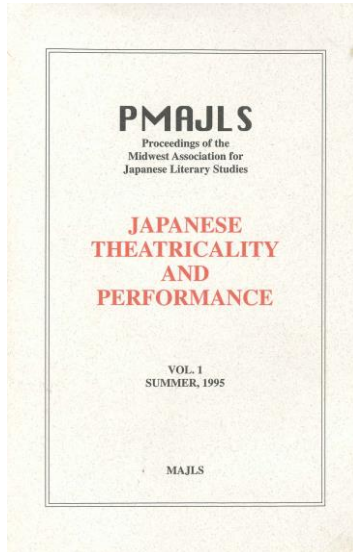


“Zeami’s *Riken* and Gadamer’s *Spiel*: A Comparative Analysis of the Bodily-Performative Subjectivity”

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**ZEAMI'S RIKEN AND GADAMER'S SPIEL:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BODILY-
PERFORMATIVE SUBJECTIVITY**

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Contemporary philosophical thought has radically problematized and perhaps even dissolved the concept of the modern epistemological subject, the agent of knowledge who relates to the world only through mental representations and becomes absolutized in the relation. At the time of the dissolution, however, we must ask whether to finish with the epistemological mode of subjectivity means to finish with *every* mode of subjectivity.

This dissolution may not mean "the death of the subject" in every possible sense. Zeami Motokiyo, a medieval Japanese dramatist, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, a contemporary German philosopher, offer a different kind of subject. In what follows, I shall inquire into this alternative subjectivity by analyzing Zeami's concept of *riken* and Gadamer's concept of *Spiel*.

In *Kakyō*, Zeami writes:

Kenjo yori miru tokoro no fūshi wa waga riken nari.
Shikareba, waga manako no miru tokoro wa gaken nari.
Riken no ken niwa arazu. Riken no ken nite miru tokoro
wa sunawachi kenjo dōshin no ken nari. Sono toki wa,
waga sugata o kentoku suru nari.

[*Riken* is what the spectator both educes from the body of the actor and projects onto it. It fundamentally differs from the image of the actor's body that the actor himself sees and assesses. When the actor procures *riken*, he hermeneutically corresponds with the spectator. Only then the actor attains the *being* of his own appearance.]¹

Here Zeami seems to argue that only the actor who can procure *riken* attains the true identity of actor. The actor obtains his identity as the subject-agent of performing a character, that which is represented, in the process of grasping *riken*. But what is *riken*? It is a type of aesthetic appearance which is constituted by the fusion of the sensible form of an external body and the supersensible form of the body that is viewed and interpreted by the spectator. It belongs exclusively neither to the body of the actor nor to the mind of the spectator. It is rather the mediated form of the body in the sense that the form comes into being between the quasi-physical and the quasi-interpretative.

Riken is the admixture of the physical and interpretative aspects of the character, who is in reality absent. The actor who obtains *riken* presents himself as a bodily agent of the performative actions which require the spectator's acknowledgment and qualification. Thus, the actor who attains *riken* cannot inhabit the epistemological, closed space in which he sustains his invariant, solitary interiority of knowledge. But he may dwell in the open space where the spectator encounters the bodily exteriority of the actor. In the encounter, the actor is spatialized not in an abstract position but in his embodied

¹ Zeami Motokiyo, *Kakyō*, in *Zeami Zenchiku*, ed. Omote Akira and Katō Shūichi (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1974) 88, vol. 24 of *Nihon shisō taikai*. Translation is mine.

presence; and the embodied presence of the actor is interpreted by the spectator. I call this the performative space. Indeed, in the latter space, the actor is embodied as actor-character only while the spectator is interacting with and interpreting him. The presence of his embodiment is produced by the passing interpretative interaction in which the actor performs for and with the spectator. The presence is permeated by the mind of the spectator who recognizes the ephemeral body as actor-character. Hence, the performative interaction creates the actor's presence as an appearance of his performative bodiliness manifesting itself between the actor and the spectator. *Riken* is the *being* of this mediated appearance, an image of the character, the represented, in the performative space.

David Sommers analyzes the connection between an image and what it represents and its interpretative potential. In "Real Metaphor: Towards a Redefinition of the 'Conceptual' Image," he examines an Olmec hand ax, an artifact sculptured in the image of the Olmec deity.² The image changes and empowers the implement by implying the specific, religious ritual in which it may have been used. The change and empowerment occur because by virtue of the image, something mighty becomes present and contemporaneous with the implement and its spectators. Through the image, the spectators make the deity belong to the space and time in which the implement and the spectators are located. The image fuses "the world's always being present to us" with "its seldom being present to us as we desire it to be."³ It brings about the transformation of a thing that is actually present at hand. Thus, the image accommodates our

² David Sommers, "Real Metaphor: Towards a Redefinition of the 'Conceptual' Image," in *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation*, ed. Norman Byson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (New York: Harper Collins, 1991) 239-241.

³ Sommers 241.

desire for the absent, and we transform the artifact in the actual space and time of human action by projecting something absent onto that which is already present. The real artifact is partially replaced by the image of what it represents in the projection of our desire for the absent. It becomes other than itself. Likewise, any artifact which is present in the actual space can be transformed into an image in a space which derives from real space but displaces it. The image is meaningful only in the quasi-real space that is constructed by our interpretative potential. What is absent motivates us to participate in the construction; only in the participation, we interpret the image of the represented. The represented induces interpretation; this interpretation requires mediation.

What is the interpretative mediation of *riken* in the performative space? What subject does it constitute? Hans-Georg Gadamer may pave the way for answers to these questions. In *Wahrheit und Methode*, he argues that if a spectator is to understand a performance and to search for its meaning, she and the performer must "interact" with each other. That is, understanding is only possible when both are present and mediated with each other; and this mutual presentness and mediation presupposes, in turn, a process in which both actor and spectator are outside themselves. The process is not an epistemological process in which the spectator mentally represents the performer, self-contained and absolutized in the interiority of her thoughts and consequently alienated from the world of the performer. Rather the process is hermeneutical.

Gadamer explains the hermeneutical process of the mediation through the concept of *Spiel* [play]. He writes, "Nur dann erfüllt ja Spielen den Zweck, den es hat, wenn der Spielende im Spielen aufgeht [Indeed, play fulfills its own aim

only if the agent of playing is absorbed in the play]."⁴ But what does the absorption mean? For Gadamer, it is the event of being in which the player cannot relate to an object purposively. Such play takes place in the *Spielraum* [playing space], which is enclosed and isolated from actual aims. This playing space is not real, purposive space. When the player participates in the event of being in the playing space, he loses his normative relationship to this world and thereby abandons his identity as a subject standing externally against the object and orienting itself by purposive goals. In this absence of the normative subject-player, the play, which is "unabhängig von dem Bewußtsein derer, die spielen [independent of the consciousness of the agents who play]," presents itself as the subject.⁵ Mediating here means creating this self-presentation of play. Gadamer finds an example of the self-presentation of play in the to-and-fro movement in Huizinga's anthropological investigation of holy play. The movement repeatedly manifests something else "mit dem der Spielende spielt und das dem Zug des Spielers von sich aus mit einem Gegenzug antwortet [with which the agent of playing plays and which of itself reacts to the agent's stroke with a counterstroke]."⁶ Time and again, the movement generates something responsive which appears to move as if it had its own life. The thing that moves is not the player but the play itself. This responsive and repetitive movement defines the play so decisively that the play presents itself as the subject. This subject includes the player, the agent.

Gadamer extends this idea of the play-as-subject to include the spectator of the play. He writes, "Das gespielte Spiel ist es,

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960) 97. All translations are mine.

⁵ Gadamer 98.

⁶ Gadamer 101.

das durch seine Darstellung den Zuschauer anredet, und das so, daß der Zuschauer trotz allem Abstand des Gegenübers dazugehört [The play, which is played, speaks *to* the spectator through its representation, and therewith the spectator belongs to the play despite all the distance between her and the play].⁷ The play is open to the spectator. The openness creates the playing space in which the spectator becomes suspended by surrendering herself to what she is watching and by belonging and responding to the play. For the spectator, to watch the play means both the suspension from her being in the real world and the construction of a new self which non-purposively participates in the play. Only while she is watching the play in this manner does the play absorb her. In the absorption, the play becomes the subject of the mediated heterogeneous reality. Only something mediated and medial exists as the subject, and only the absorbed spectator can understand the subject as her own.

In light of the aforementioned Gadamerian argument of *Spiel*, I suggest that the actor who is absorbed by *riken* can have his appearance mediated by the spectator as his own subjectivity. As *Spiel* dwells in non-purposive *Spielraum*, Zeami's subject emerges in the performative space where the subject is fictionalized in the fusion of the discursive forces, forces that presuppose a mediated understanding. In the performative space, one force exists only in the dynamics of the directed and reciprocal interaction with another. The actor achieves his subjectivity only in the hermeneutical mediation with the spectator, or vice versa. The one is positioned only in the relation to the other. This relative positionedness means that the subject mutates and moves endlessly while appearing and disappearing, as it were, in a many-valued mathematical function. The subject does not occupy a determinate zero-point of the

⁷ Gadamer 110.

epistemologically referenced coordinates, from which centrifugal mental vectors originate independently. Hence, Zeami's subjectivity as *riken* is a variable in the nodus of discursive relations that crisscross within the hermeneutically indexed coordinates in accordance with the rules of interdependency.

To summarize: In *riken* and *Spiel*, one's subjectivity is neither contained within itself nor alienated from another self. It is graspable through the performative aspect of the appearance that the fictionalizing interpretative faculty of the other instantaneously derives from and fuses with the physicality of the one. If we are to grasp our selfhood, we must engage in what others fictionalize as the bodily hermeneutical experiences of our appearance.