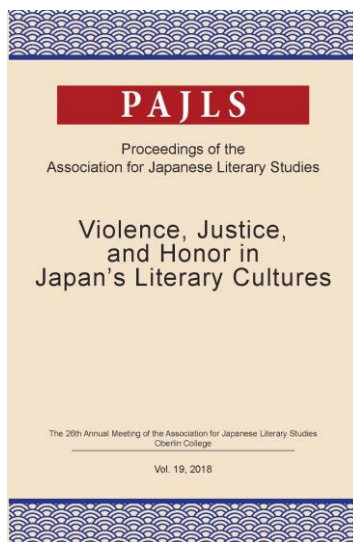


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Higuchi Yoshizumi 

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## THE BODY AND WAR: VIOLENCE IN THE WORK OF PLAYWRIGHT AND NOVELIST KARA JÜRÖ

Higuchi Yoshizumi<sup>1</sup>  
*Kanto Gakuin University*

### THE 1960S: THE AGE OF VIOLENCE

Japan in the 1960s was replete with aspects that should lead us to say that it was an “age of violence.” Not only was it the real violence of the dissident movements such as the students’ movement, the anti-pollution movement, the Vietnam anti-war movement, violence in culture, violence to resuscitate humans and society (as George Sorel controversially proposed) also erupted. This engagement with violence was above all manifest in the obsession with the body.

In the background was resistance to the particular concept of modernism that was constructed after the war. As a result of the heart-searching over the upsurge of the irrational wartime emperor-system nationalism, Japanese society switched to the pursuit of modern rationalism. Japan’s new direction functioned admirably in the flow from recovery to economic growth throughout the 1950s. When post-war recovery settled down in the early 1960s, however, it became clear that this modernistic milieu was not sufficiently adapted to Japan’s realities. Against the modernistic reforms and the logic of rule from above, a sense of discomfort spread from the locales of everyday life. It was avant-garde culture that reacted most sensitively to the trend of regarding the post-war period as a delusion. A movement that questioned the body diffused out from all cultural realms, literature, art, drama, design, and music.

These aspired to pre-modernism rather than modernism, to the personal rather than the public, to laughter, pathos and folly rather than rationality. An energy that can be said to have been a rebellion from the body against modern rationalism exploded in the 1960s. When attempting to resist the modern, the artists found that traditional modes of expression were also entangled with war and therefore not easy to employ. The device that could be more reliably used was the body that everyone currently owned. These artists struggled against the modern urban space and social systems with the body as their stronghold. These arts highlighted violence, sex and death as something inherent in the body, the moving flesh.

In the theatrical world, what is called as the new drama, *Shingeki* 新劇, influenced by the modern plays of the West, was fashionable in the

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<sup>1</sup>  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6192-7692>

1950s because of the reconsideration of nationalism under the war. On the other hand, a contrary movement arose to seek original forms of expression. Some of these experiments removed themselves from the theater to put on performances in the streets. Hijikata Tatsumi 土方巽, who was studying modern dance, created *Butoh* 舞踏. Together with Terayama Shūji 寺山修司, it was Kara Jūrō 唐十郎 who developed the most extreme way of asking these questions in drama, questions about modern civilization from early 60s.

### THE BODY AS VIOLENCE AND TENTS

Kara Jūrō was born in Tokyo's old district of Ueno in 1940. Bombing raids became intense in 1944, making it necessary for his family to evacuate to Fukushima Prefecture. In the Great Tokyo Air Raids of March 10, 1945, the old districts of Tokyo were reduced to ashes. After the August defeat, the family returned to Ueno. The totally changed scenery of the city at the time became Kara's literary point of departure. The landscape of burned out vacant lots where there had once been bustling streets taught Kara that reality is fragile. Further, as he had evacuated from the burnt city, he had not directly experienced hostilities, but the urban landscapes moving toward recovery gave him a sense of a different reality. It seems this became the motif in his search for his own unique "post-war."

Kara studied drama at the Faculty of Literature of Meiji University, but this was in the time when modern realist drama was in its full flourish. Dissatisfied with this, Kara turned to existential theater, which was just beginning to become popular at the time, to seek out his own original form of expression. When he discovered the idea of staging performances in tents, this method became the antithesis of modern drama, which was focused on conventional theater. In 1967, he staged his first tent performance at Hanazono Shrine in Shinjuku, a performance of the new play *Petticoat Osen* (Koshimaki Osen 腰巻お仙). In contrast to theater space, the tent was a transient, pre-modern (like a freak show or a street play), and unbounded (where the inside and outside of the dramatic space was ambiguous) space. The staging of plays in a tent was a form of resistance to the modern theater space. Kara choreographed the plays such that the sides of the tent would be lifted at the end of the play, removing the boundary between inside and outside. The tent was used as a method to express his thought that the dramatic space and the space of reality are connected.

In his book *Petticoat Osen*, which contains the script of the play, Kara develops his original theory of the body, the "theory of privileged corporality" (3–78). The theory states that the essence of drama is to create

a privileged dramatic illusion in which the corporality of the actors exceeds their limitations under the gaze of the audience. With the social discrimination that actors encountered before the World War II in Japan in mind, Kara wanted to emphasize their importance in the dramatic space and use their negative power for creation. So he thought about their body as “privileged.” He did not think about dramatic space as fiction simply. Rather, the relation between the actuality of actors and their roles, between the actuality of spectators and dramatic space would make dramatic illusion. The dense and fragile space of the tent is suitable for creating this distinctive relationship between the audience and the actors.

The 1960s culture of the “rebellion from the body” manifested itself as the violence of the resistance against reality. This proceeded from the body, a peripheral phenomenon, toward the central institutions, authority and power. Certainly, Kara’s “privileged body” and “tent” were a revolt against established arts and city, so his works were considered as a kind of “violence” in the midst of the everyday space of the 60s, especially after his arrest for performing without permission in a public park. As I explain below, however, Kara’s “violence” was not a one-sided resistance from the periphery. In *Petticoat Osen*, there is a scene at the end where an aborted fetus returns to life and attacks the heroine. The fetus is a symbol of returnees from the continent, disabled soldiers, and Koreans and Chinese people living in Japan who had been despised by society in post-war Japan. Kara depicts the way in which those who were excluded and driven off to the periphery were at times the foundation on which Japanese capitalism was built. During the war years, Japan advanced into Asia, and many Asian people came to Japan. But after the war Asian people were cut away, and sacrificed for the reconstruction of Japan. Kara wrote those people with this history. They were tragic but strong and compelling. Some people recovered their agency and led their nations. The resisters became rulers and the line between victim and perpetrator blurred. It was within the complex system where Kara positioned himself, having grown up amidst the burned-out ruins of the early post-war period and living with his Japanese-Korean wife. He knew the system very strictly.

During the same period, it was famous novelist and cultural figure Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 who made the body an important theme of his literature, but comparing the approach toward the body of Mishima, who had a close friendship with Hijikata, the differences are very clear. Mishima’s sense of the body was ultimately a modern body. In a mind and body dualistic interpretation, Mishima disciplined his body through body-building and kendo, and eventually committed suicide after planning a coup d’état based on the principle of unification of thought and action.

Mishima believed in fashioning a body that could be controlled by the spirit, integrating thought, thus leading to action. Hijikata and Kara did not perceive of the body in a dualistic manner. Hijikata's well known saying was "Butoh is a corpse that is risking its life by standing." Both Hijikata and Kara pursued a dramatic image that exceeded finiteness through the limitations of the body.

However, Kara's violence as culture gave rise to real violence. Forming the Jōkyō Gekijō (Situation Theater) Drama Company, Kara staged an unauthorized performance of *Petticoat Osen* in Shinjuku's Chūō Kōen (Central Park) in January 1969. After the play ended, police surrounded the tent and arrested Kara for offences under the Urban Parks Law. Kara had revealed that everyday urban spaces are governed by power. After his release, Kara stopped his truck in a parking lot, again in Shinjuku, and performed *Petticoat Osen* using the rear deck of the truck as a theater.

#### INTO ASIA

This incident became a turning point for Kara. Coming into the 1970s, he travelled to South Korea (in 1972), Bangladesh (in 1973), and Syria and Lebanon (in 1974). He wrote stories for each location and performed them in the local language. Aided by Kim Chi-ha, whom he met by chance in Seoul, South Korea, while it was under martial law, he staged an unauthorized performance of his play *A Tale of Two Cities* 二都物語 in which a Korean girl whose brother, a Korean living in Japan, is murdered by a Japanese person during the war. The girl wanders around Tokyo searching for some remnant of her brother and strives to reenact a fantasy sibling relationship with a young man. In Dacca and Chittagong, in the newly-independent Bangladesh, Kara presented his play entitled *The Tiger of Bengal* ベンガルの虎, in which a soldier who is supposed to be arranging the funerals of his dead comrades remains in Burma after the wartime defeat is transformed into the vanguard for a Japanese trading company that attempts to trade in the skeletal remains of Japanese soldiers. In Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, Kara staged *Palestine version of Matasaburō of the Wind* パレスチナ版風の又三郎. Based on Miyazawa Kenji's famous story *Kaze no Matasaburō*, the play tells the story of a girl, accompanied by a young man, who searches for her Self-Defense Force lover, who is reported missing after failing to get aboard a Self-Defense Force plane. Kara's play depicts the hardships of trying to discover her lover in the land of the dead and subsequent rebirth. People of colonized world, dead people of war and soldiers, in all of these, people who have been shunted to the periphery of Japanese society return and

create an illusion from the bottom of periphery. They shake up normal, everyday life. Kara thus attempted to sketch what he thought of Japan's post-war period against an Asian-scale backdrop and the twisted historical structure of the period.

Being totally self-funded, none of these overseas tours received support from any public agency. This was an endeavor by Kara to indicate the realities of Japan and the image of the people who live there to audiences in the locations where the plays were performed through the "privileged body." This was a Japan where wartime problems were still continuing, though in different forms, and Kara's efforts provoked a reform in the way society and history are viewed that surpasses theatrical performances. Putting aside the effects of his works, the guerrilla-like tent performances in Asian areas of conflict (diplomatic relations had not yet been normalized with China) and with even the Middle East firmly in his field of vision, undoubtedly left his audiences with a deep impression.

In a declaration announced at Haneda Airport on July 1974 as he was about to depart for the Middle East, Kara stated, "We who believe that culture is the product of struggle and the memory of that panorama, I am hopeful that we will present the totality and content of the red tent nurtured by Japan's riverbank beggars before the people of Palestine with the courage of tiger" (*The Complete Works of Kara Jūrō*, 4:366). For Kara, theatrical performances were the product of struggle. Struggle was conceived of as raising a challenge to societal realities, the primordial nature of which was the "body" and the "tent." The "body" and the "tent" journeyed to Asia's western edge, and by expanding that capability of theatrical imagination throughout Asia, Kara succeeded in re-invoking the question of the "post-war" on that huge scale and on that time axis. It was in Asia that Japan's post-war was to be depicted as the desire of the masses and the historical struggle against the existence of pre-war Japan that continued even after defeat in the war.

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