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Japanese and European Medieval Theatre and their modern revivals: Performing Cultural Heritage in the Mirror of the Other

Knowledge Forum, TFC, Sendai, February 2017
Introduction

✧ Luis Frois, *Treaty of the Differences and Contradictions between European and Japanese Customs* (1585)

Chapter 13: « On Plays, Farces, Danses and Musical Instruments »

‘We must assimilate your modern arts to our taste, and then go back to our traditional practices with a new point of view, in order to revive their influence on us.’
I. Japanese and European Medieval Theatres: Exploring Differences, Searching for Similarities

II. The Art of Noh and French Neo-Medievalism on Stage. Two case-studies (1920-1950)

Conclusion.

Interculturality and East-West Exchanges on stage: Meeting the Other or Foreignizing the Self?

Otojiro Kawakami and Sadda Yacco in Paris, Theatre de l'Athenee, 1901
I. Japanese and European Medieval Theatres, Exploring Differences, Searching for Similarities

A. ‘It is not our Tradition’: French Audience and Japanese Troups, A Rare Encounter before 1960

The discovery of Kabuki
Otojiro Kawakami in Paris, 1900

The Geisha and the Knight

Sadda Yacco
Production: Loïe Fuller
Sadda Yacco by Pablo Picasso, 1901
The Discovery of Noh

1957: First Performance of a complete Noh-Kyogen cycle
Obagasake Sagi & his troupe
Paris, Theatre Sarah-Bernhardt
b. ‘But it looks like our Past’ : the Raise of Analogies with Theatres in Antique Greece Antiquity, Medieval France & Early Modern England (end 19\textsuperscript{th}-beg. 20\textsuperscript{th} c.)

✧ 1873, *Things Japanese* by Basil Hall Chamberlain
✧ 1922, *The Noh Plays of Japan* by Arthur Waley
✧ 1873, *Le Théâtre au Japon* by Georges Bousquet
C. Noh, Kyôgen, Mystery plays and Farces, What is at stake in their Comparison?

- 14th-16th c.
- 200 Noh plays 250 Kyôgen / 100 Mystery plays, 200 farces in French
- Staging the links with the Other World
- Long performances where plays were articulated
- Mystery play: a Community Drama
- Farces and the Professional Technique of Acting

Jean Fouquet, *Sainte Appolline’s Martyrdom*, Representation of a Mystery Play, c. 1450
II. The Art of Noh and French Neo-Medievalism on Stage (1920-1950)

A. When Noh means ‘No’: Jacques Copeau and his heirs or How to declare war to French Modern Theatre using Japanese Acting Technique?

Waley’s Translation (1922)
Noël Péri’s Translation (1921) reviewed by Jean Schlumberger for the Nouvelle Revue Française in 1922
Jacques Copeau (1879-1949)

1913: Foundation of the Vieux-Colombier Theatre in Paris

❖ Copeau’s battles:
❖ A Theatre with less Text and more Body
❖ ‘Bare scaffolds’ of the Past against Modern Illusionist Staging
❖ Codification of the Scen nnaissance (Knowledge) shared with the Audience

Jacques Copeau (wearing hat) and his troupe: Charles Dullin (seating left), Louis Jouvet (standing near the tree), Suzanne Bing (seating right)
Copeau playing Scapin in Commedia dell’Arte-style  (Molière, Les Fouberies de Scapin, 1923)
At that time, he was studying Noh, ‘the most rigourous technique we know of’.
The Noh play Katan was in preparation with Suzanne Bing and their students
Marie-Hélène & Jacques Dasté

Grenoble, 1947: *The Sumida River* (transl. S. Bing, 1923)

French Cultural Decentralisation = ‘Japanese silly things’
B. When Noh means ‘Notre’ ( ours ) : Paul Claudel and the Reconciliation with French Medieval Past through a Japanese Emotion

Paul Claudel (1868-1955), Ambassador for France in Japan 1921-1927

Claudel’s vision of Noh

✧ A Path to the Other World
✧ A Shared Knowledge
✧ Communication based on Emotion

‘Drama is what happens ; Noh is somebody who appears’.
✧ 1923: a Noh plot to explore ‘the borders of the Worlds’, *La Femme et son ombre* (*Onna to kage*)

✧ Merging Medieval Theaters into Oratorio-Patomime:
✧ *Jeanne au bûcher* (1934), A. Honegger
✧ Joan and saint Dominic, the *shite* and the *waki*

Joan and Dominic on the Bridge between the Worlds
Paris, Bastille Opera, 1992, dir. C. Régy
‘In my mind, it is a Mystery Play, perfectly suited for a staging on Medieval scaffolds...’ Claudel, interview in Comoedia 1941

Dual Stage inspired by Mystery Plays, Carnavalesque Feast of the Ass, Japanese-style Choir and Choreographic Interludes

**Joan on the Stake, 2005**
Production for the Seiji Ozawa Matsumoto Festival
Conclusion

Interculturality and East-West Exchanges on stage: Meeting the Other or Foreignizing the Self?

✧ « The Past is a foreign (Eastern) country » (L.P. Hartley)

✧ Ariane Mnouchkine and Richard II by Shakespeare in Avignon, 1982
Richard II by Shakespeare, dir. A. Mnouchkine, 1982, Palace of the Popes, Avignon
Performing European Past: Medieval decor + Kabuki-style Acting
Reconnecting West to West: The East as Self-Reflection or as Cultural Partner?

Research & Training Collaborative Project
Le Spectacle de l’autre

「他者のスペクタクル—日仏間の移動と文化的移行」