

## Bodies of the Future : On the Art of Acting around 1900

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Early in the twentieth century, two theatre events took place in Berlin that hardly seemed comparable at first glance. First, the guest performances of *The Geisha and the Knight* and *Kesa* by Otojiro Kawakami's Japanese troupe with its star Sada Yakko, staged between November 18 and December 19, 1901, at the Zentraltheater and the Buntes Theater. Secondly, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* (after Sophocles) premiered at the Kleines Theater on October 30, 1903, directed by Max Reinhardt and starring Gertrud Eysoldt. Despite their different contexts, both events were similar in that they confronted the audience with unfamiliar body concepts that stood in stark contrast to the "natural" bodies propagated and presented by naturalistic acting. Both events also unleashed a vehement discussion about a new art of acting.

### 1) Kawakami's and Sada Yakko's European guest performances

Otojiro Kawakami's troupe's first guest performance in Europe took place as part of the World Fair in Paris, which opened on April 14, 1900. The troupe performed from July to November in the theatre built specially for Loïe Fuller on the occasion of the Fair. Kawakami's troupe adhered to the so-called *soshi* school that explicitly aimed at reforming traditional Japanese theatre, especially *kabuki*, following the model of the naturalistic "Théâtre Libre" of Antoine or the symbolist "Théâtre de l'Œuvre" of Lugné-Poë. Kawakami had lived in Paris for several years; upon his return to Japan he wrote a play about the Chinese-Japanese War. In order to enhance its realism, he travelled to Port Arthur and obtained as many photographs as possible. Next, he attempted a dramatisation of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Yet, he chose traditional Japanese plays for the guest performances, making consider-

able changes to the text that he felt would adapt them to Western tastes. In order not to bore the audience with lengthy dialogues in a language incomprehensible to them, Kawakami mercilessly cut lines to a minimum. He inserted a maximum number of dance scenes to replace the dialogue. Consequently, the *danmari*, the pantomimic scene traditionally functioning as the interlude between the most exciting episodes, was elevated to the main component of the performance. Moreover, Kawakami substantially reduced the music, which traditionally accompanies the entire action.<sup>1)</sup>

Despite their eagerness to reform, even the troupes of the *soshi* school never went so far as to admit women and overrule the active ban of 1630 that generally prohibited women from appearing on stage. Kawakami's wife Sada Yakko, who was trained as a Geisha and dancer, first took the part of the female lead when the troupe toured abroad (San Francisco in 1899). Overnight, she became the star of the troupe.

During the World Fair in Paris, the troupe gave two shows a day (afternoons and evenings). They performed *The Geisha and the Knight* (218 times), *Kesa* (83 times), *Hidari jingoro* (34 times), and *Kojima kotoku* (29 times). Generally, each show consisted of two plays. In between each play, Loïe Fuller, acting as the troupe's impresario, presented her latest dances, including the Serpentine Dance.<sup>2)</sup>

The troupe subsequently embarked on its European tour with this programme, which was extended to include the plays *Shogun*, *Kosan*, and the judgment scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. Among other places, the troupe gave guest performances first at the Criterion and then the Shaftesbury Theatre in London from June 18 to August 7, 1901, and performed once again in Paris from September until early November before leaving for Berlin. After their guest performances in Berlin, the troupe performed in Bremen, Hannover, Leipzig, and Wiesbaden in February, 1902, in Vienna, Lemberg, Krakow, Warsaw, and St. Petersburg in March, and in Budapest, Rome, Florence, and Milan in April.

The performances met with mixed criticism. While some mostly British critics deemed the Japanese actors laughable, odd, droll, or "cute", critics for the influential

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1) See O. Edwards, *Japanese Plays and Playfellows*, London 1901, p. 67.

2) See G. Brandstetter, B.M. Ochaim, *Loïe Fuller, Tanz-Licht-Spiel*. Art nouveau. Freiburg 1989.

German and French newspapers generally detected a form of theatre in the Japanese guest performances that differed fundamentally from their own contemporary theatre — i.e. naturalistic theatre. In this respect, the critics felt the Japanese performances to be superior to naturalistic theatre on several counts. Sada Yakko and Kawakami's art of acting served as the starting point for the critics' deliberations. *Die Neue Rundschau* characterises it as a wholly “unliterary art of acting”, whose “effect” was “tremendous (...) for us”.<sup>3)</sup> What was meant by an “unliterary art of acting”? And what was the nature of its “tremendous effect”?

The emergence of literary theatre in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century led to the creation of a realistic and psychological art of acting. The actors were no longer to be guided by their whims and fancies, their talent of improvisation, acrobatic skill, sense of humour, genius, or even their vanity. Rather, their function would be limited to communicating to the audience the meanings expressed by the poets in their texts. Actors were to shift from dominating the theatre to selflessly serving the poet's text.

To achieve this goal, the art of acting had to be drastically revised. Actors had to become proficient at expressing physically the meanings that the poet had expressed textually — especially the emotions, mental states, thought processes, and character traits of the *dramatis personae*. To assist the actors in obliterating their bodily being-in-the-world, their phenomenal beings, on stage, this reconceived art of acting would transform them into semiotic bodies, into a “text” consisting of signs for the emotions and mental states that build a character. Such an art of acting that serves as a vessel for expressing only the meanings contained in the poetic text could be called ‘literary’.

What struck critics about Sada Yakko and Kawakami's art of acting, however, was the pre-eminence of the physical. *Die Neue Rundschau* notes:

Affects emerge in an uninterrupted chain of grimaces and contortions, which increase with every moment. [The actors] continuously leaping, jumping, twisting sharply, making a decisive turn of the head or a calcu-

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3) *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 13, no. 1, January 1902, pp. 110-2, p. 112.

lated movement, snapping their eyes open, broadening their mouths, widening their nostrils, pushing forward their chins, furrowing or straightening their brow. And all this within a moment, lasting no longer than a blink of the eye, congealing and dissolving again, only to congeal once more.<sup>4)</sup>

Evidently, the actors here are not concerned with transmitting meanings through their semiotic bodies. Instead, they are embodying affects through their phenomenal bodies. The same feature caused Alfred Kerr to deride this art of acting:

...these expressions show more dexterity than mental depth. More physicality than spirituality. And yet one takes them seriously when one observes Sada Yacco. Her heart spasms, she snorts, a fury; her demeanour deteriorates beyond recognition; her face swells; she squints; she becomes pallid; she turns blue; she perishes... like an animal.<sup>5)</sup>

Evidently, Sada Yacco's death scenes in particular brought to the fore the specific physicality of her art of acting. Nearly all reviews mention them. On the occasion of the guest performance in Paris, the *Mercure de France* wrote:

Theatre has never seen such a bleak scene performed. Sada Yacco's death terrifies like death suffered on one's own body. The effect is entirely physical. The facial features become distorted: the eyes become stiff; gradually, the mouth, lips, and skin are tinged by violet; the hair becomes flat; the greying process becomes visible. How this phenomenon comes to be—it cannot be said. It borders on a miracle. And yet it is the result of keen observation and profound intuition.<sup>6)</sup>

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4) *Die Neue Rundschau*, p. 111.

5) Alfred Kerr, Sada Yacco, in: Alfred Kerr, *Die Welt im Drama. V. Das Mimenreich, Gesammelte Schriften* in two volumes, vol. 1, Berlin 1917, pp. 349-52, p. 351.

6) "Chronique de l'Exposition", in: *Mercure de France*, November 1900, pp. 480-95.

The remarkable features of Sada Yakko's death scenes alienated and fascinated the critics as much as Kawakami's art of acting. The critic for *Die Neue Rundschau* writes on Kawakami as Morito, Kesa's lover, who intends to kill her husband and unknowingly murders Kesa:

Twitching, mad passion quivers within this man. Gurgling, chuckling, hissing sounds gush from his mouth; he struggles with every breath, wails like a child, howls like a beast, beats himself with his fists like the member of a wild tribe. Torment and pain in its frenetic, terrifying nativeness race around.<sup>7)</sup>

To the German and French critics, Sada Yakko's and Kawakami's art of acting appears "unliterary" because their bodies are not transformed into signs that transmit meanings, but instead embody affects. The actors' phenomenal bodies cannot be read like "texts" consisting of gestural signs and referring to the mental states of the character created by the poet. Rather, their phenomenal bodies in themselves appear as the location for articulated affects. These affects could not exist as "pure" meanings or the meanings of a literary text without these bodies.

The fusion of affect and body creates a specific effect. While the literary art of acting involves de-coding its signs and understanding character, the above effect is "wholly physical" (*Mercure de France*). *Die Neue Rundschau* critic seems to share this view:

"The entire effect is aimed at the senses and only then proceeds to the soul".<sup>8)</sup> Kerr also alludes to this when he laments the lack of "mental depth" and "spirituality". The actors' performance seems to have an immediate effect on the spectators' bodies, triggering physical reactions. The reviews, especially by the French critics, merely hint at the nature of those reactions. Verhaeren, *Mercure de France*'s critic, speaks of Sada Yakko's death "terrif[ying] like death suffered on one's own body". He elaborates:

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7) *Die Neue Rundschau*, p. 112.

8) *Die Neue Rundschau*, p. 112.

(This form of acting) in other words is only used as a sort of stepping stone for reaching a certain apex of fear that even the ancients sought in their best plays. At the moment in which one encounters such a perfect aesthetic realisation and in which a simple, scenic performance brings forth such a powerful emotion, the need for discussion and analysis vanishes. It is best to accept the appearing impression like a rare offering and thank the brilliant actress for enriching our feelings and thoughts.<sup>9)</sup>

Sada Yakko's physical performance directs the audience's attention to just this physicality. The affects embodied by her phenomenal body in turn trigger physical reactions, such as fear and other affects, in the spectators. Thus, her acting, through her body, immediately affected the spectators' bodies in a manner that eluded "analysis" and "discussion" and precluded any definite understanding of it.

Critics such as Kerr regarded this as a shortcoming and missed "mental depth" and "spirituality" in the performance. Others viewed this in opposition to the naturalism dominant at the time and proclaimed it a model for revising their own theatre of the future:

What we are able to see, conceive, and understand—the outer appearance, the physical— (...) is anything but naïve, undeveloped, juvenile, an art form of the past, which lies behind us and which we surpassed. *It is still before us, it is imminent, perhaps we are steering towards it.* (...) We are looking at the future. (...) No, there is truly no reason for us to shrug off this art. *We may infinitely profit from it.*<sup>10)</sup>

## 2) Gertrud Eysoldt as Elektra

Such an "imminent" art of acting that required an unfamiliar use of the body and

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9) *Mercure de France*, p. 485.

10) Critic for the Berlin newspaper *Der Tag*, cited in "Die Kawakami-Truppe (Sada Yakko) in Berlin", in: *Ost-Asien*, vol. IV, no. 46, 1902, January, pp. 449-450, p. 450.

also affected the audience immediately and physically indeed captured the imagination of critics and spectators at the performance of Hofmannsthal's tragedy *Elektra* just two years later. Gertrud Eysoldt in particular presented a "strange" instead of a "natural" body on stage. Hermann Bahr's description of the curious presentation of Electra, with which Gertrud Eysoldt wrote theatre history, is in some ways reminiscent of the characterisations of Sada Yakko's and Kawakami's performance:

Here the world is closed, the breath of humanity halts. A creature, wholly washed out and destroyed by suffering; all pretence of custom, friendly habituation, and shame torn to pieces. A naked human being, reduced to the last. Banished like night. Turned into hatred. (...) Screams, as if from the distant, primitive past, kicks from the wild beast, glimpses of eternal chaos. Ghastly, the shuddering people say.<sup>11)</sup>

The performance and Eysoldt's presentation of Electra in particular created a sensation in the audience. According to one critic, the spectators remained seated in silence "for a few moments" after the performance "as if dazed by the exhaustion of their nerves" before granting "the poet and the performers a grand ovation."<sup>12)</sup>

However, Bahr's words do not describe Eysoldt's concrete actions in her presentation of Electra. That is to say, he does not describe her postures, gestures, facial expressions, modulations of voice when she spoke, etc. Bahr avoids such a description and instead attempts to capture her presentation intuitively and associatively—"screams, as if from the distant, primitive past, kicks from the wild beast, glimpses of eternal chaos". He seeks to convey the horrendous impression that Eysoldt's strange presentation made on him. What Bahr tries to put in words seems to elude verbal expression. Unmistakably, however, Bahr creates the sense that Eysoldt crossed borders in her performance that had been considered taboo until then, that she entered unknown terrains which others avoid with a shudder.

Neither Bahr nor the critics of the premiere specify the nature of these borders. It

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11) Hermann Bahr, *Glossen zum Wiener Theater*, Berlin 1907, p. 276.

12) Cited in *Vorwärts*, November 1, 1903.

is striking that the reviews rarely contain any description. This strongly suggests that the critics lacked the appropriate vocabulary for accurately describing what they perceived. Nevertheless, their reviews contain sufficient information for hypothesising on the nature of the borders Gertrud Eysoldt crossed in the performance. It appears that they concerned the same two aspects that had struck the critics of Sada Yakko's performance: firstly, the actress' use of her body, her method of acting and what it expressed; secondly, her effect on the audience, i.e. the larger relationship between stage and audience and actress and spectators.

Positive or negative, all reviews seem to agree that Eysoldt used her body in a heretofore unknown manner, creating an entirely new art of acting. The reviews emphasise Eysoldt's immoderate use of her body and its tremendous intensity on stage. According to one critic, these features violated the norms of performing Greek tragedies with "force," "dignity," and a "sonorous tone." In their place the critic found "nervosity," "unrestrained passion," and "raucous shouting".<sup>13)</sup> To those critics opposed to her acting, Eysoldt transgressed from the accepted "healthy" ideal and ventured into the domain of the "unnatural" and "pathological." Many critics disapproved of the "shouting and fidgeting, the exaggerated sense of horror, distortion and intemperance at every turn"<sup>14)</sup> and the "passion ending only in absurdity," a sure indicator of "pathological conditions"<sup>15)</sup>. They rejected Eysoldt's "immoderate" and "uncontrolled" movements. They deemed her transgressive exploration of "pathology" that dissolved the limits of the self "unbearable".<sup>16)</sup> The critics took diverse stands towards this immoderation, as shown by their judgments of the "nameless dance" at the end of the performance in which Electra collapses dead. The aforementioned critic deemed it perverse and deeply shocking: "The final scene, for example, must be the most detestable ever seen on stage: Electra dances around the courtyard as if drunk on her mother's blood like on wine"<sup>17)</sup>. Another critic merely expresses his—considerable—sense of alienation:

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13) Fritz Engel, *Berliner Tageblatt*, October 31, 1903.

14) Richard Nordhausen, unidentified review from the archive of the Cologne Theatre Museum.

15) H.E., *Freisinnige Zeitung*, November 3, 1903.

16) Paul Goldmann, unidentified review from the archive of the Cologne Theatre Museum.

17) *Ibid.*



In the final scenes, Electra prowls back and forth before the castle gates like an excited watchdog and then, in a convulsive crucifix pose, guards the gates. Finally, she erupts into a terrifying, grotesque dance to vent her wild excitement about the success of her deed. These scenes make up the strangest acting I have experienced.<sup>18)</sup>

A third critic finally sees Eysoldt's artistic apogee contained in this dance: "How she (...) stares into space, her head thrown back in visionary rapture (...), impossible to imitate"<sup>19)</sup>. In particular, the positive reviews of Eysoldt's performance highlight the contrast between her small, delicate body and the horrendous force of her passionate movements: "At the front Gertrud Eysoldt, who played the fanatical demon of vengeance Electra with tremendous impulsivity due to the contrast between her small physique and the violence of her temperament"<sup>20)</sup>. This was a form of violence directed especially at her own body, straining it to its outer limits with "short, quick twists"<sup>21)</sup> and "convulsive jerks"<sup>22)</sup> and other movements "that aimed at extreme ecstasy from the very first scene."<sup>23)</sup>

Regardless of whether the critics condemned Eysoldt's performance as a transgression into the realm of the pathological—perhaps because it reminded them of the movement patterns of female hysteria patients—or celebrated it as a significant artistic innovation, we may conclude from all of the reviews that Gertrud Eysoldt crossed a line here that had been established for the art of acting during the eighteenth century and had gone unquestioned since. This line denoted the demarcation between the violence suffered by the character and the actor's own body that remained unharmed—a line that actors were expected to establish and mark clearly through their acting. In his *Mimik* (1784/5), Johann Jakob Engel chides actors—and particularly

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18) A.K. (probably Alfred Kerr), *Vossische Zeitung*, October 31, 1903.

19) Dt. in *Vorwärts*, November 1, 1903.

20) W.T., *Neue Hamburger Zeitung*, November 1, 1903.

21) *Vorwärts*, November 1, 1903.

22) Unidentified review from the archive of the Cologne Theatre Museum.

23) F.-E., *Berliner Tageblatt*, October 31, 1903.

actresses—who draw the audience’s attention to their bodies by inflicting violence on them, such as through “falling” or “tumbling” “as if she wanted to split open her skull”. Such actions would cause concern in the spectators for the physical well-being of the actors. However, “such concern invariably destroys the illusion; we are meant to empathise exclusively with the dramatic character but instead feel for the actor”<sup>24</sup>). Accordingly, a good actor must develop techniques and procedures to create the illusion that his character suffers physical violence—caused by outer or inner influences—without inflicting violence on their own body. In other words, Engel draws a clear line between the actor’s semiotic and phenomenal body. The semiotic body creates the impression of suffering without inflicting any pain on the phenomenal body.

In her performance, Eysoldt permanently crossed the line between the semiotic and the phenomenal body. Her movements did not merely signify that her character was suffering unspeakable violence. By performing it, she at the same time carried out an act of violence against her own body. This blurred the line between the actress’ semiotic and her phenomenal body. While we might not go so far as to claim that her acting obliterated the line—at least to a certain extent—between the semiotic and the phenomenal body it can be said that Eysoldt’s bodily use oscillated between the two, precluding the possibility of separating and distinguishing them from another. Bahr’s and the other critics’ inability to adequately describe Eysoldt’s performance may be due especially to this particular use of her body.

The particular quality of her performance prevented the spectators from entering the illusion of the play. The relationship between stage and audience, actors and spectators changed significantly. The critics repeatedly refer to this change. Yet, they seem once again unable to clearly describe and define it. All critics seem to agree that the performance had a tremendous and in many respects unusual effect on the spectators, despite the considerable variations in judging this effect. The critics repeatedly take recourse to dreams in order to characterise the particular modality of the effect: “The events stormed past us like Maeterlinckian dream fantasies, a single, unbroken furore that began with the first scene and escalated dramatically until the

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24) Johann Jakob Engel, *Schriften*, vol. 7, *Mimik*, part I, Berlin 1804, p. 58.

end"<sup>25</sup>). Dreams here at once allude to the impossibility of fully grasping the stage actions—they transcend human comprehension—and also capture the peculiar, heretofore evidently unknown effect of the performance: "Electra's story plays out before us like a terrible dream of wildly flickering images"<sup>26</sup>). These images could not be interpreted. Rather, they triggered "emotional associations of a compelling force"<sup>27</sup>). With the line between the actress' semiotic and her phenomenal body erased, the spectators experienced the events on stage as a "tormenting reality"<sup>28</sup>) that affected their senses and strained their nerves: "Racing and storming and whimpering without cease. One watches the rampage like a fight between caged wild animals, nerves strained"<sup>29</sup>).

For this reason some reviewers sharply criticised its effect as inartistic: "The shock is certainly profound but it is entirely inartistic and not worth more than the excitement of an audience at the circus"<sup>30</sup>). The comparison to caged animals and the circus brings to mind the fairground, the only place Engel would allow concern for the actors' physical well-being. Indeed these reviews reveal why the performance failed to establish a sense of illusion in Lessing's or Engel's sense. The performance had an immediate effect on the spectators' bodies, their senses and nerves. This very aspect is deplored by some critics: "The effects of this art rely wholly on physiological and not intellectual stimulation"<sup>31</sup>).

Whereas the stage's threshold clearly separates actors from spectators and enables the creation of illusion in the first place, Eysoldt's performance crossed even this line: "Then there was Eysoldt's nervous force, which one virtually sensed floating beyond the stage's threshold and gripping the throats of those who listened"<sup>32</sup>). Evocation took the place of illusion. The spectators were "gripped as if by the gaze of a

25) J.S., *Hannoverscher Courier*, November 1, 1903.

26) Fritz Engel, *Berliner Tageblatt*, October 31, 1903.

27) Unidentified review from the archive of the Cologne Theatre Museum.

28) *Berliner Morgenpost*, November 1, 1903.

29) Dt. in *Vorwärts*, November 1, 1903.

30) *Freisinnige Zeitung*, November 1, 1903.

31) Julius Hart, unidentified review from the archive of the Cologne Theatre Museum.

32) Bahr 1907, p. 277.

basilisk, as if by hypnotic magical powers"<sup>33)</sup>. The performance enthralled the spectators to such an extent that they could not escape its immediate sensual, simultaneously nerve-racking and exhausting, effect. They entered an almost hypnotic state<sup>34)</sup> from which they were released with "a breath of relief"<sup>35)</sup> and the subsequent frenetic applause only after sitting "as if dazed" for several minutes after the performance ended.

### 3) The Phenomenal and the Semiotic Body

Despite the large differences that undoubtedly existed between Gertrud Eysoldt's and Sada Yakko's—and Kawakami's—art of acting, both are still comparable in at least one respect. Neither aspired to the ideal of a "natural" body, which can effectively be defined as a semiotic body in which the "inner" states of a character can be read from the actor's "outer" actions; both instead used and presented their bodies on stage in ways that must have initially made them appear strange to the spectators. However, in Sada Yakko's case, the impression of strangeness was not primarily derived from the fact that she hailed from Japan. In both cases, the reason for the sense of alienation lay, rather, in the new relationship established between the actress' phenomenal and her semiotic body that precluded their clear distinction.

Sada Yakko's affect did not refer to an "inner" state that the performance brought to an outward expression and made legible in this way. Quite the contrary, it appeared as an embodied affect, whose only basis for existence lay in the actress' phenomenal body. It articulates itself through this body and can therefore not exist without it. The phenomenal body alone performatively brings forth the affect. The specific temporal structure and arrangement of the movements further accentuated its performative generation.

The set designer Adolphe Appia and the poet André Gide highlighted this peculiarity, largely overlooked by the critics. After the guest performance, Appia remarked:

33) *Berliner Morgen Zeitung*, November 1, 1903.

34) See Techentín 1998, pp. 77.

35) J.I., *Berliner Börsen Courier*, October 31, 1903.

The simplest action, for instance how a passionately inflamed woman chases her rival to give her a beating, is dissected into tiny fragments and confidently arranged in an artificial temporal sequence, resulting in the stylisation that so delighted our eye. A sort of *painted sculpture* appears in the movement—in the temporal structure—that is of the highest artistic value.<sup>36)</sup>

Gide identifies this very quality as rhythm:

Through her measured, rhythmic ferocity, Sada Yakko conveyed to us the holy feeling of the grand ancient dramas that we seek and no longer find on our stages. For in her gestures, rhythmically structured by a constant lyricism, nothing appears disharmonic, nothing unnecessary, nothing accidental. It was the height of simplicity, present in all great artworks, possessed by a higher notion of beauty.<sup>37)</sup>

Similarly, Georg Fuchs identifies rhythm as the fundamental and structural principle of Sada Yakko's art of acting and the Japanese performance as a whole, concerning all temporal and spatial elements of the performance. In this art of acting, he already sees realised the basics of the "Stage of the Future" that he projected and propagated, in which rhythm was to act as the structural foundation.<sup>38)</sup> As a principle, rhythm belongs to the phenomenal body in its performativity rather than to the semiotic one.

In Eysoldt's case, she erased the line between the phenomenal and the semiotic primarily by inflicting violence on her body through her ecstatic performance. She did not make her phenomenal body disappear into her semiotic body but allowed the first to performatively transcend the latter in the state of ecstasy. Unlike Sada

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36) Adolphe Appia, *Œuvres Complètes*, Edition élaborée et commentée par Marie L. Bablet-Hahn. Introduction générale par Denis Bablet, vols I-IV, Montreux 1983-92 (II 1986, III 1988), vol. 2, p. 331.

37) André Gide, *Prétexes*, Paris, Société de Mercure de France, 1903, pp. 129-36, p. 136.

38) Georg Fuchs, *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft*, Leipzig/Munich 1905.

Yakko's case, the rhythmicisation of movement did not lead to stylisation but to ecstatic self-divestment in Nietzsche's sense. In his book *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music* (1872), Nietzsche identified ecstasy as the characteristic and constitutive feature of Greek tragedy.

Nietzsche's disciple Georg Fuchs sought to apply this notion to this "Stage of the Future". Accordingly, he defined the art of acting as

rhythmic movement of the human body through space, born from the creative urge to physically communicate sensations, thereby releasing this inner urge with passionate lust and infecting other people with the same or similar rhythmic vibrations and driving them into a similar exaltation.<sup>39)</sup>

It seems plausible that Fuchs' definition of a new art of acting describes precisely that created and practiced by Gertrud Eysoldt, were one to replace "lust" with "suffering" in the above quote. For Fuchs, the emphasis lies on erasing the line between the actors phenomenal and their semiotic body. Due to this erasure, their performance loses its "as if" quality; it no longer imitates another reality but constitutes its own reality.

The new relationship between phenomenal and semiotic body that made the actress' body appear strange and unfamiliar had a new effect on the spectators, both in Sada Yakko's and Gertrud Eysoldt's case. The actor's semiotic body, perceived by the spectators as "natural", enabled the latter to imaginatively slip into the characters shoes and empathise with them, thus creating a purely "mental" effect. Here, however, the spectators felt themselves exposed to the direct impact of the actress' performance on their bodies. The unfamiliar body was able to transcend the line between actress and spectators and induce an immediate physical, sensual, and mental effect. In Sada Yakko's performance, the spectators experienced it as powerful affects triggered by the performance. Eysoldt's audience experienced her performance as a kind of trance, able to dissolve the borders of the I, like in a state of exaltation. Replacing the "natural" with an "artificial" body turned out to have far-reaching conse-

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39) Georg Fuchs, *Der Tanz*, Stuttgart 1906, p. 13.

quences.

Undeniably, both performances form isolated cases that merely happened to be staged at the same place—Berlin—within such a short time of each other: on the one hand, we have the guest performance of a foreign, Japanese, troupe and on the other, the first peak in the art of an actress who had already experimented with similar methods in previous roles—as Nastya in Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, as Salome in Wilde's play of the same name, as Lulu in Wedekind's *Earth Spirit* (all three directed by Max Reinhardt) without, however, achieving a comparable effect. Yet, the temporal proximity of the two events suggests a symptomatic significance: what audiences deemed entirely new and unfamiliar to European theatre in the early twentieth century when confronted with these two wholly different forms—a result of the crossing and blurring of the borders between the phenomenal and the semiotic body on stage and its immediate physical effects on the spectators—the avant-garde movement made their ruling paradigm after World War I. The “natural” body was replaced by the artificial and stylised (e.g. in Meyerhold's biomechanics or Brecht's epic theatre), or the ecstatic (e.g. in the expressionist art of acting or in modern dance) body. In light of this development, the two isolated cases achieve a new significance. They appear as premonitions—visions proclaiming the future.