

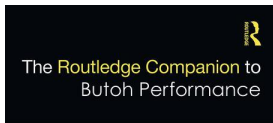
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The Relationship between Avant-Garde Dance and Things

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AVANT-GARDE DANCE AND THINGS

Mishima Yukio (translated by Bruce Baird)

Recently when I was speaking to Hijikata Tatsumi, he said something interesting. Usually, his speech is a series of unexpected chimerical fantasies, but the following really struck me.

He said,

Recently, I saw a paralyzed child try to reach for an object. I observed that his hand did not reach directly for the object, but went in the opposite direction and only after having traveled a long way finally grasped the object, and it is this image that is the same as the peculiar kind of hand movements that I have taught in the past. I was encouraged by this.

And saying this, he showed me the movements. He hunched his shoulders, and moved his hands in an uneven manner. The movements that he showed me, were already familiar from his recitals.

I then thought about classical ballet. There is no dissonance between humans and things in classical ballet, the beauty of the movement (in which the appearance of things is very rare) is a kind of decoration, a kind of exaggeration, and if one were to use a handy word, nothing more than a “formalization.” However, in avant-garde dance, the awesome “thing itself” – even if it should not be concretized on stage – exists imperiously, and the relationship between things and humans is full of tragic contradictions. The movements of humans try to arrive at things, but slide into an empty abyss, or else, they are completely controlled by things. These¹ [things] are useful in exploding the falsehood of everyday movements, the falsehood of our ‘natural movements’ that are trained by social custom. This is because reaching our hands out mindlessly for a cigarette, or cup of coffee on the table and grasping them, that is *begreifen*-ing them, is possible precisely because we live peacefully in a world of concepts (*Begriff*),² and that which we think of as natural movements are in actuality a momentary glossing over of the fearful and strict relationship between humans and things, through the performance of a kind of collusive ceremony by everyday movements under the veil of collusion. A strange perversion lurks here, or rather it is precisely our everyday movements that are ceremonial; it is precisely the avant-garde-dance-esque movements of a paralyzed child, that in the true sense of the word are “natural movements.”

In the upcoming dance of Hijikata, “Sugar Candy,” it appears that the stage will be filled with jangling and fragile toy phenomena, but toys are “flatter objects,” the so-called monster “things”

by which the fearful world of things dresses up to draw near to children. And yet, they deceive children with their fragile and easily breakable character (rather than their solidity and permanence), turn them into children, and cause them to see the world of things indulgently, and are thus the beginning of social training by the adults who cause the children to try them out. I am looking forward to seeing the results of the creation of a performance in which Hijikata and his cohorts approach the toy-like things and do battle with them.

Notes

- 1 Translator's note: From here to the end of the paragraph is also translated in Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), 170–171.
- 2 Translator's note: Mishima uses the German verb *begreifen* (grasp, grip, comprehend, fathom, take in) and the related noun *Begriff* (concept, idea, perception, understanding).

Work cited

Mishima Yukio. 2004. "Zen-ei buyō to mono tono kankei (The Relationship between Avant-Garde Dance and Things)" originally in the pamphlet for the September 3, 1961 2nd *Hijikata Tatsumi Dance Experience Gathering*. Reprinted in *Hijikata Tatsumi no butō: Nikutai no shururearisumu,shintai no ontorojī* (Tatsumi Hijikata's Butoh: Surrealism of the Flesh, Ontology of the Body), edited by Takeshi Morishita, 16–17. Tokyo: Keio University Press.