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Japanese avant-garde theater from the 1970s
reviewed four decades later

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Introduction

Terayama Shûji (1935-1983) was one of the leading artists of a new avant-garde Japanese theater movement in the 1970s. He was an extraordinarily versatile person, writing poetry and plays, directing theater and film productions, and enthusiastically participating in sports. Horse racing and boxing held a particular fascination for him, which is one reason why boxing rings sometimes appeared as a scenic motif in his theatrical productions.

Terayama first gained public notice in 1954 for his poetry (Sorgenfrei 1978, 92). He was therefore known in Japan as a young literary figure. However, when he started his theater group, *Tenjô Sajiki*, his reputation as a theater director was not as acclaimed. Terayama did not mind working with laymen, for which he was often criticized. From early on in his career he was accused of scandal-making and sensationalism, and his performances were often called vulgar. Therefore, Terayama and his group members were regarded as outsiders and representatives of a subculture (Senda 1995, 141). Nevertheless, they were the first Japanese avant-garde theater group invited abroad, to countries such as France, Holland, the U.S.A. and Germany.

In this article, Terayama's theatrical ambitions will be examined from the perspectives of his performances in Japan and via the reviews he received from

abroad. In Japan he is still appreciated despite his untimely death in 1983, but abroad his plays and films have been mostly forgotten.

Since the 1970s, Terayama was highly esteemed as a playwright and director, and his theater work gained interest because he was an innovative dramatist and thespian. His street theater experiments are especially worthy of remembrance. Terayama tried to break the traditional theatrical framework because he wanted to blur the border between stage and auditorium in order to connect theater with everyday life. Terayama's purpose was to overcome the passivity of the average audience. Therefore, he often tried to motivate spectators to participate in his performances. However, when his group members overstretched their anti-establishment behavior, they switched over to an authoritarian attitude toward their audiences, especially in cases when spectators were forced to do things against their will. Nevertheless, despite some crucial blunders, many of Terayama's ideas are worth saving from oblivion, and other episodes from his theater life can be seen as anecdotes from past times.

Terayama often claimed that the contents of his plays were not important, and the audience should instead only pay attention to the form of the presentation. However, statements like this could also be interpreted as camouflage. The topic of a lot of his plays was a problematic mother-child relationship, a hidden attempt to handle his own past. He was raised in war-time Japan and suffered for his entire life from mental wounds, unfulfilled hopes, and broken dreams. Typically for his generation, as a young man he turned his aggression against society, but this behavior simply covered the incurable psychic trauma of his boyhood, like a shield.

Early career

Terayama was born in Japan's northeastern Tohoku region¹⁾, in Aomori prefecture. Even as a renowned author in Tokyo, he never denied his roots or lost his local dialect. His personality was open and winning. He succeeded in recruiting a great deal of creative people into his orbit. There were also some scandals surrounding him²⁾, but these resulted in a lot of legends about him as well. In 1997, a Terayama museum was built in a pop-art style near his birthplace.

Terayama established his theater group in the late sixties, but he was not taken seriously as a theatrical practitioner until the seventies. Nevertheless, his first theatrical experience as a playwright dates back to 1957 when he completed his first play. The title was *Chi wa Tatta Mama Nemutte Iru* (Blood is Standing Asleep), and it was performed by a theater group at that time (Sorgenfrei 1978, 92). A later play was *Wa ga Hanzaigaku - Adam and Eve* (Our School of Crime - Adam and Eve), which was performed in 1966 in Tokyo at the *Art Theater Shinjuku Bunka*.

Until the early sixties in Japan, the so called *Shingeki* (New Theater) style was in vogue, but despite the name, this kind of theater was basically just a plain copy of western literary theater. Its roots went back to the beginnings of the twentieth century, when almost all translations of foreign works were presented as 'new theater' in Japan, with only a few exceptions of original Japanese plays.

Since the middle of the 1960s, an underground theater movement started in

1) Terayama's 'Tohoku provincialism' was mocked, with nasty allusions made regarding his origins (Kara 1997, 30).

2) In December 1969, there was a brawl between members of *Tenjô Sajiki* and another troop leading to Terayama and his adversary being arrested (Goodman 1988, S. 234).

opposition to the *Shingeki* style. Terayama was one of the theater practitioners at the forefront of this movement, noted for its inclusion of traditional Japanese elements. His theater group, *Engeki Jikkenshitsu Tenjō Sajiki*, was established in 1967 (Senda 1995, 136). It was particularly unusual in that Terayama came into theater as an author, yet specifically rejected the ‘literary theater’ style due to its perceived inauthenticity (Terayama 1983, 158).

The name of Terayama’s theater group referred to the film *Les Enfants du Paradis* by Marcel Carné (Goodman 1999, 47). *Tenjō Sajiki* means ‘the gallery at the very top’. *Engeki Jikkenshitsu* means ‘theater laboratory’. It was therefore intended as experimental theater which took surrealism as its model (Goodman 1999, 47). In English, the group’s name is referred to as ‘The Peanut Gallery’. In this group, Terayama gathered people who only had the chance to appear in the circus or variety shows. His motto was ‘the rehabilitation of showman-hood’. *Tenjō Sajiki* therefore stood at a distance from other theater groups for the whole period of its existence (Senda 1995, 138). Most of its members lacked theater training and were not connected to the *Shingeki* style or university student theater groups.

Terayama’s criticism of conventional western theater lies in the fact that it was too often used as propaganda. In every epoch, theater has fallen into the hands of people who try to use it to manipulate reality. Terayama also criticized how theater always has to define itself through the existence of a stage—if the actors and audience are not allotted places above and below, theater somehow loses its authenticity. As in the visual arts of the twentieth century, objects were therefore simply seen as ‘art’ because they were put in museums; otherwise, people would carelessly pass by them (Terayama 1971, 29). In other words, Terayama felt that while framework defines content, content does not have anything that defines

itself. As a result, he believed theater should be given back to itself.

To overcome Western theatrical conventions, in Terayama's view, theater's fictitious nature needed to be emphasized. Just as a spectator observes sideshows or waxworks and knows they are not real, so theater should not be allowed to copy reality. According to Terayama, sideshows with deformed creatures were originally a means of moral education. Parents could say to their children, "Look, so that your sins will be repaid" (Terayama 1971, 20). In Japan, it could be argued that immoral actions in one's former life might be punished through deformities upon rebirth. Therefore, those with handicaps or other abnormalities were shown as deterrents. However, these performances fascinated Terayama as a child for the sake of curiosity: he did not feel the need for them to be morally justified. For this reason, Terayama wanted to present spectacles like a showman with *Tenjô Sajiki*. He was not looking for a 'noble' public that wanted to see 'art' in a theater.

Early *Tenjô Sajiki* productions

Aomori-ken no Semushi Otoko

The first production of *Tenjô Sajiki* was a play called *Aomori-ken no Semushi Otoko* (The Hunchback of Aomori). For his casting call, Terayama posted a newspaper advertisement in which he was looking for "giants, dwarfs, deformed creatures, and beautiful women". At the audition, he cared less about acting abilities and more about actors with the requisite physical showiness for his production. He wanted to create a circus-like performance, so he was not looking simply for "actors and actresses" (Senda 1995, 138). He felt an inner connection to outsiders because he saw himself "as an outsider, cut off from the mainstream of society by the fact of his unrecorded birth, his roots in the frontier of the almost

primitive Tohoku region, and his conviction that his mind was somehow different due to the separation” (Sorgenfrei 1978, 92).

Shortly after Terayama’s death in 1983, a retrospective of his most important works was organized. A videotape of an *Aomori-Ken no Semushi Otoko* performance was made available on this occasion. In the show, strange figures appeared on stage, but not one of the actors had a real affliction. The title figure was not at all the main character. The actual leading role was a woman played by a male actor whose theatrical acting style alluded to the appearance of women in *kabuki* theater. This woman felt sexually attracted to the hunchback, but a sense of maternal concern for him also mingled into their relationship. The possibility that the hunchback could actually be her son also came up, as it was mentioned that she was raped as a maid by the son of her master and then bore a disfigured child.³⁾ Although the child’s father had died, the maid was taken into a rich family, and her son was abandoned. The family let the official birth and death registers vanish in order to destroy all proof. As a result, when the hunchback appeared as an adult, there remained a doubt as to whether he was her son or not. Their strange relationship became especially clear in a bath scene in which she roughly tore off his clothes in order to wash his back with fervor. A mutual sexual desire also mingled into the longing of the hunchback for a mother. The woman was also physically misshapen - she walked with a limp even though she tried to conceal it. Now she was the mistress of the house, but she was surrounded like a moody queen with strange servants: a dwarf, a giant, and a naked girl.

3) Terayama possibly wanted to associate the mother’s pregnancy after the rape with her child’s hunched back. The mother and son would therefore have to carry the disfigurement together (Sorgenfrei 2000, 276).

To the side of the stage knelt a *kabuki*-like narrator that provided commentary to the sounds of a *shamisen*. According to Sorgenfrei (1978, 124), through this approach Terayama was drawing on the tradition of *Naniwabushi*, a musical recitation of old tales, which became tremendously popular in the Meiji era (1868-1912). Musical recitation has a very long tradition in Japan in the form of *shinnai*, solo recitation, as well as *jôruri*, in combination with doll theater. In Terayama's play, the narrator was a young woman wearing a sailor-style dress, like a schoolgirl. Unlike in *kabuki*, however, this narrator also performed a role in the play, and the truth of her remarks was questioned during the performance. Specifically, the alleged mother of the hunchback disagreed with parts of the narrator's telling of her story and felt jealousy toward her because the narrator also showed interest in the hunchback and seemed not to speak from an objective point of view. In the play, the narrator is eventually murdered by the dwarf servant when she is about to divulge critical secrets.

In addition to *shamisen* music, archaic sounds of gongs, drums, and horns were played in a very uncanny manner. There was also a kind of chorus consisting of whispering voices without bodies that emphasized fear and superstition (Sorgenfrei 1978, 134). The atmosphere of the region in which Terayama was born came alive in the play, as well as the supernatural atmosphere of *Osore-zan*, the mountain in Aomori where it is believed that the immediate presence of spirits can be felt living alongside people.

Finally, another characteristic of this production was the unique stage set-up. On the stage was a platform where only those who entered it were considered to be part of a scene. Whoever stood outside it was not part of the ongoing story. In other words, with this arrangement, actors were simultaneously on stage and off

stage.

From the point of view of the 1983 retrospective, it is impossible to adequately judge the first production of *Aomori-Ken no Semushi Otoko*. By the time the video was taken, the scenery had changed quite a bit from the original premiere, which was fifteen years earlier. As can be seen from old photos, the stage at the premiere contained a beach and a Japanese war flag in the background that symbolized the rising sun over the sea (Corona 1997, 25). Directed by Higashi Yutaka, the scenery utilized the graphic artwork of Yokô Tadanori, a *Tenjô Sajiki* co-founder, as well as design elements referring to pop art and folk art (Sorgenfrei 1978, 123).

Sorgenfrei (1992 S. 120) interpreted *Aomori-Ken no Semushi Otoko* as a kind of Japanese version of the Oedipus myth despite the fact that a father figure was absent in the play.⁴⁾ The mother of the hunchback could be seen as a symbol of old Japan and how it was ‘raped’ at end of the nineteenth century by powerful western states but later taken into the family of rich industrial nations (Sorgenfrei 1992, 121). The hunchback could also be a metaphor for the atomic bomb victims of World War II. On one hand, he was separated like the survivors, marked as a consequence of a forceful event. On the other hand, also like the *hibakusha*, the hunchback was the object of lecherous interest (Sorgenfrei 1992, 121).

Ôyama Debuko no Hanzai

Terayama’s next play, *Ôyama Debuko no Hanzai* (Fat Ôyama’s Crime) brought a grotesque banquet to the stage. The crime of Fat Ôyama was that she ate for two

4) Terayama, on the other hand, claimed that his generation suffered from an Orestes complex (Senda 1983, 13).

while others had to starve elsewhere (Terayama 1971, 10). In addition to an obese woman, Terayama also cast sex actor starlets and bodybuilders for the production (Senda 1995, 139). The set design resembled *Aomori-Ken no Semushi Otoko*, and the narrator-driven musical recitation style also accompanied stage events in this play.

According to Terayama, the script of this play was not important. The main aim was to afford the opportunity to place attractive bodies beside a hundred-kilo-woman on the stage (Senda 1995, 139). However, Terayama's protest against literary theater could also be seen in this production. *Hiragana* characters from the Japanese syllable poem *i-ro-ha* were used in a card game scene, one by one. Later on, a new sequence of these characters was recited in the form of a poem (Terayama 1983, 269). This kind of broken use of literary meaning was reminiscent of dada experiments.

Kegawa no Marie

The third production of *Tenjô Sajiki* was *Kegawa no Marie* (Mink Marie). Terayama did not use the musical recitative approach in this play; Nevertheless, the influence of *Aomori-Ken no Semushi Otoko* was evident. A transvestite actor played the lead role of Marie. She first appeared as a woman who changed her lovers like shirts and kept a kind of slave who had to shave her arms and legs in the bathtub and perform other lowly services. However, later in the play it was established that Marie was a man, not a woman. The Japanese title *Kegawa no Marie* therefore is a reference to male body hair.⁵⁾

5) This appears to be an anticipation of modern gender ideology. However, in the late sixties, it was probably only used as a provocative aspect of transvestitism and homosexuality to attack the conservative male and female gender concepts of that time.

Marie pretended to have a son named Kinya, a teenage boy who appeared in short pants but whose biological mother had been raped and then died during childbirth. Marie did not want to let him grow up, so she had him live in an artificial world⁶⁾, in an apartment decorated like a jungle in which Kinya would go on butterfly hunts. Marie was neither Kinya's mother nor father, but she felt responsible for causing his biological mother to be raped (Sorgenfrei 1978, 168). In one scene Marie explained the reason for choosing the life of a woman and occasionally the male actor stepped out of the female part by speaking some lines with a deep voice. Another female character, also played by a transvestite, tried to seduce Kinya, but Kinya was so strongly under Marie's influence that he would rather murder the girl to escape sexual persecution. As a result, Marie dressed him henceforth as a female and taught him how to be a transvestite.

Sorgenfrei (1978, 168) describes another version of *Kegawa no Marie* in which the girl strangled Kinya, but he was brought back to life by Marie in the end. Here Marie appeared as a Christ-like figure in a circle of twelve gay apostles. There were also other allusions to Marie's divine nature in this version of the play. For example, during the girl's first seduction attempt, Kinya called out for his mother's help, and Marie's voice answered in a God-like manner from behind the curtain (Sorgenfrei 1978, 181).

In a flier for a guest performance in Essen, Germany in 1969, the play was called a *Lehrstück* because it showed a "metamorphosis, a transformation of the natural into the artificial". In actuality, while Terayama never intended to write a

6) This artificial world, similar to Disneyland, resembled in certain respects the world in which many Japanese children are raised because their mothers themselves do not want to get older.

Brechtian *Lehrstück*⁷⁾, his story depicted a metamorphosis of ‘the real’ into ‘the wrong’, a transformation of truth into lies symbolized by the reversal of sexual orientation but also by alluding to the association of a cocoon/caterpillar/butterfly. Becoming a butterfly was equivalent to escaping from reality (Sorgenfrei 1978, 168) because in the parlance of the play, truth was imagination while reality was a lie (Sorgenfrei 1978, 177).

Sorgenfrei also interpreted the play as a blasphemous parody of Christianity. The ‘artificial jungle’ could be a reference to the *Garden of Eden* (Sorgenfrei 2000, 280), and the girl could be seen as the serpent in paradise (Sorgenfrei 1978, 179). Marie therefore appeared in the first part as a disguised God/Father figure, and in the second act as a God-like Son with allusions to the Last Supper (Sorgenfrei 1978, 183). “The music of Bach and Wagner spews forth as Christ’s descent into hell and resurrection are parodied by a dancing chorus of Mink Maries” (Sorgenfrei 2000, 280).

Sorgenfrei (1992 122) noted the similarity of *Kegawa no Marie* to a *nô* play, as the first act depicted a disguised god who was then revealed fully in the second act. Therefore, Terayama could have written a play about the ‘resurrection of the flesh’, where the body represented a new church and sexuality the new sacrament (Sorgenfrei 1992, 123). While allusions to Christian religious ideas could hardly be understood in Japan, in guest performances abroad, the messages were apparent (Sorgenfrei 1978, 183). A German critic wrote, “If ... in derision of sacral images religious classical music is satirically abused, then a not yet completely denatured

7) A *Lehrstück* is a type of ‘teaching play’ in the tradition of playwright Bertolt Brecht. The plot of the drama should serve as a parable for social relationships and in interspersed songs or comments the audience should be taught the right point of view, which in Brecht’s intention was always leftist.

Christianity as well as a humanistically open socialist society can only say ‘no’ (Hübner 1969, 20)’.

The strange mother-son relationship in *Kegawa no Marie* had a striking similarity to the one in *Aomori-Ken no Semushi Otoko*. By the end of the sixties, this might have seemed provocative because of the emphasis on homosexuality, but in fact it should not be overlooked that Terayama’s own relationship with his mother was reflected in these plays. Terayama’s relationship with her was probably especially close because she had reared him alone after his father had been drafted into the military. When his father did not return from the war, his mother left him with relatives and went to work on an American military base. In several of Terayama’s works and in the autobiographical film *Denen ni Shisu* (Dying in the Paddies)⁸⁾, this problematic mother-son relationship can be recognized. The mother-role was often played by a male actor, as if Terayama was looking for a substitute for his lost father. In this respect, Terayama’s *Orestes complex* can be seen again.

Moving in new creative directions

Sho o Sute Yo, Machi e Deyô

After three dramatic yet similarly conceived plays, Terayama tried to move in a new creative direction in 1968. With the production of *Sho o Sute Yo, Machi e Deyô* (Throw Away Your Books, Go Onto the Streets), he gave up the idea of theater as pure fiction (Senda 1995, 139). He let students who had published poems in a magazine perform and gave them the option of reciting these poems on stage, accompanied by rock music. He called this type of performance *dokurama*,

8) This film was shown abroad under the title *Cache Cache Pastoral*.

which was a blend of documentary and drama concepts. It was a kind of *théâtre vérité* as a counterpart to *cinéma vérité* (Courdy 2000, 257) and harsh social criticism could be heard in this production (Senda 1995, 140).

There were reprisals of *Sho o Sute Yo, Machi e Deyô* in 1969 and 1970. A film with the same name was produced in 1971, but only the opening scenes refer to the theater performance. Essentially, the movie was about the life and first sexual experiences of a teenager, interrupted by different scenes from everyday life. Scenes from other plays (such as *Kegawa no Marie*) were referenced in addition to Terayama's early street theater. It was an experimental film, with incomplete, restless camera work, a mix of black-and-white and color, and intentionally under and over exposed frames.

Jinriki-Hikôki Solomon

Terayama's next step was his experimental production of *Jinriki-Hikôki Solomon* (Solomon, the Man-Powered Airplane). Here his intention was to embed theater consistently within everyday life. As a result, this was a street-theater production. It began at noon and finished at sunset (Terayama 1971, 14). The spectators got a map in which approximate directions were stated with arrows that marked where they should look for 'theaters'. The protagonists had a solid workload with a full schedule. One was a long-distance runner wearing a signboard that read, 'Speak to me!' He was only allowed to stop if somebody really spoke to him. Another actor had to sell crocodiles, a second had to buy 'parents, which become useless', and a third had to look for *Popeye* spinach cans in drugstores. On this occasion, much improvisational skill was demanded. The spectators were encouraged to take part and to sing along with the songs (Terayama 1971, 15). The last arrow then led to the 'take-off point' of the airplane. The actors climbed a mechanical contraption

and ‘took off,’ accompanied by rock music, leaving their families, and sterile society behind (Terayama 1971, 16).

The theme in *Jinriki-hikôki Solomon* was one that reappeared in several of Terayama’s works: average citizens who are stuck in reality can never overcome gravity on their own. Only through the use of revolutionary imagination can this be accomplished. Then through the power of imagination, mankind is able to fly like birds (Sorgenfrei 1978, 195). In 1971, Terayama’s troop was invited to perform *Jinriki-hikôki Solomon* in France and Holland (Senda 1995, 149). In a video broadcast on Dutch television of a performance in Arnheim, one can see how the big airplane made from wood and paper was burned up in the end. It went up in flames as a symbol of how only the spirit lends us wings in order to leap skyward.

Garigari-hakase no Hanzai

For Terayama, the opposite of street theater was ‘room theater’. He therefore presented *Garigari-hakase no Hanzai* (The Crime of Dr. Garigari) on a uniquely arranged stage in his first playhouse, which was built in 1969. This play took place simultaneously in different areas, or ‘rooms’, but the setting was meant to be the house of a family. For this purpose, the stage and the auditorium were divided with curtains into different sections. Different characters performed in each section. For example, the father performed in the bedroom, the daughter was in the bathroom, and the grandmother was in the dining room. There was also a lodger in the toilet. The story began at seven o’clock. The doorbell rang, and an uninvited guest emerged from the public, embracing the servant and calling him father,

although the servant denied his paternity.⁹⁾ Both then agreed that they would play the roles of father and son in the show (Sorgenfrei 1978, 212). Simultaneously, a scene began at seven o'clock in the Japanese bathroom where the daughter and two adolescents were bathing. She was trying to pretend to be the mother of the 'boys', but they were uncooperative, claiming that they had only been paid to play the roles of her children and were clearly developing a sexual interest in her (Sorgenfrei 1978, 214). Also at seven o'clock, another scene began in the dining room where the grandmother and her seven guests methodically listened to sitar music. However, the guests did not speak a word. Only the grandmother spoke, but in absurd monologues. In not one of the three scenes did anyone speak continuously, so there were occasional moments of silent actions. Since it was necessary for all the scenes to end simultaneously, the first intermission occurred after all three scenes were completed (Sorgenfrei 1978, 216).

At eight o'clock, the second act began. There were scenes with the two sons of the house. One thought he was a detective and pretended to possess keys to various locked doors, but he could not find the doors to which the keys belonged. The second son had a tape recorder. He recorded one half of a conversation, leaving pauses after each sentence. After rewinding the machine, he carried on a complete conversation with it, speaking within the silent gaps (Sorgenfrei 1978, 220). The third scene took place in the bedroom where the father was absorbed in the operation of a strange machine until the servant came to inform him about the

9) One assignment in Terayama's street theater workshops involved having a participant call a passer-by 'father' and then insist that he is meeting him for the first time unexpectedly in the street after having not seeing him for a long time (Terayama 1983, 77). According to Terayama, one time a Dutch actor in Holland was really taken seriously, and the 'father' ended up taking him home and entertaining him (Terayama 1983, 255). This could be regarded as a good improvisational exercise on the one hand, but on the other hand, it could also be seen as Terayama's hidden attempt to find his own lost father.

presence of the uninvited guest, at which point a family meeting needed be called (Sorgenfrei 1978, 222).

At nine o'clock, after the second intermission, the family met together in one room. The spectators, who were viewed as invited guests and whose number was restricted to forty, could sit wherever they felt comfortable, but no one had seen all of the scenes in all of the rooms. This fragmented viewing experience forced the spectators to imagine the missing parts of the action (Sorgenfrei 1978, 209). The entire stage and all of the actors were made visible to the audience only during the last part of the play (Sorgenfrei 1978, 224). The father opened a family conference which required the distribution of a unique set of cards. These cards represented the various roles of each family member. Each character tried to get the card which represented their own role (Sorgenfrei 1978, 224). However, the card for the oldest son was missing, and the uninvited guest announced that the oldest son had already died. The servant tried to cut him off, but the uninvited guest insisted on becoming part of the family (Sorgenfrei 1978, 225). The uninvited guest then discussed the shifting roles everyone played in daily life with the servant and claimed he could play all possible roles, like a joker. He also insisted present and past were only fiction (Sorgenfrei 1978, 227).

For Terayama, the fragmented perceptions of the play by the audience was analogous to their perceptions of everyday life (Terayama 1971, 13). When he was invited in 1970 to stage *Kegawa no Marie* at the La Mama Theater in New York with American actors, he experimented with a similar method. He wanted to break away from a fixed text (Terayama 1971, 55) and tried to emphasize the concept of the fractional nature of each person's view of reality. However, the attempt to change the original dramatic structure of the play did not completely succeed

(Sorgenfrei 1978, 169).

Ahen Sensô

For Terayama, a transitional step between ‘room theater’ and ‘street theater’ was ‘labyrinth theater’. An experimental performance of *Ahen Sensô* (Opium War) took place in 1972 in Amsterdam. The spectators were gathered in front of the theater and then led through an adventurous path over a broken wall and under some hanging laundry to a place where a labyrinth with nine secret chambers was positioned (Terayama 1983, 139). The task for the spectators was to search in the labyrinth for a certain person called ‘Han’. The actors were interspersed within the audience, so it was on the paths and in the secret chambers where the theatrical activities took place. For example, there was a sentry at a customs station who asked the spectators puzzling questions for which only those who knew the answers were allowed to pass (Terayama 1983, 140). In one chamber, a naked man asked a spectator to sit down in a chair. Then the naked man blindfolded him, took off some of his clothes and began to rub him with oil and massage his upper body (Terayama 1983, 141).

Ahen Sensô was close to a sideshow attraction. Terayama wanted to play with the spectators and assault their complacency by involving and forcing them to participate imaginatively in the theatrical adventure. He produced an atmosphere of amusement, but also an intentional feeling of claustrophobia (Sorgenfrei 1978, 220). Some spectators in the labyrinth got lost and did not know what was going on as they heard sounds and voices coming from everywhere. There were also interior walls that obstructed their way (Terayama 1983, 260). Some laughed about this, while others were afraid and banged on the walls calling, “Let us out!” (Terayama 1983, 139). Eventually these walls were reduced so that the spectators

could find their way out. However, since the performance was also meant to reduce interpersonal distance, i.e. the ‘walls’ that separate people in everyday life, the participants had to introduce themselves outside by stating their names (Terayama 1983, 140).

The experiences which Terayama created with his early theater experiments strengthened his conviction that anyone could become an actor (Senda 1995, 140). In his view, actors trained by drama schools were not at all necessary. Terayama said, “Eliminating the actor is the biggest task of the modern theater” (Terayama 1971, 86). By this he meant both the *Brechtian*-style actor as well as those from the *Stanislawski* school.¹⁰⁾ Above all, the idea that actors should change themselves on stage displeased him. In his opinion, people that changed themselves were hypocrites in daily life. An actor should appear as he is and demonstrate his corporality (Terayama 1971, 91).

Terayama therefore used the term ‘underground theater’ somewhat like a shield because under this cover he could work undisturbed. He intentionally did not stick to the rules of how to make theater. The façade of the playhouse in the Shibuya district, which he had used since 1969 for *Tenjô Sajiki*, was decorated with a clown-face collage made up from body parts of big female dolls and bicycle tires.¹¹⁾ In the evening during performances, it was illuminated with neon lights. The stage was in the cellar, and the auditorium consisted of about 40 seats. On the ground floor, Terayama’s mother ran a coffeehouse, and the office was on the first

10) Simply explained, according to Stanislawski, an actor should identify himself with the role, but according to Brecht, an actor should only stay in character and act with emotional distance.

11) The façade of the Terayama Museum in Aomori reminds visitors of this theater because it is similarly decorated.

floor (Senda 1995, 142).

Finding acceptance and acknowledgement abroad

With his provocative attitude, Terayama stood in opposition to the *shingeki* as well as to other practitioners of contemporary Japanese theater. Because of his experimental approach, he did not rely on the traditional theatrical frameworks that the others did. Consequently, he did not achieve mainstream acceptance in Japan. However, he did manage to find acknowledgment abroad at an earlier age than other young Japanese theater practitioners. In 1969, *Tenjô Sajiki* was invited to the international avant-garde theater festival, *Experimenta 3*, in Frankfurt. There they presented *Inugami* (God Dog) and *Kegawa no Marie* to great acclaim, much to their surprise (Senda 1995, 145).

The organizers of the *Experimenta 3* festival became aware of Terayama because he had won two awards in Italy for two radio plays produced by the Japanese broadcast network NHK: *The Mountain Witch* (Prix Italia 1964) and *Comet Ikeya* (Prix Italia 1966). As a result, he received approval as a dramatist outside Japan (Kujô 2003, 37). However, one condition for participation in *Experimenta 3* was that *Tenjô Sajiki* had to pay for their own pre-production costs and travel expenses. However, getting financial support in Japan was unthinkable because according to official opinion, underground theater was not representative of Japanese culture

at that time¹²⁾ (Kujô 2003, 38). After struggling to scrape together the necessary funding, the *Tenjô Sajiki* troop finally made it to Germany in time for the festival. Their guest performance took place on the 3rd and 4th of June in 1969 at the Theater am Turm. *Kegawa no Marie* had already been staged before in Japan, but the production of *Inugami* in Frankfurt was a world premiere (Sorgenfrei 1978, 143).

Inugami

In *Inugami*, young Tsukio was possessed by a God Dog. Tsukio grew up without friends under his grandmother's care in a village. The circumstances of his birth were already mysterious because it was rumored that his mother had been raped in the mountains by a wild dog before she gave birth to him. His relatives intended to kill him if he showed any animal characteristics, but he turned out to be a normal baby. Tsukio was raised by his grandmother because his mother had died young. However, he had a strange character which marked him as eccentric in the eyes of others. As a result, he was treated as a shunned outcast. His only friend was a stray white dog. Villagers claimed that the dog had been killing chickens and rooting up gardens, so they demanded that it be put to death. Tsukio therefore hid the dog from the angry villagers (Sorgenfrei 1994b, 82). When Tsukio grew up, his grandmother found a bride for him from another village. However, the morning after the wedding night, Tsukio vanished and the bride was found lying dead in her bed with a neat red wound on her throat (Sorgenfrei 1978, 145).

12) The Japan Foundation was established a few years later in 1972 as an “agency primarily responsible for the funding and hands-on management of Japan’s official cultural relations” (Thornbury 2000, 214). But Terayama’s troop could never profit from it, and even success abroad did not bring them any official financial support. Therefore the troop was faced with the same problem, lack of money, with each additional guest performance invitation. Ensemble members sometimes had to work part-time jobs in order to raise money for their travel expenses (Kujô 2003, 39).

Inugami resembled a lively version of an old Japanese legend, but its theme was about the social repression of individuals. The setting was a rural province where people still believed human beings could be possessed by spirits. Terayama set this story in an ominous atmosphere in which the characters seem just as eerie as spirits. Tsukio was depicted as being under the control of supernatural forces (Sorgenfrei 1994b, 83). Terayama called this “a play for masks”, so all of the characters wore special white-face masks that were created by Awazu Kiyoshi (Sorgenfrei 1978, 143). The story was told by an old woman character, like a tale.

There were also black-robed *kuroko*, the stage assistants often used in *kabuki* and *bunraku*. Their faces were covered with black cloth so that the audience could imagine them as invisible on the stage. They acted on the one hand as puppeteers: they manipulated the dog, which was a large cardboard puppet. On the other hand, they brought props on the stage, which featured a minimalist design. The *kuroko* took on further tasks that went beyond their traditional function when they imitated sounds and animal voices or spoke in chorus. This behaviour was meant to represent the ‘people’s opinion’ of the events in the play (Sorgenfrei 1978, 145). Furthermore, the old woman supplemented the narrative with stories of events that occurred over the course of many years, a litany of disease, suicide, accidents, and war, all of which resulted in only the very old and very young surviving (Sorgenfrei 1978, 145). It was also told that Tsukio’s mother ended her own life when he was just five, and that his father left with another woman.

Despite its experimental character, *Inugami* was deeply rooted in Japanese theatrical tradition, which is quite apparent from photos of the performance. In a review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (June 5-6, 1969), the following imagery of Terayama’s direction was noted as being especially successful: the

stylized gestures, dancer-like movements, and a scene in which the *kuroko* appeared to observe everything and everyone in the village with big eyes. In another scene, a symbolic transformation of Tsukio into a dog was carried out on stage. The play was a hauntingly beautiful, lyrical, and subtly disturbing folk legend (Sorgenfrei 1994a, 164).

Sorgenfrei interpreted *Inugami* in different ways. First, the dog could be seen as the alter ego of Tsukio, who had to take on the role of scapegoat for a bygone incident (Sorgenfrei 1993, 98). But in another interpretation, she indicated that the bride is explicitly and simultaneously an incarnation of the dead mother (Sorgenfrei 1994a, 165). She defended this theory with the fact that in Japanese folk tales, women are routinely discovered to be foxes in disguise (Sorgenfrei 1994b, 82).

Sorgenfrei saw the mother's rape in *Aomori-ken no Semushi Otoko* as symbolic of Japan's rape by advanced industrial nations, and the hunchback as a victim of the atomic bomb. However, in *Inugami*, the mother's rape represented the war atrocities committed by Japan. The father's sins were passed on to Tsukio, who was eternally polluted. By analogy, Japan could never fully join the world community because it too was polluted, contaminated by nuclear impurities (Sorgenfrei 1994a, 166). However, this kind of interpretation seems a little bit arbitrary. The origin stories of Tsukio and the Hunchback seem almost identical. When Sorgenfrei said that the mother's claim to have been raped by a dog could be only a sign of her insanity (Sorgenfrei 1994b, 83), she contradicted herself. With this inconsistent analysis, Sorgenfrei unintentionally demonstrated it is impossible to explain the ambiguous multiple meanings of most Japanese dramas (not only Terayama's) with simple one-sided interpretations.

Jashûmon

Terayama went to London after *Experimenta 3* and saw performances of the Living Theater. He then came back to Japan from his European trip not only with new inspiration but also with assuredness that he was on the right creative path. When he saw a performance of *Paradise Now* in London, somebody from the public had yelled, “Stop it, it’s boring!” But the actor’s reaction from the stage was, “If it is boring, come and make it better” (Terayama 1971, 29). Terayama then announced this maxim in Japan: “If theater is boring, then the public is half to blame” (Senda 1995, 145).

The first guest performances of *Tenjô Sajiki* in Europe were unexpectedly successful sensations, but in the following years, Terayama’s group gradually settled into the international avant-garde theater scene. In 1971, Terayama presented *Jashûmon* (The Gate of the Heretics), a provocatively shrill production, at a theater festival in Nancy, France. In the beginning, the audience was kept waiting in the lobby until a large, impatient crowd had gathered. Finally the doors to the auditorium were opened, and the crowd pushed its way into almost total darkness. Some black-robed *kuroko* stood at the entrances and guarded black pedestals upon which candles flickered. Other *kuroko* moved aggressively among the audience, yelling threateningly, shoving against and provoking the spectators by shining bright lights into their eyes (Sorgenfrei 1978, 253).

With this aggressive tactic, Terayama tried to attack the audience’s passivity as he had done in many of his previous productions. Terayama wanted to disturb the passive, consumer-oriented spectator mentality of the average theater-going public. The stage itself was draped in red. Huge reproductions of Japanese paintings by Ekin (1812-1876) formed the proscenium, wings, and backdrops.

In addition to these paintings, which showed scenes of lust and violence, a kind of watchtower and cross were constructed in the center (Sorgenfrei 1978, 253). At the performance, there was no actual separation between stage area and auditorium. The acting area was dispersed around the auditorium. It included the stage proper, two long runways like the *hanamichi* in *kabuki*, and six platforms around the sides and rear of the seating area. The actors also used the aisles and even the spectators' seats at various times during the production. Members of the audience were pulled up from their seats, abused and threatened by the *kuroko*, and made at last to become actors in the drama (Sorgenfrei 1978, 253). The *kuroko* were less assistants than sovereigns over the actors and audience, who were manipulated like puppets. In other words, the *kuroko* watched and controlled everything (Sorgenfrei 1978, 253).

Jashûmon was about a young man called Yamatarô, who was in conflict between his love for his mother and sexual desire. The woman whom he desired was a prostitute. She demanded that if he wanted to possess her, he must abandon his mother. Yamatarô was admittedly not the first that she had driven into such a conflict, but he could not resist her. He tied his mother up (who was again played by a male actor), put her in an old sack¹³⁾ and carried her away. However, Yamatarô's new bride refused to have sex with him because she did not believe that he had really abandoned his mother. Even if he had, she could not sleep with such a polluted sinner. However, his mother was still alive because of an ironic mistake — another man had tried in a similar way to abandon his mother — and the bags got confused when checked at a railway station. As a result, Yamatoro's

13) The Japanese word *fukuro* can be defined as both 'sack' and a slang word for 'mother' (Sorgenfrei 1994b, 79).

mother became free again (Sorgenfrei 1978, 263). She returned just in time to see that her son was not happy and regretted what he had done.

As Yamatarô lunged forward to murder his bride, the *kuroko* held him back so that he could not move. As a result, it became clear that puppets were powerless because they were manipulated by puppet-masters, who symbolized social pressure and expectations. The only chance for liberation was if all of them were gotten rid of. Therefore, Yamatarô killed the *kuroko*. At the end, the other actors also revolted, giving up their roles and removing their costumes in order to turn to the public with impromptu words until all shouted together, “Down with theater!” (Sorgenfrei 1978, 268). Here Terayama wanted to show that all people, even the public, were manipulated. Because the behaviors were all socially determined, it was apparently a play about basic emotions. Society made rules according to how people arranged their lives and therefore all human beings were manipulated in some manner. “The wheel of fate, pulled by strings, goes round and round” (Sorgenfrei 1978, 262).

Increasing popularity in Japan

Jidai wa Circus no Zô ni Notte

The success of *Tenjô Sajiki* abroad brought more attention to Terayama’s performances in Japan. In 1969, the year of their first guest performance in Germany, the production of *Jidai wa Circus no Zô ni Notte* (We’re all riding on

a Circus Elephant)¹⁴⁾ became a success in Japan. The stage was designed like a boxing ring in which the actors were playing, dancing, and singing. Fifteen actors appeared altogether, but not all of them always acted in the ring. Some of them stayed outside but were still visible to the public. There they prepared for their next appearance, changing outfits and wigs, but they retained interest in what was happening on stage by interjecting words or acting as a rhythm and blues chorus (Sorgenfrei 1978, 230). The play was divided into many single scenes, and the general theme was criticism of America and the American war in Vietnam. Stereotypical Americans were mocked as well as the ‘American way of life’, which was copied by the Japanese at that time (Sorgenfrei 1978, 234). In their attempt to speak English, they only repeated pointlessly absurd phrases. The play tried to highlight the price Japanese society paid for its economic miracle: the loss of its cultural identity (Sorgenfrei 1992, 123).

Another sign of *Tenjô Sajiki*’s growing popularity in Japan was a song from the play called *Toki ni wa Haha no Nai Ko no Yô Ni* (From Time to Time Like a Motherless Child) that became a hit record (Senda 1995, 146). This called profiteers into action. Terayama’s playhouse was selected for a sightseeing tour that was promoted as a *Night of Adventures* in Tokyo. Other attractions on the tour were a visit to a gay bar and a haunted café (Senda 1995, 146).

14) After his success in *Experimenta 3*, Terayama was invited to stage the play with the German title “*Unsere Zeit reitet auf dem Rücken eines Zirkuselefanten*” in Essen, Germany (Terayama 1983, 81). The explanation for the title was as follows: “America is the elephant which we must train so that he will not destroy us”. Terayama used layman actors and a beat band for the performance. Male actors embodied Jean Harlow and Marilyn Monroe. In a German review, it was referred to it as “A sharply lit revue of the fear, aggression, and agitation against Americanism that one can hardly think of more hatefully (Waidelich 1994, 270).

Rising fame and controversy

As *Tenjô Sajiki* became famous, prejudices against the group nevertheless increased. Terayama not only made sexuality and death common themes in a lot of his works, but there was also a sadomasochistic symbolism in his productions, as can be seen in numerous photos. The erotic atmosphere and dirty jokes in the dialogues were provocative. The playwright Yamazaki Tetsu, who saw early performances of the *Tenjô Sajiki* as a student, confirmed this fact (Corona 1997, 30). This atmosphere tended to attract voyeurs in the audiences. Terayama was not pleased about the development of *Tenjô Sajiki* becoming a sightseeing attraction (Terayama 1983, 107). While his rising popularity had its advantages, expectations for more sensationalistic performances grew among the spectators who came off the tourist buses. In the end, the group ended up canceling this arrangement (Senda 1995, 146).

However, a new idea originated from the failed tourism experience: only the first part of *Tenjô Sajiki*'s next production (called Yes) took place at the playhouse. For the second part, the public had to go by bus to an unknown location. In order to increase the tension, the windows of the bus were covered with cloth, as in a theater experiment that Terayama had learned about in New York (Terayama 1971, 88). Upon arrival at the second location, the spectators were led into an apartment in which a couple was eating dinner. Ignoring protests by the couple, the guide had the spectators sit down around them. The couple finally calmed down and continued their dinner. The audience was able to witness a typical domestic scene as 'theater' (Senda 1995, 148). This production was not written and directed by Terayama, but by Takenaga Shigeo (Sorgenfrei 1978, 205). Nevertheless, it was another step for Terayama in his quest to blur the border between fiction and reality and between theater and real life.

Knock: The end of Terayama's street theater

Terayama's performance of *Knock* was the climax and sudden end of his street theater experiments. Various theater activities took place in almost thirty different performance sites before approximately a thousand spectators altogether, and the entire event lasted about thirty hours. It began in the afternoon at 3pm on a Saturday in April, 1975 and ended the next day at 9pm in the evening (Senda 1997, 56). The spectacle finished with a scandal that was overblown by the media. Like in *Jinriki-Hikôki Solomon*, each paying spectator got a map at a subway station in downtown Tokyo. There were designated places to which one had to walk. Theater critic Senda Akihiko, who participated in the experiment, got his 'admission ticket' from a man with an eye patch dressed strangely in black (Senda 1997, 57). The hand-drawn map contained written statements of what one could expect at the different sites, but not in detail. Every spectator had to find his own 'personal drama' en route, putting together all the pieces like a puzzle. This forced each individual spectator to look at everyday life in a more theatrical way. For example, there was a puzzling set named *Drosselmeyer's Clockwork Store*. Senda (1997, 57) was confused about whether he would find a normal business in a somewhat strange store or whether it would just be a regular theatrical set. Sometimes the protagonists could be recognized easily by their costumes or performance, such as an acrobatic act in a park or a loudly arguing couple on the street surrounded by spectators. However, fiction could spill over into reality at any moment, as with the scene in which a postman called out, "Stop that thief!" while pointing to a woman who was fleeing. Passers-by ran after her and took her to a police station, where it took time to sort out the fiction and reality (Courdy 2000, 257). In other instances, actors and spectators could not be separated at first glance, as in a public bath in which everyone sat naked in the water while bathing

(Senda 1997, 59). It was only when a group action began that it became clear who was acting and who was watching. As a result, the protagonists often did not seem different from ordinary people because they acted in scenes which could actually be happening on any given day (Senda 1995, 150).

The theatrical framework which dictates that spectators do the watching while only the actors are watched was discontinued in *Knock*. Spectators who were on the lookout for typical theatrical scenes did not always know who was an actor. For the actors, it was also not always clear who belonged to the paying public and who was only there by chance, especially when the spectators appeared little by little. Sometimes, nothing in particular happened before the spectators because Terayama wanted to deliberately confuse the audience with some of the statements on the maps (Senda 1997, 59). This opened up new perspectives, namely that everyone could be an incognito actor. For example, the police officer who always appeared with his bicycle at the performance spots may have also been an actor instead of an observer (Senda 1995, 150).

The play scripts and production were not created by Terayama himself but by some of his co-workers (Rolf & Gillespie 1992, 242). There was no dialog written in a traditional linear manner, but rather a menu of numbered sentences that could be spoken by the actors at will. This format made it easier to match actions exactly with the play's schedule (Rolf & Gillespie 1992, 243).

The big Knock scandal

Senda (1995, 150) wrote about the big scandal that occurred at the end of *Knock*. The climax of the event was the appearance of mummies in a park during the evening. For this purpose, the actors were completely covered in bandages. While

in costume, one of them tried to enter a house. The housewife was so startled by the strange and scary visitor that she notified the police. Fiction had changed into reality again, but this time it was not planned. The next day, the incident was picked up by the media, and slanderous coverage exaggerated it into a scandal as upright journalists were outraged over this “annoyance of peaceful citizens” (Senda, 1995, 150). In the *Asahi-shinbun*, Terayama got an opportunity to justify his experiment. He wrote that he was looking for new perspectives that would wake people up from their trivial everyday lives. The title, *Knock*, referred to knocking on locked hearts as well as on locked doors (Senda 1995, 151). However, since there was an inherent danger of public disturbance during this kind of play, the authorities prohibited it from being repeated (Senda 1995, 151). Since a favorite idea of Terayama’s was that art and theater were more effective change agents for society than political agitation (Senda 1995, 151), it was very difficult for him to accept that experiments like *Knock* were no longer allowed to continue (Senda 1995, 152).

Forcing audience participation

Kankyakuseki

In 1976, Terayama gave up his former playhouse and moved with his troop to a new one. In 1978, with the production of *Kankyakuseki* (Auditorium Seats), he tried out a different method in which to force audience participation. In this production, after everyone had taken a seat, the doors were locked and the theater was declared to be a secret room. Black-robed cast members were present in the auditorium, creating a dark and mysterious atmosphere (Corona 1997, 18). Like in *Jashûmon*, the *kuroko*-actors went around and insisted that certain people, whether they wanted to or not, take over their roles. The audience reactions on this

occasion were considered part of the performance. Naturally, many people refused to take part and offered up excuses (Terayama 1983, 264). But excuses did not serve any purpose at that point because from that moment on, the spectators were no longer simply watching — they were the focal point of attention. Improvisation was therefore an important element of the performance, but the deliberate attempts to force audience participation also engendered some discomfort among spectators (Senda 1995, 153).

Terayama (1983, 266) describes what happened next: After individual spectators were taken from the auditorium as ‘volunteers’, a bell rang, music began to play, and the curtain rose. However, there was a second curtain behind the first, and after that a third one appeared. After the third curtain went up, a bare, dimly lit stage could be seen. All of these steps were designed as attacks against public expectations for what should happen in a typical theater production. The spectators who were forced to perform on stage were given more or less simple tasks to complete. For example, one was put into a coffin, while another had to put turtles into a refrigerator. Other tasks included counting the remaining Sundays on a calendar or making three different alarm clocks ring simultaneously (Terayama 1983, 264). Also, money was hidden throughout the auditorium, and the spectators were asked to look for it under their seats. A more difficult task was to call prominent people and talk with them on the telephone from the stage (Terayama 1983, 269). The performance was intended to last 90 minutes, but if anything unintended or interesting happened, the evening could last longer. This type of performance was not so different from television shows in which participants had to answer questions or solve other tasks. In contrast, from the beginning, Terayama wanted to keep open the question of who was an actor and who was an audience recruit (Terayama 1983, 269).

Reactions against forced audience participation

The roots of the *Kankyakuseki* experiment could be found in *Jashûmon*, in which the *kuroko* also forced people to act (Terayama 1983, 10). Spectators were not allowed to leave the auditorium during a performance unless they vehemently insisted. This was all done in service of a mysterious atmosphere (Terayama 1983, 22). Naturally, this practice did not sit well with some theater critics. According to Terayama (1983, 20), Roland Wiegenstein became very angry during a guest performance of *Jashûmon* in Germany. His article in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* took the matter up under the headline, *Hitler war besser* (Hitler was better) and interpreted the play as an “act of force”.¹⁵⁾ Prior to the show, Wiegenstein became outraged when he did not receive a VIP seat as a critic. After finally calming down, he watched the performance from the back. After a while, he wanted to leave, but a *kuroko* did not let him out. At this point he yelled that he was being unlawfully detained (Terayama 1983, 22). Later, he claimed that he had wanted to escape from the loud and smoke filled theater but was prevented from doing so by “fist blows and karate hits” (Spiegel 44, 1972, 170). Later on, during a discussion with Terayama (1983, 24), Wiegenstein emphasized that actors did not have the right to touch spectators because they did not have anything to do with the performance and should have been allowed to stand apart from it. However, this was exactly the attitude that Terayama wanted to challenge, so *Kankyakuseki* became an important artistic concern for him. He therefore continued theatrical experiments like this as a protest against the general convention (Corona 1997, 21).

15) Despite its serious reputation, the *Spiegel* magazine misinterpreted the performance of *Jashûmon* intentionally in a review and even quoted defamations from the dubious German mass publication *Bild-Zeitung*, which called *Tenjô Sajiki* an “epidemic from Japan”.

Larger theatrical spectacles

In the following years, Terayama's productions became ever bigger. Senda (1997, 89) describes the staging of *Nuhikun* (Directions to Servants) in 1978 at the Tokyo International Trade Center, which was billed as a huge theatrical spectacle. Terayama had a giant arena at his disposal. The stage was like an island in the center of the auditorium, surrounded by spectators. In the early 1980s, *Tenjô Sajiki* was invited with this production to Europe and America for several guest performances. This was the last international success before Terayama's untimely death and dissolution of the troop.

Nuhikun was partly based on Jonathan Swift and partly on motifs from the works of Japanese author Miyazawa Kenji (1896-1933). Terayama had borrowed names from Miyazawa's most well-known protagonists. The premise was also influenced by Genet's *The Maids* because in *Nuhikun*, slaves lived in a house without a master. However, they did not want to feel free without reign, so they chose a sovereign from among them in time to stabilize their power structure to prevent anarchy (Senda 1995, 154). The first scene showed naked men sitting on chairs as a symbol of absolute equality. However, after one of them was prepared to be the 'sacred master' he immediately began to rule, and while the 'obedient slaves' obeyed his commands, subversive resistance began to form with the eventual goal of overthrowing him. In Terayama's view, that was a simile for the present social condition. If the people have no master, they are unhappy; However, once they get one, they become even more unhappy (Takatori 2003, 168).

Originally, this community of masterless servants was meant to be a utopian classless society with complete freedom for all, but Terayama had the protagonists

realize their desires for power recklessly, and the ‘ideal society’ changed into a sadomasochistic universe (Senda 1997, 90). This reversal of common notions of freedom, equality, and brotherhood could be seen as criticism of a distorted democratic system in which the powerful, who pretend to be legitimized through the majority, rule like in all other political systems. Terayama seemed to suggest that fascism can lurk in the shadows of democracy (Sorgenfrei 1978, 198).

A dramatic principle that marked Terayama’s later works also became clear in the production of *Nuhikun*. The performance fragmented into individual scenes or loosely-interconnected scene cycles. Each of these scenes came to a climax, which ended up working like a kind of *tableaux vivant* (living picture), before they dissolved again (Senda 1997, 88). This dramatic principle had some similarity with scenic realization in *kabuki*, where the *mie* pose freezes the action for a moment at a climax and creates a living picture. However, in Terayama’s productions, some scenes already began like *tableaus*, only to dissolve in order to form new ones. The scenic actions often took place formlessly, but in the *tableau*, they took shape again.

Terayama’s later years: a period of intensive artistic creativity

In the last years of his life, Terayama developed an intensive artistic practice which resulted in a number of productions. The titles of three plays, which appeared in a cycle, alluded to known western playwrights. The first was 1973’s *Môjin Shokan* (Lettre sur les Aveugles), based on Diderot. In 1976 he released two plays, *Ekibyô Ryûkôki* (A Journal of the Plague Year), based on Daniel Defoe and *Ahôbune* (Ship of Fools), based on Sebastian Brandt. Takatori (2003, 164) wrote about a guest performance of *Ahôbune* that took place shortly before

the fall of the shah of Persia at the Shiraz Festival in Iran. The skeleton of a gigantic ship was displayed on stage, but one could not tell whether it was still in construction or already a wreck. In 1977, Terayama staged his version of *Chûgoku no Fushigi na Yakunin* (The Wonderful Mandarin). In 1978 came *Nuhikun*, and in 1979, *Aohigekô no Shiro* (Bluebeard's Castle). With these plays he created a sadomasochistic universe, but in a kind of commercial show-business style in the vein of the *takarazuka* shows (Takatori 2003, 167). *Aohigekô no Shiro*, which was originally performed in 1968 (Sorgenfrei 1978, 120), was a kind of theater within a theater, with the stage manager also taking part as a character. In this production, as described in Takahashi (2003, 98), six murdered wives met behind the stage while the seventh waited in vain for Bluebeard, who did not appear.

In 1978 Terayama staged *Shintokumaru*, a play he wrote with co-author Kishida Rio. Later a reworked version of this play became famous when it was directed by Japanese star director Ninagawa Yukio. Terayama's original version worked quite differently on stage. It was accompanied by traditional *shamisen* music, like in his earlier works, but also included rock music and operatic echoes reminiscent of Carl Orff. The composer was J.A. Seaser, and the music was played live on stage. As a result, Terayama's original version was subtitled a "curiosity-show-opera". There was little dialogue in each scene, which consisted mostly of monologues or chants. In some scenes, a part was spoken, but then the counterpart was sung. The story was based on an old legend which had already been brought to the stage for *bunraku* and *kabuki* productions.

Shintokumaru was the name of a young man whose mother had died. His stepmother tried to get rid of him with a magic curse in order to replace him with her own child. In Terayama's version, *Shintokumaru* grieved about his mother and

did not want to accept his stepmother. A mysterious mask dealer gave him a ‘black hole’ which he called the ‘exit from the world’. Through this hole, Shintokumarū descended into the underworld to meet his dead mother in a highly symbolic scene which appeared in altered forms in later Terayama plays.

In 1979, Terayama created *Lemmings*, and in 1981 he brought *Hyakunen no Kôdoku* (One-Hundred Years of Loneliness) to the stage (Senda 1995, 153). The production of the latter took place on five different stage areas that were interconnected with walkways where actors sometimes performed simultaneously. The topic was inspired by a novel by Gabriel Garcia Márquez (Takatori 2003, 174). This play turned out to be Terayama’s final theatrical production.

Terayama’s widespread body of work abroad

Terayama’s body of work, including his activities abroad, was quite prolific and diverse. He was not only invited to perform at theater festivals and guest performances along with *Tenjô Sajiki*, but he also conducted workshops, produced several films, and won several awards.¹⁶⁾ Last but not least, his literary and dramatic works were translated into several foreign languages.

Terayama spent a lot of time in Germany. After participating in *Experimenta 3*, he was invited to stage *Kegawa no Marie* and *Jidai wa Circus no Zô ni Notte* in Essen with German actors (Corona 1997, 63). Seven years later, the German version of *Kegawa no Marie* was staged in Pforzheim once again. A review called it “a pompous transvestite dramolette”, with the critic complaining that nobody

16) Above all, *Denen ni Shisu* achieved international attention.

would be able understand it without previous knowledge of traditional Japanese theater (Theater Heute 8, 1976, 56).

In 1972, Terayama and his troop were invited to the Olympic games in Munich to participate in Jérôme Savary's *Grand Magic Circus*. They presented an open-air theater production called *Hashire Merosu* (Run Merosu). *Der Spiegel* described Terayama's performance as follows: "He chases a herd of beautiful Nippon witches in an ecstatic terror play set to lascivious ritual music, lashes, dances, and rapes which all lead into a peace celebration" (Rumler 1972, 137). However, due to the terrorist incident that took place during the games, the performance was cancelled by the organizers (Senda 1983, 23).

Môjin Shokan

In 1974, Terayama and *Tenjô Sajiki* were invited to a festival in Breslau where they presented *Môjin Shokan* under the English title *A Note by Blind Men*. The play was a simple fable, but it had a complicated structure. A child was blinded by his mother and then abandoned because she wanted to marry another man. After ten years, the child returned, and the mother feared his revenge. The actors performed these events in a dance-like style (Terayama 1983, 56). Photos of the performance also reveal that marionettes were used (Krieglstein 1974, 30). In addition, there were two other groups of performers, one consisting of blind skinheads who tried to lighten the story, while the other was a band of hooligans in leather jackets who attempted to darken it. According to Terayama (1983, 149), the blind skinheads were perhaps meant to represent the "rationalizing tendency of enlightenment". Their bodies were covered all over with Chinese characters. However, with their attempt to bring light into the darkness, they also wanted to wipe out the irrational world, the world of dreams and imagination. Therefore, the

hooligans acted as their counterpart.

The play took place mostly on a dark stage. In the beginning, matches were distributed to the spectators (Takatori 2003, 161). This idea had come from a London theater experiment in which *King Lear* was presented without stage lighting and the actors illuminated only their faces with matches. Likewise, at least half of *Môjin Shokan* was not meant to be seen (Terayama 1978, 44). In other words, he wanted to stage a drama that no spectator could see in its entirety. The original concept was that the stage and auditorium should be not explicitly separate: at the beginning, there was light in the theater, but the stage was completely empty (Terayama 1983, 150). After the audience had sat down, the hooligans nailed the entrances shut with boards, the lights went out little by little and impromptu dialogues were spoken (Terayama 1983, 151). After the skinheads had brought light again, a big transparent matchbox appeared on stage, with people inside who were sleeping or already dead. They awakened like dolls coming to life and acted out the story of the blinded child (Terayama 1983, 152). The impression was meant to imply a daydream that was coming true or reality appearing like a dream (Terayama 1983, 153).

A journalist who interviewed Terayama in Breslau understood *Môjin Shokan* as “an attempt to pass on tradition by showing its cold beauty and then breaking it down” (Kriegelstein 1974, 30). According to Terayama, the story was not at all important. For him, the way the play unfolded on stage took precedence. This approach was designed to stimulate the imagination (Terayama 1978, 44). The music, sounds, and dim lighting provided only a fragmentary impression of stage events, thus making somewhat visible what could not be perceived in regular everyday life (Terayama 1983, 144).

Ekibyô Ryûkôki

According to Corona (1997, 16), another German version of a Terayama play was staged in 1976 in Hamburg, called *Ekibyô Ryûkôki*, (in German, *Im Jahr der Pest*). In this performance, Terayama further developed the idea he had first used in *Garigari-hakase no Hanzai* where the stage and auditorium were divided into sections with black curtains. However, this time there was a labyrinth of curtains cutting through the audience and acting areas, creating numerous enclosed spaces. Action occurring in one space was invisible in another although the dialogue could be heard. At times parts of the audience were plunged into total blackness, then curtains raised again (Sorgenfrei 1978, 200).

In the play, the world was shown in a decaying state, with epidemics and other problems depicting the overall diseased state of mankind. In the opening scene, coffins containing people who had died from the plague were closed shut with nails, while healthy people tried to protect themselves from this scourge. Sick people were deported to a concentration camp, and swindlers of all types did their dirty work. A female character calling herself ‘the illness’ went about infecting other characters and thereby came to embody the incarnate plague that was ravaging the land.

It was said that in the war a former nightclub had been turned into a military hospital. It was from this place that the epidemic had supposedly found its way into the world. In the story, a detective character investigated this mystery in a parody of a classic Agatha Christie mystery novel. His conclusion indicated that war prisoners were infected on purpose with a bacillus in the cellar of the military hospital with the intension of spreading the plague to their home countries after being freed. However, before this evil plan could be realized, the war came to an

end, and the prisoners died in the cellar. The sole survivor later wanted to take revenge on his torturers by releasing the plague into the world. However, as the detective relayed his findings, the stage lights slowly went dark and remained so until lightning and thunder began. Then, all of the men who had been killed of the plague rose from their death like sleepwalkers and began, as in the opening scene, to nail coffins shut.

It could be said that the play's message was basically about war being the root of all evil in the world. However, Terayama always emphasized that he had never wanted to produce Brechtian *Lehrstücke* with simple political messages. For Terayama, the mute performance in *Ekibyô Ryûkôki* was more important than the content of the script. According to him, the message of the play should be transmitted through body language (Terayama 1983, 245). This approach proved quite useful for guest performances abroad. It enabled him to translate his plays into music, sound, and action in order to make them comprehensible without words (Kujô 2003, 39).

For Terayama, an important intention of *Ekibyô Ryûkôki* was to make Artaud's idea about the relationship between 'theater and plague' concretely visible (Takatori 2003, 162). In Terayama's view, social order existed only on the surface, and horror and chaos lay below (Courdy 2000, 261).¹⁷⁾ He wanted to distress the public, to infect their minds and make the spectators feel the uncanny bacillus of chaos and disorder. The restriction of perspective was a means to this end: the

17) In her essay, "Antonin Artaud's Influence on Terayama Shûji", Courdy (2000, 261) claimed: "Terayama does not use the idea of the plague in exactly the way as Artaud did. For him, the plague is rather a state of the world that the theatre can represent in order to be free of it. The plague is the result of rumors which, like the disease, spread among the people". However, this article refers only to Terayama's theoretical remarks.

spectators could see only parts of the performance, and sometimes nothing at all, hearing only sounds. Therefore, Terayama looked for actors with the ability to go beyond the script, not for ones who were enslaved by the text (Terayama 1983, 53). The opening and final scene, with the hammering of the coffins accompanied by gloomy words that name all illnesses of mankind, worked like some kind of conjuration (Takatori 2003, 162).

Lemmings

In terms of his intent to banish illness and death, there was a certain similarity between *Ekibyô Ryûkôki* and Terayama's production of *Lemmings*. On the occasion of the retrospective in 1983 following Terayama's death, a video of this performance was recorded. It is one of the few original works directed by Terayama for the theater that is still accessible today. Unfortunately, the lighting was so poor that one could only get a vague impression of the production, such as scenes in which the actors' faces were illuminated with only flashlights. However, the performance was described at that time as possessing an opium-induced-like beauty (Takatori 2003, 173).

Lemmings contained sequences featuring several themes that were only topically interconnected. At the beginning, a man laid dying on the stage, and several scenes took place in a hospital. Later, a man tried to break out from a prison, but a female warden appeared in a dominatrix outfit and treated him badly. In another story thread, a film crew was tyrannized by a moody diva. Then a man who was aroused by some sexy young ladies appeared, but at this moment his mother's head emerged from a trapdoor in order to rebuke him. The appearance of the mother, again performed by a male actor, differed from former Terayama works, as her power seemed already weakened. On the other hand, the mother appeared

as if she was calling her son from the grave. In one of the last scenes, the mother came out from the trapdoor and pushed her son in.

An important scenic motif in *Lemmings* was that one could look through walls. Terayama wanted to show how people living in a mass society were insulated. They all built walls around themselves in order to protect themselves. They retreated into their own world of thoughts, which could only be gradually distinguished from insanity (Senda 1997, 110). A protagonist who claimed that he could walk through walls was promptly certified insane. One keyword of the play was *deguchi* (exit). Being able to break through walls is similar to the desire to break through the boundaries between outside and inside, between freedom and servitude, between reality and insanity, and not least of all, between life and death.

Terayama's final film, *Saraba Hakobune*

Terayama's last film, *Saraba Hakobune* (Goodbye Noah's Ark), was produced in 1982. It was adapted from his 1981 play, *Hyakunen no Kôdoku*. The setting was a fictitious village in which a murder occurred. The murdered person appeared again to the murderer in later scenes, not to seek revenge, but rather to accompany him like a friend. In the village, there was a hole in the ground which supposedly connected the living with the dead. At one point, the postman climbed down in order to deliver letters to dead people. All the figures appeared in the final scene in modern Tokyo, the living as well as the dead.

The hole in *Saraba Hakobune* had a strong symbolism, like the trapdoor in *Lemmings*. Terayama had previously used this black-hole motif in *Shintokumarû*, where the protagonist climbed down into a hole in order to meet his dead mother

but was able to return to the world of the living. At the time *Lemmings* was in production, Terayama knew that he himself would fall into this hole before long. Since 1979, he had been suffering from liver disease, and his condition became successively worse, with no hope for a cure. But even if he had to die, he wanted to at least hold on to the hope of a return.

Terayama's legacy

Most critics, even those who had regarded him as a poet only, acknowledged that Terayama had become a brilliant theater practitioner in the end. He had set up a whole catalog of new theatrical possibilities with his experiments (Senda 1995, 154). Shortly before his death, his desire was to create a *kabuki* play, or at least a production in the *kabuki* style. It was meant to be a show for a contemporary audience that should not destroy the old *kabuki* spirit (Senda 1983, 30). After he had torn down all of barriers as an uncompromising avant-garde artist in order to achieve the utmost in artistic freedom, it was the disciplined form of classic theater that appealed to him in the end.

Terayama died on May 4th, 1983 of liver cirrhosis after he had already suffered a kidney ailment in his younger years. A few months later, *Tenjô Sajiki* dissolved (Senda 1995, 157). It was a diverse troop with a great fluctuation of members. Terayama's motto was, "Take everyone who comes, hold back no one who goes" (Senda 1983, 22). After he passed away, some of Terayama's companions tried to continue his legacy, the most successful of them being his co-author, Kishida Rio, and her group *Kishida Jimusho* (Kishida Studio). She, however, died in 2003. Besides her, there was also the musician and composer J.A. Seaser, who was also Terayama's co-director during his later years. Seaser later established the independent theater group *Ban'yû Inryoku* (General Gravity). One of Terayama's

actors, Takatori Ei, founded a girl-ensemble group called *Gesshoku Kagekidan*. Other actors started solo careers, but overall only a few of the former *Tenjô Sajiki* members are still active in film or theater today. Finally, another theater group was formed, called the *Ryûzanji Company*. Despite not having any direct staff connections with *Tenjô Sajiki*, this group founded by Ryûzanji Shô paid homage to Terayama and can be seen as an example of his legacy moving forward (Senda 1995, 160).

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