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À LA MAISON DE SHIBUSAWA

The draconian aspects of Hijikata's butoh

Robert Ono

Shibusawa Tatsuhiko (1928–1987) occupies a unique space in post-war Japanese culture. He is perhaps best known as the translator of works by Marquis de Sade, but is also credited as a widely learned critic who introduced and popularized many notions pertaining to Western art and history, especially surrealism and the occult. It is safe to say that butoh pioneer Hijikata Tatsumi (1928–1986) had a great respect for this decadent scholar of his own generation.

While Shibusawa wrote several essays on Hijikata's performances and helped his ideas of butoh to disseminate, Hijikata also learned considerably from Shibusawa's works. On one occasion, Hijikata grandly acknowledged this by adding the epigram "*À la maison de Civeçawa* [Shibusawa]" to the poster of his performance *Rose-Colored Dance* (1965). Shibusawa, on the other hand, wrote: "I cannot reflect upon the 1960s without thinking about Hijikata Tatsumi" ("On Hijikata Tatsumi and *ankoku butoh*" 土方巽と暗黒舞踏派について, 1976, *Complete Works* 14:431).¹ It could be said that during the 1960s, their visions were intertwined, and to some extent, evolved in tandem.

This chapter aims to shed a light on how several aspects of Shibusawa's draconian (the adjective he used to sum up the vast scope of his interest, from the Chinese character "dragon" in his name) hemisphere might have influenced Hijikata's practice of butoh, and how Shibusawa perceived Hijikata's performances. Special attention will be paid to Shibusawa's view on human body as *objet*, the idea he nurtured through his studies on surrealist art.

Mutual interest

Shibusawa Tatsuhiko was born to Takeshi, a bank clerk, and Setsuko, his wife. Although related to Shibusawa Eiichi, a banking tycoon sometimes dubbed "the father of Japanese capitalism," his immediate family led a modest life. In fact, it is not hard to imagine that Tatsuhiko was under hefty pressure when his father suddenly passed away in 1955, making him head of the house, with his mother and three younger sisters to care for. At the time he was 27 years old and had two volumes of translated books published in his name: *Ômatagiraki* 大勝びらき, or Jean Cocteau's *Le Grand Écart*, and a collection of short stories by Sade, entitled *Koi no kakehiki* 恋の駈引 (The Bargain of Love).

By the summer of 1959, he was gaining significant attention as the translator of works by Sade and several other French authors. He was also beginning to contribute book reviews and critical essays to different magazines, while building networks with contemporary literary figures, most

notably novelist Mishima Yukio (1925–1970). It was August of this year that, according to his first wife Yagawa Sumiko (1930–2002), he met Hijikata Tatsumi for the first time.² Although the details of their encounter are not clear, it is not hard to imagine that Hijikata, who would perform *Saint Marquis* (*Sei-Kōshaku*) in the following year, was already well acquainted with Shibusawa's works.

Perhaps in a more official sense, their professional relationship began in July 1960, at the performance of “Hijikata Tatsumi Dance Experience.”³ After the performance, Mishima took Shibusawa backstage and introduced him to Hijikata. As if this formality greenlit their professional correspondence, we can promptly see Shibusawa's name on the pamphlet of the next “Dance Experience” that took place in October. Here, Shibusawa contributed a small article entitled “Avant-garde and Scandal” 前衛とスキャンダル.

Solitude is power, said Saint Marquis. This is such a noble paradox, that in today's world, it is solely reserved for artists.

Complete Works 2:357

The last sentence of the article, quoted above, should definitely have flattered Hijikata. Shibusawa, who has been his guide to the world of Sade, is now making analogies between him and the Marquis. Was this pure praise? Or was there calculation involved?

We must bear in mind that Shibusawa was on the verge of entering a legal battle with the Japanese government, which was seeking to ban his translation of Sade's *Histoire de Juliette, ou les Prospérités du vice*. In April 1960, the police raided Gendai Shichō-sha, the publisher, and confiscated 162 copies of the novel's second volume. In January 1961, Shibusawa would be sued for distribution of obscene objects, which is a violation of Article 175 of the Japanese Penal Code.⁴

Given such circumstances, we are able to see another reason why he may have compared Hijikata to Sade. Shibusawa describes Hijikata as an artist who engages reality in a scandalous and terrorizing manner, a definition that almost exactly mirrors the ideal he saw in great works of literature. In an essay entitled “Dark Humor, or Literary Terror” 暗黒のユーモアあるいは文学的テロル, he claims that the work of art should be made of “chaos and terror, which arise from the destruction of the *ancien regime*” (*Complete Works* 1:110).⁵ In a way, therefore, while advocating Hijikata's scandalous performance on the surface, Shibusawa was simultaneously advocating the works of Sade and his own role as the translator of decadent literature.

But this does not mean Shibusawa's essay was written in a selfish manner, nor that it fails to capture the essence of Hijikata's performance. Quite on the contrary, as Bruce Baird states, it seems to demonstrate the deepest understanding of Hijikata's *butoh*, especially when compared with other essays contributed to the pamphlet:

Ironically, the one essay on the program not specifically dealing with synthesis, Shibusawa's “Avant-garde and Scandal,” seems the most prescient, given the form that Hijikata's synthetic arts were to take.

Baird 2012, 61

In the following year, Shibusawa wrote two more essays concerning Hijikata and his *buyō*.⁶ The first essay, “Hijikata Tatsumi: Burnt Offering Dancer” 燔祭の舞踊家・土方巽 (*Complete Works*, 2:413–414), which was once more written for the pamphlet of the “Dance Experience” gathering in November 1961, is a collection of aphorisms that makes comparisons between Hijikata and various figures of the past, such as emperor Caracalla, a Byzantine theologian, an Italian tyrant, and Joséphin Péladan, an occultist poet. Here we see that Shibusawa has released Hijikata from the framework of Sade and started to critique his performance from a wider scope.

The second essay written in 1961, “The Caged Eros” 檻のなかのエロス (*Complete Works*, 2:309–315), was the first occasion for Shibusawa to introduce Hijikata to the wider public. The essay was contributed to the magazine *TV Drama*, which had a national circulation. Here Shibusawa shares his dialogue between Mishima and Hijikata about how modern technology relates to the human body. This article perhaps had a significant impact on increasing Hijikata’s celebrity, but what is more important here is that Shibusawa discusses Hijikata in the context of eroticism, as defined by the French poet Robert Desnos and philosopher Georges Bataille. Shibusawa, who in 1958 translated Desnos’ *De l’erotisme*, and will in 1973 translate Bataille’s *L’erotisme*, acknowledged himself as an expert on this matter. Therefore, to evaluate Hijikata as an embodiment of eroticism was, for Shibusawa, an utmost compliment.

Let us not forget that Shibusawa was still a novice critic. Sade and concepts such as scandal, terror, and eroticism covered a big portion of themes he had at his disposal, and he manipulated them all to theorize the performance of his dancing comrade. For Shibusawa, who was working vigorously to build up his reputation as a critic, Hijikata was an excellent point to start. And Hijikata too, like Shibusawa, had only begun his career. He surely benefitted from a critic who could advertise his endeavors and set him up in a certain position within the contemporary art scene.

Perhaps it was a token of appreciation, then, that Hijikata gave Shibusawa a special place in his work *Rose-Colored Dance* (1965). On its poster, designed by Yokoo Tadanori (born 1936), the imagery of several artists that were important to Hijikata was incorporated in a collage-like manner: Nakanishi Natsuyuki (1935–2016), Kanō Mitsuo (born 1933), Yokoo himself, and finally, Shibusawa. Clearly Shibusawa is in a place of his own; not only is Shibusawa’s portrait inserted independently in the top-left hand corner, but the subtitle of the performance, which is displayed in large print (even larger than the main title) across the poster, reads *À la maison de Civeçawa* (Shibusawa). One might even suspect that the whole performance is dedicated to this sanctified patron.⁷

Retrospectively, in “On Hijikata Tatsumi” 土方巽について (1968), Shibusawa shares his thought on the subtitle of this performance:

Perhaps some would find it odd that the title of the performance held in 1965 was *À la maison de Civeçawa*. This is pretty much in the same vein with Proust’s *À la maison de Swann*⁸. We were so close for a while back then, and I was always welcomed at Asbestos Hall in Meguro where they practiced.

Complete Works 20:465

Shibusawa’s home at Kamakura had many visitors: artists, critics, writers, and performers, including names such as Iwaya Kunio (born 1943), Matsuyama Shuntarō (1930–2014), Tanemura Suehiro (1933–2004), Katō Ikuya (1929–2015), and of course, Hijikata. The phrase “maison de Shibusawa” crystallizes the nights they spent together discussing vigorously about art and philosophy of all time and space.⁹ It could be said that Hijikata’s *Rose-Colored Dance* was in part, therefore, designed to commemorate their friendship and mutual trust.

The body as objet

In the 1961 essay “Begone With the Ethics of Productivity” 生産性の倫理をぶちこわせ, Shibusawa focuses on the concept of *objet*:

Incidentally, the surrealist works of art that are called objet are an attempt to restore the alienated beauty of the objects themselves by returning the tools of production – which

assert their existence t the center of capitalist society – to their original state of purposelessness, separate from all necessities of life.

Complete Works, 2:342

For Shibusawa, who himself was in the midst of the struggle against modern, capitalist values, *objet* was definitely a hopeful concept. And it seems Shibusawa believed that Hijikata had an ability to free the human spirit from bodily imprisonment.

Let us take a look at his essay “She Fears a Negative Response” 彼女は虚無の返事を怖れる, which was published in *Anma* あんま, a small volume printed by Dance Experience to commemorate the eighth anniversary of Hijikata’s *butoh*. Here Shibusawa laments how human beings are forever trapped in their bodies. This means *eros*, the very source of eroticism, is also unable to leave the cage of flesh. However, Shibusawa thinks this may be altered if the concept of the body could be substituted with that of a doll.

Wax dolls, paper dolls, marionettes, realistic dolls, mechanical dolls . . . these dolls, with their rigid forms, awkward limbs, and still eyes of glass, exist on the other end of rhythmical dance, and serve as mystical substitutes for the human body. From them arises a different sort of eroticism, an eroticism of discontinuity, rather than rhythmical movements.

Complete Works 3:360–361

And Shibusawa claims that this analogy of human body as *objet*, or doll, makes perfect sense when he sees Hijikata dance:

Perhaps with painstaking effort, the human body could be transformed into something closer to a doll. I dearly love Mr. Hijikata Tatsumi’s performance that is full of spasmodic, painful, and dangerous moments, which overcome the impossibility of unleashing *eros* from the body.

Complete Works 3:361

To give his argument some concreteness, Shibusawa mentions Hans Bellmer (1902–1975), a German painter, photographer, and doll maker, who worked closely with surrealists in Paris.¹⁰ According to Tanaka (2008), in the 1960s, Bellmer was introduced to Japan as the inventor of the ball-joint doll by critics such as Shibusawa and Takiguchi Shūzō, and therefore he has had a bigger impact on the Japanese public than in the West, where he is not considered a doll maker *per se*. Yotsuya Shimon (born 1944), arguably the most celebrated doll maker in Japan, for example, relinquished his style once he read Shibusawa’s essay on Bellmer published in 1965 in the magazine *Shin Fujin* 新婦人.

The essay entitled “The Women’s Kingdom” 女の王国, discusses Bellmer along with the painter Paul Delvaux. Shibusawa states that Bellmer is obsessed with the human body, as is apparent from the dolls he produces:

The doll, which twitches spasmodically, is usually naked. Sometime it wears panties, stockings, socks, or shoes. The crudeness of its immature eroticism!

Complete Works 8:306

Note the adjective “spasmodic” 痙攣的 being used for both Hijikata and Bellmer’s dolls. For Shibusawa, the two had a lot in common: the severed body, the body without meaning, and the body as *objet*. As Fujii (2014) claims, during this period Shibusawa was not only fascinated by

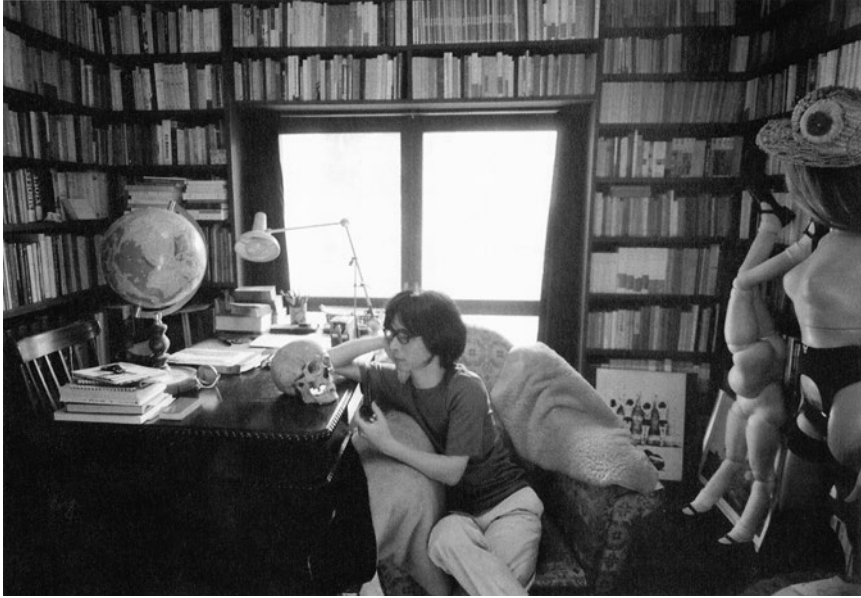


Figure 6.1 Shibusawa in his study. The replica of Bellmer's doll, described above, is visible in the back. Photograph by Ishiguro Kenji. © Ishiguro Kenji.

other works with similar themes, such as the novel *L'Ève future*, by Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and the short story "One Arm," by Kawabata Yasunari, but he even wrote a story of a similar nature himself, entitled "Doll Mound" 人形塚 (1962). Hijikata was to add yet another aspect to Shibusawa's pygmalionic universe through his performance.

Finally, perhaps Hijikata's significance for Shibusawa is best demonstrated in his essay "The Danger Within the Body" 肉体のなかの危機, published in July 1968 in the magazine *Tenbo* 展望. Here, Hijikata and his dance are neatly aligned with many of the themes Shibusawa cherished:

The *objet* of the surrealists strips purposiveness from objects and tools made in the service of goals, customs, and the everyday, and returns them to a state separate from all daily necessities. The beauty that was alienated from these objects is thus restored. Likewise, the body in Hijikata's dance aims to peel off the phony purposiveness that clings to our bodies and expose their alienated beauty under the bright sun. . . . And this is where the body in Hijikata's dance starts to become erotic. The body stripped of purposiveness, like the fetish of primitive man, charges eros into its void. The same mechanism applies to the human body. By shedding its customary purposiveness, the body may charge eros into its own empty space.

Complete Works 9:382

Conclusion

Perhaps Shibusawa's vast scope of interest may be summarized with a single word: *heterodoxy*. Throughout his career, he wrote tirelessly on demons, black magic, alchemy, hermaphrodites, Rosicrucianism, conspirators, and poisoners. Shibusawa, however, did not live in an ivory tower; he had to grapple with the modern, capitalist society as a translator and advocate of decadence.

Naturally, he needed an ally, preferably a contemporary, real-life artist, to whom he could entrust his views toward the world; and Hijikata fitted the profile perfectly.

During the 1970s and 1980s, as Hijikata began exploring his career off stage, Shibusawa wrote considerably less about him. And when he did, it was more about his memory of Hijikata, rather than the actuality of Hijikata's recent activities. In "On Hijikata Tatsumi and *ankoku butoh*," Shibusawa claims that during the 1960s, he had served Hijikata as a "mastermind and a consultant," a "loyal critic," and a "strategic agitator" (*Complete Works* 14:431).

Through the process of critiquing and thus encouraging performances of Hijikata, Shibusawa was able to re-evaluate and reinforce his views towards concepts such as body, eroticism, dolls, and *objet*, and this in turn very likely affected Hijikata's process of creation. Their interest was mutual, and they both gained significantly from the relationship. The bottom line is, they were comrades in arms.

When Hijikata died in January 1986, it was Shibusawa who served as the master of ceremony at his funeral. In his eulogy Shibusawa explains his relationship with Hijikata in a personal tone, substantiating their friendship straightforwardly:

Back then, around 1960, Hijikata Tatsumi and I were both in our early thirties. I think we influenced each other professionally.

Complete Works 22:504

A year and a half later, in August 1987, Shibusawa died from a rupture of carotid artery aneurysm. The two, who were born the same year, and even shared a phonetic value in their names, left this world in rapid succession, as if in a *pas de deux*.

Notes

- 1 All citations from Shibusawa (1993–1995) will be referenced in this manner, with the volume number followed by page number.
- 2 Yagawa recounts her memory of this day in Inata (2008).
- 3 Shibusawa has written, on several occasions, that this was the night he met Hijikata for the first time. He never mentions Hijikata visiting him in the previous year. Perhaps this "confusion" was a deliberate one, since it would obviously be more dramatic to include Mishima on the sight of their encounter.
- 4 The course of the trial, which continued until October 1961, is well documented in Supplementary Vol. 2 of *Complete Works*. Although Shibusawa lost the case and was ordered to pay the fine (of a mere 70,000 yen), all in all it boosted Shibusawa's publicity. The case itself, without a doubt, had a significant impact on the issue of freedom of expression in Japan.
- 5 Baird (2015) points out that Hijikata himself once called his performance "terror dance."
- 6 Shibusawa almost always uses the term *buyō* instead of *butoh*. In the essay "On Hijikata Tatsumi" (土方巽について, *Complete Works* 20: 459–466), he claims that during their conversation, Hijikata always used the former.
- 7 Baird offers a detailed analysis of the poster in Chapter 3 of *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh* (2012).
- 8 The section of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* is, of course, "*Du côté de chez Swann*." However, since the phrase is commonly translated into Japanese as "To Swann's House" スワン家の方へ, it would become "*À la maison de Swann*" when re-translated into French. Katō Ikuya recalls Hijikata saying dreamily, "look, Proust is walking along the edge of *hibachi* stove," while having a conversation at Asbestos Hall (2001, 31).
- 9 Tanemura Suehiro's collection of essays (2003) dedicated to Shibusawa is aptly titled *Tea at Five at Shibusawa's House* 澁澤さん家で午後五時にお茶を.
- 10 The title of the essay, "She Fears a Negative Response," is taken from a poem composed by Paul Éluard, which accompanied his dolls in the work *Les Jeux de la Poupée* (1944).

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