

World History and Modern Japanese Drama: The Case of Hirata Oriza's Plays

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For the theatre, Asia is a constant! Brecht constantly touched on that. And as for Artaud, he simply said, "The theatre is Oriental."

—Ariane Mnouchkine¹

If throughout the world today—and so many examples bear witness to this in the most striking fashion—all theatrical audacity declares its fidelity to Artaud . . . then the question of the Theatre of Cruelty, of its present inexistence and implacable necessity, has the value of a historic question. . . . This question is historic in an absolute and radical sense. It announces the limit of representation.

—Jacques Derrida²

Forget kabuki. Ignore tradition. Move, don't dance! Talk, don't sing!

—Osanai Kaoru, admonishing the actors during rehearsals
for Tsubouchi Shōyō's *En no gyōja*³

The history of at least two dominant trends in modern Western and Asian theatre demonstrates a curious symmetry, as if one were the mirror image of the other. And this is no accident. For more than a century Western theatre practitioners like Artaud, Brecht, and Mnouchkine have wholeheartedly embraced Asian theatre as an ideal to be exploited in order to revitalize their own stage art. At the same time, theatre in Asian countries over the past century has turned to the West, particularly to realistic, spoken drama, as a model for its own reform.

The impact of the West on Japanese theatre since the 1880s manifested itself not only in the incorporation of new themes and subject matter, but also, in a more fundamental way, on the meaning, form, and style of modern drama. And, in Japan, theatre became synonymous with modernity. In emulating the West, the so-called "new theatre" (*shingeki*) in Japan attempted to make a clean break from the traditional theatres of nob, *ningyō jōruri*, and kabuki. More than practically any cultural form except perhaps fiction, the new drama was seen as not simply the emergence of a new literary form but a manifestation of modernity itself. As one Japanese playwright, Iwata Toyoo, put it, "I felt what I had seen in Paris was not so much the modernization of the theatre, but the theatricalization of the modern spirit." In a way impossible in the traditional theatre, the stage came to be used as a site for the exploration of new ideas and ways of being. Problems explored included the rise of the "new woman," the individual's struggle against social convention and political repression for self-realization, and the spiritual toll of trying to accommodate to sudden and radical change. In the first half of the twentieth century, spoken, social drama became the necessary medium for this "theatricalization of the modern spirit."

Innovation in Western theatre has meant something quite the opposite, however. The spectacle, formal rigor, and musicality of Japanese *noh* and *kabuki*, Chinese *jingju*, and Balinese *barong* have been admired as quintessentially theatrical stage arts by several generations of Western stage directors who, since Meyerhold, have been keen on sloughing off the naturalistic influence of Ibsen and Stanislavski. Though Antonin Artaud was certainly not the first to do so, his writings have informed the work of many of the most creative people in contemporary Western theatre: not only Mnouchkine and her Paris-based Théâtre de Soleil, but also Peter Brook, Robert Wilson, and Robert Lepage. The influence of Artaud and Asian theatre has hit the mainstream with director Julie Taymore's Tony-Award winning work on *The Lion King*.

At the centre of Artaud's radical critique of modern Western theatre was its focus on language and the mimetic function of drama. Aristotle's definition of drama as an imitation of an action was refined in the naturalistic stage art of Ibsen, Chekhov, and Stanislavski. Music and spectacle were rejected in favour of an intense concern for an actor's faithful reproduction of a written text, one that in turn attempted to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, realistic spoken dialogue. Artaud, however, saw this tendency as a denial of everything that was unique about the theatre, which should not be an imitation of reality, but rather create its own artistic reality. Spoken dialogue, the medium of mimesis, represented for Artaud an impoverishment of theatre's potential as an art. "How is it that Western theatre cannot conceive of theatre under any other aspect than dialogue form?" Artaud asks (Artaud 1974, p. 25). Theatre demands another language than words, other expressive forms unique to it that, he believed, had reached its highest development in Asian theatre:

The Balinese theatre was not a revelation of a verbal but a physical idea of theatre, where drama is encompassed within the limits of everything that can happen on stage, independently of a written script. Whereas with us, the lines gain the upper hand and theatre as we understand it finds itself restricted by them. Thus theatre is a branch of literature, a species of verbal language (*ibid.*, p. 51).

By the same token Artaud also took issue with the humanistic model of theatre that dialogue drama presented: "whoever said that theatre was made to define a character, to resolve conflicts of a human, emotional order, or a present-day, psychological nature, such as those which monopolise current theatre?" (*ibid.*, p. 28) Artaud wished to restore to the theatre the sense of "the stage as a tangible, physical space that needs to be . . . allowed to speak its own concrete language" (p. 25), what he called a Theatre of Cruelty "where violent physical images pulverise, mesmerise the audience's sensibilities, caught in the drama as if in a vortex of higher forces" (p. 63). Art was not an imitation of life, but rather "life is the imitation of a transcendent principle which art puts us in communication with once again" (*Oeuvres Complètes* 4, p. 310; quoted in Derrida 1978, p. 254). And in the modern world, Artaud claimed, this sense of the sacred can only be accessed through the body.

The restitution of physicality as a central feature of the theatrical experience, and of theatre's resistance to standing for anything other than itself, are Artaud's cardinal contributions to the theory of the modern stage. Thus "whatever can be said of the body can be said of the theatre," Jacques Derrida asserts in a seminal essay on the theoretical significance of Artaud's ideas (Derrida 1978, p. 232). "The theatre is the only place in the

world where a gesture, once made, can never be made the same way twice. . . . It is neither a book nor a work but an energy" (ibid., p. 247).

Derrida identifies in Artaud's ideas a fundamental critique of the Western humanist and logocentric metaphysic—a critique that is, of course, also Derrida's. Western theatre continues to be dominated by "a primary *logos* which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance," a pseudo-theological system with a godlike author and directors and actors who are "interpretive slaves" in service of the text and performing for a passive public who are "voyeurs" and "consumers" (p. 235).

What Artaud and his epigones have attempted to do is restore to theatre an intrinsic artistic meaning that had been lost to it so long as it was understood to be a medium for representing or imitating reality. Though neither Artaud nor Derrida discuss this, a comparison can be made here with modernism in the visual arts, which were liberated by the mechanical reproduction of photography from the need to represent objective reality. In a similar way, the development of cinema demanded a reappraisal of stage art. Thus, the "retheatricalization" of theatre that Artaud and others advocated was an attempt to rediscover precisely what theatre can express which other art forms cannot. In short, modern Western theatre reform has been fundamentally a search for form itself. Ariane Mnouchkine:

We Westerners have only created realistic forms. That is to say, we haven't created a form at all, in the true sense. The moment one uses the word "form" in connection with the theatre, there is already a sense of Asia (interview in *Catalyse* 4, June-August; quoted in Pavis 1996, p. 97).

Standing inside the tradition of realism, it may be difficult to see the form that the mimetic takes. (All artistic expression, even the realistic kind, takes some form or other.) But even so, if modern Western theatre has been a search for form, a quality identified as quintessentially "Asian," modern Japanese theatre has sought from Western realism a liberation from traditional form and convention.

In short, a dialectic of mimesis and its critique has been at the root of most of the major trends in Japanese theatre for at least a hundred years. Put baldly, the pendulum has swung from fantasy to realism, then back to fantasy, and recently back again to a new realism that is a major trend in the contemporary theatre scene. On the one hand, traditional Japanese theatre can be seen to epitomize the Artaudian ideal of a pure and total work of stage art, a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* that was simultaneously sensual and metaphysical. (Whether in fact Japanese theatre has ever done everything its European enthusiasts have claimed is another matter.) Noh can be characterized as a theatre of *mythos*, where the central dramatic event is an epiphany of a particular god, spirit, or emotion. Myth is also an important element in kabuki and the puppet theatre, but in kabuki particularly, *eros* (sensual and sexual appeal) comes to supplant *mythos* as the key quality. In contrast, by subordinating itself to language and representation, modern Japanese drama came under the domination of a *logos* where the stage became a reflection of the real world and the forum for the expression of ideas about that world.

The first step in creating this new theatre in Japan was to establish the playwright at the pinnacle of creative production, over the actor (the *sine qua non* of traditional theatre)

and even the director (who was himself an invention of the nineteenth century). But the first major hurdle for modern theatre in Japan was the total lack of modern Japanese plays. Osanai Kaoru, who almost single-handedly created *shingeki* as we know it today, said that the only solution for some time was to stage Western plays in translation. *Shingeki* was therefore faced with what Gioia Ottaviani has called a twofold learning process: it had to learn the codes of a new theatrical model—realism—but also the “unfamiliar cultural reality” reflected in that form. (Ottaviani 1994, p. 226) Undoubtedly too, the stress on performing translated drama ensured that for a long time any modern Japanese theatre would remain a pale imitation of the West, but that was not so much a problem for people like Osanai, who saw *shingeki* as a place where Japanese could begin to assume a new cultural identity shorn of native tradition.

Naturalism was the dominant force in modern Japanese theatre as it was in literature in the first decade of the twentieth century. One of the key features of theatrical naturalism was summed up in Osanai’s description of Gerhart Hauptmann’s *Lonely Lives* (*Einsame Menschen*), a drama that the protagonist of Tayama Katai’s *Futon* turns to almost obsessively for spiritual guidance. Osanai said of *Lonely Lives* that “it was a play that is not a play, in the sense that there are no occasions for acting” (quoted in Ottaviani 1994, p. 220). It would seem that many Japanese recognized that realism was the antithesis of theatre. Indeed, going to the theatre increasingly resembled a literary activity. “It was sufficient for actors of the modern theatre,” recalled Kitami Harukazu,

to take the burden of reading plays off the shoulders of theatre-goers and to do the work in their place. Even when the actors’ expressions were clumsy and inadequate, the theatre-goers would supplement and fill in the gaps with their own personal imaginations, and would perceive the performance as if tracing the printed words on stage. There would even be students alternating between looking at the stage and looking up the text of the play in the original language (quoted in Kano 2001, p. 160).

If the “unification of the spoken and written languages” (*genbun itchi*), the central aim of literary reform in the last decades of the nineteenth century, was ostensibly about bringing literary Japanese in line with how people actually spoke, then it would seem that for the theatre this idea paradoxically resulted in moving stage language closer to the written (translated) text. In fact, there was nothing particularly “natural” about these translations, which not only conceptually but also syntactically reflected rules strange to the Japanese language. Many of the plays written by the Japanese themselves under the influence of *shingeki* realism still seem foreign. Hirata Oriza, a contemporary playwright whose work I shall presently discuss, has noted that this language “makes sense, but Japanese wouldn’t talk that way” (Hirata 1998a, p. 140). Despite the revolutionary aims of many *shingeki* theorists, who saw theatre as a place for transforming society, Japanese modes of expression and social discourse have not been substantially Westernized. *Genbun itchi* remained an incomplete project under *shingeki* because its language has never been naturalized nor have the Japanese become sufficiently Westernized.

Shingeki continues in Japan, albeit as a foreign exotic that needs an artificial environment to survive, and its once revolutionary realism has degenerated into mannerism. Its hold on

modern theatre was broken during the 1960s by people like Terayama Shūji, Kara Jūrō, Hijikata Tatsumi, and Suzuki Tadashi, who attempted to recapture the physicality and eroticism of early kabuki and other traditional forms of Japanese performance. To some extent, this trend was a “reverse Orientalism” (or *gyaku yunyū*). Certainly Artaud’s ideas, not least his appreciation of Asian theatre, resonated with many in the Japanese theatrical avant-garde in the 1960s; Suzuki Tadashi for one admitted that he had no particular interest in noh theatre until he saw Kanze Hisao perform on the same bill at a theatre festival in France in 1972. (He was no doubt impressed by the enthusiastic reaction of French audiences to Kanze’s performance.) Since then, much of Suzuki’s acting method has been predicated on reviving what he calls the “animal energy” generated in the lower body—the hips, legs, and feet—by traditional Japanese dance theatre. To a large extent, the post-*shingeki* (also called *angura*, or “little theatre”) movement has involved a focus on performance and a corresponding rejection of the notion of drama as a literary form. Since that time, the avant-garde has nonetheless been distinguished by a number of great playwrights (Terayama and Kara being just two examples), but even there the dramatic text has been regarded as primarily a plan for performance. What is more, these plays eschew the realism and humanism of *shingeki* in favour of fantasy and myth in an attempt to make sense out of a contemporary world rendered absurd by the war and its aftermath.⁴ In short, by way of a rejection of *shingeki* logocentrism and a considered appraisal of the avant-garde theories of Europeans like Artaud, post-*shingeki* was a nativist movement that attempted to restore, in a new form, the mythic and erotic spirit of traditional Japanese theatre. It was felt that only through myth, dreams and fantasy could Japanese theatre confront its modern history.

Angura hasn’t exactly died in Japan—Kara Jūrō still performs in his trademark red tent—but two of its notable leaders, Terayama Shūji and Hijikata Tatsumi, passed away in the 1980s and much of its revolutionary fervour also dissipated in the materialistic culture of that decade. *Shingeki* and *angura*, despite their radical formal differences, nonetheless resembled each other inasmuch as both theatres were animated by the notion that the theatrical event is an essentially ideological vehicle for communicating the artist’s point of view. *Angura* in the ’80s and ’90s carried on the stylistic tradition of its ’60s forebears: a preoccupation with dreams and fantasy; a propensity for dramatic collages that are an eclectic mix of cultural references and play fast and loose with both theatrical genres and temporal sequences; and a preference for music and spectacle and an in-your-face physicality. But with a few notable exceptions (like *Daisan Erotika*), *angura* ceased to be interested in exploring political or social problems. Groups like Kōkami Shōji’s Third Stage (*Daisan Butai*) and Noda Hideki’s Dream Idlers (*Yume no Yuminsha*) were stylistically the offspring of *angura*, but inasmuch as they exemplified the speedy, hedonistic spirit of the 1980s bubble economy, they had traded in political message for entertainment.

In the past decade, however, the collapse of the Japanese economy, coupled with the Kobe Earthquake and the Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in 1995, ushered in a far more sober and realistic style of drama by playwrights like Iwamatsu Ryō and Hirata Oriza, typically called “quiet theatre” (*shizuka na engeki*). The past decade has witnessed a return to the naturalism of older *shingeki* theatre, a restitution of the “well made play,” with dialogue that attempts to reflect how people actually speak, and a deliberate pace that is in

stark contrast to the festive and frenetic restlessness of '80s theatre.

Hirata is one of the most dynamic and intelligent young voices on the Japanese theatre scene today. Barely forty, he has been writing and directing his own plays since the early 1980s and is the leader of his own theatre company, Seinendan. The Actors' Theatre (Haiyūza), the Literary Theatre (Bungakuza) and Theatre Circle (Gekidan En), all venerable *shingeki* companies, have also commissioned him to write and direct works. He has also been active as a teacher, critic and media personality and has also written a number of books outlining his theories of the stage. His 1998 *Introduction to Theatre (Engeki nyūmon)*, published in the popular Kōdansha shinsho series, had the unusual distinction for a theatre book of becoming a bestseller; another recent book on Japanese cultural policy, *How Art Can Make a Nation (Geijutsu rikkokuron)* has also sold well. He served as director of the Japan Playwrights Association from 1993-2002 and is currently director of the Japan Society for Theatre Research.⁵

The work by Hirata I wish to focus on here, the 1994 *Tokyo Notes*, is his most successful work and illustrates the playwright's interest on the one hand in formal problems—namely, the potential of realism as a theatrical style—and, on the other, in social issues, particularly the Japanese people's confrontation (or lack thereof) with world historical events. *Tokyo Notes* won the 1995 Kishida Prize, Japan's top drama award, and has since gone into more than forty productions, including a French-language production in Paris in the spring of 2000 and a Japanese-language North-American tour in the fall of that year and has since toured in Europe, Hong Kong and Australia as well.

As its title suggests, *Tokyo Notes* is a kind of homage to Ozu Yasujiro's 1953 film *Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)*. Yumi, the eldest of the Akiyama children, has arranged to meet her siblings in the lobby of a suburban Tokyo art gallery to discuss what is to be done about their aging parents. She has put her life and career on hold to look after her parents, who live in some unnamed provincial town. The other Akiyama siblings are too busy with their own private lives—their work, their marriages, their children—to pay too much attention, however, to either art or the health of their parents. Like Ozu, Hirata deals here with the state of the Japanese family, which, fifty years later, still seems to be breaking up. We see the Akiyamas growing farther and farther apart. The specter of divorce is an added element here: Yoshie, the wife of Yumi's little brother Yūji, confides to Yumi that her husband has been having an affair. For her part, Yumi feels closer to Yoshie than to any of her blood kin.

Yumi's interest in art introduces two other motifs in this play. The drama is set in the near future, 2004, and a substantial number of paintings by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer have been evacuated to this little gallery from a war-torn Europe. The Akiyamas are as little interested in global events as they are in art or even their parents, but the war, though still remote, is increasingly having an impact on individual Japanese. Many Tokyo citizens are caught up either in anti-war demonstrations or in profiteering through the manufacture and sale of weapons to both warring sides; at the same time, human refugees, and not just art works, are beginning to flood into the city. Hirata suggests that contemporary Japanese society, like the Akiyamas, is embroiled in its own trivial concerns and is thus unaware of the bigger picture—that is to say, its own place in the world. (When Hirata wrote this play, the war in Bosnia was raging and Japan was trying to decide whether

its constitution allowed sending UN peace-keeping forces to Cambodia.) The play presents us with a group of people who seem emotionally disengaged, not only from their own blood relations, but also from larger geopolitical events. The coolness of his portrait of contemporary society is on the one hand an attempt to capture the indirectness of Japanese (or at least Tokyo) social discourse, but there is also a suggestion here, as in a number of his other plays, of a self-involved civilization oblivious of its own impending doom. Larger issues are raised, only to be brushed off or trivialized.

Hirata's choice of one of the masters of Dutch realism introduces another important motif. (Incidentally, Vermeer's current and international reappraisal would seem to reflect a renewed critical interest in realism in the west as well as Japan.) Hirata uses this painter as a foil for discussing the acts of looking and representing what one sees, and sometimes also that of choosing to ignore what is going on around one. I have discussed this feature of Hirata's play elsewhere (Hirata 2002) and so I reiterate much of my argument here. Seeing is the subject of the longest speech in this play, where the curator Kushimoto describes to Yumi how Vermeer used a *camera obscura*—a “dark box” into which an image was refracted by means of a lens onto a sheet of paper or canvass—as an aid in drafting his paintings:

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

The renaissance ushered in what one critic has called “a virtual science of vision” that had a profound impact not only on art (notably, perspective) but also on mathematics, navigation, astronomy, and philosophy (Weschler 2000, p. 68). Optical instruments revolutionized not only how we see things, but also how we see ourselves. In particular, the lens reduced vision from the binocular vision of the naked eye and perspective to a monocular regime that governed vision and representation until painting's “liberation” from mimesis with impressionism, later, cubism. Instruments like the camera obscura enhanced one's powers of observation but at the same time, they shut out all but the distinct object of one's restricted vision.⁶ Hirata underscores the notion that intense observation also involves an intentional blindness to what, as it were, lies outside the frame. Kushimoto admits to a colleague that the Japanese people have their heads stuck in a dark box, ignoring the world at large. They are no different from the proverbial ostrich hiding its head in the sand, he claims, thus casting doubt on his own rosy picture of the European enlightenment.

Of all the characters, it is Yumi who has the artist's eye and also an insight into people, particularly into her sister-in-law Yoshie's state of mind. Yet she is equally aware of the limits of both vision and compassion. Even as she reminds Yoshie (quoting a line from Saint-Exupéry's novel, *The Little Prince*) that “what is essential is invisible to the eye,” she asks “but how can

you see with your heart? Everybody's hearts are different." Like Vermeer's paintings, then, Hirata's vision of human nature is a carefully circumscribed one. Light is thrown on only one corner of existence, leaving the rest in darkness.

It is often said that realism is a style of alienation: the audience is cut off from the actors by an invisible "fourth wall" and the stage characters themselves, as it were, exist in an entirely secular universe cut off from God, or rather, on in which the audience assumes a God-like status, peering into the private consciousness of the stage characters. But the experience as a spectator to this hyper-realistic play is uncannily pleasurable, drawing the viewer into the world of its characters and other members of the audience. The act of looking at something that has been created to be seen—something, moreover that is fashioned in the object's almost photographic likeness—creates an eerie double or even triple vision. *Tokyo Notes* both affirms vision and questions its limitations. An exercise in realism that is keenly aware of its own artifice, its emotional power lies in what will not, or cannot, be expressed.

What might Hirata's drama say about the direction Japanese theatre is headed today? In his theoretical writings, Hirata suggests that the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, ethnic strife abroad, and economic, social and political uncertainty at home has bred an instinctive aversion in contemporary Japan to ideologies of any kind. Hirata betrays an analogous skepticism toward narrative. Like Ozu, Hirata is stylistically a realist who is more interested in character than plot. His play is even more sketchy and disjointed, though, than Ozu's film: Hirata resists the urge to tell a story and presents us instead with a series of vignettes, or "notes." In his 1996 collection of essays, *Cities Need no Festivities*, Hirata writes that "theatre is meant to portray not events or actions, but rather human existence and relationships." Hence, "the problem is not what is said, but *how* it is said" (Hirata 1997, p. 14). Contemporary theatre—at least the kind Hirata is creating—thus shifts the modernist emphasis from self and message to attention on the other, one's particular environment and nest of social relationships. Elsewhere, I have suggested that, if *shingeki* was the expression of *logos* and *angura* that of *eros* or *pathos* (emotion), then Hirata's theatre might be described as a theatre of *koinohnia*, communion. But I think, so long as we are using Greek words here, that *ethos* better describes Hirata's dramaturgy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *ethos* as "the prevalent tone of sentiment of a people or community; the genius of an institution or system." Cognates such as "ethics" and "ethology" ("the portrayal of character by mimicry": OED) also capture Hirata's interest in moral and mimetic problems. (Hirata himself [1998] has employed the term *ethos* to characterize premodern Japanese theatre, to the extent that it is informed by convention and tradition.)

Hirata's theatre of community or relationships must be contrasted with the communalist culture of much post-*shingeki* theatre, which generally has been predicated on the creation of a participation mystique (*kyōdō gensō*), a fantasy shared by both performers and audience. For all the talk about the importance of the actor, Hirata remarks, *angura* directors nonetheless imposed their own image on their companies and those who have resisted have been forced to leave. This attitude brought about closed and hierarchical organizations in the theatre world. An age that has seen what cults like the Aum Shinrikyō can do surely should no longer accommodate this kind of authoritarianism, Hirata writes (1998a, pp. 175-7). (*A Night Longer than the Sea* (Umi yori nagai yoru), his 1999 play about the collapse of a citizen's

movement, examines the inherent irrationality of group psychology.) In contrast, Hirata somewhat paradoxically advocates a return to directorial control over the total vision of a work, an authority multiplied by the resurgent importance of the playwright.

For Hirata the task of the artist is ultimately an inquiry into the nature of reality and a quest to portray it as faithfully as one can. "Our lives are not a litany of big events such as love affairs and murders," Hirata writes,

Most life has nothing whatever to do with what theatre in the past has liked to portray, but is grounded instead in quiet and uneventful moments. . . . What I want to do is distill from all those complicated elements an objective sense of time as it is lived—quietly—and directly reconstruct that on stage (Hirata 1997, p. 182).

This privileging of life "as it is" (*ari no mama*), and the faith that an artist can indeed portray reality directly and transparently, is perhaps not so far from the naturalist *shingeki* ideal as Hirata imagines. Hirata is, to some extent at least, following in a long tradition of Japanese lyrical empiricism, though (unlike the I-novelists who followed in the wake of Japanese naturalism) he has for the most part avoided autobiographical references in his drama. (His 1996 play about Japanese backpackers in Istanbul, *Kings of the Road*, is the only direct reference I am aware of to events in Hirata's own life.)

The revival of realism is a trend some feel may be a step back for Japanese theatre. In a 1995 essay "Has Theatre Died?" Kōkami Shōji lamented that "people have forgotten that [the anti-naturalistic post-*shingeki* movement] bore fruit in the production of performances that easily transcended world standards in theatre" (cited in Shichiji 2000, p. 8). In a round-table discussion published the previous year, critics Nishidō Kōjin, Ōzasa Yoshio, and playwright Betsuyaku Minoru pointed out that contemporary plays do not attempt to portray a complete and coherent picture of the world, and so to that extent differ from orthodox *shingeki*. For that reason, Betsuyaku has dubbed the new style *shaseigeki*, or "sketch drama," after the practice by writers like Masaoka Shiki and Kunikida Doppo at the turn of the last century of writing literary sketches from direct observation of life. With the collapse of universalistic ideologies, perhaps that is the best an artist can do—portray slices of life. Playwrights like Hirata may excel at detail but, Nishidō Kōjin wonders, do they have "the imagination to face the whole" (*zentai e mukau sōzōryoku*)? (Betsuyaku et al. 1994, pp. 23-25.) Admittedly, much contemporary theatre in Japan seems a smaller, more modest thing compared to the great experiments of the 1960s, and it may still be too early to tell whether this radical style of realism will coalesce into a prevailing theatrical vision of contemporary society, but Hirata's theatre seems as close as the form will allow to a coherent style. It would seem to be a refusal (rather than an inability) to imagine any such totalities that defines much of Japanese theatre today.

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NOTES

¹ Ariane Mnouchkine, "L'acteur est un scaphandrier de l'âme," *Le Soir*, 20-22 July 1984. Quoted in Pavis 1996, p. 95.

² Derrida 1978, pp. 233-34.

³ *Kabuki o hanare yo. Dentō o mushi seyo. Odoru na, ugoke. Utau na, katare.* Osanai Kaoru, 小山内薫, "Enshutsu nōto" shoshū *En no gyōja no daiichi-ya o oete* "演出ノート" 所収「役行者の第一夜を終えて」(A Director's Notes: Completing the First Night of *En no gyōja*), quoted in Akiba 1955-56, vol. 2, p. 583.

⁴ This tendency is described in detail in Goodman 1986 and 1988.

⁵ Further information on Hirata and his company can be found in Hirata 2002, or by consulting Seinendan's comprehensive, trilingual (Japanese, English, and French) website.

⁶ The use of the *camera obscura* and other optical instruments is the subject of painter David Hockney's recent book, *Secret Knowledge* (Hockney 2001). See also chapter two of Crary 1990, pp. 25-66, and Sanford Schwartz's review of a recent exhibition and two books on Johannes Vermeer (Schwartz 2001).