

Ass Mask: *Noh* Faces New Ends

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces Kyoto-based *butoh* dancer Yasuo Fukurozaka's approach to improvised dance. Floating between ritual and raw physicality, Fukurozaka's dance practice often focuses on committing his body to physical situations that his body – and he – do not plan or expect. Through this approach, his body's physical responses guide the creation process by locating itself within, adapting to and improvising conditional functionalities to stark and unpredictable physical contexts. In this way, Fukurozaka's dance becomes a real-time physical affective document, his body's exhibited capacities in relation to changing situations. Through a focused examination of one of Fukurozaka's performance called "Princess Moonlight," and by exploring links between his approach and the theoretical aesthetic concerns and applied methods of *nob* drama as exhibited in its stage craft, performance theory and use of masks, I analyze how Fukurozaka's unorthodox use of the *nob* mask both reveals the enduring power of this simple yet powerful ancient technology as well as illustrates the radical respect which this avant-guard improvising dancer shows for and shares with *nob's* centering of the audiences' imaginative autonomy.

KEYWORDS

Noh, Yasuo Fukurozaka, Butoh, Improvisation, Dance, Avant-guard, Japan, Audience, Mask

YASUO FUKUROZAKA: BODY/OBJECT/PLACE

In 2014, Kyoto-based *butoh* dancer Yasuo Fukurozaka performed his hour-long work *The Decay of the Angel*. In it, Fukurozaka explored themes of history, politics and Japanese culture as frames to contextualize and facilitate his intensely physical approach to avant-guard improvised dance, an approach which can be described as bodily documenting the processes of how his anatomy experiences, endures and orients itself in response to adverse and changing conditions. In the fifth section of *The Decay of the Angel*, Fukurozaka performs a dance entitled “Princess Moonlight.” Starting in darkness, Fukurozaka balances his nearly naked body upside down atop his shoulders. With his head obscured upstage, his bare back faces the audience and his slender legs and arms rise up into the air. As a single light fades in, the audience slowly makes sense of his oddly inverted anatomy. But, soon after, small bursts of laughter can be heard from the audience as spectators gradually realize that an object attached just below Fukurozaka’s naked ass is a *noh* mask of a young woman’s face. While undeniably humorous, Fukurozaka is not deploying the mask as simply a gag. Rather, Fukurozaka’s dance exploits the effectiveness of the mask’s traditional technology in activating the viewers’ imaginations to generate unique and private visions, characters, potentials, etc. from the mysterious and disorienting creatures which become embodied on the stage. In this paper, I will introduce Fukurozaka’s approach to improvised dance, detail the performance of “Princess Moonlight,” introduce some of the theoretical aesthetic concerns and practical methods of *noh* drama and finally analyze how Fukurozaka’s unorthodox use of the *noh* mask both reveals the enduring power of this simple yet powerful ancient technology as well as illustrates the radical respect for and centering of the audiences’ imaginative autonomy that is shared by both traditional *noh* and this avant-guard improvising dancer.

Yasuo Fukurozaka (45) was born and raised in Hokkaido, Japan’s huge and cold northern island, and came to Kyoto at age 18 to study nuclear engineering and *noh* at Japan’s prestigious Kyoto University. While nuclear engineering was his declared field of study, his primary passion for attending Kyoto University was to join its large and well supported student club devoted to studying *noh*. While in graduate school for nuclear engineering, Fukurozaka first came in contact with *butoh* when he saw and was shocked by a picture of one of *butoh*’s founders, Tatsumi Hijikata. Fukurozaka attended some *butoh* workshops, but never had an intention to perform until one of the teachers, Yuki Goza, a *butoh* dancer in Kyoto, told him: “You should stand on the stage. So, cut your hair.”

Butoh is an avant-guard dance practice which originated in the cultural turmoil of 1960s Japan. Founded by Hijikata, Kazuo Ono and their various cohorts, *butoh* is often outwardly recognized by dancers with shaved heads and white-painted bodies engaged in extremely concentrated and slow physical movements which distort the body and face in ways that imply disability, mutation and gravity’s weight – exploring the body in direct contrast to the uplifting choreographic grace of most other dance traditions. However, beyond any superficial outward aesthetic forms, *butoh* is a practice of intense exploration of the body as a vehicle of being, discovery and “corporeal mutation.”¹ *Butoh*’s genesis partly sprang up in confrontation and rejection of racist western and westernized aesthetic notions about the Asian body, namely that it was wrongly proportioned or not suitable for modern dance. However, this initial rebellion against the modern dance establishment of the time evolved into a sophisticated practice of profound explorations regarding the body as a deep source of actuality and into ways to “scrape off customs and present crisis straightforwardly.”² Many of the performance works that were staged in its formative years offered broad interrogations of taboos, cultural and social conventions and even

¹ Stephen Barber, *Hijikata: Revolt of the Body*, (N.p.: Solar Books, 2010), 107.

² Bruce Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits* (London: Palgrave 2012), 48.

logic itself. While brightness and light had long been established symbols for western ideals of beauty, purity, reason and good, Hijikata ventured into the darkness, using the body in its particular, momentary, non-linguistic mystery as his vehicle for exploring another and vaster way. For Hijikata, the “body was restricted to an unrealized and chaotic form, but had the potential to implode cataclysmically and uniquely, in the act of gesture, with one instant of unrepeatably incandescence, to the point at which it would terminally swallow all light.”³ As Bruce Baird summarizes in the first sentence of his book, “*butoh* defies definition.”⁴ However, this is true not merely because *butoh* has no authoritative formal qualities or goals for completion against which any particular act of *butoh* can be determined to have succeeded or failed, but also because *butoh* actively works to confound the functionality of descriptive and defining systems.

Fukurozaka has been dancing *butoh* for close to 20 years, primarily in Kyoto, solo and improvised. He has never done nuclear engineering. To offer a glimpse of what his dance is like, there are a few aspects which identify his work. While none of these are forms which he strictly makes use of, they are elements that arise enough to be identified as his. He is usually almost naked when he dances – wearing only a small white loincloth – and about half the time paints his body and shaved head white. He also regularly includes some small element or moment of humor in his dance, often something which evacuates the tension of seriousness that can arise around contemporary dance. A couple of examples to illustrate his humor include his use of a flashing red police car light which he wears in place of his loincloth. Another is his recent occasional use of a rubber toilet drain plunger which he ritualistically attaches to his bare scalp and he then covers with one dangling leg of a pair of nude pantyhose that are pulled over his head. His dance movements cannot be categorized except to say that they range from stillness to highly kinetic, but both the stillness and the wildness always exhibit an intense physicality and the active energy of his body. Fukurozaka never seems to become a character or play a distinct role. His dance is always placing his body in the position of impetus maker.

Fukurozaka’s dance contrasts with the way conventional dance typically showcases the body as a document of predetermined choreographic flow and practiced aesthetic forms. Instead of leading his body through a series of imagined mental abstracts, Fukurozaka arrives at forms by committing his body to physical situations that his body, and he, don’t plan or expect, thereby allowing his body’s physical responses to guide the creation process. Fukurozaka’s dance becomes the real-time physical document that his body exhibits in relation to a situation, illustrating the concept in affect theory that “the capacity of a body is never defined by a body alone but is always aided and abetted by, and dovetails with, the field or context of its force-relations.”⁵ Fukurozaka’s dance aesthetics float between ritual and raw physicality, creating a dance of moments from his body’s ability to locate itself, adapt and improvise conditional functionality in the stark and unpredictable physical contexts he subjects it to.

One example from 2015 illustrates his approach more vividly. In an improvised dance performed for an exhibition by abstract calligraphy and ceramics artist Kinuko Naito at a very small gallery-space near Kobe called Atelier 2001, Fukurozaka performed amidst hundreds of small ceramic sculptures displayed in rows on the uneven concrete floor. The works were tough little organic-shaped nuggets of high-fired clay. Each about 5cm tall, the pieces resembled multi-surfaced conglomerate rock forms. Each object was oriented upward, balanced vertically on its base. In the approximately 2m x 3m area where Fukurozaka was to dance, the ceramic sculptures were evenly spaced, each about 20cm from its neighbors. Performing with Fukurozaka was the

³ Stephen Barber, *Hijikata: Revolt of the Body*, 16.

⁴ Bruce Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a Pool of Gray Grits*, 4.

⁵ Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, “An Inventory of Shimmers.” In *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

improvising soprano saxophonist Tenko Hino. Fukurozaka limited his area to half of the 3-meter-long space, with the musician walking in the other half. Dancing barefoot and nearly naked except for his white loincloth, a thin shawl draped over his shoulders and a pair of dangling pantyhose pulled tight over a drain plunger attached to his head, he delicately let his feet find spaces in the rows without disturbing the works (fig. 1). But, gradually pieces began to tumble, roll and relocate themselves, coming to new positions of temporary stasis. As Fukurozaka's dance proceeded, he placed his body more and more in contact with the variety of hard and projecting surfaces. His feet found unique ways to support his weight while responding to the sharp chunks underfoot (fig. 2). The rest of his body responded as well, shifting in relation to the pulls of gravity and pressures against skin. His body found specific affective means within the actuality of the conditions. Without needing choreographed guidance, the body created new and ephemeral forms. And, then Fukurozaka let his body tumble to the floor and the body/dance proceeded to document the ongoing process of discovering responses to those new and changing conditions. Each new form was always actual and always specific And, this fact reveals a truth for all bodies in the world. Nothing general has ever happened, because there is never a general sharp point of a general piece of sculpture poking into a general place of a general person's hip (fig. 3). The real world is always a confluence of particulars. And, I hope my writing here does not convey Fukurozaka's dance as being semi-masochistic pain-porn for it is not. His dance never has a nuance of "Watch me hurt myself. Pain is my message." Quite the opposite. It is as though his dance/body is an empty object, free of a human director – like how a sleeping body in a chair does not seem to acknowledge or care about comfort, custom or manners as its neck droops awkwardly or an arm is pinched into numbness. Fukurozaka's dance makes use of and documents this type of emptied out body as object, a body/object which has its own improvised methods for orienting itself within the conditions it exists amidst.



Fig. 1 Yasuo Fukurozaka, at Atelier, 2001, photograph by the author.



Fig. 2 Yasuo Fukurozaka, at Atelier, 2001, photograph by the author.

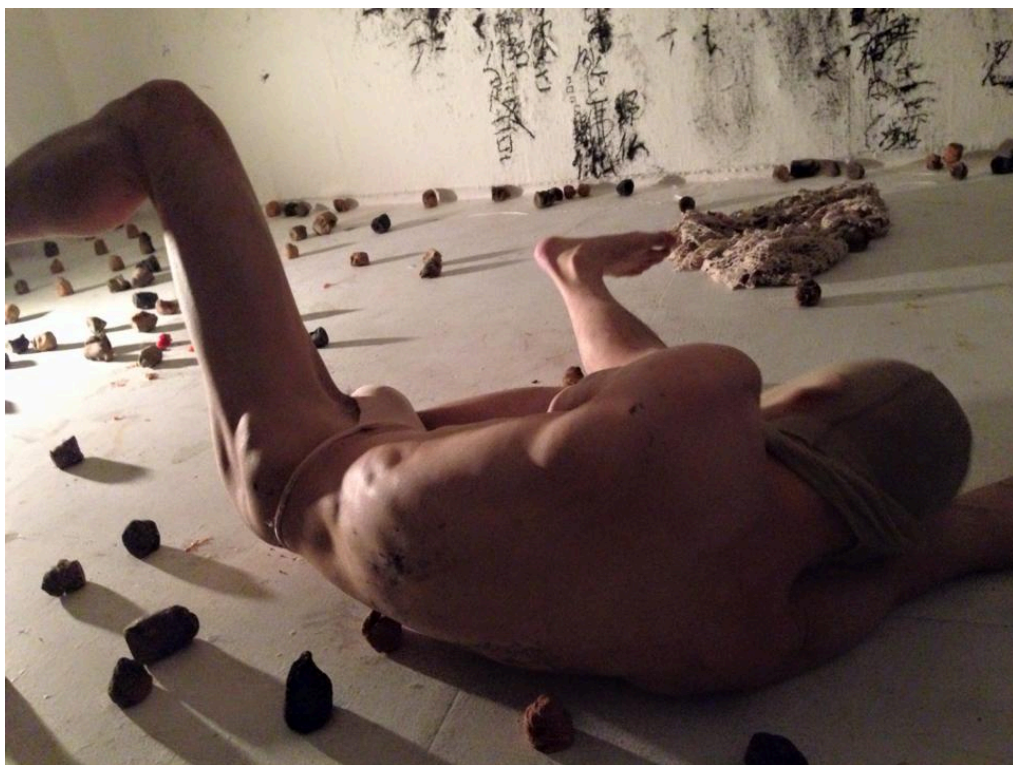


Fig. 3: Yasuo Fukurozaka, at Atelier, 2001, photograph by the author.

NOH AND IMAGINATIVE SPECTATORS

Noh is the classical drama of Japan, and has been regarded as the nation's highest form of theatrical performance culture for centuries, since the time when *nob*'s revered dramatist and theorist, Zeami (1363-1443), perfected the art form. For those unfamiliar with it, *Noh* can be seen to share some comparable elements with what is available to us regarding ancient Greek tragedy, such as elevated and philosophical themes in the plays' scripts, the use of poetic language in dramatic dialogue, choral commentary, certain similar degrees of dramatic unity regarding time, place and action, as well as the use of masks and male-only actors. For such reasons, *nob* has been closely examined for potentially offering useful hints that could help scholars deduce conceptual, aesthetic and performance-craft elements that may have existed in ancient Greek tragedy but which are now unknown. Such insights into Greek drama are considered possible by studying *nob* because "the external evidence for *nob* . . . is by comparison quite extensive."⁶ A vast amount of information is available. *Noh* has maintained an uninterrupted tradition of performance, training, theater companies, documentary commentary, contextualizing visual artwork and venues within Japanese society for over 600 years. Numerous extant plays, treatises on acting and music, masks, illustrations, stage art, notes, stage designs, theater companies and costumes have been carefully protected and passed down through generations of master-practitioners and by the culture at large. As well, *nob* has been supported by traditional and modern systems of interested students, amateur practitioners and patrons. All of this speaks to why and how *nob* has continued to live as an active performance tradition in Japan.

While *nob* is widely considered to be an artifact of high culture and has a "rather esoteric reputation" in Japan, it has a deep reach down through all levels of contemporary society.⁷ There are chances to see, learn and participate in *nob* activities open to anyone with an interest. While not as popular now as perhaps even 40 years ago, one can still readily find gatherings of amateur chorus groups which meet to learn and practice the styles of dramatic choral singing. In such groups, it would not be unusual to find a bank president kneeling next to a kneeling taxi driver as they sing through the choral section of a play written more than half a millennium ago, demonstrating how the interest in and contact with *nob* is not limited to elites or scholars. Likewise, some high schools and universities have clubs in which students can learn, practice and perform *nob* singing, acting and music. In addition, classical Japanese dance—called *nihon buyo*—which is practiced widely and involves the use of kimonos, hand fans and declarative chant-style singing, draws a portion of its repertoire from *nob* plays and choreography.

Noh maintains a vibrancy in Japanese culture in a way that is comparable to, if not as widely popular as, the practice of martial arts, flower arrangement and tea ceremony. Individuals study its traditions, formal qualities and norms. This keeps *nob* existing in the culture, but also freezes it as a formalized and perfected system of traditional knowledge. *Noh* is not viewed as a vehicle for original or personal expression. Instead, it lives as a cultural asset worth protecting, enshrined like a cherished treasure rather than opened to the risks related to dynamic artistic expansion. There are very few new *nob* plays created. Practitioners look to the past for models of performance, mask aesthetics, costume design, etc. rather than experiment with new or critical alternatives. This is not to say that *Noh* is merely a museum piece, except to the degree that one might imagine that Japanese culture itself functions as a museum.

Thus, in Japan, *nob*'s vibrancy is both woven and oddly entangled with cultural pride in its genius, history, national identity and soul. And, the masks of *nob* are arguably not only the face of

⁶ Mae J. Smethurst, *The Artistry of Aeschylus and Zeami: A Comparative Study of Greek Tragedy and Nob* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5.

⁷ Royall Tyler, ed. and trans, *Japanese Nob Drama*, (London: Penguin, 1992), 1.

the theater, but also a symbol of Japan itself and its contribution to the traditional arts of humanity. Both inside and outside of Japan, *nob* is most readily recognized by the iconic carved wooden masks it uses, in particular the oval-shaped moon-white masks of demure young women and the horned, sinisterly grinning mask of the *hannya*, used to portray women who are enraged with jealousy. However, most actors in *nob* do not wear a mask. In fact, in the vast majority of plays, only one performer wears a mask. This performer is called the *shite*, who plays the central role and dances at the play's climax. As only men perform in *nob*, masks are used for portraying characters that the bare face of a typical male cannot convey. Thus *nob* masks primarily depict females, gods, heroes, demons and a few unique men in Japanese history and legend. Hand carved by skilled artisans from single blocks of wood, these masks are not made to fit the particular face of the actor, but rather they are crafted based on the designs of historical masks of fame or special note. The masks are not intended to cover the entire face of the male actor, but instead positioned over the center of the face during a crucial ceremony of transformation whereby the *shite* "first denies the existence of physical facial expressions and then goes a step further to deny within his consciousness the existence of the mask."⁸ This ceremony occurs in a special area called the "mirror room," which is located just before the threshold passed when entering the stage. In addition, the *shite* does not simply put on or wear the mask. Rather, there is an emphasis that the *shite* affixes the mask to his face, and in that act he transforms into the character to be performed.⁹ However, in terms of practical logistics, the affixing of the mask remains purely metaphoric and thus the carved piece of wood is secured using cords tied at the back of the *shite's* head.

As the eye holes of *nob* masks are only about 1cm across, the actor's eyes are not visible or used to show any emotions in performance. All of the emotional expressions conveyed through the mask come from controlling how it is tilted in relation to the light and the viewing perspectives of the spectators. To express happiness, the mask can be tilted up, which "brightens" the face. Tilting it down is said to "cloud" it, and express sadness. By quickly turning the mask from side to side, the mask can convey anger or other stronger emotions. From alterations of these three general mask positions, the mask's "qualities create infinite possibilities."¹⁰ This open potential for a vast range of emotional expressions from a fixed mask which covers the most expressive areas of the human face is based in a sophisticated theoretical concept that *nob* is able to put into practical use. Likely derived from Buddhist examinations of the non-dual nature of self and other, *nob's* concept channels the interdependent relationship between the performer, the viewer and the viewing space into the creation of the performance. According to Kunio Komparu, this is what "enabled *nob* to make the great transition from being an entertainment imitative of ritual to becoming a great art" and it can be summarized as a realization that the viewers are essentially engaged in the completion of the performance.¹¹ And, thus, rather than trying to control or narrow what the audience members see or interpret, *nob* facilitates a collaborative co-creative merging of audience and performance. This can take place by allowing abstraction and symbolic suggestion to engage the spectators through their individual perspectives, desires, hopes, fears and experience. In short, each audience member filters his life through the play in order to bring the play into realization. The play's art is successfully fulfilled not by establishing one authoritative view in the minds of spectators, but by the greater abundance of unknowable individual visions that exist beyond the stage's limits.

Nob employs various practical ways to bring about such collaborative inclusion of the audience. One way is through not trying to hide too much of the stage craft. This means that the

⁸ Kunio Komparu, *The Nob Theater: Principles and Perspectives* (New York: Weatherhill, 1983), 17.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

viewer has degrees of control to look beyond or smooth over gaps between reality and fiction, using her imagination to build her specific private vision. An example of how *noh* does not hide its stage craft can be seen with the masks. Due to the mask's size, there is commonly an obvious area where the flesh of the actor's jowls, chin and forehead show outside the edge of the mask. This evident seam reveals where the real face of the actor forms something of a hybrid interface with the artistic visage of the fictional character. The actor never fully vanishes inside the dream, or, from another perspective, the dream must be sustained by an active and real body in sleep. The imagination-technology of the *noh* mask and the reality of the performer's flesh show an obvious border of difference. And, while such a noticeable contrast between actor and character would potentially get a film industry costume designer fired, *noh* is working with a different affective intent. To various degrees, *noh* makes purposeful and aesthetic use of revealing worlds confronting or juxtaposing one another. Indeed, a central theme of a large number of the plays is about just such "supernatural meets mundane cross-border interactions," such as monks meeting ghosts, etc. Far from trying to erase such differences and absorb the spectator into an authoritative and fully controlled vision of the art by creating a seamless aesthetic totality, *noh* trusts the spectator's imaginative concentration to respond, integrate or make use of unpredictable and chance elements. In western theatrical traditions as well as in other Japanese theater systems, the goal is to virtually supplant the spectator's imagination with an extremely powerful and completed vision organized by the directors, actors, stage artists, musicians, technology, etc. In contrast, *noh* allows and even relies on the viewer to be an active participant in building a private or secret vision through her own imagination. Some commentators even say "the proper way to watch *noh* is in a hypnagogic state between waking and sleeping."¹² Drawing from the abstract and suggestive details provided by the play's text, performers, stage craft, chance, etc., the viewer creates a deeply personal experience. *Noh* does not attempt to force its creative vision and overpower the imagination of the spectator or input some closed totality that will forever hold the viewer's imagination as the signature or ultimate enactment of the play. Rather, for *noh*, "all superfluities must be expunged, for only by extreme economy of presentation can [the true intent of the character] be manifest."¹³ And the spectator serves as a key collaborator in actualizing the character's true intent. As Komparu states:

"the viewer participates in the creation of the play by individual free association and brings to life internally a drama based on individual experience filtered through the emotions of the protagonist. The shared dramatic experience, in other words, is not the viewer's adjustment of himself to the protagonist on stage but rather his creation of a separate personal drama by sharing the play with the performer. Indeed, he becomes that protagonist."¹⁴

Facilitating this personal activation of the spectator's imagination is partly accomplished through juxtapositions of the real (actors, stage, spectator herself, etc.), the realistic (masks, costumes, etc.), the abstract (props, language, gestures, etc.) and chance (the innumerable happenings that occur between a time, place and viewer). The rather loose but sensitive interplay of such elements gives the spectator openings and blanks into which she can let various virtual imaginings develop before any particular one becomes actualized, perhaps due to a specific inspiration or connection which might appear either on the stage or from her mind. Rather than being directed into specific emotional plot points by powerfully directive dramatic triggers as is common in formulaic

¹² Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 230.

¹³ William Scott Wilson, Introduction to *The Spirit of Noh: A New Translation of the Classic Noh Treatise the Fushikaden*, Trans. William Scott Wilson, (Boston: Shambhala, 2006), 5.

¹⁴ Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theater: Principles and Perspectives*, 18.

Hollywood films, *nob* places the spectator at the center of her own private process of creativity, catalyzing visions from elements of imagination that are not preprogrammed towards predictable reactions, attractions or activations. In this way, the spectator comes away from a performance with a private or secret experience by having ventured amidst a performance's gaps to create a unique work in collaboration with more open and freely associable inputs. This is the collective or interdependent completion of the performance.

THE DECAY OF THE ANGEL

In March of 2014, Yasuo Fukurozaka staged *The Decay of the Angel* in Kyoto at UrBANGUILD, a performance space that actively supports experimental music, *butoh* and other forms of contemporary dance. Fukurozaka is a regular performer at UrBANGUILD and is a key figure of the Kyoto *butoh* scene. *The Decay of the Angel* is a work inspired by three literary sources: the Yukio Mishima novel by the same title, the *nob* play *Hagoromo*, and Buddhist cosmological writings which describe the signs of decay that indicate when an angel is coming to the end of its life (in Buddhism, angels are not eternal beings). The performance features eight chapters, in which Fukurozaka primarily dances solo. In the finale section, Fukurozaka performs with two female dancers who also provide some brief support performances in other parts.

I will not analyze *The Decay of the Angel* as a whole, except to say that the various chapters present a range of themes somewhat oriented towards Mishima's life. The chapters and their pace are physically challenging and presented a good range of Fukurozaka's intensities, humor and dance approaches.

The fifth chapter is called "Princess Moonlight," which creates an association to the *nob* play *Hagoromo*. *Hagoromo* is often credited to Zeami, but its authorship is regularly questioned. It is one of the most popular and often performed *nob* plays. It tells the story of an angel from the moon who descends to earth out of an interest to feel what being human is like. To this end, she removes her robe made of feathers and hangs it on a tree branch while she experiences bathing in water. While she is away, a fisherman finds the robe and realizes what it actually is. The angel returns but the fisherman refuses to give back the robe. She pleads with him to return it, saying that she needs to have the robe to return to the moon. Without it, she is trapped on earth and will die. He finally agrees on the condition that she dance for him. She consents, but says in order to dance she must first have the robe back. Hesitantly, he gives her the robe, she dances and then departs back to the moon.

Given the connection to the moon and the fact that the angel in *Hagoromo* is performed using the mask for a young woman, Fukurozaka's "Princess Moonlight" is clearly contextualized by the *Hagoromo* story. But, his ten-minute dance does not illustrate the story in any direct way. The story serves as a filter of references offering a rich layer of suggestion for potential imaginative sparks.

"Princess Moonlight" starts in silence and stillness. In the center of the bare stage, a dim light from above barely disturbs the darkness, but casts shadows down Fukurozaka's inverted body. He is calmly perched upon his shoulders, his bare back facing the audience. Almost plant-like, his bare legs and arms are extended upward and their anatomical contours are shaped against the darkness upstage. While disorienting, the vaguely visible form makes sense as a body positioned upside down on a stage. But, then, as the light increases, a small shining spot appears on the white forehead of the *nob* mask of a young woman. What had made sense in the previous moment now begins to get fuzzy. The light grows to reveal the ridge of the woman's nose. The mask, affixed to the back strap of Fukurozaka's loin cloth, calmly stares out from the deteriorating darkness, its whiteness contrasting to the warm tones of the dancer's back, ass, legs and arms. People laugh, indicating that segregated worlds have been unexpectedly merged in a breath of surrealism. The

high and the low. The real and unreal. The ass and the face. The front and the back-end (fig. 4). The eyes of the mask quickly become the center of my focus as a spectator. The eyes become what orients and disorients the surrounding elements of Fukurozaka's body. The eyes are the strongest center and thereby direct my mind to make sense of everything else in relation to them and the face.



Fig. 4: Yasuo Fukurozaka Princess Moonlight, photograph by Masaki Yanagida

While I never lose track of the fact that this is a dancer perched on his shoulders with a mask attached to his ass, the mask triggers my mind to make creative sense of the ongoing changes taking place. As I concentrate on the face, Fukurozaka's subtle body movements in adjusting his upside down balance become evident in contrast to the mask's utter stillness. Such differences reveal how conditions mutually orient each other. Movement defines stillness. A face posits a head or a neck or some anatomical method of linking it to the body. While this is a man with a mask on his ass, other forms are appearing, changing and vanishing. In this way, the mask starts to contextualize each different movement and position of the body in relation to the logic and power of itself as a face. As well, the mask activates orientations between the female face and the potential forms this transitional body takes. Details affect what details become. Is this a woman? And, if so, in what way? At times, the creature on the stage becomes an angelic female calmly bowing down towards the floor, her fingers drawing close to her face as though in formal apology or great thanks or preparing to eat. At other times, the mask orients the dancer's legs to become the struts of an angel's wings rising powerfully above its shoulders, or the face orients the visible anatomy into that of a grotesque monster that is haunting the darkness or a broken angel that has fallen to earth (fig.5). Each vision appears out of the same type of interdependent relationship between the actor,

spectator and performance space that is activated in *nob*. Ongoing and changing orientations between the real, realistic, abstract and chance facilitate a rich complexity of collaborative envisioning, made possible by the underdetermined context of Fukurozaka's improvised dance. In the same way as *nob*'s use of understatement and suggestion open the audience to filter the dramatic action through their lives via free association and activated imagination, Fukurozaka's improvised dance is completed through the richness of the audience's envisioning. Individual by individual, the spectators breathe life from and into the dance, catalyzing its instances with their own private memories, dreams, fears and fathoming to complete the work beyond the claim of control by any one entity. The work becomes an intensity of assembled culminations.

If we analyze more deeply how the *nob* mask is able to function as such a richly suggestive trigger for imaginative potential, we can gain more appreciation for the power of this ancient technology. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari analyze the use of masks for a very different purpose than that of *nob*. They argue that tribal Native American cultures use masks to obscure the human face in order to reunify the head with the body in a process of becoming animal. In such ritualized unification of the head-body into a single territorialized body contour, spiritual power can be accessed through possession by the animal's spirit. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari imply that the human face causes the deterritorialization of the unified head-body volume because the face affects a signifying process of decoding based on black holes (eyes, mouth, etc.) rather than body volumes.¹⁵



Fig. 5: Yasuo Fukurozaka Princess Moonlight, photograph by Masaki Yanagida

As Deleuze and Guattari state “the organization of the face is a strong one.”¹⁶ The face has a great power to orient and contextually imply or determine other body elements – and even objects near

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Brian Massumi, Trans.), (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 1987), 176.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the face – by using itself as the dominant reference point. The face organizes expectations regarding how a body’s anatomy should be arranged, or imposes logics which make sense in relation to the face’s dominant positioning. Faciality territorializes space around the face.

This idea offers a way to understand some of the suggestive power that *nob* masks wield in both the classical dramatic tradition and in Fukurozaka’s performance. The mask has a territorializing power by which it can suggest or strongly orient the logic and function of elements located in relation to it. Thus, for example, the female mask employed in Fukurozaka’s dance was able to influence how the dancer’s legs are envisioned in relation to the mask’s location and direction. When the mask is upright and Fukurozaka’s legs are raised up behind it, there is a feeling of disorientation in the viewer. This means that the legs briefly threaten to deterritorialize the face-centered orientation logic. But, as the face’s signifying power reestablishes its dominance, the viewer’s imagination needs the legs to make sense in relation to the face. Thus, the legs cease being merely legs and become capable of suggesting other imaginative possibilities. The face never loses its stability as a face or the power the black holes of its eyes and mouth have to hold the spectator’s gaze. Thus, for the face-centered territorialization to make sense, the face cannot be situated below the legs. Therefore, the protruding elements of anatomy rising above the face must be something else. The legs cannot be legs. Thus, in an act which reinforces the face-oriented dominance, the imagination envisions the dancer’s legs to be the struts of a pair of powerful wings. And, in another example, we can see that the face suggestively orients gestural meanings to itself when Fukurozaka extends his hands up in front of the bowing mask. At this time, the hands become territorialized by the mask and the potential suggestions of the gestures are oriented as existing in relation to the face, or for the face, such as eating, prayer, contemplation, etc. (fig 6). Had the mask not been included in the dance, or had the mask not been associated with the angel in Hagaromo, the gestures of Fukurozaka’s dance would have surely contained very different imaginative potentials.



Fig. 6: Yasuo Fukurozaka Princess Moonlight, photograph by Masaki Yanagida

In a similar way to how *nob* theory realizes the interdependent relationship between the actor, the audience and the stage, the various affective elements of any instant function in collaboration to

bring about different potential capacities in a body. The body becomes different via interaction, resulting in different capacities. In reference to Spinoza talking about the body, Brian Massumi makes a point which echoes these ideas: “When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected.”¹⁷ Similarly, Fukurozaka’s approach to dance, in which he commits his body to the conditions confronting it and lets his body find new forms in response, exhibits an inherent openness to interdependent relationships with collaborative agents, an openness to becoming. Massumi continues, “What a body is, [Spinoza] says, is what it can *do* as it *goes* along. This is a totally pragmatic definition. A body is defined by what capacities it carries from step to step. What these are exactly is changing constantly.”¹⁸ Fukurozaka’s dance works in this very way, whereby he places his body into conditions through which the body is left to its creative devices to develop new capacities, embodying new aesthetic forms in response to the direct contextual influences of gravity, torque, exhaustion, balance, etc. In this way, his dance body leads him beyond expectations and into new actualities. He releases his body into experimental collaborations, such as balancing on his shoulders or falling amidst sharp objects, and then his body actualizes new forms in the dance that result in engaging the specifics of the real through improvisation.

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BIOGRAPHY

Gerald Gordon is Associate Professor in the International English Department at Baika Women’s University. His research focuses on improvisation, particularly in relation to music, dance, poetry and other arts practices. He has served as the director of MIIT House in Osaka, Japan, since 2011. MIIT House is a small factory which has been repurposed as a venue for improvised and experimental music, dance and performance. Gordon’s ongoing research project is interviewing improvising musicians regarding collaborative aspects of instrument/player physicality and improvisation. In addition, Gordon is an active improvising musician, poet, bike rider and cook.

¹⁷ Brian Massumi, Interview by Mary Zoumazi, *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, Mary Zoumazi, ed. (Annandale: Pluto Press Australia, 2002), 212.

¹⁸ Ibid.