continues. Recently he has unfolded ambitious plans: SCOT members will permanently settle in Toga village, establishing there a self-supporting theatre commune. He and his group

will engage in farming as well as theatrical activities. Also, the Toga theatre area is to be developed into a new mecca of international theatres—the “New SCOT-Land.” As part of the project, in collaboration with the University of California at San Diego, Suzuki is currently building in the area a performing arts library and a new 500-seat theatre complex.

Suzuki once referred to his ideal activity as “a spiral process of new creation out of the old” (Suzuki 1973, 298). Paradoxically, as Takahashi Yasunari points out, Suzuki knows the way backward is also the way forward (Takahashi 21). By recapturing the rich heritage of the theatrical past in the modern context, the director has successfully created a unique form of contemporary theatre that goes beyond the limits of rootless *shingeki* as well as tradition-bound *nō* and *kabuki*. In the years ahead, it is likely that innovation will continue to spring forth from Suzuki, and his work will attract theatre artists both in Japan and abroad.

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