



2023

**INCORPORATING NOH TRAINING INTO CONTEMPORARY  
WESTERN THEATRE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE BENEFITS TO  
IMPLEMENTING NOH THEATRE AND SUZUKI TRAINING INTO  
WESTERN PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY**

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THEATRE AND SUZUKI TRAINING INTO WESTERN  
PERFORMANCE PEDAGOGY**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts  
at Virginia Commonwealth University

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May 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family for their support and encouragement. I am sincerely thankful for my parents Theresa Windley Holloran and William Joseph Holloran Jr. Even during the most difficult times, they uplifted and inspired me to continue doing my best. Thank you for teaching me to read with passionate curiosity, and to walk with joy in my heart. I would like to thank my colleagues, who have grown with me over the past few years. Their knowledge, resilience, and love for their craft is truly inspiring, and I feel honored to have worked alongside them. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Keith Byron Kirk and Dr. Jesse Njus, and my amazing committee chair Karen Kopryanski. Without them this thesis would not have been possible. Finally, I would give the deepest gratitude to my husband, Harrison Runion. It was through his love, gentleness, and friendship that I was able to complete this thesis. I am so unbelievably grateful for you. I love you more than sand.

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## *Abstract*

By: Baylee A. Holloran

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at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Noh theatre is a traditional Japanese theatre practice that focuses on isolated and intentional physicality and separating actor personality from character. It is an imaginative and heightened performance that differs greatly from Western theatrical realism. This thesis examines Noh theatre, its origins, and why it should be more implemented into Western acting pedagogy. I start by describing what Noh is as an art form, from the ritualistic aspects to how it is staged and performed. Then I outline the religious and historical significance of Noh and how they are showcased in its storytelling and performance. I analyze the pedagogies of Japanese practitioners Zeami and Tadashi Suzuki and compare them to traditional theatre pedagogies found in the West. My research into the comparison of Noh and Western theatre practice extends into audience reception theory. My findings reveal that Japanese audiences are drawn to Noh because they are attracted to the alienating and abstract nature of the theatre form, whereas Western audiences want to get lost in a relatable narrative. Noh characters and stories are spiritual and fantastical, and it is not concerned with establishing a sense of place or time, further differentiating itself from realism. I conclude by reporting my personal experience from witnessing Noh performance at the National Noh Theatre in Tokyo.

### *Vita*

Baylee Alexis Holloran was born June 5, 1995 in Virginia Beach, Va. and is an American citizen. She graduated from Kempsville High School, Virginia Beach, Virginia in 2013. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance from Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia in 2018. She worked as a professional actor for two years, then enrolled in graduate school in 2020. She received her Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Performance and Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2023.

## *Introduction*

Noh is a traditional form of Japanese theatre that dates back to the 14th century, or what was known as the Muromachi period. It is one of the oldest practicing theatre forms in the world. Noh performances are done all over Japan but are primarily performed in Kyoto and Tokyo. However, Noh is practiced worldwide by numerous theatre companies and troupes. Noh draws audiences in through historical and cultural storytelling, minimalistic but intentional staging, and the ritual engagement with each piece. In this thesis I will argue that Noh theatre training and practices should be more integrated into Western theatrical teaching programs, so as to offer students and young actors unique and versatile acting techniques that are not dependent on realism.

The study of Noh theatre is beneficial to Western theatre practitioners and educators, not only for historical purposes, but for the plethora of voice, speech, movement, and acting techniques that Noh training provides. In chapter one I will discuss what initially attracted audiences to Noh performance, as it will give context to how Western audiences might also show attraction to the style. This will include the rituals/traditions, as well as the relationship between Noh staging and movement of the actors. The study of what draws Japanese audiences to Noh can give insights into the elements of Noh that can be adapted into Western Theatrical pedagogies.

In chapter two, I will go into a brief study on the historical and religious aspects of Japan then relate them to the development of Noh. The study of the historical and religious aspects to the development of Noh gives justification and context for why Noh performance techniques exist, and how they are adapted into curriculum.



With the historical and religious aspects of Noh established, one can then delve into how Noh Theatre can be applied into Western theatrical practice. I do this by first studying the methods and exercises detailed in *The Spirit of Noh: A New Translation of The Classic Noh Treatise the Fushikaden* by Zeami and translated by William Scott Wilson. Zeami was a playwright and actor who is credited for having invented the Noh theatre as we know it today. He wrote over 20 treatises detailing his philosophies of art and natural beauty. I primarily focus on his work detailed in *Fushikaden*, and his ideologies on performance and theatre. I argue that some of his lessons can be applied to higher theatrical education, using examples such as “Sound first, ki second, voice third,” the study of “the flower,” and key techniques to help ease the mind and body for performance. I then detail the writings and ideologies of Tadashi Suzuki from both his article and his book published under the same title, *Culture is the Body*, translated by KHS., translated by Kameron H. Steele. I give in-depth examples of stomping and gesture exercises, since they address the necessity of acknowledging weakness in the body, and how to better control one’s movement through dance and performance. I also delve into his ideologies of sound making, and how the spirit of a person's sound rests within their core. I give exercises examples provided from Suzuki’s texts to give readers the tools to hone their ability to create a powerful and supportive voice for performances. I end this section with explaining how exercises from Suzuki and Zeami can directly influence the quality of an actor’s performance, and argue that incorporating these techniques provides performance students with new and unique solutions to issues of connection, ease, and comfort that can arise on stage. The techniques of Zeami and Suzuki are vital to layering Noh training into Western acting pedagogy. By understanding Zeami’s founding principles of Noh performance, alongside the modernization and physicality developed by Suzuki, means that students can observe how acting techniques evolve over time.

Through seeing how the common style of Noh was developed by Zeami shows where Suzuki drew his influences from, and how he could create a marriage between both Japanese and Western acting philosophy. This is significant as students can see this as an example to reclaim agency in developing their individualistic style, as well as learn that a performer can utilize theatrical technique from a variety of different origins.

In chapter four, I examine the theory of Audience Reception, and discuss how it relates to implementing Noh training and performance into Western theatre pedagogy. I use the works of Edith Hall and Susan Bennett to define the term, which Bennett refers to as “particularly concerned with the diversity of theatres which operate in contemporary culture and the different audiences they attract” (1). The term can shift when considering classical text, or audience, but the consensus is that Audience Reception is concerned with the relationship between audience, text, and performer. The ways in which audiences interact with performers and text varies under alternative performance direction, but I also argue that theatrical space plays an important role in establishing this relationship. I use Karen Gaylord and Bennett’s perspectives on Outer and Inner space to defend the argument that Western audiences are capable and enthusiastic for unique staging and performance, which Noh theatre can provide in spades.

In this chapter, I compare the experience of Noh audiences with audiences for American melodrama, as both of those genres are closely related in performance objective, heightened text, and musicality. I use the writings of James R. Brandon, John Mercer, Martin Shingler, and Toyotiro Nogami to explain why audiences favored these two forms of theatre during the height of their conception, as well as how common those desires were for theatre to defend that Western audiences could be excellent spectators for Noh theatre.

Chapter five focuses on my personal experience traveling to Japan and watching a performance of Noh theatre. I explore elements that I observed, and compare them to my experiences as a Western actor and audience member. This comparison reveals that the experience of the audience is quite similar, which reinforces my belief that Noh training would be successful.

Before I begin, it is necessary to define terms that will be used throughout this thesis. *Noh* is used as a reference to *Nō*, which is a traditional style of Japanese theatre that contains highly stylized text and movement with musical elements. Noh is often attributed as being invented by **Zeami**. *Kyogen* refers to the traditional Japanese comedic theatrical form known by the spelling “*Kyōgen*.” Kyogen is another traditional Japanese theatre art that was developed alongside Noh to act as comedic intermissive breaks between or before Noh productions. *Nōgaku* is the term used to define the combined performances of Kyogen and Noh. *Dengaku nō* is a style of Noh theatre often used as a prayer to the gods for a strong and bountiful harvest. *Dengaku* and *sarugaku* were Chinese dance and acrobatic performances that inspired the movements of Noh. The *Kojiki* is a religious text that details the origins of Japan, and alongside the *Nihon Shoki*, another ancient historical text compiled after the *Kojiki*, chronicle the birth of the Japanese archipelago and royal family through spiritual and divine means. They are regarded as the oldest sacred and historical text in Japan. *Bugaku* is a form of Japanese court dance and performance, which was another Chinese dance style that influenced the development of Noh. *Johakyu* is the rhythm in which Noh is performed. *Kabuki* and *Bunraku* are two other forms of traditional Japanese theatre, with the former being spectacle-based and the latter using puppetry.

## *Chapter One: Introducing Noh Drama*

### WHAT IS NOH THEATRE

Before moving forward, it is important to first explain why the study of Noh staging, movement, and history is important in the context of incorporating Noh theatre practice into Western theatrical pedagogy. If one were to attempt to incorporate Noh theatre without first studying or recognizing where and how the style originated, artists attempting to use or present the practice would only be appropriating Japanese cultural heritage. In order to properly contextualize methodologies from other cultures, we must examine the culture as a whole, rather than cherry-picking elements to suit our purposes. That is why the historical and cultural information presented here plays a part in the argument that Noh theatre practice can belong in a Western pedagogy. It can only exist, however, when one presents the willingness to learn something new from it, rather than forcing it to fit into their own notions on what that theatre should be.

Noh theatre can be defined as “a theatrical or dramatic tradition.” This means that Noh plays represent ancient historical or spiritual figures from Japanese mythology, and that these stories were passed down from teacher to student to carry on the cultural traditions of Noh performance. Tom Hare, translator for the book *Zeami Performance Notes*, credits the Chinese dance-inspired theatre of *saragaku no with* influencing Zeami’s creation of the Noh drama familiar to audiences today. (Hare, 109) Much of the Noh theatre performed in modern time is inspired by the efforts and developments Zeami had on classical Noh theatre during the Muromachi period of Japan, or what we know as the 14th century. But it was not solely this century that was responsible for the development of Noh theatre. Hare notes that “The idea that such a transformation took place within a single generation is an exaggeration and distortion;

rather, *nō* took centuries to become the performing art so designated today” (109). Let us examine the aspects of Noh theatre performance to better understand why audiences enjoyed it.

## STAGING AND MOVEMENT

*Nōgaku* is the term used to refer to the combined performance of both Kyogen and Noh. Noh and Kyogen were developed to complement each other. Kyogen “takes part in most plays, most prominently during an interlude” (Hare, 502), and was meant to be a reprieve from, or an introduction to, the Noh performance. While Noh theatre is often somber and melodic, Kyogen is comedic and fast paced. Both, however, share similar traits. They both use expressive and stylized movement to accompany heightened text and story. Both also incorporate spiritual aspects and elements that can be traced back to the time before Noh’s conception.

In *The Japanese Theatre*, Hayashiya Tatusaburō found that many of the movements and styles of dance in Noh refer back to examples of ancient *Kagura*, ancient Shinto ritual dances where the dancer, often a female shaman, is possessed by (or takes the form of) a *kami* god during the performance. These dances can be traced back all the way to the oldest sacred text in Japanese history, the *Kojiki*, which features a myth where the goddess of the sun, Amaterasu, is coerced out of a cave by Ame-no-Uzume and her fellow *kami* gods by performing the first *kagura* dance recorded in sacred literature. The slow and methodical control over the movement of the body in the *Kagura Mai* is extremely similar to the movements we see in Noh drama. We can also discover links between *bugaku* court dance and Noh through what is known as the “*Johakyu*” principle of traditional Japanese Theatre. *Gagaku* and *Bugaku* court performances, which both began in the Heian period, were the source of the *Johakyu* that is present in many forms of traditional Japanese theatre. The elements of *Johakyu* were inspired by the dances performed during royal events in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which included a 4-to-5-part cycle of energy.

This principle was widely used in most of Japan's traditional theatre styles, including *Kabuki* and *Bunraku*. *Johakyu* is the coordination of a rhythmic pattern of movement, music, and narrative within the same cadence which begins slowly (jo). As tension and stakes rise, the rhythm picks up throughout the middle of the play (ha) until the end, where the energy climaxes into a peaceful conclusion (kyu). This rhythmic pattern is one of the most important and central elements of Noh performance, as the speed and tempo dictate the emotional moments throughout the play.

In the very early stages of *Nōgaku* performance, *Kyogen* plays were less focused on detailed script work and presented more like Italian *commedia dell'arte*. There was an emphasis on improvisation, which made it difficult to record all the stories presented. The style also delineated the very early concept of separation between *Kyogen* and Noh actors. The varying

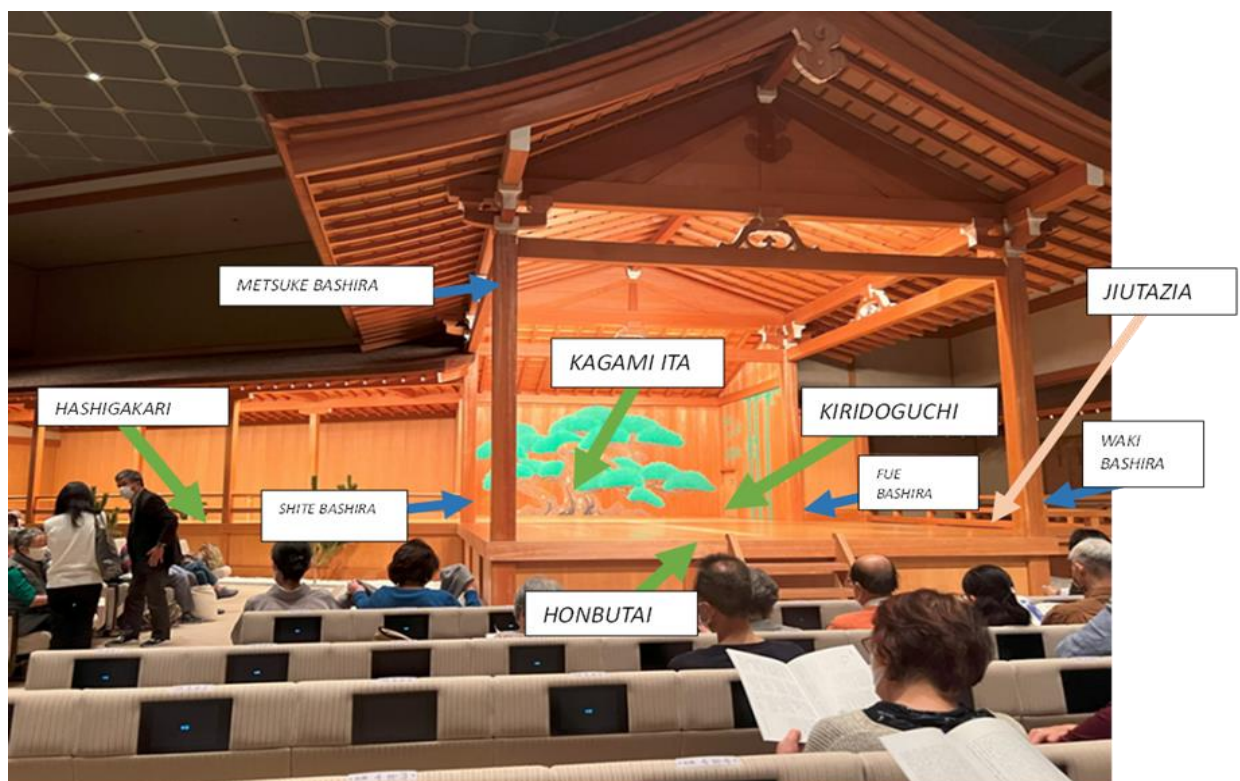


Figure 1

moves and styles required different training, so an actor looking to work in *Nōgaku* would have

to choose to train for one style or the other very early on. The creation of guilds for both Japanese and Western theatre ensured that their theatre and theatrical styles were preserved.

The layout of the stage also reveals how Noh performances were designed (early forms of *Nogaku* were performed outside). I captured this image of a modern Noh stage in March 2023 (Figure 1), while waiting for a production of *Nogaku* at the National Theatre in Tokyo, Japan. Unlike the traditional outdoor Noh stage, this stage protrudes out of the wall, similar to a thrust design, but with a slightly different shape due to the bridgeway. There is a curtain that cannot be seen in this image but appears in Figure 2. The rise and fall of this curtain, called the *agemaku*, signifies an important entrance or exit for a character during a Noh play. The *agemaku* is

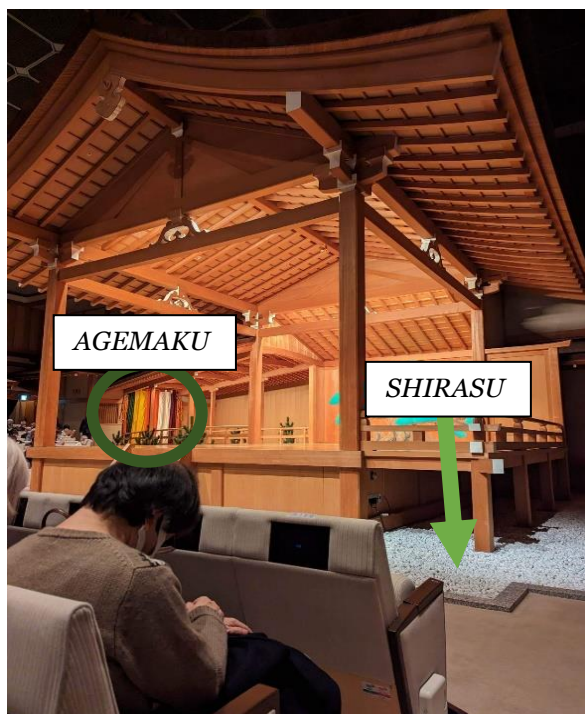


Figure 2

decorated using five alternating color threads (representing wood, fire, earth, metal, and water) that are sewn and presented vertically in front of the *Kagami no ma* (or mirror room). Much like the ribbons tied to the ends of Kagura bells during a Kagura dance, these colors represent the five principal elements presented in the theory of yin and yang. There are two bamboo poles that connect to the bottom of the *agemaku* that allow two people to raise the curtain, while also shielding the *Kagami no ma* from view. The

*Kagami no ma* is a room behind the bridgeway connected to the stage, and is where the actors prepare for their entrances. This bridgeway, called the *hashigakari*, is also where an actor can adjust or put on their mask. When music is played from this section of the stage, it is usually to

indicate that the performance is about to begin. A character will cross the *hashigakari* to signify the transition from the spirit world to the physical one.

The pine tree in the center flat of the stage is meaningful in two ways. First, it pays homage to the days when Noh was performed outside, as well as showcases Zen architecture and aesthetics. Second, the wall and stage are both made of Japanese cypress wood, which acts as a natural sound amplifier for both instruments and actors and carries their sound across the space. It also houses the *Kagami Ita*, which translates to “mirror panel.” One theory for the origins of the mirror panel comes from the lining, as it is made from *Yōgō no Matsu*, which is a specific type of pine wood that grows at the Kasuga Taisha Shrine in Nara. This wood has sacred significance, as there is a myth that Shinto gods come from the heavens and take root inside the wood of *Yōgō no Matsu*. It is often used both in Kagura ceremonies for worship, as well as during dance rituals. There is also a theory that the pine tree is meant to reflect the pine trees that would sit behind audiences when Noh was first performed outdoors. The *kiridoguchi*, which is a sliding board door that can act as an exit or entrance for the stage attendants, also resides near the *Kagami Ita*. The stagehands that use the *kiridoguchi* assist the *Ji-utai*, or chorus, and the musicians during the performance. The *Ji-utai* acts as the second voice to the *ji-gashira*, or chorus leader. They sit in the *Jiutauza*, the chorus seats, where they sing and emphasize the plight of the main character.

Four pillars surround the *honbutai*, giving the main stage its iconic square shape. These pillars, or *bashiras* (named *shite*, *metsuke*, *waki*, and *fue*) all help elevate the Noh plays, and act as guiding figures for locations and characters within the play. For example, the *shite bashira* is known as the “main actor’s pillar” (*shite* in Japanese kanji means “doing-hand”). If the *shite* actor is masked and needs to move to a certain space on the stage, the *shite bashira* acts as the



first guidepost to where the actor is relative to the other actors, and stage itself. This also guides audience members by indicating where certain conversations can take place.

It is easy to look at the pillars and assume they act as nothing more than support for the roof, or to criticize them as a design choice that is disruptive to the viewing experience. Truthfully, the pillars have their own function. One pillar might be solely used by the lead actor, while another is meant to represent characters exchanging a tense moment. The pillars and the combination of physicality and movement indicate to the audience when these moments occur, and for what reason. Though footwork plays a major role in the movement patterns of the actors, and the quadrants in the stage are equally significant for spacing, the pillars still act as a unique space separator to emphasize tension and drama.

When we consider staging for Noh, it can make one think about how performances are designed in the West. In *Theatrocracy: Greek Drama, Cognition, and the Imperative for Theatre*, Peter Meineck writes about the differences between Noh theatre staging and Athenian Classical theatre. “Noh drama came to be performed in interior theatre spaces, although in the formative years of Japanese masked drama prior to the 15th century, this was not always the case. The Noh stage also used artificial lighting from both above and below, whereas on the Greek open-air stage the light source was the daylight” (97).

Meineck notes many connections between Noh and Greek drama in terms of theatre staging and design, but also in their movement qualities. “Noh drama certainly shares many performative commonalities with Greek theatre, most important that they were both masked and relied on the expert performance of movement and gesture to convey emotionality...” (35). One important difference is that, in Noh, movement is less about identifying location and circumstance, though those are certainly present. It is more about conveying the character’s

emotional status, and elevating the beauty of their tragedy, as well as highlighting their reliance in the face of conflict or adversity. This is where the emotional response for audience members in Noh exists. Rather than being determined by a personal relationship with character, like we see in American realism, Noh is centered around establishing an emotional connection to the character's story, mood, and physicality through refined dance, gesture, and physical storytelling.

Noh performance technique always begins with the actor's stance. There are two major forms for posture in Noh: basic forms (*Kamae*) and dance posture (*Kata*). These movements are all about delicacy and refinement and should never be so exaggerated that they become a distraction from the elevated language. There is beauty in control, and there is power in breath. The slower or smaller the actor moves while performing a gesture, the more difficult it becomes to focus on physicality and breathing. It is a test of focus and control over the entire body. Even the smallest movement of the toe takes immense concentration, and the actor must perform these intricate movements with a graceful air. Ortolani calls this "intense but relaxed energy" (142).

To assume the basic form, the torso must remain completely upward, with a slight bend forward. The back must create a perfectly straight line. To achieve the perfect head position, you must pull your head up, then push your chin back. This creates a straightening of the neck, while alleviating tension in the jaw. The knees should be slightly bent, and the legs are soft and slightly forward with arms gently resting at the side. With the feet parallel, the performer imagines their energy flowing into the ground. Moving the toes ever so slightly, the actor sends their energy into the earth and then uses the breath to pull it back through the soles of the feet, almost as though you are a fisherman casting a line into the sea, then reeling it back.

The difficult part is that your inner fisherman's goal is not to try and catch a fish; there is nothing in the sea to catch upon your line. Instead, cast your line and simply *be*, with no expectations in mind: no ambition, no theme, no plot, no character to embody. Your objective is to be a vessel for the story to pass through, and the images present in this posture create a wide and powerful flow of central energy.

All energy originates in the center of this stance, which comes from the abdomen, then moves into the world through the feet. It takes intense training just to get into the habit of moving this energy through the central abdomen in this way, but it is essential for strengthening and solidifying the actor's sense of gravity. It teaches the actor the importance of spatial awareness and connection to the earth. Speech and voice also become affected here, as grounding strengthens and projects the voice with weight and energy. After the actor has a solid grasp on this stance, they are ready to begin moving.

The actor must never lift their feet completely off the ground; doing so would disrupt the connection between the stance the actor has made, and the energy moving through their body. Movement also requires a significant change in the directionality of the feet. The force emanating from the body is now able to move in multiple directions. When we are moving through our everyday life, we often only have the ability to change directions at the last moment. The same is even more true in an actor's work. A director may instruct them to move to a chair, sit in it, talk for a bit, then get up and walk to the bar, have a drink, and so on. In executing these stage directions, an actor's movement can become unnatural, or seem choreographed, because they are following someone else's instructions, rather than their own impulses. It can be difficult to authentically recreate the way we move in real life on the stage. The stage becomes the actor's greatest adversary, as performance, at least in European theatre, attempts to make the most

detailed choreography look utterly candid. This is not so for Noh drama. The movements look choreographed because that's exactly what they are. There is an interesting phenomenon that occurs while watching Noh, where the sincerity of movement is less about convincing the audience that the embodied character is just like them, and more about the gestures acting as reverence to beings beyond our comprehension. Even the basic form of walking suddenly becomes mystical and otherworldly when executed with such a purpose.

Walking, or *hakobi*, uses the beginning basic posture established above and specifies that it should not change as movement begins. The actor glides the feet across the floor, one foot at a time, only lifting the balls of the feet as the heels drag along the floor. As the balls of the feet lift and return to the ground, the actor must imagine as though there is a strong, powerful magnet attached to both ends. As soon as the foot lifts, the magnet pulls against the force of the other. The actor cannot fight the force pulling against them, so with great strength they quickly but gently return it to the ground. This imagery helps keep the habit of committing the feet to the floor, so as not to disturb the disconnection. A true master of the art can move quickly and quietly while performing *hakobi*, so much so that they can move across the main stage with little to no sound or vibration. The movements of the feet change and vary depending on character or style.

This can be useful to incorporate into Western theatrical performance pedagogy as a method of showing the different ways a body can move. Acting Students walk through life, both on and off stage, with quick intention. The energy that is generated from the self while on stage creates a natural enthusiasm to move differently than one might see in their everyday life. When people are focused on a circumstance or conflict that requires all of their attention, they actually move very little. This is because their attention is no longer focused on how they appear, only on

the task or situation in front of them. Noh takes this principle and teaches it as a form of rich gesture. Actors prioritize and choreograph their movements in great detail, so as to show the audience that when they do move, it is for a reason. It is never idle or subconscious, which is a skill Western actors could benefit from. In my opinion, young actors often add extraneous movement onstage out of self-consciousness or to seem interesting, but the effect is often distracting. While behavior should retain some semblance of spontaneity, the best way to replicate certain movements each performance is by understanding the ways in which the body makes that movement, and how to compose the arrangement of it.

Music is also an important component of Noh drama. Together with the acting and dance, it invokes a truly haunting, beautiful experience. The *Ji-utai*, or chorus, performs what is known as the *shōmyō*, or the Noh chant, whose origins can be traced back to Buddhist traditions in India, where group chanting was used to help in meditation. A few iconic instruments accompany the chanting performed during Noh: two types of drums (one played with the hand, and one played with a stick) and a Japanese flute. The music creates an atmosphere of solemn contemplation, which is relevant to the practice of Zen Buddhism. The music pays homage to the practices used during Buddhist meditations, much like the singing and chanting.

Masks are another identifiable feature of Noh. These masks are made relatively expressionless, and the actor uses body language, movement, and light to adjust the mask and achieve the desired expression. We look to Meineck again to compare Greek masks to those in Japanese Noh:

“The same structural distinctions found in Greek masks can also be seen in traditional Japanese Noh masks, and several studies have been undertaken to try to learn how its fixed face seems to be able to change its expression when placed at different angles in performance. In one, a Noh mask was tilted in different directions and subjects were asked to report the expression they read in the face when it was placed at these angles. When the mask was tilted backward, most of the subjects saw happiness, and when tilted

forward, the face appeared sad. One interesting facet of this study was that there was a marked divergence in interpretation between different cultural groups, with a Japanese control group reading different responses compared to the British group. Yet, both groups saw the mask change its emotions at the same time when manipulated, just different emotions” (95).

What we can determine from Meinecks findings on this study of the Noh masks is that the conversation audiences have with masks is instinctual. Even if audiences from other backgrounds determined different expressions from those masks, they could still communicate with them. This is because mask work is an interpretive form of physical art. The masked actor can certainly assist the spectator in translating their message, but it is ultimately up to the audience to justify the mask. It should be noted that there are many forms of mask performance that are studied across different cultures and methodologies. The important aspect to remember when doing this is to give respect and credit to the style you work from, which is why to incorporate Noh one must first look at the spiritual connections to the mask work involved.

Many Noh masks reference historical or spiritual figures from Japanese mythology. Some masks represent young women and men, but others represent gods like Hannya, the demon horned mask, who was once a beautiful woman turned into a spiteful and jealous kami spirit. The Shite is often the only actor permitted to wear a mask, although there have been cases that require other characters to wear them as well. It was also customary for Noh actors to craft and design their own masks for plays, and that tradition has remained true for many who still perform the craft. This example of passing down tradition is prevalent all throughout Noh, and reinforces the idea of preserving the Noh of old as much as possible in the Noh performed today.

## RITUAL ASPECTS

Spiritual significance and historical legends abound in Noh theatre and performance. However, when we look at the history of Noh, we also must consider the composition of the

original intended audience. As was mentioned earlier, *Johakyu* was an important component of *bugaku*, and was first performed during the Heian period. Audiences were primarily from middle to upper class, while Kagura was being performed at shrines, temples, and for events of spiritual cleansing. As Zeami started to perfect the art that would eventually evolve into Noh, the audiences consisted of the shogun, and top military and governmental officials. By the turn of the 15th century, there were efforts to build theatres, establish troupes, and create schools to study and preserve the performance of Noh. These efforts ultimately changed Noh's audience as more people from other social classes had new accessibility to the rituals and presentation of Noh.

With the advancement of Japan's culture and government, audiences adapted to new social changes. There was a shift in what audiences expected from Noh drama and performance. During its earliest period, audiences watched forebears of Noh perform to cleanse the community and its people with dance, music, and tribute. Modern audiences, however, witness these rituals in appreciation of history, religion, and artistic expression. This evolution inspired a multitude of Noh forms, and practices that were influenced by it.

## *Chapter Two: History and Religion*

The connections Noh theatre has to Japanese spirituality is unquestionable. Most consider the foundation of Noh to have started very early in Japanese history, as dances and performances first began in temples, then traveled to the imperial court as it became more popular. Lyn Shela Heck certainly echoes this opinion in her thesis *Suzuki's American Disciples: The Influence of Suzuki Method in the Work of Peter Grego, Robyn Hunt, Ellen Lauren, and Steve Pearson*. She writes “The graceful art form of Nō evolved out of a rich tradition of performing arts” (65). In order to understand how Noh arose out of spiritual beliefs, we must go back to Japan's earliest inhabitants –the Jomon—who migrated to Japan from Korea and China during the Paleolithic Era. They believed that all things have a connection with nature and there are many examples of the Jōmon people practicing spiritual worship of nature. In the documentary *Jomon People and Their Lifestyle*, excavations performed in Hokkaido found objects and altars inside and outside the homes that led scholars to believe that the Jōmon people prayed not only to the gods connected to nature, but also in remembrance of those who had passed. (“A Short Documentary film: Jomon People and their Lifestyle”, uploaded by My trip TOKAMACHI, 03/01/2020, <https://youtu.be/IzIyngxiwPQ>) Many Noh and Kyogen plays tell stories with themes of nature and sustainability to highlight the importance of community and balance, which are key aspects to the development of Noh, as well as the continued practice of it. Balance and focus in movement while performing Noh is a given, but the ideology of slowing down and appreciating the significance and beauty of nature has been passed down from the early inhabitants of Japan.

Noh is the definition of classical Japanese theatre and has direct historical and cultural ties to one of the most influential periods in Japanese history. Though the actual date of when



Noh theatre was being developed is up for debate, the consensus is that Noh theatre officially began in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, then rose with immense popularity in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## JAPANESE RELIGION

Many of the Noh plays performed both in old and modern Japan were heavily influenced by Buddhism and Shintoism. Even well before Buddhism was traveling from China and Korea, religion was developing in Japan. The ancient people of Japan were already among some of the most spiritual natives in the world. In *History of Japan*, Mason and Caiger wrote “Bronze articles (swords, mirrors, and a bell-like object known as *dōtaku*) seem to have been used as symbols of power and for religious rituals, while iron was used by farmers and builders.” (17) They presented not only advanced intelligence and craftsmanship, but they also recognized their place in nature. They lived off the land, built from the land, and returned to the land after death. Even the act of burying their dead acted as a demonstration of their admiration for nature, and they were certainly influenced by its power.

While Japan was forming, the climate was in turmoil - increased temperatures caused the land to separate from the Korean peninsula, and then the islands were formed from frequent earthquakes and tsunamis. Early inhabitants of Japan had to cope with and adapt to survive their environment, learning to rely on trees providing nuts for their food and wood for their fires. They learned that heavy rains would allow them to collect potable water and leave behind clay and mud for crafting. They knew that, days after the rain stopped, fish and shellfish would come to the water’s surface to feed or wash ashore. It was from this devotion that their first religious text, and eventually their theatre, would emerge.

The earliest known scripture in Japan is the *Kojiki*, which was officially written in the very early part of the eighth century. It “recites the stories and genealogies of the ancient deities of the archipelago and of their descendants who people and rule the Japan of the present.” (Wheeler, Introduction) and is divided into three separate parts. First is the *Kamitsumaki* (上巻) “Upper Volume,” or also called the “First Volume,” which acts as a prologue to the *Kojiki* as a whole. The stories presented in this first volume are focused on the creation of the world and the birth of many other creation Gods, all of whom are in relation to different parts of nature. This first volume is significant when discussing religious connections to Noh as it is in this volume that Shinto belief is first documented.

Shinto generally means “Way of the Gods,” or “Way of the Kami.” It is an old and sacred practice that was established in Japan in the beginning of the sixth century and is considered to be animistic in origin. Followers of this practice believe that all natural objects, including flora, fauna, are beings with sentient existence and hold a soul within the body. These spirits are referred to as Kami. While the term pays tribute to divinities and spirits that exist in the natural world, it can also reference a godlike figure. Kami can mean deity, but also mind, or spirit, and even something as simple as an ideology. Often, it references the life that exists in the spiritual world, and the connection between that world and the physical one.

Let us return to Heck to get a better understanding of Shintoism, and its connection to Japanese performance: “...Shintō followers were required to participate in all temple rituals. Sarugaku and Dengaku performers were probably poor country people who were followers of the Shintō belief system. Therefore, this might indicate that both Sarugaku and Dengaku actors performed in the Shintō temple” (Heck 70). Heck explains the connection between religion and performance in Japan during its early years:

“Actors of Sarugaku may have performed exclusively in funeral rites, but it is more probable that they were best at performing funeral rites, yet performed in all rites. Thus, although it was Kanami and Ze-ami, -Sarugaku actors-who were credited with the development of Nō art form, Dengaku for it’s monomane was credited by Zeami” (Heck 70).

We can see these two forms of ritualistic and spiritual theatre as direct influences to the development of Noh, and that performances originally began in this setting. They would naturally evolve into court performances for Japanese nobility and military in the 14th century, but what is important is establishing that the religious performances that originated before the Muromachi period are equally significant to contemporary Noh performance. Though Shinto shrines featured prominently in the development of Noh, Zen Buddhism’s would also become intrinsic.

The easiest way to connect Noh with Shinto and Buddhism is through their teachings. Many Noh plays depict either deities or kami, and many of the scripts are written to recall the teachings of Buddha. Hammer mentions the importance of a “monastic life,” referencing the importance Buddhism places on a minimalistic way of living. If the body holds no attachments, there can be no suffering of the mind. Suffering is an unreal, or fabricated, hardship and the torments we experience in life are the result of a cycle perpetuated by attachments and connections we form. Relinquishing those attachments destroys that which is unreal, leaving behind a form that is empty. To achieve that emptiness is to reach enlightenment, and anyone who does so will, upon their death, achieve what is known as Nirvana. This means that those who follow Buddhism’s teachings will be free of the cycle of suffering, pain, and loss presented in life and be gifted an eternity of peace in the afterlife.

Noh theatre is also considered a purifying theatrical experience. Those who perform, direct, write, design, and help produce a Noh play are believed to be promoting and exhibiting

spiritual cleansing, and this is the direct connection between Noh theatre, Buddhism, and Shinto. Noh is not just performative and entertaining. It is ancient theatrical worship, similar to other forms of religious theatre, where teachings are explored and expressed through performance, and finally shared with an audience to use as a guide to living a more peaceful and devoted life. Becoming pure of mind and body are central principles to Buddhism, and thus are deeply connected to the development of Noh.

In Shinto, the act of purification tends to counteract the explosion of evil forces around you. Kami can be both benevolent and mischievous, and their temperament generally relies on the state of the mortal and immaterial world. Because kami don't exist as physical beings, they use elements in the environment to achieve their objectives or make their presence known. An example could be a spirit taking the form of a fox, which is a very common symbol of mischief in Japanese folklore as well as in Noh Theatre's famous play *Sesshōseki* (The Killing Stone). But, as I experienced at the Yasukuni Shrine, kami can take the form of an entire group of people, as well. If kami become agitated, start to cause trouble for people or communities, or if they wish to express gratitude for the gods, people who practice Shinto will pray at shrines or honor the kami through other methods. Prayer is what cleanses them and those who pray to the kami are actively purifying the land as well themselves. Ideally, audiences watching Noh theatre would experience the actors performing in this pure mind set and then, by extension, they themselves would take part in it. We can consider this similar, in a way, to the Greek philosophy about catharsis.

Let us look again to Meineck for a clearer understanding of catharsis. He writes "Aristotle's use of the term catharsis as a healing or purgation [was] induced by mimesis...producing emotional and empathetic responses in the audience" (Meineck 206). Noh

theatre seeks the same cathartic release as Greek theatre, and the intentions of the responses are the same. In experiencing catharsis, the spectator purges their emotions so that they may be made emotionally clean after the process. In Greek theatre, this is accomplished through making the audience experience fear and sympathy for the characters. The same idea of purging emotions can be attributed to Noh as, by witnessing characters experiencing, and eventually overcoming, tragic circumstances, the characters and audience will be made purer. By witnessing and participating in a new form of theatre, American audiences might better recognize how universal theatrical experience can be, and might appreciate the impact Noh theatre has had on Japanese theatre, such as we have seen from the connections to Japanese culture through religion and art.

### *Chapter Three: Zeami, Suzuki, and Applications to Western Theatre Pedagogy*

Actor training is a fundamental component of any academic theatrical pedagogy and instructors must be well versed in many different techniques to help students learn what will uniquely work for them while they are performing. Using Noh, and methods inspired by Noh, in higher education can be extremely beneficial to students as these practices offer alternatives to techniques based in realism to create a sense of ease and beauty on stage. To discover why this is, I will outline the teachings of Zeami, one of the most influential figures of Noh, and those of Tadashi Suzuki, who developed the Suzuki Method of Acting. I will argue that these are the two Noh-inspired methods that can be best integrated into Western collegiate theatrical programs. I will further compare these with existing Western practices, such as Meisner and William Esper, and outline how they can be blended together.

#### ZEAMI

Zeami (1363-1443) was both an actor and poet of excellent caliber. He is credited with having influenced the development of *sarugaku no*, which would eventually lead to the Noh we have come to understand. Zeami and his father, Kanami, developed the training for Noh and outlined the physical and psychological skills needed to achieve a successful performance. Kanami saw that Zeami exhibited advanced skills in dance, poetry, and philosophy and decided to teach Zeami all he knew of *Sarugaku no*. Zeami used those skills to eventually develop the Noh theatre we know today. Zeami wrote many treatises about Noh theatre (*Fushikaden* being the most famous) encompassing what he had learned from his father, as well as his own theories on performance.

One useful lesson from Zeami's teachings is the necessity of first discovering where the student has natural talent. In his book, *The Spirit of Noh: A New Translation of the Classic Noh Treatise the Fushikaden*, Wilson translates Zeami's perspectives on identifying skill in potential actors at the age of twenty-four by writing "The level of artistry that the actor may be able to achieve in his life is determined at this age. Thus, it is a crucial time to practice" (51). This process takes a lot of work on the educator's part. It also requires trust and vulnerability between the student and the educator. This is an important time for students to hone their acting skills, and to let go of the ego often associated with early performance success. Zeami continues, "...he may stand out in the eyes of others, and observers may praise him as 'exceptionally skillful'...he may rise unduly in people's estimation and may even begin to think of himself as exceptionally skilled. I must repeat again and again that this attitude is the enemy of the actor" (51).

Zeami comments here that actors often believe that once they have a solid grasp on a technique, and have received good reviews of their performance, there is no longer a need to continue any additional study or advancement. Such beliefs reveal an actor's immaturity, and is often quickly unlearned as they grow. Teachers shouldn't pressure their students to fit into a preconceived mold, and should always encourage them to expand their horizons, but they must also help them identify what they do well, and where they may be less successful. This indication helps students see where their skills are most valuable for work and guides them toward weaknesses that can be improved upon.

In reference to the transition from novice to experienced actor, Zeami writes "During this period, the actor's Noh reaches its absolute height. If he has profoundly understood and mastered the items...he should be established in his art, acknowledged by the public, and secure in his reputation" (52). During this time, an actor also begins to articulate their creativity and process

more effectively. Their physical and emotional development allows them to feel more confident and comfortable in themselves, which translates to skillful performances.

Zeami's timeline for a Noh actor's training demonstrates his acute awareness of the way audiences received Noh performances. Noh actors were trained to have a strong relationship with the audience. Their voices needed to carry, whether it was outside, in an intimate space, or on a stage and Zeami believed that the body and voice were the most important tools available to help actors achieve beautiful performances, and that actors could only perform at their peak when these are in conjunction. An imbalance in one will impact the other. When an actor's mind is clouded by fear, stress, or uncertainty, these emotions negatively affect the way they move or speak. With Zeami's teachings in mind, one way to begin to stimulate the body and voice to work is to recognize both its capacities and its limitations. This includes understanding strengths and weaknesses in the physical body, as well as exploring the full range of the voice and listening to the pitch and sound that arises. One exercise that refers to this is called "*First pitch, Second Ki, Third Voice*." The exercise begins with the students sitting in a circle, with the instructor in the middle. The instructor must have an object that makes a long, continuous sound, much like a singing bowl. The instructor then taps the side of the bowl, or makes the sound, and the students take in the sound as it fills the space, identifying the pitch without trying to match it yet. This is what is recognized as "First Pitch." The instructor continues to make the sound and guides students to open their mouths slightly and breathe through their nose into the center of their stomach, then push the air out of their mouths. The fill and release of air from the belly is what is referred to as "Second Ki." The fullness in the core is where ki is stored, and it travels through the body to release sound. Finally, after the students take another inhale, they use the air to produce a sound similar to the pitch. This is called "Third Voice."



This exercise demonstrates the motion of sound, and acknowledges the source of t sound in the body. It also identifies how one interprets pitch and volume in their own way. This exercise works to examine where the sound moves through the body, as well as where the student's natural pitch lies. This lesson can be an excellent starting point in guiding the student through more exercises over time that strengthen their natural sound.

Supported sound is what Zeami calls *ki*, and it is what allows the body to sustain the pitch of the sound. Noh requires actors to speak long and complex speeches that must be properly supported. This early lesson on Noh breath teaches beginning students the importance of connecting breath to the body to better improve vocal strength and support. This is also a useful lesson in teaching students that even if we may attempt to match pitch with the sound, we might always just be a little off. That no matter how hard we try, we can never achieve perfect pitch every time. It is a lesson in humility, and acceptance of failure, both of which help ease the struggle in controlling the body and breath. It is the acknowledgement of our imperfections, which is never something to fight; instead, it is something to embrace.

The idea of embracing imperfection is among many of Zeami's beliefs on theatre. He believed that artists should always work to expand their craft, and never become comfortable with their level of mastery. He believed that every performance was sacred, and Raz references the words of Zeami in regard to this as he writes "Now as flowers...bloom in due season, their timeliness and their rarity are the delight of all. [I]n the Noh also, the Flower consists in non-stagnation of performance. Passing from one style to another without stagnation gives novelty" (257). The flower is difficult to decipher in this case, but not impossible. Most consider the Flower to be the definition of how the Noh actor uses their body in a beautiful and focused way. However, this definition can go even deeper when applied to Western theatrical pedagogy. The

flower could also be described as the beauty in the performance itself, as well as the significant moments within it. Our Western understanding of this concept is often referred to as engagement, and all who involve themselves in a performance of theatre can be considered participants in the creation of the Flower, including the actors, the attendants, musicians and singers, and the audience.

This lesson on the Flower is an excellent way to contextualize physicality for young acting students. When we consider movement and gesture through space, we often only think of our own body, but more than one body can move through a space and that body can be another person or an object like a chair or table. The trick is to maintain the Flower, or full composition, without losing the truthfulness of the character or object. Actors should move with beauty and fullness, but cannot become lost in physicality to the point they become dishonest in their movements.

Practitioners can begin to play with this quality of movement through what is called *monomane*, or imitation. This exercise teaches actors to imitate people and spirits commonly depicted in Noh text and myth. The exercise begins with the students standing in front of one another in parallel lines. From there, they are instructed to imitate different character types that are popular in Noh drama. Examples of this can include demons, emperors, or soldiers. As they embody these characters, their partners will do the same with a different one. After a few minutes, they are free to move outside of the lines. Students can begin to explore movement and how those characters interact with the world. Rather than looking at the characters as extensions of themselves, they see them as separate beings with unique movements. This exercise would be useful in Western theatrical acting and movement classes, either on its own or combined with other movement methods, to explore different qualities of gesture through mythical characters

and circumstances. Zeami refers to *monomane* as the key aspect to the roleplay seen in Noh. There is no effort to convince the audience that the interaction between characters is real, or is placed in a realistic setting. The objective is, instead, to remove the self from the performance so the true intent of the character can come forth and be properly represented. When one is truly performing *monomane*, the actor is no longer thinking about trying to be a perfect imitation, or how to convince the audience of their talent in dance or song. *Momomane* means the complete emptying of the mind, so the moment, or the Flower, between the actors can fully blossom.

It is important to note that *monomane* is not about creating an empty imitation of character; in fact, it is quite the opposite. One might read the emptying of the mind as working under the condition of doing nothing at all, and this is understandable, but the process of emptying the mind for work is more about surrendering the ego and personal attachments to character. By working with the assumption that the mind is empty, the character and the text are the only materials the actor uses to create that character on stage, rather than pulling from their own personal opinions and experiences. There is room for creativity as movements, gestures, and the rhythm can all vary based on character and story, but the stories performed in Noh are so heightened and mythical that the actor cannot possibly use their experiences in life to justify the actions of such godlike characters. It is instead about playing these mythical stories in a way that is entertaining and educational. This can be applied to contemporary roles in a way, as the actor can now take a character and fully recognize them as their own individual with their own ideology and morality. This is particularly beneficial in teaching students that there can be a healthy separation between character and actor, and that the morality of the characters we play do not always need to match what we believe.

As actors embody these characters, they must learn to move with a gentle but strong body. Zeami refers to this subtle movement as *yugen* (170), and the term implies profundity in subtle and graceful movements. In Zeami's *Shikadosho* defines *yugen* as "A white swan with a flower in its bill; is this not the presence of *yugen*?" The gracefulness and beauty in the swan is not just about simplicity and peacefulness; they are also completely natural. A swan does not attempt to convince the viewer that it is a swan. The flower in the beak does not imitate swan behavior; it simply is. The image is beautiful because it is a natural and true representation of its authentic, subtle behavior.

Exercises that teach the fundamentals of *yugen* can be effective in educating students on the power and weight of both movement and stillness, demonstrating that both contain fullness and intention and will give them a stronger connection to their crafted characters. Where Zeami teaches effective lessons on traditional Noh performance, Tadashi Suzuki adapted and modernized Noh theatre training and transformed into his own methodology.

## SUZUKI

The Suzuki method of acting was developed by director Tadashi Suzuki in conjunction with the Suzuki Company of Toga. Together they developed what became known as the Suzuki Method, which has since been adopted into many Western theatrical training programs, including those at The Juilliard School and the Saratoga International Theatre Institute, which was created in partnership with American theatre director Anne Bogart. Suzuki's style of actor training is rooted in Noh performance, and includes stylized movement, and the strength of body and breath. Suzuki defines his method of acting training as such: "The main purpose of my method is to uncover and bring to the surface the physically perceptive sensibility which actors had originally, before the theatre acquired its various codified performing styles, and to heighten

their innate expressive abilities.” This harkens back to Zeami, as Suzuki reinforces the idea that students have naturally gifted talents and perception and that it is the job of the practitioner to identify what those abilities are.

Suzuki’s method focuses on understanding the different types of energies we produce, and that our impulses are often suppressed as we move through our lives. It is my opinion that young actors often feel the need to silence or modify the ways in which they naturally speak, act, and behave, with or without intention. In some cases, this can be good, as improvement and bettering oneself is an important part of succeeding in any profession. Western theatre practices, however, demand that actors be able to identify their feelings and reveal authentic responses so as to achieve what Suzuki calls “cozening.” This refers to when an audience becomes so invested and attracted to the energies and actions portrayed by an actor, artist, improvisation, or text, that they cannot help but focus all of their attention on the performance itself. This is similar to Zeami’s concept of the Flower, as related to nature, connection, and audience stimulation.

Suzuki’s conception of cozening does not encourage overacting thinking, or analytical deduction. He is a proponent of studying the human condition, and believes that the audience will be drawn to the actor’s authentic presence and speech: “not...through intellectual interpretation of text, but rather when the act of speaking itself becomes the drama” (144). Actors hold energy in themselves, and it is this energy that brings the text to life and lifts it off of the page. Suzuki identifies three key aspects to physical awareness and body control: energy production, breath calibration, and center of gravity control. Suzuki calls these three elements “Energy, Oxygen, and Gravity.”

In Western performance pedagogy, there is little conversation about how these elements might contribute to the overall quality of performance. More often than not, instruction and

adjustments in performance encourage the actor to remain focused on their scene partner, or consider their overall objective in the scene. Learning about these qualities, and integrating them into Western performance pedagogy would give acting students a new way of practicing how their bodies move and function through the acting space.

When looking at how energy manifests in the body, Suzuki refers to it as either “Animal” or “Non-animal,” energy. Animal energy is the actor’s uninhibited presence, and how they naturally interact with the environment. Think back to Zeami’s imagery of the Swan and the Flower when defining *yugen*. Similar to the swan, humans also have a natural response to stimulants and objects around them. They interact with these natural objects from a place of evolutionary understanding. For example, when a person takes a hike through the woods on a sunny afternoon, they can experience feelings of peace, curiosity, and joy. However, if the woods are dark and cold, a person might experience feelings of fear, trepidation, and worry. This is the body behaving with animal energy. This is the natural, instinctive response to the stimuli around us.

Non-animal energy is what Suzuki determines as contrived, or unnatural, stimuli in our environment. Suzuki references the telephone and internet as being examples of non-animal energy. Another way to think about the difference between animal and non-animal energy is in the act of swimming. When a person moves through the water with their body, they are using animal energy. When they ride a boat through the water, they are using non-animal energy. These objects, while useful in our everyday life, can become distractions when natural responses are called for on stage. Nelson Chia further comments on the differences between these energies. “In other words, culture, according to Suzuki, resides in the body that produces animal energy rather than man-made entities that are used to build civilization. When we apply this

differentiation to the theatre, we realized that most contemporary theatre are modernized and rely heavily on non-animal energy in almost every aspect of its production. In comparison, traditional performances such as Noh theatre, while also modernized at certain levels, maintain a higher reliance on animal energy in most aspects of its production” (*Chia, 2013*). We can apply this concept to Western theatrical pedagogy by helping actors reconnect to their impulses, so they can avoid substituting authentic connection with artificial imitation. Even though Noh training encourages imitation, as seen with Zeami’s *monomane* technique, this doesn’t mean those imitations are empty, or dishonest.

Suzuki also confronts the idea that the more non-animal energy we interact with, the more our natural world becomes a place of performance when he writes “We have been provided with a world where we can play with a dynamic spectrum of sensations, even in our daily life. Now, even everyday life has become a sort of theatrical environment” (906). This is certainly seen in Western performance pedagogy. Western entertainment has experienced a massive shift, as the advancement of technology and social media has made acting, entertainment, and performance more accessible to a wider range of audiences, and artists. This certainly has had a positive impact, as more people contribute to the creation of art and performance, thereby enriching available content. However, the fact that this can now happen inside a bubble can cause students in Western performance pedagogies to lose the essential task that is prevalent in performance here in the West, which is connection. The more an actor replaces human connection with non-human contact, the more separated they become from their acting partner. It would be impossible in our present day to completely eliminate the use of technology, since it is just as essential to have access to the internet as it is to have real-life conversations, which is not to say that there cannot be a balance between these two energies. If live theatre performances

require intense connection between actors, then Suzuki exercises that train Animal energy, will help establish more natural connections and responses on stage.

Gravity and Oxygen are elements of Suzuki's method that train the body to establish stronger balance and a more powerful voice. This is also where movement comes into play, as Suzuki utilizes Noh techniques of walking, stomping, and gesture to educate students on unique ways the body can move and shift. Suzuki begins lessons on Breath and Gravity through the feet to establish roots into the ground and form a strong, solid base. All Suzuki exercises begin with an energized connection to the earth, as Suzuki himself explains, "...we come to understand that the body establishes its relation to the ground through the feet, that the ground and the body are not two separate entities. We are part of the ground." Suzuki believes that there is no separation between us and the earth when we move, and that our relationship with it strengthens our ability to perform. This is represented in the voice, as the stronger the connection is to the earth, the more powerful the voice will become.

By recognizing this connection between the feet and the earth, one can more confidently establish their movements. This is similar to the walking techniques seen in Noh, as the energy flows through the body from the top of the head to bottoms of the feet. Suzuki then freely encourages students to stomp to the beat of music, as well as utilizing a variety of different gestures and tempos that experiment with stillness and movement. These exercises reinforce Suzuki's objective: to release an actor's animal energy.

"The act of Stomping and Pounding not only signifies pushing down on the enemy, suppressing him or driving him away, but suggests as well the calling forth of the energy into oneself and the bringing to ripeness of that energy. Such gestures can drive away evil spirits and bring about magical results, permitting the good spirits to come into the performer with a strength greater than that of the bad" (1196).



He suggests that when these exercises make actors feel weak and limited by their lack of flexibility or strength, it represents the pain and struggle being expelled—in this case the bad energy—to make room for improvements, or the good energy. Their physical struggle is proof they are trying to improve, and their improvement is the result of overcoming struggle. As the student participates in these exercises, results will manifest internally and externally and they will experience increased strength and control on stage, while also having developed the emotional fortitude to overcome any obstacle.

By studying Suzuki method, the actor can learn to celebrate their strengths and improve the areas where they are weak. They can acknowledge their efforts, and hone their body and voice to be well-supported. Now that I have examined Noh style training from Zeami to Suzuki, it is important to look at the training done in the West.

## WESTERN ACTOR TRAINING

Actors in America begin their training by being introduced to the idea of empathizing with the character they are playing, even as they develop the ability to respond spontaneously based on their own experiences and personalities. The most common method to begin the study of this is through Konstantin Stanislavski.

Stanislavsky, author of *An Actor Prepares*, was an acting practitioner who built his method around the idea that to make a good performance, one must use their identity and life experiences as tools to create a believable character. Addressing the actor's purpose in performance, he writes

“His job is not to present merely the external life of his character. He must fit his own human qualities to the life of this other person, and pour into it all of his own soul. The

fundamental aim of our art is the creation of this inner life of a human spirit, and it's expression in an artistic form" (13).

The foundation of Western acting begins here. An actor in America must learn the ability to translate one's personality on stage to accurately represent the life of another, fictional person, and relate to the audience. Stanislavsky believed that to truly represent life on stage, one had to really live the scenario. This ideology inspired Sanford Meisner's method on the reality of doing, which he would pass down to his students—the most famous being William Esper.

William Esper, who developed the Meisner Technique, teaches that using one's own identity in performance is imperative. He believed that "The only thing you have to offer as an actor is your unique personality, that which is yours and yours alone" (*The Actors Art and Craft: William Esper Teaches the Meisner Technique*, Esper, 2008, pp 52). Esper's ideas about character development and acting sum up the heart of American actor training: to be a strong actor, one must know everything about their own personal behavior and connecting to this "true" person is the key to achieving believable performances. He follows Sanford Meisner's ideas about truth as the essential quality to impactful performances. "Truth is the blood of art. Without truth a piece of art fails to touch the human spirit...Imagination is pivotal for actors because everything we do, every piece of our craft, takes place in the world of imagination" (18).

As Sanford Meisner famously stated, actors "live truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (17), although in this case we must define what truth means. From a Western Acting perspective, truth on stage is utilizing one's skills to lie so well they appear as honest. Esper believed there was more to acting than simply lying, as he writes "This principle—the reality of doing—is the foundation of all good acting and the cornerstone on which all of Sanford Meisner's work is built. The focus of our work will therefore be on learning to *really do*. This is

our first step on the path to the art of acting.” (22) To create fantasy truthfully, one must acknowledge their own self first, as well as the world around them; this enables an actor to effectively separate from character.

Western theatre performance pedagogy can be improved upon by the inclusion of Noh training alongside other movement and physical methods to broaden the actors use of the body and imagination. As we know, Noh is not realism. Nor is it focused on conveying characters or narratives as believable. The act of performing Noh stimulates creativity and fantasy, while encouraging the actor to perform outside of their understanding of being human. This bears some resemblance to the techniques used in Michael Chekhov Technique. Lenard Petit, founding member of the Michael Chekhov School, writes that:

“...The real work of the actor is to transform personal experience into a universal and recognizable form of expression that has the ability to change something in the spectator.” He continues, “The actor looks to the essence of things. In the essence are found the building blocks from which he can recreate the world of the character. The details are created out of the essence” (10).

Here one can see similarities between Chekhov, Zeami, and Suzuki; by engaging both the actors' conscious and unconscious mind, they can perform as figures and characters outside of their own life experience. Their personal creative spirit is joined together with character, and is not limited to the actors' individual experiences. Chekhov technique uses exercises such as psychological gesture, to release the actors imagination and fantasy, so that “the ego of the character is not subjected to the ego of the actor” (11). The same can be seen in Zeami's *monomane* exercise. By imitating a character, one can see past the limitations of themselves and instead look to the qualities and personalities that arise from other characters. Just like Chekhov, Noh theatre performance also separates the personal self from the character so that the actor's work is no longer a representation of a person, but is now looked at through the perspective of “artistic creation”

(11). This idea of artistic creation is a founding precept of Zeami's Noh training. In the documentary *Behind the Mask of the World's Oldest Surviving Dramatic Art*, famed Noh Actor Michishige Ueda explains the importance of defining the separation from actor and character Noh performance: "This is a sacred area. Beyond these boundaries is the area for human mortals, here is the area for gods. And by coming here, I can be pure. I can enter the realm of gods." Here Michishige clearly lays out what actors of Noh and Chekhov want to experience while they perform: the act of removing oneself from the performance means that the character can emerge with no biased perception of, or interruption by, the weakness of the human self.

The question then becomes, why include Noh theatre and Suzuki training in Western pedagogy if Chekhov teaches similar ideals in performance? One reason is that Chekhov encourages training in emotional and psychological analysis, whereas Noh and Suzuki focus on physical changes. By combining them, the actor has access to a new range of psychological *and* physical control. In *Bodily Awareness: The Theatre Writings of Michael Chekhov and Tadashi Suzuki*, Colin Michael Rust argues for the blending of Chekhov and Suzuki:

"Chekhov's psychological gesture would be a good tool to help connect the feelings and thoughts of the actor to movement upon the stage. Radiating, floating, flying, and molding exercises fulfill a similar role in further developing the connections between movement and psychology. Conversely, Suzuki's method which begins with stamping upon the ground could be utilized to strengthen the actor that is unsure of the body's connection to the ground or the actor that lacks the stamina required to perform the role. Building the relationship with the ground allows the actor to be centered and focused when working upon the stage... These methods may have key differences that lead to the development of very different types of actors. The most evident difference between these two methods is that throughout Chekhov's process, he favors the use of the imagination or thought to develop the other components of action and Suzuki's favors the use of movement to further develop the other components of action."

Here we can see the precepts of Western theatre pedagogy and classical Noh training are not as different as they might initially appear, and can be blended together to teach acting students the power of emotional and physical movement. Esper's Meisner is also an excellent technique to

pair with Noh performance ideology because both encourage and teach exercises that clear the mind for work. Repetition, the most famous Meisner exercise, essentially encompasses Suzuki's idea of establishing Animal energy between actors. The exercise is about reading the other actor, fully taking them in as a person, and deciphering what energy they are giving off in response to the repetition. It requires intense focus and concentration to successfully connect and read another actor while you are performing, and giving students exercises from Suzuki and Zeami can be helpful in teaching them other methods to establish this connection.

In my opinion, the reason Noh theatre training is essential to Western theatre pedagogy is because there is less attention on concrete storytelling, instead stimulating the imagination to work outside of traditional believability. Actor training should be diversified, so students can expand their understanding of theatre as an art form, and question what the requirements are to define theatre.

## *Chapter Four: Audience Reception*

Western theatre is primarily derived from European classical practices. Over time, however, the west has become far more diverse, and Western theatre should reflect that diversity both in representation and in practice/methodology.

Incorporating Noh theatre performance techniques into contemporary Western theatre pedagogy is, essentially, discussing the integration of an East Asian classical theatrical form into the modern, American theatre landscape. To discover whether that will work, we must examine what function theatre serves in both American and Japanese societies, and examine the expectations and perceptions of audiences in both cultures. Only then can we understand how Noh training might impact American performances, and how they might be perceived. Why do audiences - American or Japanese - attend the theatre? Would elements of Noh theatre be relevant to American audiences, and vice versa? In what ways would Noh training impact an American performance, and how would those elements be perceived by American audiences?

To answer these questions, we must first look at the initial relationship between performer and audience. From there, we can determine why American and Japanese audiences desire to go to the theatre, which can include historical and cultural evolutions that inspired these two countries to develop different ways to appreciate seeing theatre. Then finally to see the ways in which Noh theatre practices can be integrated into Western audiences so as to enrich and challenge their perceptions of performance.

### PERFORMANCE RECEPTION THEORY

In *Towards a Theory of Performance Reception* Edith Hall defines classically based Performance Reception as:

“Performance Reception, at its most reductively defined, is the study of the process by which A impersonates a B derived from a classical prototype before C. Although other contributing subjectivities—those of translators, adaptors, authors, directors—are usually involved, it is the dynamic triangular relationship between ancient text, performer, and his or her audience that above all distinguishes Performance Reception from the study of the ways in which ancient texts have been received elsewhere.” (52)

Although Hall’s writing focuses on classical Greek and Roman theatre, it is my opinion that the relationship between text, actor, and audience does not exclude other forms of classical and modern theatre, especially Noh drama. Because Noh theatre involves heightened text and performance, it changes the way the audience interacts with it.

Hall also touches on the theory of spectator and performer by including the connection between text, audience, and actor. Theatre’s universal similarity centers around the relationship between spectator and performer, but also the space that connects them. Let us return to Suzuki for his perspective on the audience reception, and the relationship between art and spectator: “Theatre does not come into existence simply through an abstract encounter between the so-called actor and the so-called audience, but through a unique space, a mediator that unifies all those present.” Theatre begins when the audience and storytellers mutually agree to meet, and engage in the world of fantasy, but the relationship between audience and performer remains complex and fluid. Many artists, playwrights, and designers play with this relationship in the hopes of challenging the audience’s established perception of it.

Hall’s ideas about subverting the theatrical space are also important when considering the integration of Noh theatre into Western Pedagogy. One must also take great care and consideration for what effect they want to have on the audience, since placement, connection to space, and text can all either help the audience either connect or disassociate with the piece. Susan Bennett offers insights to the relationship between space, audience, and performer:

“The model this study will use is also of two frames. In this instance, however, the outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space. The audience’s role is carried out within these two frames and, perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection.” (139)

The outer and inner frames Bennett references are in direct correlation with the elements Hall discusses in their definition of Performance Reception theory. Bennett is saying that theatre occurs when these two frames—the outer playing space of the theatre and the internal dramatic events—directly correlate with one another. But do such moments occur in Noh performances as well?

The line that intersects between real and imaginary is easier to identify in Western performances than in Noh. This is because American theatre focuses on blurring the lines between real and imaginary, while Noh theatre works to create separation between actor, text, and audience. American theatre often works to create a convincing illusion that the audience can lose themselves in; this can include elements like costumes, set design, and performance techniques. Noh, on the other hand, rarely feeds the audience a realistic illusion. Both are excellent examples of how audiences from each region have developed certain expectations, or rituals, for their theatre. These audiences understand what going to the theatre means, and what is to be expected in that environment. Bennett relates back to methods of Audience Reception from Karen Gaylord, noting that these rituals are the product of theatrical inheritance.

“This ‘history’ constructs the outer frame and is confirmed by the existence of commonly acknowledged theatrical conventions. At the centre of the inner frame is the combination and succession of visual and aural signs which the audience receives and interprets, some fixed but the majority in flux, and which, as we saw earlier, signify on a number of possible levels....” (139).



Bennett's phrasing of "commonly acknowledged theatrical conventions," could give one pause. What are the commonalities in attending a play or performance? If American Melodrama is a common form of theatre in America, it would stand to reason that many people who attend it have some semblance of what behavior is acceptable. But what might happen when someone outside of that system sees a production of melodrama, like *The Count of Monte Cristo*? The same questions could be raised about Noh theatre. What occurs when an unfamiliar audience member views a production of *Atsumori*? Bennett would consider this moment the definition of Brechtian Alienation, which can connect with the purpose of Noh when she writes that "While empathy for a character...is to be avoided in performance, emotion is not denied..." (29). The Alienation effect Brecht created, alongside the isolating elements that audience members can feel when they experience theatre outside of their realm of expectations, is what makes Audience Reception theory an important topic in this discussion. The isolation, or separation, that an audience member might experience upon seeing a performance of Noh is a very real outcome, and it is important to consider what response would result from that.

A director or artist must balance consideration of the audience as both a singular entity, and multiple individuals. While it is true that each audience member will have an individual experience, and that experience is personal and valid, the attempt to satisfy each audience member, individually, would be a fruitless endeavor. There are many factors that can prevent spectators from having the same collective experience. Bennett relates this to an experience she had while watching a performance of Grand Kabuki in America:

"The performance was in classical Japanese but was also available in simultaneous translation into English through the rental of a headset. Yet the addressees were split into those who watched (no headset) who understood Japanese dialogue, those who watched (no headset) who did not understand the Japanese dialogue, those who watched with

headsets who understood (some) Japanese (and some conventions of Kabuki), and those who watched with headsets who had no understanding” (154).

This example is pertinent when discussing Audience Reception Theory and Noh theatres integration into Western theatrical pedagogy as audience members will all receive the performance differently, and the acknowledgement of measuring expectations with performance is imperative to how much the audience will participate in it. With this in mind, let us consider what, exactly, audiences in Japan and America expect from their theatre, and where they inherited those desires from.

#### JAPANESE AND AMERICAN AUDIENCES

Noh theatre audiences have changed significantly since Noh was first popularized in the Muromachi period. As the audiences shifted, so did their expectations of Noh performance. In *No and Kyogen in the Contemporary World*, James R. Brandon writes “Impermanence is a central thematic concern of Japanese literature in general, and is of course one of the major themes of Noh. The pathos of physical change and its psychological effects are frequently referred to in a great many plays” (128). In addition to addressing change, Brandon also notes another common theme: questioning a character’s mortality. However, one must consider that though these concepts are still present in today’s theatre, the meaning of life and death was more significant to those watching Noh in the 14th century, as death, disease, and famine were raging far more aggressively than we see today (Mason and Caiger 155). The theatre became a safe haven for many, and as it evolved over time its artistic aspects would influence audiences differently.

In the 14th century, Noh theatre was performed outdoors, as a spiritual ritual. Eventually, it transitioned to being performed indoors for those who were rich, influential, or powerful in

Japan: Emperors, Shoguns, Lords, and other powerful figures at the time. (PBS Learning Media, 2014, 0:00:40) Before then, during the Heian period, it was more common to see Noh performed at shrines and temples, which is where many of the Noh plays involving poetry and spirits originated. (PBS Learning Media, 2014, 0:00:58) As time went on, Noh was popularized among other social groups, which would then expand to the modern audiences we recognize today.

One can consider Bennett's perspective on the collective experience to deduce what viewing Noh was like. In *Japanese Noh Plays*, Toyotiro Nogami compares the experiences of modern and ancient audiences. "But if you go to a Noh theatre, you will be surprised to find some of the audience gazing at a libretto open on their knees, and rarely looking at the stage, but following the actor's recitation so that it may improve their own. In olden times hardly any of the audience went to the theatre with a libretto" (8). Modern Japanese audiences tend to follow along with the script to get the full grasp of the story, rather than focusing on character, whereas audiences from years prior attended Noh without such resources.

One reason for the presence of text in modern day Noh performances has much to do with the change in theatrical space: those who designed modern spaces made it a point to keep the stages as closely related to the original performances as possible. While the spatial design ultimately changed the way Noh audiences viewed the theatre, they also intentionally remained dedicated to the historical and cultural aspects of Noh.

Gestures, movement, and content also play a part in audience enjoyment for Noh. During the Heian period, the spiritual and religious aspects of Noh would have been more popular, as Noh was mostly performed as religious prayer. Whereas in the Muromachi period, historical and poetic plays were more prominent, as the audience was primarily made up of high-ranking

military officials and powerful political figures. So, what do modern day audiences value?

Brandon gives further insight into this:

“It is undeniable that the contemporary experience of no theater retains a special relation to the past, to the tradition of no. That is one of its most appealing characteristics and one of the features that distinguishes no from other dramatic forms, both Japanese and non-Japanese. The semiotics of no, its grand and exquisitely articulated system of difference within the categories of movement, sight, sound, and suggestion, is in many ways amenable to artistic transmission; much of it can, and must, be learned consciously and taught to others” (139).

Brandon puts forth the idea that modern Noh audiences desire for Noh theatre to be a combination of history and culture. From the slow and thoughtful dancing and gestures to the ancient text, modern audiences still want to see Noh because it acknowledges and connects them to the history of their community. Just as Noh performances strengthen the community, so does theatre in America. In the era of Melodrama, audiences valued events and plots that triggered sensation including, as in Noh, history and cultural inheritance.

Melodrama first became popular during the 1800s, but it would take another century for melodrama to fully develop. Mercer and Shingler both agree in *Melodrama: Genre, Style, and Sensibility* that the quality most consistent with every iteration of melodrama is the emphasis on emotional reaction. Melodrama is focused on using conflict, characters, and intense narrative plot to invoke powerful responses from audience members. The plot almost always revolves around simple characters with exaggerated characteristics. Audiences were quickly drawn to the emotional qualities of melodrama, as they helped distinguish between the harshness of the real world with the simplicity of an emotional fantasy one.

Thomas J. Riner writes in *Contemporary Audiences and the Pilgrimage to No* that opera, a form of melodrama, has many similarities to Noh:

“To choose a Western parallel, producers and directors have faced this problem with opera for several decades now. Opera, like the no \*, is a form of musical drama for which ordinary audiences are not prepared; they must be induced to learn before they can enjoy. In order to make such learning, and such understanding, more fully related to contemporary concerns, opera directors re stage works in fashions that could hardly have been imagined by their creators, glossing them for political, social, and religious messages usually only vaguely suggested by the originals” (184) .

In this way, Noh and melodrama are very similar. Changes and adaptations of Noh drama makes it more accessible to modern audiences, particularly when those audiences include foreigners.

Noh adapted to include translations, like the ones Bennett experienced watching Kabuki, and by modernizing the theatre space. Melodrama adapts to its audience as well, and contemporary productions provide a blend of historical and contemporary elements in staging, design, and performance technique. Though it is important to note that melodrama and Noh have different intentions, the tactics are not as different as they might appear.

If melodrama is a concept that Western audiences can support and enjoy, but the outcome of the performance is different than that of Noh, how might Western audiences react to Noh performance? Toyotiro believes that foreign audiences are actually excellent spectators for Noh:

“Foreigners, on the contrary, looking at it through unprejudiced eyes, will be able to grasp its essence. Most foreigners I know say that the Noh appeals to them more than the Kabuki, and well may they say so. In the Kabuki plays, if the actor's speech is not understood, it is difficult to follow the development of the action, but in the Noh plays, the plot is simple, and a spectator may easily grasp the theme with a few words of explanation beforehand, and leave the rest to his eyes and ears” (9).

Toyotiro makes the point of acknowledging that the language in Noh is difficult, but also that Western audiences gain much from observing Noh performance. Like melodrama, the plots in Noh are simple. Riner has a similar response to contemporary audiences in Noh:

“In one sense, we might say that the no could well begin here; after all, these performing traditions, even if altered, have never been lost. One might argue that, in fact, contemporary audiences might well react more positively to the no than to practically any

other dramatic form, since the performances use techniques familiar to spectators for many centuries” (185).

Riner presents the argument that Western audiences could be impacted and benefit from the incorporation of Noh into performance pedagogy, but also marks the challenges when he notes that “...without considerable education to the demands and possibilities of the no, they inevitably see such productions as exotic” (185). I am of the belief that this is precisely why Noh drama should be shared with Western audiences more widely. The only way audiences can be challenged by what their views and conceptions of performance is if they’re presented with a form of theatre that subverts their expectations. From there they can make their own assumptions on what that theatre means to them. But the essential factor is that the audience will have been exposed to something different regardless, and that alone is more useful to an audience than having never experienced it at all.

## *Chapter Five: Experiencing Noh Drama at The National Noh Theatre*

The following chapter will detail my journey to Japan to view a *Nogaku* performance at the National Noh Theatre in Tokyo. I will discuss what I observed and experienced and compare it to my experiences attending Western performances. I will then outline the elements of both to argue for incorporating Noh training into contemporary Western theatre and performance.

### THE EXPERIENCE IN COMPARISON

I am struggling with comparing the objective experience of viewing Noh, with the subjective elements that I enjoyed, though I must consider if that is even possible to accomplish. As both an actor and student of the theatre, it is challenging to try and separate the practical, fundamental aspects of a performance with the personal attachments I form around performance in general. I am, and have always been, a very willing and eager participant in theatre performance, so the chance to attend Noh theatre in Japan was an opportunity that had me at the pinnacle of artistic anticipation. However, as a Westerner it is important to acknowledge that my experience viewing Noh can only be described and detailed from the perspective of an outsider who has a deep appreciation for the style, aesthetics, history, and training of Noh. It is a beautiful and unique theatrical art form, and I am awed by the fact that the practice has remained intact for thousands of years, enabling me to reach back through history and experience a performance that is as close to the original conception as possible. The profound feeling of honor and privilege was not lost on me, and throughout my explorations of viewing Noh I hope to remain both honest and respectful to the significance of viewing Noh in person.

With that being said, it was surprisingly uncommon to hear Japanese people discuss or engage with Noh/Kyogen Theatre. I relate this experience to what I discovered after reading *Japanese Noh Plays* by Toyotiro Nogami:

“Yet, strange to say, they thoroughly understood the artistic intention of the Noh. The reason I say it is strange that they should understand the Noh is because not many, even among the Japanese, understand it well. This will be proved by asking Japanese ladies and gentlemen who you meet if they go to Noh performances. I am sure most of them will probably say that they do not. The Noh of today is, therefore, far from the life of most Japanese, and there must be few who really appreciate it. The reason why the Noh has become so neglected is that the speech and manner of its representation have begun to appear too antiquated to the Japanese of today.” (Toyotiro, pg 8)

Though Toyotiro's perspective on the lack of popularity in modern Noh theatre surprised me, I cannot deny that it makes sense. Because I am not Japanese, and was not raised in the culture of Noh, the information and content is all still new to me. Which I believe actually further defends my argument that Noh theatre can have an impact on Western audiences, so long as those spectators are willing to absorb something new. However, as members of that community, the routine of that theatre ritual may not always be desirable, similar in the way Western audiences might not always seek out Shakespeare performances or Greek adaptations. This perspective, in my opinion, has validity as an audience member's personal experience of disliking or liking a piece of art or theatre means that individual was willing to put themselves in a position to like/dislike it, which is a vulnerable and risky place to be as a spectator of theatre. I certainly experienced this fear while waiting for the Noh performance, so I attempted to observe the other audience members to gauge if others were showing the same timidity as I was.

I recall seeing a healthy mix between audience member backgrounds, and many of them appeared quite comfortable in the space. I speculate that it is quite uncommon in Japan for a Noh audience member to buy a ticket to a Noh performance without some knowledge on the subject. There were many Japanese audience members in attendance, but there were also a good number



of foreigners there as well. Perhaps I might have seen more foreigners in attendance if I had gone during the on season for tourism in Japan, which I believe impacted those in attendance that night.

While waiting for the performance to begin, I noticed that there was a distinct air of formality. People were dressed quite nicely, with some in very intricate and expensive kimonos, and the atmosphere was generally quiet and somber. At the same time, the theatre space felt very peaceful in the quiet. The sounds of walking, talking, and doors opening seemed to envelop the space in an interesting way. I recall noticing these sounds were both exceptionally clear and could be heard all throughout the lobby, but they died down so quickly and quietly it made me question if I had heard it at all. I suspected this was a product of the architecture, as the design elements of the theatre were inspired from Japanese Zen Buddhism, much like Noh itself. This made the disbursement of sound move through the lobby in a way that even the smallest noise felt loud and significant. As someone who tends to speak quite loudly, I felt pressured to lower my voice and temperament more significantly, so as not to disturb that of the room. In terms of sound and speech, there was a apparent shift when moving from the lobby to the garden entrance. The outside space meant audience members could participate in louder conversation, but never escalated to the point where it became a roar of noise.

While taking our seats, I noticed many people, both who appeared to be sitting alone or with others, had prepared scripts of the shows that were to be performed. When the first piece began, I saw a few people take out pens, pencils, and notepads. I assumed then that it was common to take notes or write during the performance, which was unique when compared to audience members in the West. I believe that it is far less common for audience members to take notes while watching a performance. This was a good example of the differences of engagement

between Noh theatre and American realism. Where Noh seeks for the audience to respond directly to the story and performance in real time, American realism works to connect the audience with the narrative by establishing the fourth wall to make the audience be silent and unseen observers to the characters and their lives. I would find the differences in these two forms challenging to observe at first.

The first piece we saw was called *SAKO NO SAMURO*, or *The Hunter and the Priest*. It was the Kyogen play, and quite honestly, I still don't fully understand what the performance was about. I had to sit in the back and didn't have access to the translation screen yet. Even so, it was quite the Brechtian moment. I realized quickly that the experience would be very isolating. However, as I continued to experience it, the performance started to feel very strange. I had already heard the those fluent in Japanese struggle with understanding the language of Noh, but it was truly a mystery to someone who barely knew it at all. I would quickly realize that without a translation, I was completely lost in terms of story. I could only identify the characters due to their costume and props, but as for the narrative I felt a powerful separation.

Since the Kyogen was performed before the Noh, and I had no available translation, it was not only my first interaction with traditional *Nogaku* performance, but I was watching with absolutely no understanding of the material or narrative. There was a moment where the character, who I identified as the Hunter, pointed his bow and arrow at the Priest then declared something to the audience, which then made people laugh. This was significant to me, as I found myself unable to participate in this aspect of the performance alongside the rest of the audience. It was a unique experience to hear a language being spoken that you do not understand, while the people around you engage and interact with it in ways that you cannot. I had never been in that position before, as in America English and Spanish are both the most spoken languages. In my

experience, I have always been on the side of understanding. It was humbling to watch the Kyogen performance this way as it allowed me the opportunity to view theatre through a language that was not my own, which would stand as a reminder that understanding spoken language is not the only avenue of communication through performance. Because the language isolated me to such an extent, it allowed me more room to focus on the physicality of the Kyogen performance.

I was enthralled with the physical aspects of the performance. The movements were all so carefully and meticulously designed. The actors remained straight backed and stood in the basic stance often. They stood very straight and moved their bodies with much specificity. When they turned, they would twist with their whole body. With these motions, they also spoke with a precise and consistent rhythm. There was one motion that stuck out to me as a good representation of this combination of movement and vocabulary. The hunter character would stand with his feet apart, and then tightly pull the string of his bow before jumping into the air to lunge for the priest character. And while he did this motion, he said his line phonetically the same every time. Even when the line was something different, he would still say it the same way. Each time I saw him pull the bow string; I knew the vocal inflection would follow. Then the priest would react with fear or clarification, and a pause would happen, and finally the hunter would laugh in relief. It would repeat and repeat until the next big motion cycle. The facial expressions were also much more pronounced and identifiable. I could see the expressions of sadness, fear, and joy through the characters, which was different when compared to viewing Noh. So even though the language separated me from the narrative, I was still able to respond to the piece in my own way.

The subsequent Noh production was called *UNEME* or translated as “*The-Lady-in-Waiting*.” I had access to the translation screen this time, so I had a better idea of the narrative of the story. *Uneme* chronicled the journey of a monk traveling to Kyoto who runs into a woman at a shrine along the way. She tells him of the gods who guard the shrine and takes him to a pond close to the shrine. There, she tells him about a tale about a young woman who once served the emperor. She was his lady-in-waiting, or Uneme, and the two fell in love with each other. However, the emperor’s love would not last, and so the Uneme traveled to the pond to drown herself beneath the water. The woman reveals herself to be the ghost of the Uneme and walks to center of the pond before she submerges beneath the water. The monk performs a Buddhist ritual to release the Uneme’s spirit. After she emerges, she dances while recounting her tale and offering words of hope for the imperial family’s rule. The play ends with the Uneme wishing those who witnessed her story and dance be blessed with peace long life, then she descends back into the pond.

The drummers and flute player began the play, and the music they performed was incredibly captivating and haunting. This was also where the chorus and musicians began to chant and sing. There wasn’t a specific rhythm to their playing or singing, nor did they play at the same time. The bang of the drum and the sharp chime of the flute then created a melody that was both long and continuous. Throughout the play the music would fluctuate as the *Johakyu* shifted, and it did not stop until the characters began their dialogue. The music would then resume when the characters began to dance.

As the actor playing the monk walked across the bridge for the first time, it dawned on me just how slow the movements and walking were. The actor glided across the bridge so slowly, and with such skill, that it appeared as though he were floating just above the floor. The

long and folded kimono also assisted with this illusion. I could still see the stance beneath the kimono, however, and saw the actor standing perfectly straight with a slight bend to the knees. As he slowly and meticulously twisted his body to face the audience, I could see his hands were positioned in a soft, gentle fist with his thumbs over his pointer finger. He turned in such a way that he appeared both tight and fluid at the same time. It was as though someone had picked him up and spun him around by the top of his head. His torso and hips were so perfectly aligned that one would not move without the other. After he completed his walk across the bridge, the music stopped, and he began to speak.

The pronunciation and delivery of the actor's lines were significantly different than I had seen previously with the Kyogen. The Kyogen actors' speech was full of varying inflection and expression. The Noh actor's speech, however, followed a very strict cadence. There was also a vibrato to the Noh speech. Each word had an intentional shake to them. The composition of the stage was also used differently, as the Kyogen displayed more movement around the stage. Whereas in Noh the actors would stand or sit in the same spot for long periods of time. This made the movements performed by the actors even more significant, as the rarer the movement became, the more impactful it felt. This was particularly true when the Uneme was performing.

The Uneme was a unique character to observe physically. The actor playing the Uneme was the *Shite*, meaning lead actor, and was the only one wearing a mask. This signified her separation from the real world and her connection to the spiritual world. The kimono designed for the Uneme was exceptionally intricate, while the mask gave a neutral and feminine appearance to the actor. Her movements were also extremely particular. The intended mood *Uneme* seemed to convey was grief, so the movements of her arms and hands were often folded to cover her face, which is a common physical identification of crying in Noh. While she danced,

she performed many different movements I had yet to see. She spun both slowly and quickly, while frequently alternating between the two. The music also picked up tempo with the dance, and as the chanting intensified, so did her stepping and stomping. But even as the tempo increased with the shift of the *Johakyu*, the movements/music never became erratic or uncontrollable. The focus on the body was so intense that even while moving at a faster speed, the stiffness and strength never faded. After her final dance, she slowly walked across the bridge once more, signifying her return to the pond she resided in.

There was an emotional movement to watching Noh performed. The imagery that came to mind was being rocked as a child. The back-and-forth motion felt incredibly soothing. There was a moment while the Uneme was speaking when I started to get lost in the music and speech. I could feel my mind starting to wander, until it felt like I would fall asleep to the consistent rhythm. In that moment I recognized the power and influence of Zen Buddhism on Noh theatre. The high-pitched chime of the flute paired with the pounding drums and legato speech made me feel like I could genuinely fall into a trance.

Even though the movements, dancing, and music were all beautiful in my opinion, I had quite a muted response at the end of the Noh performance. I felt very tired from the music and singing, but also felt little to no emotional response by the end. This did not surprise or concern me, since Noh theatre is about focusing on a singular story and mood rather than connecting emotionally to characters. However, it was different the how I have experienced endings to performances in America. As previously stated, I am a very willing participant in performances, and often feel deeply for the characters and their circumstances. As an actor this empathy is useful when performing in America, as the deeper my connection goes to the character, I play the more realistic they will appear. Noh has no regard for this illusion, thus the response from the

audience is not about leaving the theatre weeping or cheering. It felt to me like the purpose was to leave pure, peaceful, and reformed.

## WHAT CAN BE GAINED?

After watching the Noh performance in person, I believe there are elements to both the performance and the training that can be useful to teach Western acting students. Understanding the control and power of movement are beneficial in teaching students that stillness is just as strong as motion, so long as it is used with purpose and intention. Noh actors showcased excellent skills in muscle control, and that restraint paid off in the performance as the motions they performed were so full of life and significance. Teaching this performance aspect to Western acting students can give them a new perspective on how movement looks on stage, and how to explore alternative ways to compose movement on stage. The separation from actor and character can also be a useful tool in demonstrating the ability to connect with the audience on different level. Rather than shutting out the audience and pretending they are not watching them, students can look to the audience as participants in the performance. They can acknowledge their presence, while performing for them as the embodiment of a story rather than as a complete recognizable character.

Western audiences can also gain from watching Noh theatre performed. Audiences can witness theatre that is intended to be emotionally distant, which can give them the opportunity to engage with storytelling meant to teach about life, rather than losing oneself in the magic and draw of seeing life replicated. By eliminating the illusion of life on stage and supplementing a storytelling experience, the audience can be more present in their performance

experience. But what I find most important is that those who witness or learn about traditional Noh performances can take with them an experience that is all their own, just as I did. They can learn from this classical style, and from there they can even adapt it into their own form of theatre practice. Just as Zeami did with *Sarugaku no*, and Suzuki did with Noh, others can take what they learned from Noh and create something new and extraordinary.



## *Conclusion*

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze the possible benefits and advantages of incorporating Noh theatre acting training and performance in Western performance pedagogy. Through this research and study this thesis has determined the ways Noh can be implemented into Western collegiate theatre education, and what the potential response might be from Western audiences to view Noh theatre performance.

Chapter one introduced the definition of Noh theatre and explained the inspirations for Noh theatre. Here the evolution of Noh theatre was explored and introduced Zeami as an influential figure in the development of Noh Drama. This opening to Noh theatre continued with explanations on the fundamentals to a Noh stage, and the physical movement that is often composed on it. Analyzing the staging and movement aspects of Noh led to discussions on the significant history of Noh design elements, and the ways in which they evolved from their early conceptions. There were comparisons made between Greek and Noh mask work, which highlighted that both were dependent on mask and movement to express the intended mood of the play. After analyzing basic stance and walking, this chapter concluded with the ways in which ritual played a role in the evolution of Noh, and the importance of recognizing spirituality as an aspect of Noh development when discussing its incorporation into Western theatre pedagogy.

Chapter two briefly discussed the political history connected with the development of Noh theatre. There were many examples of how Noh theatre evolved with the Japanese political climate, and that its popularity was in part thanks to the admiration nobility and military leaders had for the art form. From there the chapter continues with the spiritual aspects to Noh theatre,

focusing primarily on Shinto and Zen Buddhism as influences on the development of Noh theatre. This chapter concludes with comparing Noh and Buddhist philosophy with Greek classical theatre practice to discuss the ways in which Western audiences can benefit from viewing alternative forms of classical theatre, which can both improve their craft and enrich their performances.

Chapter three discussed the fundamentals in Zeami's technique of Noh acting training, Suzuki's Method of acting, and comparing these methods to Western theatre technique. Through analyzing translations of Zeami's treatise titled *Fushikaden*, his process of Noh acting and ideologies on audience and performance were explored. His perspectives on the growth of students by age provided a basis for the design of his exercises and ideologies. This included exercises called "First pitch, Second Ki, and Third Voice," which is an exercise on listening to sound, and how the energy of that sound travels through the body to identify where the voice rests. The second exercise explored was called *monomane*, which was detailed as being Zeami's imitation activity. It teaches students the importance of separating character from self, and instead encourages the emptying of all judgment and bias so the actor can remain free and open to heightened character work. Elements of Zeami's Flower and *yugen* were also applied to the study of Noh performance, which introduced the concepts of weight for motion and stillness on stage. Chapter three continued with analyzing The Suzuki method of Acting. This section discussed Suzuki's understanding of the hidden elements to performance which included "Energy, Oxygen, and Gravity." From there each element was broken down and connected to possible applications in Western Theatrical pedagogy. This chapter concluded with the study of Western acting training, and how the methods of Zeami and Suzuki can be integrated into Western Theatre pedagogy for performers and audience members.

Chapter four began discussions on Audience Reception theory, and the ways it can be applied to Zeami and Suzuki training. It presents the question of why audiences are drawn to theatre, and how they might respond to viewing theatre that is vastly different than what they are used to. I compare the developments of Noh theatre with American melodrama, as both are examples of theatre being developed during a critical time a countries artistic life, and that though they have different elements, they have enough essential similarities that give Western audience members a perfect theatrical landscape to receive Noh theatre, and to subvert their expectations on theatrical ritual.

Chapter Five focused on my personal experiences seeing Noh performed in Japan. I detailed participating in the ritual of Noh performance from the perspective of a Western audience member. I outlined my observations on pre-show behaviors and compared them to what I have experienced in the west. Analyzing the performance elements of Kyogen and Noh drama while also examining the music, singing, and movement helps to better understand the differences in traditional theatre practice between the east and the west. The chapter concludes with the perspective that Noh drama is a useful and impactful form of theatre practice when incorporated into western theatrical pedagogy. The elements of intentionality and heightened storytelling make for a unique experience that explains the meaning of life on stage rather than becoming lost in the imitation of it.

Theatre performance is about exposing people to something new, and as artists we should always look forward to being introduced to alternative forms of theatre. As Suzuki says: “The role of the artist in society must be, rather, to give people an opportunity to perceive the world anew, to stimulate their imagination so they may ‘live in the question.’” (83) This quote from Suzuki encompasses the overall desires for artists who perform theatre. Why is theatre so

desirable? What makes the performance of it so engaging to so many people? Even when we look at Japanese Noh theatre and examine the differences between it and American theatre, there is still evidence that audiences have a deep appreciation and passion for both, and that passion can be experienced when those audiences are exposed to one another. We are naturally interested in things that are new, or out of the ordinary from our perspectives. This is fundamental. Our theatre may be completely different than another, but it is the audience interprets that difference. To us, Noh theatre is unique and different and a subversion from our normal theatre experience. But to Noh audiences, we are what is unusual. This is something one can never forget when studying international theatre, as one must always remember that normalcy is relative. Educating students on Noh performance through a practical theatrical lens can teach them important lesson in humanity, and that the world is full of unique people and different experiences. To create better actors, practitioners must first teach students to be curious about the world around them, and that to fully pursue character work, they cannot be judgmental or close minded. Students only have to gain from Noh theatre being more fully incorporated into performance education.

It is important to always remember why theatre has a history of invoking such a passionate following. Whether it is an audience of American melodrama, or a Noh performance in 14th century Japan, audiences have a history of longing for the answer to questions that plays and pieces invoke. Suzuki, however, challenges artists to seek a life devoid of answer searching. Instead, he encourages artists to always seek the path forward, and never lose our passion for exploring and learning about theatre.

Artists can learn much from studying Noh theatre. They can see how the oldest practicing theatrical form in the world first came to be, and how intrinsic that theatre is to the development of a countries history, religion, and art, and make observations on how theatre came to be so

influential in both America, and abroad. They can study alternative methods of movement, gesture, and performance that can greatly enrich their experience on stage, and can further inspire their creative goals to continue pursuing other forms of theatre in the future. And through these lessons of Noh, art, and creative passion, one can move forward curious for more questions.

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