Cultural Techniques of Play: A Global Perspective

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1. The History of Play as a History of Cultural Techniques

How can a world history of play be written? The word "play" is used here to mean a form of culture in which actors or puppets perform roles. Play can be improvised entertainment on the street, or it can be a performance based on a written text in a modern theater building. Play can be rooted in dance or religious rituals, whereby the term "play" is also meant to include such original forms.

The history of the play as a distinct cultural form has been written in many ways, for example, as part of the literary history of its region of origin, or as the history of great writers and masterpieces. The history of European theater, for example, can be and has been written as the history of playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, Shakespeare, Molière, Racine, Goethe, and Schiller. The history of Japanese theater, similarly, can be and has been written as the history of the masterpieces in the traditions of nô, kyôgen, ningyô jôruri, and kabuki. These regional histories can be combined and overlaid into the global history of theater. Such a history can be found in the theater section of any major encyclopedia (e.g., see Kawatake 2000).

Far less obvious than this, the history of theater has also been written as the history of the actor; this is especially true of actor-centric forms such as kabuki. It would be difficult to write about the history of Japanese theater in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries without mentioning the names of kabuki actors such as Danjrô IX, Kikugorô V, Utaemon V and Utaemon VI, and would result in an incomplete and inadequate record. On the other hand, it would be possible to collect visual representations (e.g., *nishikie* and photographs) of famous actors of the same period from all over the world and

write a modern history of the play both as a history of actors and as a kind of art history.

The history of the play can also be written as the history of directors. The history of European play in the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, dominated by the so-called director's theater (*Regietheater*), can typically be written in terms of the names of directors.

A world history of play can be written differently, namely, as a history of what Bernhard Siegert calls cultural techniques (Siegert 2013), that is, techniques in the broad sense that underlie cultural phenomena. What are the cultural techniques that underpin play? I focus on the following:

- Performance space
- Stage technology (technology in the broad sense used in the performance)
- The writing surface on which the plot or text of the play is written, stored, and distributed

The state of cultural technique can define the state of culture itself at a fundamental level. If we want to analyze this intimate link, we can do so from the perspective of German Kulturwissenschaft (Cultural Science). The study of historical discourse from the perspective of the cultural techniques (e.g., types and typewriters) that both enable and define discourse is a major achievement of Kulturwissenschaft (i.e., a literary history embedded in the history of cultural techniques; see Kittler 1995). Kulturwissenschaft can be used to analyze how cultural techniques enable and define play. Although Kulturwissenschaft has focused typically on European cultural history, when we connect the history of cultural techniques to global history, we can apply the concepts of Kulturwissenschaft to comparative culture (see Nawata 2016: 9–21 for a discussion on the need to open up Kulturwissenschaft to global comparative culture). Where theater studies, Kulturwissenschaft, and global history meet, a new field of research opens up. In the following sections, I address each of the three types of cultural techniques for play mentioned above: performance space, stage technology, and writing surface.

2. Performance Space

The history of theater buildings and stage technologies has already been written, at least for Western theater, with some additions regarding theater in Asia (e.g., see Hildy 2000). The range of discussion that becomes possible on the basis of these previous studies is quite broad.

It is important that theater studies be integrated with history, and specifically with world history. World history is now no longer written as bundles of distinct and individual regional histories, but as a unified history of the earth, that is, as one global history. The history of objects can also be written as a type of global history; for example, as the global history of books (Suarez et al. 2013). The category of "objects" also includes architecture. *A Global History of Architecture* (Ching et al. 2011) is a book that outlines such a global object history, in this case, world architecture. Architectural styles spread across regions and we can trace their spread in this book. For example, the chapter *The Roman Theatre* documents that the Roman Empire built theaters in the cities within its territory, and that these structures still exist at Ephesus and Aspendos, sites of Roman cities in present-day Turkey. Christopher Balme, in his book on the mixed cultures of the dominant and the dominated in the second half of the twentieth century in various places where colonial rule had ended, points to the influence of space on performance. He uses the concept of "performance space" to encompass various places where performances occurred, including streets and Western theaters (Balme 1995: 204–206). Indeed, if we use the term "performance space" instead of "theater," we can include manifold spaces for play from different areas and times, not necessarily limiting our scope to buildings dedicated to play. It then becomes easier to write a global history of such spaces.

Can a history of the performance spaces be written as a history of human population growth and the accumulation of population in a specific space?

David Christian's *Big History* is a comprehensive account that integrates natural and human history, describes the universe from its inception to the present, and predicts the future (Christian 2018). Christian divides human history as part of the Earth's history into three phases: the foraging era (about 250,000 years ago to about 10,000 years ago), the agrarian era (about 10,000 years ago to about 1750 AD), and the modern era (about 1750 AD onward). For Christian, it is a mystery why agriculture appeared in several places on the Earth in the same period, but it fostered settlements in many parts of the world and promoted population growth in these settled areas. The

development of industry, which ushered in the modern age, led to the growth of cities. How can we integrate a history of the play into *Big History*? Many plays have been created and performed in different places and disappeared without leaving any trace. A history of plays whose traces have survived to the present can begin with early cities in ancient civilizations. These cities left behind a wealth of historical materials, such as writing, painting, and performance spaces. Thanks to such traces, we now know what types of performances occurred there in ancient times: performances dedicated to the god Shiva at Mohenjo-daro, India (c. 3000 BC); passion plays of Osiris in Egypt (c. 2000 BC); shamanistic rituals in Shang Dynasty, China (c. 1500 BC); Dionysus festivals in ancient Greece (which formed city-states around 1000 BC), followed by tragedies and comedies from the sixth century BC onward (these examples are taken from Kawatake 1978: 228–281).

The characters of Shiva and Dionysus as agricultural gods (Kawatake 1978: 230–232) suggest that the performing arts were born alongside agriculture, as rites to these deities. The early history of the performing arts could be explained in the context of the concentration of the population in agricultural settlements and the resulting emergence and development of cities. The Japanese theater scholar Kawatake mentions a theory, without necessarily agreeing with it, that the god to whom the agricultural tribes of Central Asia and northwest India dedicated their arts became Dionysus in the West, Shiva in the East, and the source of the Japanese nô play *Sambasô*. Rather than thinking that the gods were transmitted from place to place and the performing arts associated with those gods followed, I would like to think that the histories of different regions of the earth were synchronized by the power of population accumulation through the simultaneous development of agriculture, without direct contact between regions, and that this synchronization led to the birth of similar plays in quite distant areas. Within a city, which is itself a center of population, a performance space is a place of further concentration of people within that area. If we connect global history with the history of performing arts, the history of the performance space appears as a history of population explosion.

As already mentioned, agriculture may have given rise to performing arts in many parts of the world without direct contact between regions. Let us now turn to the history of the spread of performance spaces through direct contact. We have already noted the example of the Roman theater. The Roman Empire expanded its territory using military technologies and brought the cultural techniques of different cities to many parts of its territory. In this

way, the Roman Empire brought the city as a system and the theater as part of that system to many places. Much later, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution of Western Europe spread across the world. David Christian argues that this process was accompanied by a huge population growth and that the modern city was the space to absorb this population (Christian 2018: 90–93). Theaters in the modern city were crowded spaces in densely populated areas. It is only natural that the prevention of fires in theaters became an important issue and even became a subject in theater history research (see Itoda's article in this book). It is not surprising that Japan, which aspired to be a state modeled on the Western powers, built itself modern cities and theaters (e.g., the Hibiya Public Hall in Tokyo in 1929), or that the Korean peninsula, colonized by Japan, produced modern cities and theaters as well (e.g., Fumin Hall in Gyeongseong, now Seoul, modeled on the Hibiya Public Hall; see Lee 2017). This process continued after the end of the colonial era. In African countries that gained independence from colonial rule, Western-style theaters were built one after another (Balme 1995: 204–205).

3. Stage Technologies

First, some stage technologies related to optics should be discussed.

The application of the physical phenomenon of shadow to theater, that is, shadow play, is assumed to have originated in Central Asia or India, according to Fan Pen Chen, and to have developed in different parts of the world, whereby the "Euro-Asian steppe and the seas between Africa, Asia and Southeast Asia may have served as avenues that linked disparate shadow traditions, and some influences were probably not unidirectional" (Chen 2003: 25).

In Europe, shadow plays were often called *ombre chinoise* (Chinese shadow) because they were thought to have originated in Asia; the magic lantern, a slide projection technique documented as early as seventeenth-century Europe, was also often called *ombre chinoise* (Screech 1996, 107). However, this name was inaccurate, as the magic lantern originated in Europe and spread to the rest of the world, including to East Asia. In the novel *Maler Nolten* (1832) by the German writer Mörike, there is a scene in which people gather in a house and use the magic lantern to project scenes, play a keyboard instrument, assign roles, and recite scripts to each other. A variant of this scene indicates that the concept of *ombre chinoise* is not suitable for the magic lantern: *om-*

bre chinoise is a play using dark shadows, whereas the magic lantern projects colored slides:

> ›Ein Schattenspiel! charmant!‹ riefen die Damen aus einem Mund und klatschten vergnügt in die Hände. ›DES OMBRES CHINOISES, nicht wahr? O nein, wir sind auf bunte Schatten eingerichtet, und Nolten hat nach Herzenslust einmal in ganzen Farben auf gut Nürnbergisch hier gemalt.‹ (Mörike 1967–71, vol. 4: 92)

> ›A shadow play! charming!‹ the ladies cried in unison and clapped their hands in amusement. ›DES OMBRES CHINOISES, isn't it? O no, we are set up for colorful shadows, and Nolten once painted to his heart's content in whole colors in a well Nuremberg manner here.‹

Laterna magica were brought to Japan by Dutch trading ships in the Edo period and were sometimes called *oranda ekiman kyô* (Dutch Eichman lamps). The term *ekiman* refers to the Eichman lamps used as a light source for the *laterna magica*. In Edo (present-day Tokyo), a kind of theatrical performance using *laterna magica* began in 1803, in which colored pictures were shown with sound effects while a narrator told ghost stories (Iwamoto 1992: 85–92). The Dutch ships that traveled around the globe brought *laterna magica* to many parts of the world. Japan was just one of them. As for "Dutch Eichman lamps," the adjective "Dutch" is appropriate for *laterna magica*, serving as a reminder of how this technology spread.

Perspective is a theatrical technique related to optics, which is applied in the performance space, for example, in the backdrop or set of a stage. According to Hans Belting's book *Florenz und Bagdad*, linear perspective was conceived in an optical book by Abu Ali al-Hasan Ibn al-Heitham (965–1040), who lived in southwest Asia and northeast Africa (Basra, Baghdad, and Cairo). The invention of linear perspective in fifteenth-century Florence is well known, but Belting sees the science of Ibn al-Heitham as its origin (Belting 2012: 104–126). He also notes that linear perspective was first used in Italian theater in the early sixteenth century, and spread to England during the next century (Belting 2012: 202–217). This technology also spread to East Asia. Walls, painted and posed in the style of stage pictures of a European baroque theater using linear perspective, were built in the imperial garden Yuan-ming-yuan near Beijing, in eighteenth-century China. The architect in charge was the Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione from Italy, who may have had Andrea Pozzo's book *Perspectiva pictorum atque architectorum* (original 1693–1700, Chinese translation

1729, new edition 1735) at his disposal (Mochida 2000). In twentieth-century Japanese kabuki, linear perspective was often used, though not rigorously, for scenery (Mende 2002).

It would be unfair to discuss only the optical technologies. Let us not leave the acoustic technologies unmentioned. Susanne Holl argues that a theory of sound as a propagating wave was developed in Europe and that theatrical spaces were analyzed in this light around 1800 (Holl 1997). The application of Western acoustic theory to theater architecture must have spread from the West to the rest of the world; this was certainly the case with the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo, which opened in 1911. This Western-style theater, where operas were also performed, was designed by YOKOGAWA Tamisuke. In his book *Earthquakes*, he says: "The vibrations of an earthquake are transmitted by waves caused by the shock at the epicenter. The propagation of these waves is in all directions and forms a spherical shape. It is the same as the propagation of sound" (Yokogawa 1891: 34). The idea that both earthquakes and sound are the propagation of vibrations is also found in the novel *The Earthquake in Chile* by the German writer Kleist, who was influenced by acoustics (Nawata 2018: 23-24). This idea was shared by Yokogawa, and may have been considered when constructing the Imperial Theatre. The Imperial Theatre withstood the Great Kantô Earthquake of 1923 (which was followed by a fire that destroyed it: National Diet Library 2016). This was probably because of Yokogawa's earthquake-resistant construction. If the theater had been built with an understanding of the nature of earthquakes, it would also have been built with an understanding of the nature of acoustics. For Yokogawa, the plays and singers on stage must have been the epicenter of air vibrations, if not earthquakes. From this epicenter, the vibrations (i.e., sound) spread "in all directions" and reached the audience. The reason the interior of the Imperial Theatre is round and not box-shaped (see the photo in National Diet Library 2016) could be because Yokogawa believed that this quasi-spherical shape would allow the sound to reach the audience evenly.

4. Writing Surfaces

When discussing the cultural techniques of play, it is imperative to consider the writing surface. The writing surface is not the subject of the whole book, but it is worth mentioning here. What are some of the writing surfaces that have been widely used to support plays?

Kallimachos, an Alexandrian poet and scholar of the third century BC, compiled a huge catalogue of the major works known to him (*Pinakes of All Those Preeminent in Literature and of Their Writings, in 120 Books*; this English title is derived from Acosta-Hughes et al. 2011: 120), including a category for drama (Acosta-Hughes et al. 2011: 122). *Pinakes* is not a mere catalogue of the Library of Alexandria, which possessed many papyri (Acosta-Hughes et al. 2011: 123), but a general catalogue of the most important Greek documents preserved on papyri. The Egyptian papyrus was an important writing medium for the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean world, including the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman cultures and the recording of their written dramas.

Paper, considered to have originated in China in 105 AD, spread eastward to Japan in the seventh century and westward to European factories in the twelfth century. Woodblock printing began in China in the seventh century and letterpress printing in the eleventh century, with both then spreading to neighboring areas. In Europe, letterpress printing began in the mid-fifteenth century. All this was printed on paper. The *Thirty Plays of the Yuan Dynasty* (thirteenth/fourteenth century, China) were printed in woodblock, the *Kanze School Nô Dramas* (c. 1600, Japan) in wood type, and the first complete works of Shakespeare (so-called First Folio, England, 1623) in metal type, all on paper.

From the end of the fifteenth century, shortly after Europe entered the age of paper and typography, Spain and Portugal spread both Catholicism and Christian plays throughout the world. The Spanish and Portuguese also brought paper with them (we are talking here about paper in the strict sense of its Chinese origin, which is different from the Amate bark paper that existed in Mexico before the Spanish conquest). Thus, a new kind of Christian play emerged in Mexico, based on a script written on paper and combined with local rituals. Louise M. Burkhart discusses a script that has been preserved: "This new literary and performance genre premiered in the early 1530s, so impressing its audience that native historians recorded an enactment of the Flood in 1531 and one of the Last Judgment in 1533. Some performances involved hundreds of participants and included songs, dances, or processions in addition to the spoken script. Through the use of multi-level stages, ropes, and platforms, angels could descend from heaven, Christ or the Virgin Mary ascend there, and devils could drag people down into hell" (Burkhart 1992: 266).

The Catholic mission of Spain and Portugal also reached Japan. Here, too, the same thing happened as in Mexico: using scripts and devices, Christian plays were performed, blending local and European elements. In a play performed in Bungo, Kyushu, on Easter 1562 (more precisely, the scene from the

Old Testament book of Exodus, where the waters of the Red Sea break open to reveal the land allow the Israelites to pass through, then close to drown Pharaoh's soldiers), it is assumed that a stage device was used for the first time in Japan. Thomas F. Leims cites this example and speculates that the stage sets of Christian plays performed in Japan in the second half of the sixteenth century were a source of inspiration for the stage sets of ningyô jôruri and kabuki. Behind the large scale of the production, which must have been well prepared, Leims suggests that there was a script written in Japanese: a Japanese man of Yokoseura, Kyushu, known as Paolo, may have written the script, blending the European style of drama, including the use of theatrical devices, with the Japanese style of drama, and would have instructed the Japanese in the performance of Christian drama (Leims 1990: 289–296). If this is correct, then the Christian theater was received and performed with the help of paper originally from China and the Japanese script, which helped to create and develop ningyô jôruri and kabuki. Spain and Portugal moved both westward and eastward, using the cultural techniques of paper and theatrical devices to create impact and new forms of play in the American continent and in Japan.

Palm leaf is a writing surface that coexisted with paper for a long time, even after paper had spread to a significant part of the world. Palm leaf was probably used in India from BC onward and spread not only to South Asia but also to Southeast and Central Asia (Yasue 2010). Kawatake argues that India's ancient epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, provided the material for Indian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian plays, and were the sources not only for the culmination of classical Sanskrit drama, Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśakuntalā* (fourth–fifth century) but also for the kabuki play *Narukami* (Kawatake 1978: 238–239). We should also ask what kind of cultural technique enabled the dissemination of such dramatic content. The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, probably because of the writing surface of the palm leaf, could be long stories and transmitted over a long period of time to a wide area. The palm leaf, which can store and carry more information than mere oral tradition, allows for the dissemination of a long and complex story, and more opportunities for theatrical performance. Palm leaves in the Oriya language, containing rewritten parts of the *Mahabharata* by the Orissa poet Saraladasa in the mid-fifteenth century, copied in Orissa in the early seventeenth century, probably reached Japan by merchant ships and were introduced into Japan around the eighteenth century in Tsushima (now Ehime Prefecture) (Dash 2006). As palm leaves were never the main writing surface in Japan and no one in Japan would

have been able to read Oriya, these were mere curiosities, but they are a testimony to the power of palm leaves to spread across time and space.

It was the introduction of printing techniques from the West that almost ended the use of palm leaves in much of Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Yasue 2010: 132–133). At this time, the French built European-style theaters in the three Vietnamese colonial cities of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), Haiphong, and Hanoi, where they performed operas and operettas (McClellan 2003). The spread of Western printing techniques was part of the spread of Western culture. It was a global phenomenon that extended beyond the region where palm leaves were used as writing surfaces. Western-style cities that sprang up around the world had their own letterpress houses. Tokyo is an example of a city where theater flourished on the back of such printing houses that printed plays, which were then kept in libraries. Western-style theater, printed books (with the new Western typesetting instead of the old East Asian printing methods), and libraries (in the new Western style instead of the temple archives): this was the setting and cultural context for MORI Ôgai's novel *Seinen* (*A Young Man*), serialized in magazines printed with movable type from 1910 to the following year. The protagonist, the titular young man, visits "this Western-style night theatre, the first of its kind in Tokyo and a much talked-about rarity" (Mori 1972: 323). Henrik Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* (Ibsen 1909, originally published in 1896), translated by Ôgai and printed by the Tokyo Printing Company in 1909, came to the stage of the Yûraku-za Theatre in the same year. It was the first time a modern Western play had been performed in Japanese: this epochal real event is incorporated into the fiction in which the protagonist sees an Ibsen play. The "Western night theatre" is the Yûraku-za, but the word "night" probably means that, unlike the old kabuki houses that used natural daylight, this is performed in the evening, using only artificial lighting (Kittler, citing Richard Alewyn, argued that lighting determines the length of the act. Lighting is one of the cultural techniques that define theater: Kittler 2011: 105–106). The protagonist later visits the home of a woman he met at the theater, and on his way back, he passes the Imperial Library in Ueno (Mori 1972: 341).

In antiquity, as in modern times, the writing surface has been the backbone of the play, as it is a determining factor in the transmission and repetition of the work, greatly expanding the further globalization of play. The world history of the performing arts corresponds with the world history of writing surfaces.

5. Conclusion

The globalization of play, examined in this light, did not just happen with the so-called globalization of the last decades as we now understand it. It began much earlier. A world history of play can be written as a history of the long globalization of cultural techniques that have defined and supported the performing arts from the outside.

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