

Ayumi Fujioka

A New Notion of Time in Modern Tokyo Life: A Comedy at High Speed at the Imperial Theatre in the 1920s

Abstract

The Imperial Theatre in the 1920's operated both as a stronghold of multifarious modern Japanese theatre and as an embodiment of the acceleration of Tokyo modern life, in which people started to benefit from theatrical entertainment provided by thriving consumerism. A popular genre performed at the Imperial Theatre was *joyūgeki* (actress play), a series of satirical comedies in which actresses portrayed the main roles. *A Comedy at High Speed* can be recognised as a description of exhilarating modern life where the object of laughter aroused by the audience being the discordance experienced in the multifaceted modern life of the 1920's controlled by a new perception of time. This new concept consisted of economic systems as well as social structures, in which not only anticipation of desirable flamboyancy grew swiftly, but also intolerant darkness, represented by fascism, a violation of human rights, and class distinctions were equally underlaid.

Author

Ayumi Fujioka is professor in Theatre Studies, School of Cross-Cultural Studies at Sugiyama Jogakuen University (Japan). Her research has been centred on various aspects of the Edwardian theatre and comparative theatre. She currently conducts the following research projects; the founding process of National Theatre; the intercultural relationship between British and Japanese theatre in the early 20th century; theatrical trans-Asia and Pacific. She has edited a book: 'Dan Leno and Pantomime-Wonderland', 'An Imagined National Theatre: the Royal Court Theatre', *Theatre and Culture in London: A History of Modern British Theatre*, Asahi Press (2015), and co-edited books: 'The Birth of Repertory Theatre Movement', *Critical*

Aspects of Theatre Studies vol.2, Sankei-sha (2015), ‘The Emergence of an Actress Who Tells the Story of Herself; Elizabeth Robins in British Modern Theatre’, *Critical Aspects of Theatre Studies* vol.1, Sankei-sha (2011).

Published under the Creative Commons License CC-BY 4.0 All rights reserved by the Author.

1. Introduction

The Imperial Theatre embodied a significant chapter of metropolitan Tokyo in the 1920s, as was often reflected in many contemporary literary works, one of which was a newspaper novel, *Shinju-fujin* (*Mrs. Pearl*, 1920) by playwright Kan Kikuchi (1888-1948). One particular scene that stands out is of a married aristocratic man accompanying a voluptuous, married aristocratic woman, Ruriko, to the Imperial Theatre: “Shinichirō was once again trembling when he went up the southern stairs of the Imperial Theatre with Ruriko. He was considerably concerned about the conspicuous beauty in the crowd, not knowing who was at this glorious building” (Kikuchi 2002, p. 325). This scene demonstrates that the Imperial Theatre was a ‘glorious’ site, an urban space where nameless people gather in a crowd, and an extraordinary setting for an affair outside one’s daily life. Accordingly, going to the Imperial Theatre correlates with the flamboyancy of the modern lifestyle of the upper and middle classes.

As the prime representation of the newly built theatres in the middle of Marunouchi, Yurakuchō and Ginza, also considered to be the heart of Tokyo, the Imperial Theatre has been referred to as the bright side of modern life. Scholar Shunya Yoshimi indicates that the substance of modern life is characterised by mass consumption: “*Modern life* is a general term for life, culture, and custom, and has permeated the lives of most young people in the cities of Japan and colonial countries following the tide of Americanisation [...] upon which the first mass consumption society was realised.” Furthermore, he states that the desire for consumption leads to the creation of the high speed found in the city: “The remarkable development compressed cities both spatially and temporally, and thus

the substantial feature of modern life, speed, was engraved deep in urban space” (Yoshimi 1987, pp. 67–72).



Figure 1: *The Imperial Theatre, Theatre Postcard: Teikoku Gekijou Engeki Ehagaki*

This paper examines the performance of *Kousokudo Kigeki* (*A Comedy at High Speed*)¹ by Taro Masuda (1875-1953), which showcased the whirlwind of modern life with short comical sketches and music. It was first performed in July 1925, about a year after the theatre was reopened after its destruction by fire after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. Because of the theatre’s popularity, it not only repeated performances only two months later and once again the following year, but also began to offer staple comedic sketches drawing attention to the quickened pace of city life, thereby influencing revues in Asakusa as well as those by the Takaraduka Revue Company throughout the 1920s.² Since writer Mantarō Kubota (1889-1963) indicates that “The Comedies performed at the Imperial Theatre seemed to masterly grasp the atmosphere of Taishō period” (Shibusawa 1945)³, the performances have been perceived as a bright take on modern life, coloured by the acceleration of consumption and the speed in rebuilding the city; thus, the comedies seem to applaud contemporary flamboyancy. However, although the flamboyancy of the modern lifestyle is a part of society as a whole, this society is in

fact multifaceted; accordingly, the location of the Imperial Theatre cannot be completely separated from its versatility.

After World War I, Western intellectuals⁴ such as Paul Valéry (1871-1945) expressed scepticism towards Western knowledge. In his *Crisis of the Mind*, Valéry states:

We later civilizations [...] we too know that we are mortal. We had long heard of whole worlds that had vanished, of empires sunk without a trace, gone down with all their men and all their machines into the unexplorable depths of the centuries, with their gods and their laws, their academies and their sciences [...] (The Athenaeum 1962, p. 23).⁵

This human crisis urged the reexamination of nation states internationally, which in turn made Japan reconsider its course of Westernisation in which it had modelled itself on Western civilisation in order to modernise its society. For example, *Shakaikaizō no Hachidaishisouka* (The Eight Giants for Renovating Society),⁶ was published in 1920 to reintroduce familiar philosophies by Karl Marx, Peter Kropotkin, Bertrand Russell, Leo Tolstoy, William Morris, Edward Carpenter, Henrik Ibsen, and Ellen Key for the purpose of social reconstruction. Furthermore, practices of social modernisation, such as the suffrage movement, labourers' strikes and the left-wing movement in Japan, traced those of the West; for instance, political movements that happened simultaneously in Japan were generally called "Taishō Democracy".

The 1920s were also the intolerant predecessor of the Japanese Empire's totalitarianism in the 1930s. The slaughter of ethnic Koreans due to false rumours spread about them after the Great Kanto Earthquake, the Public Security Preservation Law of 1925 to control freedom of speech, and the 15th March incident which led to the wholesale arrests of communists were the Empire's preparations for later instituting fascism. The whole of the 1920s, in this sense, was torn apart by conflicting aspects; furthermore, multiple areas of society were repeatedly urged to transform. Thus, the bright and glorious modern life of the '20s became inseparable from the other layers introduced by the changing hegemony. The performance of *A Comedy at High Speed* at the Imperial Theatre, in addition to Japan's burgeoning

modernity, leads us to examine the complexity of modern life in the 1920s by focusing our attention on a new notion of time.

2. The Imperial Theatre in the Bewildering Changes of Tokyo: A Topography

The Imperial Theatre was erected in the midst of dizzying changes in the urban topography: most of the theatres in early twentieth century Tokyo were built after the Tokyo Urbanisation Scheme of 1888,⁷ and were modelled after Western urban planning, on which the city of Tokyo was based. Since the Meiji government had a distinct policy of creating a new society equivalent to that in the West, the whole legacy of traditional theatre, known as *akusho* (bad place), a den of prostitution and gambling, needed to be modified in order to elevate Japanese culture. Therefore, officials decided to designate a new location for all future venues. Although theatres before the Meiji era were gathered in Asakusa's Saruwaka-machi, Marunouchi-Yurakuchō, a business area next to consumer-friendly Ginza and Tsukiji, an area designated for foreigners, were selected as the area for new theatres, such as the Imperial Theatre, the Tokyo Takarazuka Theatre, the Kabuki Theatre, and the Shinbashi Playhouse.⁸



Figure 2: *The Imperial Theatre: Takashi Mine, Teikokugekjō Kaimaku (The Curtain Rises), Chūkō -sinsho, 1996.*

This site was already crowded with the Police Affair Bureau, head offices of conglomerates, stockbrokers, banks and newspaper companies, along with cultural sites, such as museums, hotels, and department stores; thus, in Marunouchi-Yurakuchō, modernity became inseparable from the fields of economy and culture. Theatres that had been known as disreputable places for pleasurable pastimes were intentionally converted into consumable entertainment on a par with other types of urban entertainment, such as shopping and cinema.

On the one hand, the Imperial Theatre, which opened in 1911 and still exists today, consolidated a diverse range of modern Japanese theatre. In addition to performances by foreign companies, the repertoire of the Imperial Theatre consisted of traditional Japanese theatre as well as newly adopted genres, including *shimpa* (new theatre), *shingeki* (new drama), opera and dance. Among these unconventional genres, *joyūgeki* (actress play), a new musical comedy mainly performed by actresses, attracted large audiences with lively revues and magnificent spectacles. On the other hand, the Imperial Theatre became an icon of cosmopolitan Tokyo, in which newly established modern business methods, such as those of the railroad company and the department store, were applied to the management of the theatre. For example, the method of selling tickets at the theatre's box office was based on the sales method used by the Sanyō railroad company⁹, while publicity was often generated through Mitsukoshi department store, where one famous advertisement ran as follows: "Today you are welcome to the Imperial Theatre, tomorrow you are welcome to Mitsukoshi", thus anticipating its audience consisting of white-collar workers and their families. Since the mayor of Tokyo stated that the Imperial Theatre "should be prominent and graceful as a representative of Japanese theatre" and that "it must not only be an entertainment space for the bourgeoisie" (Gotō, Apr. 1921), he seemed to be suggesting that the middle and upper classes at the Imperial Theatre perceived buying luxurious goods and attending fashionable entertainment as equally desirable. Writer Kousei Andō (1900-1970) described the area surrounding the Imperial Theatre as follows:

Today, Americanism is the value that reigns in this area. Look at the men and women stepping on the pavement there. They disguise themselves by imitating American films [...]. You can hear American jazz music (Andō 1977, pp. 30–41).



Figure 3: ‘Kyō ha Teigeki, Asu wa Mitsukoshi Gofukuten (*Today you are welcome to the Imperial Theatre, tomorrow you are welcome to Mitsukoshi*): Waseda University Theatre Museum, Theatre Collections.

Furthermore, instead of the French influence and feelings of nostalgia from the Edo period that were trends in the Taishō era, “Capitalism flourished as speed increased and American films became more prominent in society” (Andō 1977, p. 30–41). Since the audiences of the Imperial Theatre in the 1920s were from the city, they seemed akin to ‘the men and women’ who ‘disguise themselves by imitating American film’ to indulge in pleasures resulting from ‘capitalism’ and ‘speed’.

In contrast, though, this accelerated brightness came with a dark side; in fact, the infrastructure of urbanisation was driven by labourers relentlessly working; shopkeepers and proprietresses were busy managing their shops and restaurants; vagrants were begging for money while sex workers aimed to attract middle and upper-class clients under the railroads at Shinbashi, which was next to dazzling

Ginza. Thus, the point at which Marunouchi, Yurakuchō, and Ginza converge can be perceived as the site of a heterogeneous melting pot. The novelist Jirōmasa Gunji (1905-1973) conceals the dichotomy of the city in darkness and only sheds light on the top layer in his novel, *Mr. Japan*. An aristocrat who works in Marunouchi takes his black limousine after work to go around the areas of Marunouchi, Yurakuchō and Ginza to indulge in pleasure:

A sea of illumination and waves of people are vaguely in focus. The centre of Ginza is the backbone of this big city and a capital of pleasure in East Asia. What are the words written on dozens of lamps with paper shades hung in the twilight dusk covered in a spring veil? They are “*Azuma Odori* (East dancing)!” The electronic clock of the Asahi Newspaper Company’s building says it’s 7 pm. At the height of this illuminated world, the headlights of cars cross each other and the limousine passes by the Kabuki Theatre, the Imperial Theatre, and Hōraku Theatre. Our protagonist, Duke Ikeda, rides in his Chrysler towards the Shinbashi Playhouse. The cigarette smoke hides his bald head and gives the impression of blond curly hair slowly rippling (Gunji 1983, pp. 99–100).

In this passage, every detail is dynamically depicted with a sense of flamboyancy and desire; especially, the sense of speed is indispensable with a limousine passing through the unstoppable growth of urban space, where the Imperial Theatre was an iconic figure. Consequently, a new notion of time began to control the city in the 1920s.

3. *A Comedy at High Speed at the Imperial Theatre*

One of the most popular genres performed at the Imperial Theatre was the newly established, contemporary *joyūgeki* (actress play), a series of satirical comedies in which actresses portrayed the main roles while male actors played the supporting roles. Actress plays included some performances inspired by plots of overseas plays, such as British musical comedy and revues. This genre, *au courant* at the time, was peppered with music, dance and a magnificent finale; besides including such features common among Japanese plays at the time, there were also elements responding to the demands and issues of the day, such as *komesoudou*, the term for depression after wartime prosperity and the term for first flight training in Japan;

settings reflecting a family's new drawing room or a chic café in Ginza; excerpts from women's suffrage speeches; left-wing labour; and music from the radio.

One of the most frequently performed actress plays in the 1920s, Masuda's *A Comedy at High Speed*, consisted of a series of short comedic sketches in which a curtain raiser delivers the prologue swiftly:

[...]Trains, steamboats, cars, motorcycles, airplanes, and even buggies are all at high speed these days. Thus, daily lives, neuron transmissions, changes of ideology are also all at high speed, and love even more so [...] Accordingly, culture is namely speed (Masuda 1924, pp. 1–2).

From the beginning of the performance, the prologue establishes the sense of urban modernity, in which a bewildering speed controls everything in society.

Scene 1 is set on the platform of a train station during the morning rush hour, packed with white-collar workers including a female typist who starts a quarrel with a man.

OFFICE WORKER 'A': Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!

A Station Staff member involuntarily releases his arm.

OFFICE WORKER 'A': What nasty treatment, it will be useless if you pull my arms out from my body. I can't see the lady's face but what she said was really bothering me and I can't pass it over [...] Why do I have to accept such an insult from a whale. Don't say something impertinent, you are only a woman!

Ungh [...] the pain's killing me.

FEMALE TYPIST: A whale? How dare you! That phrase, "only a woman," is such an out-of-date expression, take back your words immediately! [...] To begin with, what do you think women are? [...] Listen to me, as far as I can see, men as an embodiment of egoism tend to be steeped in some traditional fallacies and treat women as machines to bear children, which we'll never admit [...].

The curtain falls while she continues to speak (Masuda 1924, pp. 13–19).

In the second scene, a serious and lonely left-wing labourer envies a young couple cuddling.

LABOURER: [...] Holding your girl's hand in the daytime! All right,
 enough's enough!

YOUNG WOMAN: I am scared of him, my brother.

LABOURER: Brother? You guys are brother and sister? Excuse
 me [...] (Masuda 1924, pp. 24–25).



Figure 4: The First Act of A Comedy at High Speed: Waseda University Theatre Museum, Theatre Collections.

Needless to say, both feminists and labourers are iconic figures in the age of the “Taishō Democracy”, anticipating radical social changes; however, they are depicted as caricatures in this play. At the end of this scene, the labourer rushes off stage, followed quickly by the next short sketch at a café in Ginza.

PLAYBOY: [...] What is the black thing, like a bowl of a pipe on the
 table?

OSATO: Oh, it's a radio.

PLAYBOY: You are an unpleasant woman, speak Japanese instead of
 using an English word!

OSATO: A wireless telegraph...we can hear songs and so on.

PLAYBOY: Where are they singing?

OSATO: At the radio station (Masuda 1924, pp. 44–45).

Radio was a new form of broadcast media, a tool for reducing distance and connecting people throughout the country that had just been introduced to Japan. When a playboy, who is unfamiliar with the new medium, tries to tackle the radio at the end of the scene, his foolishness provokes a roar of laughter. The next sketch follows immediately, showing two labourers digging a hole in a street of Marunouchi.

KUMA: Hey, Tora, I am wondering what happened to the people on the street, as they look like they're lacking energy.

TORA: It seems to be because the depression discourages them.

KUMA: Right, they call themselves the intellectual class by acquiring useless knowledge, but you know, they earn less than we do. We, as labourers, will never lose our jobs as long as we have our bodies and arms, isn't it wonderful? Look, we are always short of labourers, who dig and fill up holes all over the city of Tokyo (Masuda 1924, pp. 53–549).

As Kuma's speech ends, a gentleman passes by and wonders if there is a box of treasure in the dirt, as there were extravagant mansions around the site where the labourers are digging. When they actually do find a box, the gentleman shows his excitement only soon to be disappointed as the treasure box is revealed to be a lavatory. The gentleman, a representative of the middle and upper classes of Tokyo, is at the mercy of money due to capitalism.

The last sketch takes place at a busy intersection in central Tokyo. According to the stage direction: "Sounds of high-speed music, the bell of a train ringing, a car's horn honking" (Masuda 1924, p. 68). In the crowd crossing the intersection are a husband and wife having a quarrel as they cross. A flagman tries to defuse the situation and says, "I am not sure where to raise the flags during the quarrel of husband and wife. It is confusing! Madam, where do you want to go?" (Masuda 1924, p. 72). After he helps the pair reconcile, he is entranced by a beautiful lady crossing the intersection and starts to get so excited and unsettled that, according to the last stage direction, "When the flagman raises red and blue flags without order, many people coming from different directions run to the centre of the intersection" (Masuda 1924, p.76).

Since the play was extremely popular among audiences, it was revived only two months later and once again the following year; however, the contents of the sketches varied in the second and third versions. In the prologue of the second production, the curtain raiser said:

In July, *A Comedy at High Speed* as an actress play was unexpectedly favoured by the audiences as it mirrored the rapidly changing world [...] Indeed, during the two months, we have seen some more hectic changes, such as the reorganisation of the cabinet, the first Japanese flight to Europe, a Japanese mountaineer climbing the Canadian Rockies, the performance by the world famous dancers, Ted Shawn and Ruth St. Dennis, at the Imperial Theatre [...] Everything, big or small, passes by just like a super-express train (Masuda 1924b, p. 1–2).

Thus, the sense of breakneck speed in the performance clearly reflects the dizzy pace of modern life in the 1920s.

Although most theatre critics and intellectual theatre practitioners had criticised the play for being nonsensical, there were some, such as the non-fiction writer Hideo Shibusawa (1892-1984), who extolled it: “[...] much polished satire emerged in *A Comedy at High Speed* [...] Tarō Masuda was an outstanding playwright who made people explode with laughter” (Shibusawa 1945). As Shibusawa stated, the audiences were delighted by satire set in contemporary life, as well as by the lovable caricatures of modern people, ranging from the middle and upper classes to lower-class labourers, all of whom were inhabitants of the urban city. If the experience of bright modern life is inseparable from the other layers of society as well as the changing hegemony, *A Comedy at High Speed* analysed as a “lovable work” is only a one-sided view. Rather, the implications of the performance should be reexamined against the backdrop of the complexity of modern life using the sense of high speed as a guide.

4. The Implications of Speed in Modernity: “Time Given to Others”

Since the curtain raiser declares that “culture is namely speed”, *A Comedy at High Speed*, featuring fast-paced acting, music and progression, gives form to the

representation of accelerated city life. According to the highlighted sense of speed in the performance, the notion of time can be identified as an object of audiences' interest.

Although scholar Akira Kamiyama writes that "It is difficult to define exactly when speed started to be valued" (Kamiyama 2012, p. 28) in Japanese theatre, he clarifies that theatre in the first decades of the twentieth century paid great attention to speed by illustrating the success of each genre: an adaptation of Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* in the genre of *shimpa*; actor Masajirou Sawada's quick acting in samurai fighting scenes of the genre *shin-kokugeki*; *shingeki* director Kaoru Osanai's concept of speedy acting; Takarazuka's popular production *Mon Paris* with its swiftness; and an actress play, *A Comedy at High Speed*, at the Imperial Theatre. As a means to change the notion of speed in modern life, Kamiyama mentions modern transportation, especially railroads which emerged in cities (Kamiyama, 2012, pp. 22–28). Transportation was certainly crucial in the transformation of daily life, and provided a new perspective on the newly established notion of time.

The global trend of worshipping speed, Futurism was simultaneously shared by Japanese intellectuals and artists, and Filippo Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto* (1909) was immediately translated in a Japanese literary magazine¹⁰ by Ōgai Mori in the same year. Adoration of a machine-based civilisation at the expense of existing traditional values encouraged an insatiable desire for speed, which is described in the manifesto as follows:

We affirm that the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath—a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace (Apollonio 1973, p. 21).

This avant-garde art movement crossed borders as well as genres, penetrating literature, music, theatre and architecture and resulting in the first Japanese Futurist exhibition in 1920.¹¹ Although Japanese Futurism, which was intriguingly associated with proletarian art and communism, later faced a crackdown by the

militarist government, the aesthetic of speed remained the core part of Futurism internationally.

Another belief that transformed the notion of time was Scientific Management (Taylorism), which emerged simultaneously with Futurism and spread globally. Scientific Management extirpated apprenticeships and internal contracts; instead, it established the idea of management, in which labourers' efficiency was measured by using a stopwatch and precisely examining time and movement. While this idea spread to factories and companies, intense criticism¹² of this new management of time immediately arose in the 1910s because it was considered a violation of human rights. In addition, it triggered a divide between white- and blue-collar workers due to its definition of management's plan and employees' conduct. Nevertheless, the criticism demonstrates how the idea swiftly spread throughout industry, since the new idea of saving time to increase efficiency was founded in urban work sites. As scholar Satoshi Sasaki illustrates in his book (Sasaki 1998), Japanese society also adopted and applied this concept on job sites from the 1910s, thereby effecting a change in the perception of time in urban society.

In both Futurism and Taylorism, a new concept of time which glorified speed emerged concurrently and internationally. Accordingly, the citizens of modern cities, on the one hand, perceived high speed favourably by welcoming this new phase in development, which instilled in them an endless desire for flamboyant mass-consumption; however, on the other hand, they might have also unconsciously accepted its negative aspects, such as a shadow of fascism, violations of human rights, and a distinction between classes, which were inseparable from Futurism and Taylorism. Thus, both the desire for high speed and anxiety about its consequences would have been shared in Tokyo modern life in the 1920s.

Philosopher Takashi Uchiyama indicates that modern citizens, who deserved individual freedom, started to face a new paradoxical concept of time:

The establishment of modern individuals was equal to the establishment of individual time, however: Since we depend on objectified time, which the clock ticks away, we cannot avoid giving time away little by little to save our individual time. Thus, we manage time rationally by

sacrificing our individual time to others, which might be used toward capitalism, economic systems, or social structures (Uchiyama 2011, p. 251).¹³

As Uchiyama indicated, modern individuals in Japanese society had started to obtain a sense of individual time since the collapse of Japan's longstanding feudalism during the Meiji Restoration. Accordingly, citizens in the 1920s lived dual lives: in one life, people freely spent their individual time as they wished; in the other, people got lost in the hustle and bustle of the big city. Along with the newfound quickened pace of urban life, people were attracted to and surrounded by the pleasurable desires fostered by 'capitalism, economic systems, or social structures'. However, their involvement encouraged in them a social anxiety created from disorder, turbulence and intolerance in society.

A Comedy at High Speed, in this sense, is defined by this new concept of time instead of just being perceived as a reflection of the brightness of modern life. Unless audiences objectively view the performances on stage, laughter is never aroused in the auditorium. In the case of *A Comedy at High Speed*, the objects of laughter were urban citizens compressed by time and space during the rush hour, a lack of understanding of the suffrage movement, a boorish leftist, communication transformed by new broadcast media, the voice of hidden labourers in modern cities and wandering people controlled by time at intersections. The audiences, in other words, viewed the discord of city life applied to others. Therefore, the audiences laughing at these silly caricatures were actually laughing at themselves since they knew that, once they stepped into an urban setting, they could not help becoming involved in its breakneck speed, in which desire and anxiety are two sides of the same coin.

5. Conclusion

The Imperial Theatre in the 1920s functioned both as a foothold for diverse modern Japanese theatre and as an embodiment of the acceleration of modern Tokyo life. The auditorium of the theatre was occupied by the middle and upper classes, who wished to experience this glorious modernity. The stage was perceived as part of a new era in which people started to benefit from theatrical entertainment

provided by thriving consumerism. Although the actress play, *A Comedy at High Speed*, has been recognised as a description of exhilarating city life, the object of the audience's laughter is actually the discordance experienced in the multifaceted modern life of the 1920s controlled by a new perception of time. This new concept consisted of 'capitalism, economic systems, or social structures', in which not only anticipation of desirable flamboyancy grew swiftly, but also intolerant darkness, represented by fascism, a violation of human rights, and class distinctions were equally present.

According to Mantarō Kubota, "The Comedies performed at the Imperial Theatre seemed to masterly grasp the atmosphere of the Taishō period" (Shibusawa 1945). However, the question is: Who created 'the atmosphere'? In fact, the voices of diverse people including men and women, young and old, white-collar workers and labourers, all of whom comprised the era, are heard in *A Comedy at High Speed*. Regardless, the plays never made any radical statements about society because the characters in the play were self-contradictory, torn between being jubilant and depraved, and this ambiguity is exactly 'the atmosphere' of the era in which people were living. Consequently, the performance of *A Comedy at High Speed* reveals that audiences from sophisticated Tokyo in the 1920s confronted its contradictory temporal issues and laughed at its noncommittal characters in which they themselves were mirrored with the ambiguity of desire and anxiety, learning to tolerate themselves while beginning to question the society in which they lived.

References

- Andō, Kousei. *Ginza Saiken (A Gaze into Ginza)*. Chūō-Kouron-sha, trans. Ayumi Fujioka, 1977 [1931].
- Apollonio, Umbro, ed. *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos*, trans. Brain, Robert, R.W. Flint, J.C. Higgitt, and Caroline Tisdall, Viking Press, 1973.
- Gotō, Shinpei. "Nihondaihyō no Gekijō toshite (As a Representative of Japanese Theatre)." In *Engei Gahō (The Illustrated Theatre Magazine)*, Apr 1921.
- Gunji, Jirōmasa. *Misutā Nippon (Mr. Japan)*. Trans. Ayumi Fujioka, Arusu Shuppan, 1930 quoted from Hiroshi Unno, *Modan Toshi Tokyo: Nihon no 1920nendai (Modern City of Tokyo: the 1920's in Japan)*, Sanyō-sha, 1983.

- Kamiyama, Akira. “Supido no Jidai: Nihon Kinai Engeki no Fukugou Ryouiki (An Age of Speed: Compound Areas of Modern Japanese Theatre).” In *Bungei Kenkyu* vol.105, trans, Ayumi Fujioka, 2012.
- Kikuchi, Kan. *Shinju-fujin (Mrs. Pearl)*, trans. Ayumi Fujioka, Bunshun Bunko, 2002, [1920].
Masuda. Trans. Ayumi Fujioka, 1924a and b.
- Sasaki, Satoshi. *Kagakukanrihō no Nihontekitenkai (The Development of Scientific Management in Japan)*. Yūhisha, 1998.
- Shibusawa, Hideo. “Comedy of Tarō-kaja.” In *Nihon Engeki (Japanese Theatre)*, Feb 1945.
- “The Crisis of the Minds.” In *The Athenaeum*, April 11 and May 2, 1919. *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, vol. 10, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, New York: Pantheon Books, 1962.
- Uchiyama, Takashi. *Jikan nitsuiteno Jūnishō: Tetsugaku niokeru Jikan no Mondai (Twelve Chapters on Time: Issues of Time in Philosophy)*. Trans. Ayumi Fujioka, Iwanami Shoten, 2011.
- Yoshimi, Shunya. *Toshi no Doramatsuruji : Sakariba no Shakaishi (The Dramaturgy of Urban Space: A Social History of Entertainment District)*. Trans. Ayumi Fujioka, Koubunsha, 1987.

Images

Figure 1: *The Imperial Theatre, Theatre Postcard*: Tēkoku Gekijou Engeki Ehagaki.

Figure 2: *The Imperial Theatre: Takashi Mine, Teikokugekjō Kaimaku (The Curtain Rises)*, *Chūkō-sinsho*, 1996, p. 5.

Figure 3: Kyō ha Teigeki, Asu wa Mitsukoshi Gofukuten (*Today you are welcome to the Imperial Theatre, tomorrow you are welcome to Mitsukoshi*): Waseda University Theatre Museum, *Theatre Collections*.

Figure 4: *The First Act of A Comedy at High Speed*: Waseda University Theatre Museum, *Theatre Collections*.

Endnotes

- ¹ Sceleratus (also known as Tarō Masuda), *Kousokudo Kigeki (A Comedy at High Speed)* vol. 1, 2 and 3, Waseda University Theatre Museum, *Theatre Collections*, 1925a, 1925b and 1926. Masuda used the pen name “Tarō-kaja” taken from the stock character of *Kyogen* in addition to “Sceleratus” meaning a “great offender” in Latin.
- ² Direct influences can be found: *Zensokuryoku Kigeki (A Comedy at Full Speed)*, Asakusa Theatre, Oct 1925; *Kousokudo Kigeki (A Comedy at High Speed)* Takarazuka Yuki-gumi, Takaraduka Large Theatre, Nov 1927.
- ³ Mantarō Kubota’s comments are quoted in the following article: Hideo Shibusawa, “Comedy of Tarō-kaja.” In *Nihon Engeki (Japanese Theatre)*, Feb 1945.
- ⁴ Other Western intellectuals who declared their scepticism towards Western knowledge are: Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, first published in two volumes between 1918 and 1923, Alfred A. Knopf, 1926; Thomas Mann, *Order of the Day*, trans. H.T. Lowe Porter, Alfred A. Knopf, 1942, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg, 1994, University of California Press, pp. 105–109.
- ⁵ “The Crisis of the Mind” first appeared in *The Athenaeum*, April 11 and May 2, 1919. *The Collected Works of Paul Valery*, vol. 10, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, Pantheon Books, 1962,

p. 23.

- ⁶ Kouji Ikuta, and Hisao Homma. *Shakaikaizō no Hachidaishisouka (The Eight Giants for Renovating Society)*, Toukyoudō Shoten, 1920.
- ⁷ Tokyo-shiku Kaisei Jōrei, enacted by the Ministry of the Interior.
- ⁸ For further information, see Satoko Nagai. *Gekijō no Kindaika: Teikoku Gekijō, Tsukiji Shogekijō, and Takaraduka Daigekijō (The Modernisation of Theatres: The Imperial Theatre, Tsukiji Little Theatre and Takaraduka Theatre)*. Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2014.
- ⁹ The Imperial Theatre introduced Japan's first box office based on the method of selling tickets used by the railroads. For further information, see Ryūichi Kodama, "Kindai-toshi wo Utsusu Basho: Teikoku Gekijō to Tetsudō, Hyakkaten (The Space Reflecting Modern City: The Imperial Theatre, Railroads and Department Stores)", ed. Tōhō & Co., *Teigeki Wanda-rando (The Imperial Theatre Wonderland)*, Pia & Co., 2011. pp. 64–65.
- ¹⁰ *Subaru*, Sanshū-sha, 1909.
- ¹¹ The exhibition was held by the newly established *Nihon Miraiha Bijutsu Kyōkai (Japanese Association for Futurism)*.
- ¹² For example, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) repeated acts of aggression against the human rights violation and rejected the application of Scientific Management both in 1913 and 1914.
- ¹³ Takashi Uchiyama, *Jikan nitsuiteno Jūnishō: Tetsugaku niokeru Jikan no Mondai (Twelve Chapters on Time: Issues of Time in Philosophy)*, trans. Ayumi Fujioka, Iwanami Shoten, 2011, p. 251. Uchiyama infers that the new notion of time during the modern period radically modified human existence by taking the case of Scientific Management. (*Ibid.* pp. 143–169.) He perceives that individual time resides in human existence, which is realised by the circulation of time within relationships; thus, his framework to capture time is different from those of Husserl and Bergson, who recognise time rectilinearly as a succession of past, present and future.