

# LE GESTE COMME LANGAGE

## Gesture and Social Communications

SOCIAL

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Since the beginning stages of futurism or Dadaism, performance has not been limited only to a physical gesture. Performance known as an art genre allowing the participation of the audience by using physical gestures, language or tools is a definition of the 1970's conceptual art. It is no longer so. Performance has allowed the audience to actively participate as a partner to the artist. Whether the audience is an artist himself/herself, a partner or a non-artist, the role of the participating audience is to help the non-artist, striving to become an artist himself/herself.

It is often that the audience has a better understanding of the performance than the performer. This is because from the very beginning, the motive of the performance, whether be it with a concrete objective or whether be it the problem of the performer, is in social communication. And the expression of the artist has a singular mode.

Performance is certainly a genre in which the expression of the artist can be represented to the fullest. The artist is able to select the time and place of his/her expression at his/her own will. And he/she may also consider in his/her own way the expression itself. Not even abstract art which maximizes the experience and perspective of the artist is able to match the subjectivity, the hostility and flexibility of performance artists.

Let us recall such performance like the symbol of uncertainty

artist who participated from the Futurist Art Association lineage. The work consisted of three young people with their faces painted red, blue and black. These painted visages were then decorated with eerie paintings of randomly placed snakes, lizards, horses, birds and other images. The three took on the guise of mannequins, but in fact they were living humans, exhibiting human, not clockwork, movements. This work was not very correct in its manners, they smoked cigarettes, sipped coffee before their audience. And it was not the Kinoshita's unique creation, undoubtedly he had referred to Burliuk's activities in Russia.

Painting pictures on faces, and then appearing before the masses was one of the styles of the Russian Futurists, and it had already made its appearance in 1912-13. Burliuk participated in a 1913 Futurist street parade down the main street of Moscow with his face painted with pictures, wooden spoons hanging from his buttons, reciting Futurist poems as he marched along. Then again, "Why we have painted ourselves with colors - A Futurist Manifesto", was published in a magazine, stating "Now art is seeping into life, painting our faces is the beachhead of this influx." Thus we can consider the deep roots of Kinoshita's expression via living humans.

On the 30th of May 1925, the "Gekijo no Sanka" opened at 6:30 p.m. as the latest thing in town. The theater was filled with a capacity crowd of 500 and the event was said to have reaped full-house bonuses. There were twelve acts, a description of the principal events follows.

As previously noted, Murayama Tomoyoshi danced two Neue Tanz pieces, and they served as inter-act elements for the other works. He was a self-styled professional dancer, and these inter-act elements may have been an attempt to appear less conspicuous amongst the amateurish performances of the evening. But if we think about it, it is the first time he had danced upon a normal stage as a dancer.



Kinoshita Shuichiro painted his own face red and white for this occasion, and in imitation of Burliuk, he appeared in formal attire, top hat and tails, to recite poems. With a considerably stimulating, almost roaring delivery, he recited in a manner which one newspaper reporter noted as shouting "Wa - - , Wa - - , Wa - -".

The work by Asano Mofu, Okamoto Toki and Yoshida Kenkichi was titled "Construction". They painted their bodies with spiraling smoke, and when stage curtain was raised slightly, the three scampered across the stage with only their legs visible to the audience. When the whole curtain was raised, red, blue and green balloons were released, and Asano began his dance among them. As he danced, a single rope descended from the stage ceiling, and Okamoto slipped down the rope from a height of around fifteen to sixteen meters. The act continued with Yoshida performing a pantomime of a deluge. Okamoto remembered this scene in a painting created for his retrospective painting collection in his later years. The languid movement of the balloons, the slicing descent of the figure, and then all is swept away in the deluge. This can be seen as suggesting the development of the world. Kanbara Tai's work "Jinsei", or humanity, was similarly suggestive. Asano Mofu appeared as "Painter" and Yabe Tomoe appeared as "Philosopher". On a platform stacked in an exaggerated double structure, two people conversed in whispers. The audience couldn't understand what they were saying. Without any apparent reason the curtain was then lowered, then raised, and the whispering conversation would begin again. Heckling, jeers of "Curtain!!!" flew, intermittently, as if they in fact wanted the opposite. We might see this as an effect of "interval", those moments when we are drawn to listen, similar to the intermittent, irregular movements of contemporary sculpture.

The work by the Action member Yabe Tomoe was titled with the group name "Action", but only scant information on the piece remains. The same three people acted, A, B, and C, and they wore cubist inspired cardboard

costumes. It seems that the last scene left an especially intense impression and has been noted in a number of articles. They burned orange peels, filling the theater with smoke, and then from up on stage, they faced the back of a large motor bike at the audience, raced the engine and with a tremendous explosive bang they let out yet more oily smoke. The curtain rang down to a chant of Move! Move! Move!. The script included the words "Today, today, has been completely assaulted" signaling the openly defiant challenge to the audience.

During his time in Berlin, Murayama met the Italian Futurist painter F. T. Marinetti, and it is said that he was entrusted with the manifesto statement of Miracle Theater supervised by Marinetti. This meant that in the middle of the performance, a fantastically moving thing came flying out and hence the surprise theater with its strong shocks to the audience. The appearance of the motor bike in the Sanka Theater reminds us of this theater of surprises.

The theatrical elements incorporated in the program were Yoshida Kenkichi's "Button" and Murayama Tomoyoshi's "Birthing Prostitute". "Button" was the evening's opening act, and we might consider that Yoshida's role was two-fold, to smooth the progress of the entire event, and emblematic of the fact that the event was taking place in a theater. The greatest number of people appeared on stage in this act, a staging whose new structure resembled the continuation of actions that occur in a happening. A film was screened in one scene, and when the film was finished, thirty some workers shredded and burst forth from behind a paper screen. Indeed, it reminds one of the happenings held by the Gutai group. In any event, an amateurish, ad-lib performance continued, with the film cut en route, and we can imagine all sorts of things happening which were not what we could call theater.

Murayama's actual appearance in a piece was greatly anticipated, and even though it was such a topic of discussion, only fragmentary records remain of the event. There were a great number of participants, and from the extant photos that seem to show rehearsal scenes, the work had quite a lively



composition. We can infer that it had its dramatic elements. One scene, however, is noted in the Hochi Shimbun newspaper. According to this record, Shibuya Osamu played a prostitute who appeared on stage with a huge belly. He stood on stage and gave birth to a child, a form which lowered gradually from beneath his skirt. This was then suspended from a bamboo pole and raised up. The newspaper article ran a photograph of this scene and criticized the work as a joke. They implied their conclusion in the line, "The See and Don't Understand It Play".

Whatever the press reactions, this kind of underground theater which enmeshes its viewers saw the lowering of the curtain amidst enthusiasm. One newspaper expressed the incoherence of the situation with such comments as "Well it was surprising. It was a full house. It was a spasm, a fit. It made you dizzy. It made your eyes dilate. It made you lose your appetite." (Yomiuri Shimbun).

A certain art critic noted with a somewhat bantering admiration, "Sanka has gone as far out as theater." For the artists, just as they smeared paint on canvas, the force of their compelling need to express themselves through the actions of their entire bodies ran unimpeded, and the results can be considered the pinnacle of the avant garde arts of the Taisho period. In effect this was the pinnacle of their efforts, almost immediately after this evening the Sankakai moved rapidly into a Dadaesque expression. The domestic quarrel between the elements of this disparate union exposed its very fragility. Just a few months after the Sanka Theater, the group disbanded in September. Their disbanding also signaled the last moments of progressive art movements, a boundary was cut the following year, 1926, the end of the Taisho period. The majority of these artists then leaned left in the midst of proletarian art.