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Japanesque Shows for Western Markets: Loïe Fuller and Japanese Theatre Tours Through Europe (1900-08)

Abstract

The hype of Japanese theatre in Europe during the first decade of the twentieth century has received much scholarly attention focused on the global stars it produced: Sada Yakko, and Hanako. This article, starting from the assumption of a strong western angency in circulating Japanese products during the heyday of *japonisme*, highlights the decisive contribution of their western impresaria, Loïe Fuller, to the success of the Japanese tours. In a period marked by a strong professionalisation of theatre brokers, Fuller – a cross-over artist and cultural mediator *sui generis* – is an eccentric apparition, a belated example of artist-impresaria, who cumulated sundry functions in the process and reshaped the Japanese shows, by multiple acts of translation and mediation, into a global theatre brand.

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Prelude

The emergence of Japanese theatre in Europe started with a momentous event that catapulted it right into the focus of public attention: the guest performances of Kawakami Otojirô, starring his wife, Sada Yacco, at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900 in Paris. Their run of 369 shows performed up to three times a day from June through October was the sensation of the exposition.[1] They were not the first Japanese to perform abroad. Before them, hundreds of artists, acrobats, geishas, teahouse girls and artisans had displayed their exotic bodies in various venues, including international fairs,[2] which emphatically celebrated technological progress and colonialist expansion. But Kawakami and his troupe were probably the first *theatre actors* abroad (albeit not belonging to the establishment),[3] and they were offered a new frame, which ensured excellent visibility and press coverage. Set apart from the oriental bazaar with its typical display of exotic performers,[4] and also from cabaret and other minor showbiz genres – to say nothing of

the circus, where Japanese usually performed – Kawakami's actors played in a stylish theatre pavilion in the centre of the Exposition and were welcomed as ambassadors of a refined and sophisticated theatre culture.

Several factors concurred in this brilliant start. One was the craze for things Japanese that swept Europe towards the end of the century. Thus, a *japonisme* at its peak put its mark upon the whole Exposition, preparing the ground for the actors. Embedded in a ubiquitous Art Nouveau scene pervaded by Japanese elements, their shows reinforced the commercial success of the Fair, even setting new trends in fashion.[5] From the start, theatre interacted with other commodity chains, such as arts and handicrafts, domains where Japan had already gained an international reputation. However, with these performances the audiences' responses to exotic Japan shifted from superficial reaction – as aroused by hits such as *The Mikado* or *The Geisha*[6]– to a more serious interest in Japanese stage art, which could provide European theatre with fresh impulses, just as the woodblock prints had inspired Western artists.

A second factor was the palatability of the product brought by the Kawakamis to Paris. During their preceding American tour – a haphazard enterprise, which lasted several months, alternating triumph with catastrophe – the troupe had heavily adapted its practice to Western tastes.[7] They had started one year before as an all-male group of nineteen actors to show 'modern' Japanese theatre mixed with pseudo-Kabuki extracts and arrived in Paris with fourteen male actors grouped around a female star, with a modified repertoire and adapted acting styles. All in all, the repertoire in Paris included four melodramas, featuring stock heroes of almost archetypal simplicity involved in intricate imbroglios in plots loosely patched together by Otojirô from Kabuki hits.[8] Noisy battle scenes, madness, murder and suicide alternated with elaborate dances, in which the former geisha, Sada Yacco, excelled. Bringing an actress onto the stage was the greatest concession to Western tastes and it proved the key to success. After several months of stage practice in America and London, a self-made actress Sada Yacco reached Paris radiating the composure and self-confidence of a Western diva – an excellent prerequisite to conquer the European market.

However, the decisive factor in the breakthrough was their encounter with the dancer Loïe Fuller, then the most famous American in Paris, who became their manager. The agency of this prominent 'cultural mobilizer' (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 251) in what may be considered an early commodification of Japanese shows in Europe will be the focus of the present paper, which argues that besides hosting the troupe at her own theatre and subsequently moving it throughout Europe at her own risks, Fuller also reshaped the shows and even expanded her agency when moving a second Japanese troupe and its star, Hanako, throughout Europe between 1905-08, when she authored the plays, finally leaving her personal mark on the Western perception of Japanese theatre during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Moreover, Fuller's role is traceable in the Japanese perception of European theatre as well: in the famous adaptations of European classics staged by the couple Kawakami – Sada Yacco after their return from Europe, during the first decade of the century, to say nothing of Fuller's impact on the emergence of Japanese modern dance, where the spirit of her serpentine dances haunts the Butoh stage to the present day.[9]

Metamorphoses of a star: Loïe Fuller as cultural translator, mediator, impresaria

Several circumstances predestined Loïe Fuller for this role. She was a self-made dancer who came from America in 1893[10] with one single asset – the invention of a 'Serpentine dance', based on a combination of whirling textiles and lighting effects, which she patented, refined and multiplied in infinite varieties – and had a spectacular career in Paris, albeit begun on cabaret and variety stages.[11] With her new concept of dancing, discarding narrative and the gestural vocabulary of ballet in favour of abstract shows based on striking visual effects and new technologies (electrical lighting, but also radium experiments), she won fame as a ground-breaking, avant-garde innovator, a creator of powerful visions that echoed the *Zeitgeist*. Dubbed *la fée lumière* and, around 1900, *la fée éléctricité,* she united in her persona the aspirations and dreams of the turbulent age that would nostalgically be remembered as *la belle époque*. Moreover, she commodified this powerful image on a large scale.[12]

Loïe's persona and aesthetic concept went hand in hand with the ideological programme of the Exposition, which stressed the fascination with science and technology blended with a deep desire for the exotic. The Fair actually staged an apotheosis of Loïe Fuller, not only by exhibiting her multiple images – plaster statues and masks on prominent buildings, or tiny bibelots for sale –, but also by reflecting her visions in the overall dramaturgy of the event. A contemporary journalist pointedly notes: 'Loïe Fuller… seemed to epitomize the spirit of the exhibition' (quoted in Garelick, 2007, p. 78).

Ironically, Loïe herself remained notoriously absent from the stage. Too busy to perform in the Palais de la Danse (though her plaster image adorned the front of the building), she had to be replaced there by a double. She preferred to open her own pavilion in the very heart of the Exposition: the *Théâtre Loïe Fuller*, hastily designed under her own supervision in flamboyant Art Nouveau style, topped by a plaster sculpture of herself, the roof decorated with masks bearing her features, and exhibiting within images and figurines of the dancer. Erected at incredible speed within six weeks, the theatre pavilion absorbed Loïe's energies and mobilized her managerial talents. According to one biographer, she acted concomitantly as architectural designer, coordinator and construction supervisor, technician, electrician, and subsequently as stage designer, choreographer, entrepreneur, and (incidentally) dancer (Lista, 2006, pp. 299-327).

Notwithstanding this hyper-activism, Fuller took the momentous decision to host the Japanese troupe in her theatre. Years later she would remember the step as an altruistic project: 'Everything coming from Japan had always captivated me. It is easy to imagine how happy I was to contact Sada Yacco. I did not hesitate to assume financial responsibility for her shows when she decided to come to Europe with all her retinue.' Fuller's expectations were not disappointed, as 'Sada Yacco wasn't a success, she was a furor' (Fuller, 2002, p. 113). However, part of the triumph must be credited to Fuller herself, who had greatly interfered with the dramaturgy and stage design, in ways that affected both the acting styles and audience perception, as will be discussed below. Under her management, the Japanese shows attracted *tout Paris*, from commoners looking for thrilling sensations to highbrow guests, including the arts and letters *bohème*. The news

of the Japanese triumph, trumpeted by influential journalists and enhanced by prominent spectators (among them Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, Rodin, Gide, Debussy, the dancer Ruth St. Denis, Picasso and many others) spread quickly throughout Europe. At the Exposition in Paris a new product was created, a hybrid and fashionable concoction for which the demand of European markets seemed secure. Loïe, then 38 (a critical age for a dancer), jumped at the chance to trade it on a wide scale, thus adding to her multifarious activities the demanding role of impresaria.

Organisation and logistics of the first Japanese tour (1901-02)

The shows at the Exposition were but a prelude for more ambitious undertakings. In an impetuous rush to collaborate, the two partners, Fuller and Kawakami, planned a daring project: a one year tour (to start in June 1901) along trade routes, which connected urban centres between places as distant as London and Moscow (initially planned to end at Vladivostok!). The agreement signed on 30 November 1900 in Paris in the presence of the Japanese consul, bore the handwriting of the impresaria. Fuller insisted on stronger female participation (the number of actresses was actually increased to five) but in exchange she was ready to bear the full risk of the tour, thus guaranteeing the Japanese a regular income.[13] After the haphazard tour to America, where the actors had led a destitute life that drove them to the brink of starvation, the contract with Loïe must have seemed a haven of security. A tough businessman himself, Otojirô jumped to capitalise on the European project: on his return to Japan, he used the preparation time to run a home tour to five cities, staging improvised melodramas based on episodes from the adventurous American trip.[14] Supported by the rumours of their triumph in Paris, the group played to full houses in Osaka, Tokyo and the other cities in spite of brazenly high ticket prices (Otojirô charged 16 yen per *sajiki* box as against 13 yen paid for performances featuring the greatest Kabuki star, Danjûrô!).

The European tour started in June 1901 from London (Criterion and Shaftsbury Theatre), proceeding through Brussels and Paris (where this time they played in the large hall of the Théâtre de l'Athénée) and went on, via Cologne, to Berlin for a one-month stay at three venues (Zentraltheater, Metropol, and Wolzogen's Buntes Theater), following on through more German and Austrian cities, reaching Vienna (for a two-week stay) in February, then heading for Prague, Budapest, and further east, almost to the Black Sea, then again north, through Lemberg (Lviv) and Breslau (Wroclaw) to St Petersburg and Moscow. In April 1902 they played in Rome, Florence and Milan (where Puccini was inspired by Sada Yacco), crossing over to Barcelona and reaching Lisbon.

Even in that age of feverish acceleration, which witnessed a spectacular increase in theatre touring all over the world, Fuller's undertaking was impressive, both in terms of velocity and geographic extension. In a dense succession of shifts to different places, the tour drafts a detailed map of commercial and cultural routes, anchored in a homogenous theatre infrastructure in nodal points of the railway network.[15] To give just one example from the distant southeast of Europe: in the territory of today's Romania, theatres in four cities – Temesvar (Timisoara), Bucharest, Galati, Iassy (Iasi) – were visited, all performances being preceded by press announcements and appraised in more or less detailed reviews in the local press. In Bucharest, the royal family (Crown Prince

Ferdinand, Princess Maria and their children) waited for hours in their boxes for the belated performers to arrive,[16] and attended the show until its end long after midnight.

Echoing the tempo and the haphazard risks typical of the large industrial projects, which marked that period of rapid globalisation, the tour would overstrain both the financial and human resources of the protagonists and drive them – actors and impresaria alike – to utter exhaustion. An impulsive and tough businesswoman, Fuller would often delay or even skip the payment to the actors; she would demand amendments of the agreement, such as reducing the remuneration in hard periods (from $1000 to $700 per week) or inserting additional matinees on Sundays to maximise profits. As she had often done before during her long career, she did not shun litigation with her partners and matters were brought to court at least twice, in Munich and Budapest (Pantzer, 2005, pp. LX-LXI).

In spite of the agreement, the tour was chronically under-financed. Unlike most professional impresarios of the day, Fuller did not have at her disposal (or was not willing to invest) substantial capital to make up for occasional box-office losses, but relied instead on her fame and public relations to evade the debtors.[17] Nevertheless, moving the Japanese all around Europe proved a risky enterprise, with triumph and fiasco, profit and loss, with frequent financial embarrassment and some imponderable occurrences: thus, a theatre director in Vienna broke the contract; three actors left the company ahead of time due to the exhausting program, which stipulated no days off (actually they performed the whole year, except for five days); besides, only three out of initially five actresses stayed on till the end of the tour. Changes in the program and routes were often decided on the spot, such as offering extra performances, or leaving a city earlier than expected. However, most surprisingly, in spite of being overloaded, the schedule was kept, delays being caused either by a train accident (in Breslau), missed connections (in Budapest and Temesvar) or train delay (in Bucharest). Flexibility was often demanded: thus, when a strike in Triest hindered the performance, the actors moved on to Zagreb to give a show on the same day and make up for the loss.

Fuller's tactic of choosing large auditoriums (most theatres seated 700-1000 or more) and demanding high ticket prices – a tactic agreed upon with local impresarios and theatre directors, who also took their cut of the profits – meant risking playing to empty houses. 'We had such an elite, that half of the places remained unoccupied', a Berlin journalist ironically commented, whereas other reviewers protested against the inflated prices, responsible for 'impressively empty' houses (Pantzer, 2005, p. 231). Even price cuts could not always fill the halls, and at times Fuller had to steal away from the hotel, leaving her luggage behind as a mortgage – unless royals would agree to pay her bill, as was the case in Bucharest, where the royal household financed the further transportation of her luggage, which weighed in Fuller's own words 'several thousands of kilograms' (Fuller, 2002, p. 90).

Public relations and advertising

Notwithstanding chronic fatigue and embarrassing finances, the impresaria never neglected publicity, or shunned any efforts to ensure ample promotion of the tour. All along the route, there was good press coverage, with ample announcement of the shows,

detailed reviews, cover shots (mostly of Sada Yacco), and interviews. As usual, the bold advertisements combined bombastic circus rhetoric with the vocabulary of highbrow theatre to reach wide audiences, the aim being to raise desires for exotic bodies but also appeal to cultivated theatregoers. The posters promised strong sensations à la Grand Guignol, but also the delectations of a subtle and refined theatre art. They suggested traditionalism and authenticity (enhanced by temporal and geographic distance) but also titillating novelty (in parts of Europe, Loïe's electric dances could still pass as 'the latest sensation in Paris'), thus conjuring the vision of a unique attraction. The Japanese shows were promoted as unique entertainment, both traditional and brand-new: a border-crossing, global product.

In advertising, it seemed important to suggest the authority of a mainstream art form, which had to appear as a legitimate ambassador of the Far Eastern culture. Besides, raising the actors' status to bourgeois respectability was the cherished dream of upstarts like Fuller and Otojirô, who were both used to balancing between fame and a desolate existence, and were often haunted by financial adversity. One poster, derided by a Berlin reviewer as trashy, announced in a braggart tone 'The Ensemble of the Tokyo Imperial Court, presenting Mrs. Sada Yacco and Mr. O. Kawakami along with 30 original Japanese' (Pantzer, 2005, p. 460). Exaggeration and pretence were part of the business and Loïe was ready to use hyperbole, spicy details and anecdotes to push her point: expanding the size of the troupe (which had actually only 14 actors, instead of 30); mentioning the enormous expenses (1000 metres of textiles allegedly used for her own dance costume); alluding to fabulous fees – 'one million francs' supposedly earned by Otojirô at the Paris Fair; stressing the huge transportation costs (375,000 francs) and insurance sums (200,000 francs). Loïe added exotic details, such as the story about the carriage filled with Japanese delicacies, which had to be attached to every train; and she readily invoked her own innumerable trunks. All in all, it had to be a tour of superlatives!

When addressing more refined audiences, the Japanese star, Sada Yacco, was compared with European celebrities and dubbed 'the Japanese Duse', 'Sarah Bernhardt', or 'Agnes Sorma', whereas her husband, troupe leader Otojirô, was credited with intellectual feats such as an alleged translation of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* (Pantzer, 2005, p. 193).[18] A more subtle innuendo is found in the anecdote about Sada Yacco owing her permission to appear on stage to the personal intervention of Queen Victoria with the Emperor of Japan – a permission allegedly obtained by an exchange of cable messages between the two sovereigns (Pantzer, 2005, p. 458). The anecdote not only implies a double imperial protection for the actors, but also suggests familiar connections between crowned heads, facilitated by technological progress (cable communication).

Fuller did her best to increase the visibility of her actors, choosing for herself and the two leading stars the best hotels along the route, organising frequent interviews and photograph sessions in elegant hotel lobbies, press conferences (where Loïe herself 'translated' comments from the Japanese and back!) and occasionally special performances for invited guests – from the aristocracy and the diplomatic corps, but also actors and art critics. Her frenzied activism finally strained her relations with the actors. Exhausted and appalled by the demands of her impresaria, Sada Yacco even refused to give an additional show for the Viennese theatre community, whereas the young Isadora Duncan (whom Loïe also tried to promote while on the tour) stole away, leaving her

protector with a nervous breakdown in Budapest (Lista, 2006, p. 412). However, Fuller´s aggressive promotion assured the Japanese troupe a high amount of attention and VIP treatment all along the route. Thus, when Otojirô and his wife headed for the wrong train station in Budapest, while the other actors together with stage sets and costumes were already departed, the desperate stars obtained a special train, which enabled them to reach the evening performance in Temesvar (Timisoara) almost on schedule.

Shaping the Japanesque: Loïe Fuller's translating acts

However strong her pecuniary appetite, Fuller was not led solely by commercial interest. Moving the Japanese troupe along European routes was just one part of her business. In her autobiographic essay, she quotes from one of Rodin's letters to a friend: 'She revealed to us the brilliant Ancient times, by bringing to life Tanagra sculptures [...] She has even been able [...] to make us understand the Far East' (Fuller, 2002, p. 74). Expanding horizons in time and space was a common vision and cherished dream of the colonialist period, and Loïe felt predestined to revive lost dance traditions of ancient Greece (as suggested by the Tanagra clay figures), just as she was attracted by geographically distant dance cultures. Deeply convinced of her vocation as a mediator in various fields, Fuller saw herself as a reinforcer of synergies, a translator between cultures, and she tried to realise this vision both in her dances and her impresaria role. Throughout her career, La Loïe felt entitled to bridge gaps: between lowbrow and highbrow culture; between arts and science (experimenting with electricity and radium); between the arts (a critic observed: 'She makes music pictorial'); between past and present ('recreating' on stage ancient Egyptian or Greek dances); and, last but not least, between Orient and Occident. Her self-confidence went so far as to 'translate' the Japanese discourses of her partners on various occasions and publicly, forgetting that she knew no Japanese at all and little French. Actually, her 'translations' – in the French Academy, where she introduced Kawakami to Victorien Sardou, or with interviews given by Sada Yacco during the tour – prove an assertiveness typical for a self-made showbiz diva.

For Fuller, introducing Oriental theatre to western audiences seemed a huge task, which implied repeated acts of translation and transfer, adaptation and appropriation. Loïe used her position of impresaria to mould the Japanese shows according to her visions of the Far East and to the demands of the market. From the start – during the shows at the Paris Exposition – she forced on her Japanese guests 'improvements' in the dramaturgy of the plays and the acting style. A 'shrewd reader of audiences' (Scott Miller, 1997, p. 226), she bowed to the recent craze for horror (fuelled, among others, by the vogue of the Grand Guignol), and insisted emphatically on the expansion of the bloody scenes. Loïe stipulated at least one gory suicide per show, thus supporting a first 'harakiri craze' in Paris.[19]

Moreover, Fuller herself provided the lighting and colour effects for the shows, and occasionally designed costumes for the Japanese performers. Otojirô, who had an upstart career in Japan as a bold innovator of the stage, and won fame for his wild appropriations of western elements,[20] readily complied with Fuller's extravagant wishes, no matter how absurd they appeared to Japanese eyes (such as performing ritual self-disembowelment in a standing position, or letting a samurai commit suicide because of a woman, both unthinkable in Japan). Ironically, it was precisely the visuality of the

Japanese shows that some of the critics perceived as typically Japanese. The painter Edmund Edel, for instance, praised in highest tones the charming harmonies of lighting and colours, the assorted hues of the backdrops and costumes (Pantzer, 2005, p. 210), details that were rather due to Fuller's influence. The inclination to kitsch did not go unobserved either, and occasionally there appeared in the press ironical remarks on Loïe's 'lamplighter imagination' (Pantzer, 2005, pp. 168ff, 604). Fuller's interference with the Japanese shows was so notorious that she was even mistakenly credited with inducing the Japanese actors to create a wild adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* (which Otojirô had authored and put on stage in America): 'This lapse of taste must be blamed on the impresario Miss Loïe Fuller, who may certainly handle the serpentine dance with great mastery, but appears to have little grasp of dramatic literature.'[21]

Both Otojirô and Loïe actually disregarded literary drama in favour of physical theatricality, and in this respect they approached avant-garde positions. Loïe's visual imagination melted away the asperities of cultural clashes, encouraging the juxtaposition and combination of heterogeneous elements on stage. Many of her daring innovations violated the viewing habits of the audience and directed the perception of the acting: the spotlight projected on Sada Yacco's face during the death scenes directed the audience's gaze on one small part of the body, leaving the rest in darkness. This technical innovation certainly had a blowup effect, imposing a new regime of the spectatorial gaze. In a certain sense, Loïe's lighting effects prefigurated cinematic perception and Sada Yacco's facial movements created an aura comparable to that of later movie stars.

Fuller seems to have cherished an overarching vision of a theatre style capable of transcending East-West polarities: after all, the hybrid shows, which featured Japanese plays along with Fuller's own serpentine dances inserted either between the scenes or appended at the end of the show were a form of *japonisme*.[22] Such braided composition did not simply rely on juxtaposition, but rather on a dialectic of contrasts – the exotic show versus Parisian variété numbers, the archaic grotesque versus futurist innovation, dramatic narrative versus the abstract vision, bloody 'primitive' theatre versus 'spiritual cleansing', as a French critic put it. Parisian commentators dwelled on the tension between the Japanese shows with their mixture of love and battles, blood and death, and Fuller's abstract dances as basic contrasts in the fabric of the performance. One hundred years later, we easily recognise in this strategy an Orientalist innuendo with its underlying binaries – dark vs light; primitive vs modern; physicality vs spirituality and so on – and may identify even echoes of internal tensions that underlied Loïe's own dances (Garelick, 2007, pp. 104-05). By imposing such a fusion upon European audiences, Fuller instinctively performed an act of cultural appropriation: she domesticated an exotic art and turned it into an accessible product, a hybrid commodity to be traded on a modern global market.

Authoring Japanesque Theatre: Fuller manages Madame Hanako (1905-08)

Loïe Fuller pushed her orientalistic vision even further. Three years after parting – on less than friendly terms – with the couple Otojirô-Sada Yacco, a new opportunity arose in the person of an obscure little dancer, Ôta Hisa, who appeared in minor roles with a small Japanese troupe in curtain-raisers at the Savoy Theatre in London (1904). The

indefatigable impresaria seized the chance to turn the modest and rather unattractive woman into a star who would revive Sada Yacco's triumphs. She engaged the troupe on the spot, found a resounding name for the little actress – 'Madame Hanako' – and offered her the leading position within the troupe.

This time, the situation was different. Unlike her previous partner, Otojirô – a shrewd businessman, authoritarian troupe leader and versatile actor, notorious in Japan and experienced with tours abroad – Loïe´s new acquisition proved a docile, submissive protégée – at least for a while. Ôta Hisa (born 1868) looked back on a hard childhood and youth: born into a poverty-stricken family, sold and resold by her real and adoptive parents, respectively, raised in a geisha house, trained on the road with an itinerant troupe of actors who toured the provinces with cheap shows, unhappily married and divorced twice, she had come to Europe driven by the boldness of despair, recruited by a Danish impresario for the Zoological Garden of Copenhagen in 1902. She had subsequently joined a small group of (male) Japanese actors, who staged modest programs in European cities.[23] Fuller probably intuited the deep affinities between herself and the Japanese woman: like herself, Hisa was unglamorous, displaying little sex-appeal and she was disadvantaged by her age of thirty-six when they first met (four years older than Loïe at the start of her own career in Paris), but she possessed an equal resilience and determination to succeed.

The impresaria's expectations were once more fulfilled. Hanako, whom Fuller strategically described as 'pretty withal, refined, graceful, queer, and so individual as to stand out even among those of her race' (Fuller, 2002, p. 114) threw into the bargain some basic prerequisites: a well trained body (a thorough geisha apprenticeship and stage experience in young years), acting intuition, present-mindedness, a strong personality, along with impressive endurance and perseverance. Modest by nature, Hisa readily complied with the part Fuller allotted to her and proved an excellent impersonator of her impresaria's favourite death scenes, which became Madame Hanako's trade mark.[24]

The immediate success spurred Fuller to embark on a new adventure: playwriting for her new star. One of the first melodramas (or rather pantomimes) composed for Hanako bore emblematically the title *Galatea*! Inspired by one of Kawakami's concoctions, *Zingoro,* it featured a sculptor of feudal Japan falling in love with his own doll, which turns into a docile lover, but ends up tortured and hunted by the sculptor's jealous wife. Loïe's synoptical phantasy – outdoing that of her previous partner, Otojirô – brought several powerful stereotypes into the play: the sweet submissive child-woman (the doll), the coquettish exotic woman of infantile grace, the blind fury of jealousy as against helpless victimhood. The role, played by the dwarfish Hanako (who was reportedly 'not quite four feet tall'), became a hit and Fuller went on to expand her 'Japanese' repertoire, featuring Hanako in several martyr roles which all culminated in elaborate death scenes. The plays, signed Loi-Fu, bear telling titles – *The Martyr*, *A Drama at Yoshiwara*, *The Japanese Doll*, *The Little Japanese Girl*, *The Political Spy*, *The Japanese Ophelia*, *A Japanese Tea House*, *Otake* (Lista, 2006, p. 340).[25] For an author, who was even received in the French Dramatists' Association, Fuller showed little knowledge of and even disrespect for the rules of literary drama. In the sparse texts – the plays were practically pantomimes – she used standard plots and imbroglios, flat characters and strong

climactic scenes, borrowed freely from Japanese models and European sources. But she cleverly allowed ample space for the deployment of gestures and mime.

In advertising Hanako, Fuller resorted to her tried and tested strategies, invoking Imperial protection and links to the establishment. One poster in Copenhagen announced 'Det Kejserlige Japanske Skuespillerskab Frk. Hanako og Mr. Sato', introducing Hanako as 'a niece of Denjuro' (meaning the famous Kabuki actor, Ichikawa Danjûrô IX, who had passed away in 1903). The success confirmed the impresaria's concept of a commodified Japanese theatre, shaped to meet the desire for strong sensations and the appetite for exotic star actresses. This time, the traded product was entitled to bear the label of the impresaria: it was a Japanesque theatre authored by Loïe Fuller herself.

During the nine months of Hanako's first European tour in 1905, the tiny actress was so convincing in her death scenes that the number of performances had to be doubled in most cities. In spite of the success, Hanako ended her first contract after a series of shows at the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille in 1906, where she drew the attention of Auguste Rodin.[26] Although the tiny actress tried to escape from the domination of the 'greedy woman',[27] after several months spent in Angers, she was coaxed into a second agreement (1907-08) by the cunning impresaria, who even arranged a marriage for her star in order to win her back.

Loïe's influence on the Japanese shows outlived by far her second agreement with Hanako, whose fame increased during later tours under various impresarios, which – until 1917 – led her all over Europe, far into Central Asia (up to Baku) and even to America. A trademark (for brandy and cigarettes), Madame Hanako thrilled wide audiences, but she also impressed cutting edge innovators (N. Evreinov, W. Meyerhold), sparking debates within the avant-garde.[28] By launching and shaping the stage diva Hanako, Loïe Fuller had again created a brand commodity for the European theatre market.

'Authentic Japan' in a Japanesque package

However hybrid the products appear, European spectators were not deceived into believing they were watching the authentic Kabuki. The shows fed the appetite for gory and grotesque exoticism, mixed with palatable scraps of modern realistic (psychological) acting and the critics acknowledged the indebtedness to western viewing habits. But behind the noisy Kabuki imitation and mimicry of western techniques, the spectators perceived artistic competence: not in the gory battle scenes, but in the stage presence of the female stars. It was the actresses' professionalism, their command of their body and precision of acting that thrilled European audiences, in spite of the absurd plots and shallow roles. For what set Sada Yacco and Hanako apart from their rather dilettantish male colleagues was their training in established stage techniques cultivated in an old art refined by tradition: they were both professional geishas. This status implied long and strict education in various disciplines – dancing, singing, and musical instruments – and a precise control of posture and behaviour, extended to everyday life.

Knowledgeable spectators were sensitive to their high professional standards. The sculptor, Auguste Rodin for example, was struck by the concentration and composure of the modest little actress Hanako and felt urged by curiosity to push to the limits her bodily prowess: by asking her to sit for a portrait with crossed eyes for half an hour, days on end or by letting her stand on one leg for hours on end. He was fascinated by her well trained, feline body, by her unusual discipline and endurance. As a model, Hanako proved to be the greatest challenge in the sculptor's career: the sixty-nine portraits of Hanako in Rodin's œuvre are an homage to the powerful Japanese actress.

In the same vein, one journalist from St Petersburg acknowledges her stage skills: 'Many of our actresses should learn from this little exotic lady, how to represent death on the stage: how to remain true to life but at the same time respect artistic proportion; how to present a perfectly credible image up to the tiniest detail, without slipping into the artless ugliness of realism' (Vasilevski, 1910). To say nothing of Evreinov, the famous Russian avant-garde director and theoretician, who admired Hanako's precise timing, her perfect balance of movement and standstill, her sure command of rhythmical patterns – skills that were rather in contrast to her poor looks. Under the title *A Declaration of Love* Evreinov enthuses: 'I am enticed by your art, you delicate, charming Hanako! You are not beautiful and no longer young, but – oh, how beautiful and young you seem, when you embody beauty and adolescence on stage! You tiny, comical, adorable Hanako! I call upon all the actresses of our decrepit stage to admire you and to learn from you. (…). How coarse seems to me their declamation compared to yours! To say nothing of your mimicry and gestures!' (Evreinov, 1909). Whereas Meyerhold goes even further, endowing her with superhuman skills: 'when she played a cat, the very pupils of her eyes narrowed into an oblong shape[…]'[29]

Fuller was sensitive to the subtle art of her protégées and put all efforts into enhancing their stage effect. For instance, by turning the spotlight onto the face of her star, thus directing the spectators' gaze and forcing them to perceive the tiniest details of facial expression. For the audience, it was an almost cinematographic experience *avant la lettre*, traceable in several stage reviews.

Personal agency and structural frames

Fuller successfully refashioned and moved Japanese shows around Europe, putting her stamp on the perception of Far East theatricalities during the first decades of the twentieth century. Her aesthetic visions reinforced European stereotypes of Japanese womanhood: on the one hand, promoting the seductress and femme fatale, capable of passion and fierce hatred or jealousy (Sada Yacco's roles) on the other, the femme fragile, the doll-like woman, passive and submissive, predestined to victimhood (Hanako's hits). Fuller's powerful agency in this process was prompted by the very instability of the product she traded: the Japanese offered from the start palatable, commodified bits and scraps of their home culture, ephemeral forms thriving on the fringe of Japan's mainstream theatre, which were justifiably criticised and deplored by knowledgeable native critics of the time (such as Mori Ôgai or Iwaya Sazanami).

Structural frames of the theatre world in France and Japan facilitated the emergence of such hybrid products with a high circulation value. It was a fateful but unavoidable fact

that Japanese theatre culture – generally conceived of in terms of rootedness and closure – came to be promoted abroad by actors from the fringe. The agency of grassroot movements within the great socio-cultural turmoil labelled as the Meiji restoration, has been rather neglected by historians and needs to be reconsidered in the narratives of modernity (Gluck, 2008). Theatre histories hardly mention certain 'contact zones' in the early traffic between Japan and the western world, which shows an asymmetry typical of colonial patterns: in one direction it displays well organised, grand scale movements, with mainstream troupes from the centre of the Empire touring Japan to entertain foreign residents' communities in purpose-built local theatres (Masumoto, 1978 and 1986; Scholz-Cionca, 2011). In the other direction, it features chaotic mobility in haphazard tours initiated by marginal Japanese performers, most of them driven by the boldness of despair: acrobats, geishas, entertainers of all *couleurs*, would-be actors. These self-made ambassadors transported minor genres and peripheral, unstable theatre forms marked by hybridity, ready to adapt to the tastes of foreign audiences, malleable in the hands of authoritarian impresarios like Loïe Fuller. In contrast, the Japanese theatre establishment with its unwieldy structures was not prepared for mobility and decades would pass before the first Kabuki troupe ventured on a single tour abroad to Moscow, in 1928, whereas Nô was not seen in Europe until 1954!

Thus, in her Japanese partners, Fuller encountered courageous adventurers like herself, who took advantage of the structural changes within the theatre world. Fuller benefited from the quick expansion and diversification of the entertainment culture in Paris, which encouraged the thirst for novelty and exoticism and favoured impulsive and improvised acts of cultural exchange and appropriation. Kawakami, in his turn, rode on the waves of theatre reforms backed by governmental programs (*engeki kairyô*), which drove the established genres into a defensive position, while encouraging the emergence of new, experimental forms. After all, Kawakami proved a congenial partner to Fuller, being an upstart, self-made actor and troupe leader, versatile and reckless, determined to raise attention at any cost. He had made his way with political protest (he boasted about having been arrested 180 times!), rap songs (his *Oppekepé*-song, on the absurdities of modernisation became famous), jingoistic war plays (on the glorious Sino-Japanese war), a dilettantish leap into political life (he ran for election to the House of Commoners). He was prepared to outbid any fiasco by a new bold performance: in 1893 he fled to Paris for several months in order to escape his debtors, whence he returned with inspiration for new stage hits;[30] in 1898, after the elections disaster, he fled with his wife in a fragile boat – a spectacular trip, which provoked journalistic buzz – up to Kobe, where they drew the attention of a sponsor to finance their American tour. In spite of living perpetually on the brink of disaster, Otojirô, who constantly overstrained his wife's credit standing (which she enjoyed as a former top geisha) was able to maintain high popularity to the end of his life, even managing to build two theatres during his lifetime, albeit for short time spans: the Kawakami Theatre, 1896 and the 'Imperial theatre' in Osaka, 1910.

For the couple Kawakami, the European tour was a caesura in their activities. All their subsequent work bears the mark of the stage experience with Loïe Fuller. Adapting European performance management and stage practice became the engine of their activities. After all, Kawakami must be credited for his part in the theatre reforms in Japan: some concerning organisational matters (ticket sales, show duration), stage practice (lighting technologies, 'realistic' acting, the exclusion of singing and dance,

female actresses on stage and so on) and actors' training (he opened a school for actresses, led by Sada Yacco).

Loïe's influence is traceable in the series of adaptations from European classics – most prominent was Shakespeare – and modern authors (Maeterlinck, Jules Verne): not only in the high visuality of the shows, enhanced by garish costumes and sophisticated lighting techniques, but also in the treatment of the dramas. Literary complexity was reduced in favour of climactic scenes, which gave Sada Yacco the opportunity to deploy her star status. In Japan, she was an acclaimed Desdemona in *Othello*, an impressive Orié (Ophelia) in *The Mousetrap* (after *Hamlet*), a dramatic Monna Vanna in Maeterlinck's eponymous play, she was a success in cross-gender casting in a parody of Jules Verne, *Around the World in Seventy Days,* to mention but a few. Significantly, the world-travellers reiterated and mirrored the experience of their travels in their subsequent performances. Cross-cultural experience, travels and speed became a basso continuo of the new Kawakami style, prompted by the audiences' interests, and backed by social and ideological changes in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese war. Hamlet riding on a bicycle over the *hanamichi* and Sada Yacco's posturing in billowing gowns were only details in an emerging theatre genre, which Kawakami dubbed *seigeki* ('straight theatre', meaning deprived of song and dance). It was distinct from *shinpa* and not yet the text-centered *shingeki*, the literary theatre, which Tsubouchi Shôyô and Osanai Kaoru would promote and impose as a spearhead of modernity. However, in more than one sense, the Kawakamis can be credited for having paved the way for the emergence of modern spoken theatre in Japan (Murai Ken, 2012). In this process, Loïe Fuller's impact was certainly momentous.

Endnotes

[1] On these performances see for instance Chiba (1992), Kano (2001), Downer (2003), Picon-Vallin (2010).

[2] On Japanese acrobats' and actors', who toured overseas (some of them without permission from the Japanese authorities, that is without passports), see Miyaoka (1978, passim), also Kurata (1983 and 1994). The acrobats were recruited in groups.

[3] That is the professional genres, the elitist Nô (a ceremonial, state sponsored theatre of the Shogunate) and the commoners' Kabuki (a state controlled genre flowering, along with the puppet theatre, Jôruri, in the big cities).

[4] The exposition offered in several venues a broad range of performances: cabaret, chansons, puppet theatre, spoken drama, and also dances from all over the world.

[5] On Sada Yacco as a diva who set European fashion trends, see Savarese (2010).

[6] The musical comedy, *The Mikado,* by Gilbert and Sullivan *(*premiered 1885) and *The Geisha* – libretto by Owen Hall, score by Sidney Jones – (premièred 1896), contributed to the popularisation of Japanese clichés among western audiences.

[7] A vivid, but in many points fantastic description of the first tour is offered by Otojirô and Tanejirô (1901).

[8] The plays performed in Paris were: *The Geisha and the Knight*; *Kesa (and Morito)*; *Takanori* and *Zingoro (Jingoro)*.

[9] For instance, in the play *Komachi* (premiered 2001), Kawamura Takeshi (born 1959), an avant-garde playwright, troupe leader and stage director, has a Butoh dancer perform a 'serpentine dance' à la Fuller, swinging a film roll instead of textile robes, portraying an elderly film diva and femme fatale.

[10] By coincidence, Fuller came to Paris the same year with Kawakami, whose stay of several months had a great impact on his subsequent theatre career, prompting for instance a series of patriotic plays, which won him huge popularity during the Sino-Japanese war in the mid-nineties.

[11] Loïe Fuller has recently been reassessed as a pioneer of modern dance. Among several booklength studies dedicated to her, Brandstetter (1989), Lista (1994; 2006) and Garelick (2007) were most profitable for the present paper.

[12] Portrayed by outstanding artists (Lalique, Gallé, Tiffany, Whistler, Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso and others), evoked by writers and poets (Anatole France, Mallarmé, Valéry, Yeats), Loïe Fuller also became a trademark, advertising for women's and men's (!) fashion, beverages and cars (the Rolls Royce radiator mascot, 'Spirit of Ecstasy', is allegedly inspired by her portrait).

[13] Kawakami was expected to cover the travel costs till London and back to Japan, and to provide the costumes, whereas Fuller was to pay a weekly lump sum to the troupe: $1000 till 17 December and $1500 thereafter. A conventional penalty sum was set at $50,000 (Pantzer, 2005, p. 137).

[14] Under the title *Yôkôchû no higeki* (A Tragedy on the Journey), Otojirô gave a dramatic account of the death of two actors of his troupe during the American tour, mixing sensationalism to a gesture of pious remembrance. Compare Murai (2012, pp. 49-50).

[15] Thus, for instance, seven of the theatres which hosted the Japanese (in Graz, Mainz, Prague, Temesvar, Wiesbaden, Zürich, Zagreb) were designed by the same Viennese architects, Fellner & Hellmer. These buildings would serve as model for Kawakami's 'Imperial Theatre', which opened in Osaka in 1910.

[16] The performance in Bucharest even sparked a later collaboration between Loïe Fuller and Princess Maria (meanwhile Queen Maria of Romania): Fuller released a film *Le Lys de la Vie*, whose script was based on a story by Queen Maria.

[17] Fuller's constant financial difficulties – in contrast to her extravagant life style – are corroborated by the fact, that later on in her career, she had to look for sponsors to finance her own troupe, such as Van Beil, Armande de Polignac, or the banker Samuel Hill (Lista, 2006, pp. 476ff).

[18] On the impact of French theatre (especially Victorien Sardou's dramas) on Otojirô's plays see Liu (2009, passim).

[19] On Fuller's demand, Otojirô reluctantly introduced a ritual suicide in one of his plays, whereas Sada Yacco's long death scenes were amply commented in the press: one scene, which allegedly lasted one minute in New York was expanded to dominate the whole play in Paris and in Berlin, where it seemed 'to hold on for ever', as a critic ironically observed. (F. Blei (1902) 'Otojiro Kawakami', *Die Insel,* VII/ VIII, April-Mai, pp. 63-68, reproduced in Pantzer (2005 p. 404).

[20] In Japan, Otojirô was notorious for his innovative drive, even creating a new genre derived from Kabuki (later on called *shinpa*). His wild adaptations, patched from various sources and indifferent to copyright, caused protests by outraged contemporary authors (Izumi Kyoka, Ozaki Kôyô), notwithstanding the general tolerance for source recycling on stage.

[21] Compare 'Sada Yacco, die japanische Tragödie, in Berlin' (1901) a review signed K.C., *Schlesische Volkszeitung,* 3 December, morning issue, reproduced in Pantzer (2005, pp. 234-36).

[22] Fuller's abstract dances performed within the Japanese shows bore titles like: *Fluorescent Dance*; *The Grottoes*; *The Storm*; *Fire Dance*; *The Lily*; *The Archangel* and so on.

[23] Hanako's biography was partly reconstructed long time after her death. Compare Keene (1981) (Keene first wrote about Hanako in 1962), Sawada (1984), Sukenobu (2005).

[24] Fuller gives a vivid description of Hanako's death scenes: '[...]with little movements like those of a frightened child, with sighs, with cries as of a wounded bird, she rolled herself into a ball, seeming to reduce her tiny body to a mere nothing so that it was lost in the folds of her heavy embroidered Japanese robe. Her face became immovable, as if petrified, but her eyes continued to reveal intense animation [...] with great wide open eyes she surveyed death, which had just overtaken her. It was thrilling.' (Fuller, 1978, p. 123).

[25] Fuller herself admits that she conceived her plays under the pressure of the market, urged by contracts signed beforehand with theatre managers, who requested a repertoire 'easy to understand' (Fuller, 2002, pp. 116-17).

[26] In Japan, Hanako is mainly remembered as Rodin's Japanese model, whereas her stage career was strongly disapproved of by contemporaries (Mori Ogai, Iwaya Sazanami, Naoya Shiga and others) and remains ignored by theatre historians to the present.

[27] Hanako's only written testimony of almost two decades spent as an actress abroad is an article published by a local Gifu newspaper (reproduced in Asoya, 2010, pp. 141-78).

[28] On Hanako's reception by Russian critics and artists, see Bannai and Kameyama (1987, passim).

[29] Meyerhold (1968) *Stat´i. Rechi, Pis´ma. Besedy*, II, p. 84-92, quoted in Bannai and Kameyama (1987, p. 134).

[30] See above, endnote 18.

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