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Translation, Hybridity, and 'The Real Thing':

Don Kenny's English Kyôgen

Introduction [1]

Last spring, I gave a lecture on *kyôgen* to an undergraduate world theatre class for Cornell University's Department of Theatre, Film, and Dance. After I discussed the activities of Don Kenny, an American who performs *kyôgen* in English in Japan, I was taken aback by the students' reaction. They wondered why people would bother to attend performances of *kyôgen* in English when the 'real thing' was readily available. They questioned Mr. Kenny's motives for taking on such a project, castigating him as just another American intent on Americanising a foreign culture. I was even more confused because they seemed to enjoy the video clip I showed them of me performing *kyôgen* in English at a recital in Tokyo. Enjoyment aside, for these bright, articulate students, the project of an American translating and performing an 'ancient' Japanese theatrical art in Japan was as egregious as McDonald's setting up shop in Paris.

Confused by their reaction, because in my experience over a twelve-year period performing *kyôgen* in English with Don Kenny, I found that audiences, foreign and Japanese alike, enjoyed our performances. I did, however, secretly harbour some of the students' objections and often wondered why the people I performed in front of came to our shows. Was it just an insurmountable language and cultural barrier that Mr. Kenny had managed to overcome that opened up a new cultural experience for foreigners in Japan? But, why did many Japanese come to the shows? In fact, Mr. Kenny's most loyal fans come from the Cross Cultural Women's Club of Tokyo, an organisation comprised of Japanese and foreign women. Does English *kyôgen* simply offer these women an opportunity to engage in an intercultural exchange over an entertaining afternoon of theatre? Or, is there a deeper cultural process at work here?

In this essay, I explore the cultural processes that are triggered by an American performing a traditional Japanese performing art on Japanese soil. I frame the development of Don Kenny's English *kyôgen* against the backdrop of the *angura* movement illustrating how the theatrical activity of that period influenced Mr. Kenny's

work. I do believe Mr. Kenny's English *kyôgen* is a product of this vibrant period of Japan's history.

From Atsugi Naval Base to Waseda University

Mr. Kenny came to Japan as a junior officer with the American Navy in 1959. Three days after his arrival, knowing no Japanese, he travelled four hours from the Atsugi naval base to Tokyo to see *kabuki*, an excursion that prefigured his naval career, where, he recalls, he was more interested in directing theatrical productions for Atsugi's drama club than orchestrating naval operations. A year later, he enrolled at Sophia University as a Japanese language student and graduated in 1964. Serendipitously, while teaching English to finance his education, one of his English conversation students introduced him to Nomura Mansaku, the famous *kyôgen* actor, who accepted Kenny as his student.

Kenny, one of a small number of non-Japanese to write university entrance exams, was then accepted into Waseda University's Department of Theatre as a graduate student and researched Japan's classical theatre under *kabuki* scholar Gunji Masakatsu. He left Waseda five years later in 1969 without submitting a graduate thesis, but had acquired enough knowledge about *kyôgen* to write *A Guide to Kyôgen*, which was published by Tokyo's Hinoki Shoten in 1968. According to Donald Richie, Kenny's accomplishment overrode previous English-language forays into the world of *kyôgen* by such scholars as Donald Keene, Burton Watson, Sakanishi Shiho, and Richard McKinnon (Richie, 1968: 7). Lack of finances prevented Kenny from going through the bureaucratic necessities of applying for a diploma from Waseda.

Some interesting patterns emerge when we explore the expatriate community in Japan of which Mr. Kenny was a member. Don Kenny's experience is not unique; he follows a path cleared by other Westerners fascinated with Japanese culture whose connections with the American military brought them to the country. Previously mentioned Donald Richie, film critic and writer based in Tokyo, had himself dispatched to Japan with the United States Foreign Service in 1946 because his only other option was to return to Ohio after the war, an option he had no interest in pursuing. The most renowned trailblazer of the twentieth century, however, is Donald Keene, president of the Donald Keene Foundation for Japanese Culture, professor emeritus of Columbia University, and holder of many awards and numerous honorary doctorates from Japanese universities. [2] Born in 1922, Keene entered Columbia University at sixteen years of age, where he studied Japanese language and history with Tsunoda Ryûsaku. In 1943 at the height of the war, he was dispatched to the Pacific region as an intelligence officer after having completed eleven months of intensive Japanese- language training at the U.S. Navy Japanese Language School in Berkeley, California. His relationship to Japan was deepened due to experiences translating Japanese documents at Pearl Harbour and talking with Japanese prisoners of war in Okinawa, many with whom he became friends (Keene, 1996: 6). Unlike Kenny and Richie, however, he returned to the United States to continue graduate studies in the

field of Japanese literature at Columbia University and Cambridge. It was many years later, in 1953, when he returned to Japan to study in Kyoto for two years. After that, he assumed a teaching position at Columbia University. While it is outside the scope of this essay to ponder the reasons these men were drawn to the cultural emanations of Japan, themes of alienation, military occupation, and a twentieth century form of Orientalism emerge when we lay out their experiences side by side.

Coming of Age during Tokyo's Decade of Love

Kenny's decision to enter the exclusive world of Japanese classical theatre was as reactionary as a group of ragtag twenty-year-olds driving into a small village in a dilapidated bus and performing confrontational theatre in front of an audience of bewildered farmers. By the 1960's, young theatre directors rebelling against the monolithic enterprise of traditional theatre, a system that was 'preserved in quarantine' from other forms of theatre and maintained by a strictly adhered to 'system of hereditary custodianship' (Tsuno, 1969: 12), threw untrained actors onto makeshift stages in non-theatrical spaces. They recycled traditional theatrical styles into new forms of theatrical presentation. They also used theatre to engage the predominant social concern of the time: the US military presence in Japan.

Members of these renegade theatre companies participated in the students' movement.

Beginning with the Security Treaty riots of 1960, university students challenged the establishment with demonstrations and strikes. During this period, the young generation re-examined its role in society and questioned the authority of its government, the interference of a foreign government, and the conservative value systems of the family. The majority of students in Tokyo had come from rural homes, where traditional values had been preserved and their experience in Tokyo exposed them to a newfound freedom and gave them a space where they could express their burgeoning political ideals. Uchino Tadashi comments on the period in which the *angura* movement developed:

[INDENT] The underground theatre movement, or *angura*, from the late 1960's to the early seventies, is now unanimously considered to be an impressive period of both theatrical innovation and cultural intervention.... Without any sense of nostalgia, we can now acknowledge that this was a time of rare productivity and rich creativity in Japan's theatre history.... This *angura* period was productive notably in terms of experiments in theatre language and physical expressiveness, as is often discussed, but also because it supported a wide discursive space, surrounding and permeating those performative practices. (Fensham and Eckersall, 1999: 41)

By the late 1960's, the theatrical movement had gained enough momentum to change the face of theatre in Japan. At the head of a long list of innovators presided Kara Jûrô, Terayama Shûji, and Suzuki Tadashi. Kara performed provocative, confrontational theatre in the compounds of shrines and public parks to big audiences of young people

craving a mode of cultural expression that matched their rebelliousness and bigger audiences of police.

Terayama experimented with new forms of theatrical presentation that grated at the oxymoronic *shingeki*, Japan's traditional modern theatre. Suzuki produced experimental fusion projects of Greek classical theatre at Waseda University, Kenny's graduate school.

Kenny was at the centre of all this activity. He attended the famed performance of Kara's production in Shinjuku Central Park where the police confiscated Kara's red tent and arrested the performers. He remembers arriving at the site (the venue had been moved from Kara's usual spot at Shinjuku's Hanazono Shrine for reasons he does not recall), which was surrounded by a line of police in riot gear. A sign on the tent announced that the police would allow the performance to proceed, but would confiscate the tent and arrest the performers at curtain's close. The police presence, Kenny recalls, seemed like part of the performance, blurring the division between reality and theatre. Even the body search audience members underwent as they filed into the tent felt like a choreographed scene. The play ran without interruption and for the finale, when the actors stripped naked, the walls of the tent began to slowly roll up. Kenny recalls the humorous site of the naked actors standing in a line with their bared behinds facing another line of police rolling up the walls of the tent. There was a loud skirmish as the police dismantled the tent and arrested the actors (on what grounds, Kenny does not remember). After filing out of the dissolving space, the audience watched the police awkwardly fold the tent, an activity contributing to the festival-like atmosphere.

As Kenny does not speak of a large media presence, this spectacle exemplifies Richard Schechner's unmediated 'direct theatre,' where the narrative of the drama unfolds to a resolution merging the social and the theatrical and where the script self-consciously embraces the off-stage political reality into its liminoid sphere of influence. The bare asses of the actors pressed up against a line of police officers bedecked in riot gear is a pure Girardian 'loss of distinction' and, indeed, 'the initial stages of a cathartic process' were set in motion (Kenny, 1977: 120).

Fourteen years later, a journalist commented on Kenny's ambivalent attitude towards the activity of the 1960's: 'Norms Kenny is not particularly fond of. Nor does he have much to say for groups in general or movements in particular' (Forste, 1982: 3). Kenny expands on this when he discusses his take on the events that occurred during this period:

In the early 1960s the student riots over President Eisenhower's proposed visit, the security treaty, and the education methods made the world believe that Japan was going to the dogs for sure and that those students would never be able to fulfil their future roles as solid citizens. However, during those purportedly violent riots, I found it perfectly safe to walk the streets and observe what was going on. At that time, I was a

student in the graduate school of one of Tokyo's major universities and my friends and I simply got to know the militant student gate guards, explained to them that we were there to learn, and so easily gained permission to enter the campus. We attended our seminars and classes and carried on our research in peace while outside the activists continued to wage war with the administration. I still know a number of those adamant militants, and have found that the one subject they find most embarrassing to talk about today is their participation in those riots. When pressed, most of them admit that they have no idea what it was they were fighting for – and their participation was inspired by the times and that they did it because it was simply the thing to do. (1986a: 24)

While Kenny's perception of the Security Treaty riots and the demonstrations of the 1960's presents a non-partisan, eyewitness account of a period in Japan's modern history where too many voices clamour to offer opinions, he overlooks how vital this time was in energising society and theatre. Of course, the perception of these events experienced by the Japanese differs from Kenny's. Kara explains that 'at the time [of the Security Treaty conflict], the conspicuously violent thing was the relationship between the individual and society, in particular, the people doing theatre and society' (Senda, 1983: 216). Kenny, whose refusal to get swept up in the fashion of the times, is commendable in one respect, as his singular attitude allows him to persevere in his goals to create a non-essentialised form of hybrid theatre, however, he overlooks the connection between the revolutionary theatre moments and societal change.

The popular protests fed the creativity of the theatre artists of the time. Kara speaks of the time of the Security Treaty riots as having had a great influence on him and his theatrical activities (Senda, 1983: 215). Kara entered Meiji University two years before the Security Treaty conflict and recalls the student theatre company that he joined followed the intellectual development of the United States that led towards the student demonstrations of the late 1960's. The troupe was highly influenced by the populist, left-wing dramas of the likes of Clifford Odets (*Waiting for Lefty*), Chekhov, and Ibsen (*Enemy of the People*). Kara recalls the bacchanalian atmosphere he and his theatre troupe and the rest of the students created at the Security Treaty demonstrations, but does not look back on his days as a protester with any sense of embarrassment (Senda, 1983: 219-220). [3] While Terayama Shûji shared Kenny's unimpressed attitude of the demonstrations and criticised the various groups, including the labour unions and student groups for spending too much time in meetings when they could have been more active in disrupting the Security Treaty negotiations, he too became involved (Senda, 1983: 15). He responded to the lassitude of the demonstrators by writing the 1968 play *Throw Away Your Books and Get out in the Streets* (*Kami wo tsuteteyo machi e deyô*).

Kyôgen itself developed out of a similar rebellious spirit from the late Kamakura period (1180- 1333) into the Muromachi period (1338-1568). Peasants on the *shoen* (feudal estates) expressed discontent with their treatment by *shoen* administration. Lone

peasants began documenting their sordid working and living conditions and presented their petitions to the authorities who operated out of local shrines overseeing *shoen* administrative practices.

Gradually, more and more signatures were added to the petitions. These grassroots protests against institutionalised mistreatment contributed to the eventual dissolution of feudalism. It was during this period of societal change that pieces of a comic, narrative theatre were strung together to create the cohesive comic form of *kyôgen*.

Terayama Shûji's Influence on Kenny

Out of all the activity that occurred during the *angura* period, Terayama Shûji had the greatest influence on Kenny. In fact, Kenny translated a number of Terayama's plays and favourably reviewed the director's work during his stint as theatre critic for *The Japan Times*. It is not surprising that Kenny appreciated Terayama's work, as the Aomori director/playwright began his career as a poet – his skilful handling of language is apparent in his dramaturgy.

The two shared similar training styles. Terayama preferred the rawness of amateurs to trained professionals and people from all backgrounds appeared in his productions. His training system incorporated eclectic methods of body movement, such as callisthenic exercises of the Maori and Chinese breathing exercises, to create a unique performance style that was perfected through constant repetition (Senda, 1983: 20). When Kenny formed his company, he too developed an eclectic system that drew together techniques from classical ballet, modern dance and yoga, all of which he studied during the 1960's and 1970's. Like Terayama, Kenny prefers working with people who have little experience in Japanese classical theatre because, he insists, trained performers have difficulty breaking out of ingrained habits. Kenny also believes repetition is the most effective way for the performer to absorb *kyôgen* style into his or her body. Both were influenced by the work of Grotowski.

This is the backdrop against which Kenny's *kyôgen* in English theatre company developed. From the mid-1960's, Kenny studied *kyôgen* with Nomura Mansaku, attended graduate seminars at Waseda University, and reviewed film and theatre for *The Japan Times*. In the beginning, he supported himself teaching English and later worked as a freelance professional translator. During this period, Kenny earned the reputation as 'a noted figure on the Tokyo culture scene' (Jayson, 1974: 6) through his collaborations with such figures as Nagisa Oshima and association with people like Richard Schechner, Rudolph Nuryev, Mishima Yukio, and Tadanori Yokoo, designer and founding member of Terayama's company.

Tentative Beginnings: Alice in the Land of the Correct Place

Alice in the Land of the Correct Place (Tadashii kuni no Alisu) is the first production Mr. Kenny directed and wrote, in collaboration with Vicki Lynn, a Texan studying at Sophia University. He considers this production to be the cornerstone of his English *kyôgen*

theatre company. The production took place in the spring of 1974 at Van99Hall, a venue for underground theatre. In the programme, *Alice* is described as '[a] bilingual production with an eclectic cast made up of performers from 12 countries including Japan.' The production fused elements of *kyôgen*, *ikebana*, *kyudô* (archery) and *bunraku* into a satirical work commenting on the social conditions of Tokyo. Kenny views it as 'a sort of 'underground' theatre piece that expresses the process a foreigner must go through to learn to live in Japan and like it on a continuing basis...' (Kenny, 1977: 27). Lynn created this play so she could come to terms with her experience as a foreign student, from which she concluded that foreigners must be broken before they can adapt to life in Japanese society. The theatricalisation of the process of being broken occurred in the climax of the play where a *bunraku* puppet raped Alice.

Shukantaishû (The Popular Weekly), a popular, male-oriented 'sports newspaper,' provides the one critical account of the production in an article entitled 'Nippon fushigeki' ('Japan Satirical Theatre') (Shukantaishû, 1974: 5-8). The writer was not impressed by this performance produced by a group of 'blue-eyes.' According to the reviewer, the audience was not satisfied either and was in a slight 'uproar' at the 'pathetic' atmosphere created by the performers. Angered by foreigners commenting on such events as mothers stuffing their babies into coin lockers and drunken 'salary-men' brawling on commuter trains, the writer unsympathetically responds to this representation of the foreign experience in Japan, a response reflective of a conservative voice-piece not entirely comfortable with members of the foreign community commenting on the social health of their host country.

Alice made tentative steps in joining the *angura* tradition. Richard Emmert, a cast member who would later become a professional *nô* actor, musician and scholar, observed that *Alice* contained elements of *angura* aesthetic, particularly in the ways in which traditional theatrical forms were used in debased ways. The theatre practitioners of the time, in Terayama's words, attempted to 'sully the sanctity of [Japan's] long tradition of theatre' (Senda, 1983:18). [4] But, there is a sense of ambivalence surrounding the production, as if Mr. Kenny and Ms. Lynn could not fully commit to the radical ideals of the *angura* tradition. Lynn appeared naked holding her breasts and smiling into the camera in a promotional shot for *Tokyo Weekender* (March, 1974: 6). Perhaps I am just being a prude, but I think this type of self-showcasing softened the edge of the satire and social commentary of *Alice* and turned it into a dinner theatresque spectacle.

From the Silly to the Sublime: St. Francis

The next production that Kenny was involved in was *St. Francis*, a *nô* play written by professor of drama, Arthur Little. Originally produced in 1970 at Earlham College, Indiana, *St. Francis* was remounted in Tokyo at Roppongi's Franciscan Chapel in the spring of 1974. Kenny produced *St. Francis* and also played the part of the *Ai kyôgen*, the character who presents a colloquial version of the story. Kenny considered this production to be the second cornerstone in the foundation of his *kyôgen* in English company.

The correspondence between Kenny and Little that took place during the long pre-production period reflects the concern about Japanese classical theatre performed by non-Japanese. In one letter, Little explains why Kenny should produce *St. Francis* in Tokyo:

I would like for us to be a first. The interest in Japanese theatre abounds and grows apace in this country, and I don't want somebody else to do an American No in Japan before we do. Added to this is the possibility of a professional Off-Broadway production here which would be encouraged by the fact that it had been done in Japan. Nobody quite knows what to make of it; and nobody in a position to produce it knows whether it is the 'real thing' or not. A Japanese production would reassure them. Besides, even if it were done here professionally, it would delight my soul to have it down in Japan first. (Little, 1974) [5]

While we can sense Professor Little's urgency to be the first to produce an American *nô* play on Japanese soil, I think two other issues are activated by this type of endeavour: first, the unclassifiable nature of hybrid theatre, something we will encounter with Don Kenny's English *kyôgen*, and second, the extent the concerns of authenticity circulating in the traditional *nô* world filtered down to a broader community.

Interest in discourses of authenticity and invented tradition has focused on particular aspects of Japanese culture, such as domestic tourism, ritual and festival, and popular culture. [6] In the realm of classical theatre, Eric C. Rath explores authenticity issues in the *nô* theatre emerging from the ritual tradition built around the character Okina (old man), a tradition scholars and actors alike have claimed to be the generative force of *nô* (Rath, 2000: 254). Rath explains how the austerities practiced by *nô* actors who perform the Okina ritual – a role reserved for senior male actors – transform the performance into a sacred event. However, one particular austerity involving *bekka*, a separate fire the actor uses to cook his food and heat his water, first appeared in treatises in the Tokugawa period, not only a long time after the *nô* tradition took form, but also at a time when performers of *nô* troupes were 'clarifying bloodlines and writing genealogies to strengthen the hereditary boundaries of their profession' (Rath, 2000: 255). The modern view of Okina as a shamanistic ritual is clearly an invented tradition generated by the *minzokugaku* (folklore studies) movement in the 1940's and perpetrated by *nô* actors. In sum, as *nô* actors, the gatekeepers of the tradition, use the ritual of Okina 'to designate authenticity, confer legitimacy, and define artistry.' Rath characterises the Okina myth as a 'strategy of domination' (Rath, 2000: 262). This example of the ritual of Okina elicits concern about the authenticity discourse surrounding *nô* – is there a 'real thing' and, furthermore, how are authenticity claims embodied by insiders and perceived by outsiders?

Returning to the production of *St. Francis*, if Professor Little had neither the years of experience of living and studying in Japan, nor sensitivity to the culture which inspired his creation, *St. Francis* would have run the risk of being a mere showcase of cultural appropriation. His deep understanding of the *nô* drama, however, overrode his neo-colonialist intentions. All the people involved in the production of *St. Francis*, on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, were dedicated Japanologists. Leonard Holvik, music professor at Earlham and highly regarded collector of traditional Japanese music, composed the score. Little and Holvik had studied *nô* in Japan and had connections with such classical theatre luminaries as Nomura Mansaku, teachers from the Kita school of *nô*, and the *Iemoto* of the Komparu school of *nô*. [7] The Tokyo-based participants possessed a wealth of experience: Matsui Akira, who choreographed the dance selections, acted on the professional *nô* stage; the actor playing the *shite* was an amateur student of *nô*; Rick Emmert, *alumnus* of Earlham College, appeared in the 1970 production of *St. Francis*; and by this time Kenny had been studying with Nomura for ten years.

St. Francis drew full houses and received ample media attention from respectable sources such as the *Nôgaku taimuzu* and *The Japan Times*. At one point, Kenny refers to having received ‘a full page rave review’ from the *Nôgaku taimuzu* (Kenny, 1977: 27). While this is somewhat of an exaggeration, the *Nôgaku taimuzu* did devote almost a full page to *St. Francis*. Critic Nagao Kazuo describes the production in minute detail, giving a balanced critique of the production (Nagao, 1975: 3). Comparing Benjamin Britten’s opera *Curlew River*, based on the *nô* play *Sumida Gawa*, to *St. Francis*, Nagao concludes that the Britten production was not as effective. Kenny bore ‘a vast knowledge of *nô* and *kyôgen*’ and the stylisation of the *nô* elements was ‘well researched.’ Nagao also observes that much attention to detail went into *St. Francis* and praises the well-chosen cast. The orchestra, made up of music students from Tokyo’s Geijutsu University, and seasoned performers such as Kenny, Emmert, and Matsui contributed to the overall efficacy of the Tokyo production. Also, the ‘packed’ auditorium was half Japanese and half foreign and Nagao informs the reader that even ‘black people’ made up part of the foreign audience, suggesting people of African descent were out of place at such an event.

Western and Japanese actors ‘smoothly’ recited the script that was ‘remarkable in its clear following of the *nô* metre.’ Kenny in black bell-bottom pants, a visual counterpoint to the *nô* costumes worn by the rest of the cast, spoke ‘fluently’ in colloquial style. Nagao describes Kenny as having a ‘counter-tenor melodious voice’ and possessing a ‘first-class charm.’ He pinpoints a cloak that was too lightweight – the power and status of the character wearing that cloak should have been better represented by a heavier costume. Also, a mask representing a saint was insufficient and the Japanese idea of sainthood was not achieved. Nagao concludes the review:

If compared to an American production, this production would probably lean towards *nô*, but, as a vestige of a Buddhist art, it has been

alarmingly watered down, and a flavourless Buddhist taste has been left behind. (Nagao, 1975: 3)

Where Nagao concentrates on performance values, Donald Richie focuses on the literary aspects of *St. Francis*. Richie compares Arthur Little to Yeats, and concludes Little is a better writer of *nô* drama than the Irish poet, who had never seen a *nô* performance (Richie, 1975: 6). Richie, disagreeing with Nagao's assessment of *St. Francis* as a 'watered down' Buddhist art, finds Little masterful at striking a balance between Buddhism and Christianity: '... Mr. Little keeps Noh-like Buddhist references within his Christian context.' He wishes for 'more precise colloquial language' in the monologue of the *Ai kyôgen*. The music receives plaudits: 'Mr. Holvik's music is extraordinary. It is a pastiche ... of Noh music so precise that it sounds exactly like the Noh.' Finally, Richie comments on the cast's proficiency: the musicians are 'very able performers' and Father Abel's performance 'is one of discipline and power but at the same time, and equally important, he manages to suggest the vulnerability of Francis, his triumphant innocence in the face of experience.'

I draw attention to the details of the reviews because Nagao and Richie treated *St. Francis* like a professional theatrical production, not a showcase of foreigners performing Japanese traditional theatre. Furthermore, the production left behind a legacy. Masuda Shôzô included *St. Francis* in his *Nô no Rekishi (History of Nô)* in a chapter devoted to foreign productions of *nô*-related works, thus legitimising the production and honouring its contribution to the history of the development of *nô* (Masuda, 1978: 138). A rich, intercultural theatrical experience, the cast of *St. Francis* avoided eroticising and essentialising Japanese theatre. Most importantly, the popular interest generated by the production encouraged Kenny to establish an English-language *kyôgen* theatre company.

Don Kenny's English Kyôgen Players

Kenny's *kyôgen* group officially formed in May 1975 with an intensive training session that continued for eighteen months during which the company's repertoire was built. First, they rehearsed Japanese-language *kyôgen* plays such as *Mizu Kake Muko* (The Water Throwing Son-in-Law) and *Shimizu* (A Demon for Better Working Conditions). Then, they included William Butler Yeats' *The Cat and the Moon* in English. The first performance took place in September 1976 at the Japan Culture Institute. The group then toured universities around the United States presenting English-language versions of the *kyôgen* plays in 1977 and once again in 1978. As well, they continued performing in Japan in venues such as the International House, the Tokyo American Club, Sophia University, and Yokota Army Base.

The founding members of the group were Kenny, Jane Corddry, Ogawa Shichiro, and Matsui, the choreographer from *St. Francis*. Kenny's reputation as a *kyôgen* scholar, translator, and performer was firmly established by the late 1970's. Masuda refers to Kenny as 'a highly professional *kyôgen* actor' in *Nô no Rekishi*. (1978: 142). The others,

however, aside from Matsui, were beginning students of *kyôgen*. Jane Corrdry and Ogawa Shichiro studied with Nomura; the latter would eventually become a minor member in Nomura's *kyôgen* company and teach the art at a cultural centre in Tokyo. Ogawa would also become a professional partner in Kenny's company.

The Problem of Reviewing English *Kyôgen*

Nagao reviewed a 1977 performance at Rinsenji temple, the home base of the group, in *Nôgaku taimuzu*, the trade paper for the *nô* world. He opens the review praising '[t]he polished direction and style' of the production and commenting on Kenny's proficiency at handling 'the language problem,' and then reports on the activities of the group, Kenny's translations, his Waseda affiliation, and his training with Mansaku Nomura (1978: 9). Also, Nagao's review appeared two months after the actual performance suggesting it is a description of a theatrical event rather than a critical review.

Nagao goes into more detail about the recital in *Geijutsu Seikatsu* (Art Life) in an article entitled 'Amerikajin no *Kyôgen*' (The *Kyôgen* of an American) prefiguring a trend where Kenny is categorised as a foreigner performing a Japanese art (Nagao 1978: 128). Nagao approves of the handling of the dialogue, but a curious tone emerges when he expresses relief that 'the atmosphere and form of classical Japan was not in the least bit destroyed,' as if he entered Rinsenji Temple expecting the destruction of his country's sacred art at the hands of foreigners. He slightly criticises the confrontation between Tarô Kaja and the Master, played by Corrdry and Kenny, respectively, for being 'sharper' and more 'expressive' than the type of exchange that would occur in traditional *kyôgen*. Nagao's preconceptions of Westerners surface above his praise when he describes the confrontation scene between the servant and the Master:

We can see Don Kenny, as the Master, with the melodious voice of Peter O'toole, giving his commands to Tarô Kaja in a despotic Shakespearean tone that includes both anger and dignity. The typical matronly American Jane Corrdry voices her human rights declarations gratingly.

Enclosing a stereotypical frame around the Americans, Nagao compares Kenny to the Irish Peter O'Toole; although, this is a favourable comparison, Kenny's mid-western accent must have been quite different from the Irish accent of the title character of *Lawrence of Arabia*. The Western bodies and English-speaking voices create a formidable cultural barrier for Nagao, who can only connect them to Western references like Shakespeare and American feminists.

A survey of Japanese language newspaper and magazine articles finds the same information repeatedly. With the exception of *Shukantaishû* and the two articles written by Nagao, Japanese journalists focus on Kenny's ability to speak Japanese fluently, his deep understanding of Japanese customs and culture, and his long-standing professional relationship with Japan's foremost *kyôgen* actor. The novelty of a foreigner performing a traditional Japanese art also elicits much attention. For

example, in an article entitled '*Kyôgen ni Miserareta*' (Bewitched by *Kyôgen*), the writer struggles with the paradox of an American performing a Japanese art. Observing the actor from the front, the writer sees '[a] face that's different from the Japanese,' and viewing Kenny from behind, the writer sees '[a] Japanese *kyôgen* actor' (*Zen*, April, 1981: 17). This description of a foreigner practicing a Japanese performing art conjures up the image of the Japanese writer circling around Kenny with a sense of awe. One is reminded of 'The Couple in the Cage,' the performance art exhibit of Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña where the couple toured museums claiming to be 'authentic Amerindian natives.' Audiences were caught between states of suspension of disbelief and profound naivety as they marvelled at the exotic pair, bedecked in Converse sneakers, hula skirt, and bondage gear, typing away on a laptop and watching television. In Kenny's case, however, he is an authentic American who pulls off a capable performance of an authentic Japanese performer. For the most part, his double performance impresses the Japanese writers. There is, though, an undercurrent that runs through articles written about English *kyôgen* suggesting the form is nothing more than novelty. For example, a headline in the *Kanagawa Shinbun* (Kanagawa Newspaper) perplexes the reader as it can be translated to read 'Different Coloured English *kyôgen*' or 'Novelty English *kyôgen*' (February, 1983: 10).

While the Japanese-language media tends to exoticise and novelise Mr. Kenny's work, the English-language media tends to advertise it. There is no critical review of an English *kyôgen* production in any English-language publication; instead, writers encourage readers to attend the highly entertaining performances and focus on Mr. Kenny's ability to speak Japanese fluently and the fact that he is a long-term resident of Japan. Actually, this perhaps is more a reflection of the Western community in Japan. Until very recently, Westerners did not speak the language well and tended to drift in and out of Japan. Mr. Kenny's perseverance at overcoming cultural barriers and commitment to master *kyôgen* deserves attention, the problem is that his personality and interests (he began his career as an Opera singer, is an avid reader of classical literature in French and English, and has mastered the Celtic harp, to name just a few) shift the focus away from his productions. It would seem he has created such a novel form that there is no point of reference from which to critique his work.

English *Kyôgen* in the 1980s: From Alternative to The Cross Cultural Women's Club

Progressing into the 1980s, the number of performances and tours abroad increased, reflecting the troupe's growing popularity. In 1981, Don Kenny's *kyôgen* Players were on the same roster with Nomura Mansaku's Japanese *kyôgen* for 'The Classical Performing Arts Friendship Mission' produced by UCLA. In an article Nomura wrote about the tour, he mentions Kenny, whom he considers to have created faithful English translations of the classical *kyôgen* (Nomura, 1981: 5). Also, the group's reputation spread to the Kansai region; *Kansai Time Out* highly recommended 'the entertainment value of this experienced group' (1981: 10).

As the company's reputation grew, so did their repertoire and their participation in alternative venues. A joint performance with Kyoto-based Jonah Salz, an American who was also studying and performing *kyôgen* in English, took place in 1982. Mr. Kenny's group performed *The Cat and the Moon* and Salz's group, Noho, performed a Beckett play, *Act without Words* and *At the Hawk's Well*, written by scholar Yokomichi Mario and directed by Kanze Hisao. Throughout the 1980's, original plays written for the company were presented along with the standard plays such as *The Dwarf Tree Thief (Bonsan)*, *The Tea Box (Chatsubo)*, *The God of Happiness (Fuku no Kami)*. For example, Domoto Masaki revived a four-hundred-year-old play called *Meeting and Parting and a Paper Dog (Ronin Sakazuki)* and Donald Richie wrote a play called *Alien Registration Card (Gaijin Torokosho)*. Kenny presented these new plays in a month long programme of alternative theatrical performances for a festival sponsored by Seibu 2000 Ikebukuro Community College. The troupe was also featured in the Netherlands Theatre Instituut festival called Theatre Tape/Film Festival Japan's Theatre. The programme of *kyôgen* in English became more diverse to satisfy both a Japanese audience and a foreign audience.

During this period, Kenny established a connection with the Cross Cultural Women's Club of Tokyo. This group has hosted English *kyôgen* performances every year since 1981. In an article in the *Yomiuri Shinbun (Yomiuri Newspaper)* a representative of the club explains how Japanese homemakers do not get many opportunities to come in contact with their native traditions, but through viewing performances of *kyôgen* in English, they experience traditional Japanese performance and also interact with foreign women (Yomiuri Shinbun, 1981: 21). The women of the Cross Cultural Women's Club do not seem to be perturbed by Mr. Kenny's foreignness – he simply gives them an opportunity to enjoy traditional Japanese theatre with people from other cultures. I suggest, however, that English *kyôgen* has been absorbed into the campaign of exoticism that dominated the domestic travel industry during the 1970's and 1980's, something I will discuss in the following section, and for the Japanese members of this group, it gives them the opportunity to participate in an exotic adventure without leaving Tokyo. English *kyôgen* also offers them a taste of the past, satisfying their nostalgic urges which were aroused during this extended domestic travel campaign; however, the past that Mr. Kenny evokes is one that is deconstructed and reinterpreted.

English Kyôgen and Tourism in the 1990s

An interesting cultural process occurs with the Japan Tourist Bureau's decision to include Kenny's English *kyôgen* as part of its package tour for foreign visitors to Japan. Since 1991, Kenny has been presenting thirty minute lecture/demonstrations to groups of mainly American, Canadian, and Australian tourists at a first-class hotel in central Tokyo. After the tour group's appetite has been satisfied with a *teppanyaki* dinner, Kenny presents a modern dress performance of a short play like *The Inherited Cramp (Busu)* followed by an abbreviated lecture on the history of Japanese classical theatre and a longer meditation on his activities in Japan since 1959. A similar contract exists with the Fulbright Memorial Foundation Symposium for American School Teachers,

except the production is performed in full dress costume and the audience is made up of school teachers from the United States on a brief visit to Japan.

By including Kenny's English *kyôgen* in its foreign tourist package, the Japan Tourist Bureau approves that his work represents an aspect of Japanese culture that can and should be digested by tourists. The tour groups will leave Japan with the impression that Kenny is as much an icon as Tokyo Tower, the Ginza, and the cherry blossoms of April. In a sense, English *kyôgen* is an extension of the Japanese Tourist Bureau's 'Discover Japan' and 'Exotic Japan' campaigns launched in the 1970's and 1980's where Japanese tourists were encouraged to explore their roots, origins that were repackaged to appeal to the Japanese longing to return to a pure, pristine past. The audience of foreigners, however, are not returning 'to a mythical past in rural Japan' (Law, 1997: 220), rather they are visiting an imagined past interpreted by one of their own. The discourse of exoticism that ran through the campaigns of the 1970's and 1980's is maintained with Kenny's English *kyôgen*: for the Japanese, a foreigner performing a culturally sanctified traditional art (Mansaku Nomura, Kenny's teacher, has been deemed an Intangible Cultural Asset by the government of Japan and UNESCO designated *kyôgen* as World Intangible Heritage Art Form in 2001) is as exotic as a Zen priest playing the bamboo flute in a mountain temple; for the foreigner on a package tour of the 'Orient,' the exotic is dished out in easily digestible pieces, furthermore, the familiarity of Don Kenny from Enid, Oklahoma performing 'ancient Japanese theatre' in English washes down nicely.

Conclusion

Here, we return to Arthur Little's concern over whether an English-language production of a Japanese classical theatrical form can be considered the 'real thing.' In the case of English *kyôgen*, I believe Don Kenny has mastered the 'real thing'—at least the 'real thing' presented and preserved by his teacher, Nomura Mansaku. The longest standing member of Nomura's group of amateur students, he has participated in every annual recital from 1964 to 2001, an accomplishment no other non-Japanese scholar or practitioner of *kyôgen* can claim. He has mastered, in Japanese, the vocal delivery and stylised movement of the art, which he translates to English and then conveys to his students. Aiming for accurate reproduction of the form that Nomura has taught him, he does not exoticise the art: as he and I were developing the play *The Fake Sculptor (Busshi)* in the spring of 2000, we constantly referred to a video of the Japanese-language version he and Ogawa performed for Nomura's student recital. In his translations and in his presentations of English *kyôgen*, Mr. Kenny aims for accuracy, not innovation.

In his current performances, however, he brings in new elements that stray from accurate representations of *kyôgen* style. The most recent English-language article about Mr. Kenny's activities discusses his solo performances of *kyôgen* that include songs performed on the Celtic harp (Hirayama, June, 26, 2005). This innovation suggests that English *kyôgen* cannot sustain itself and certainly increases its novelty

value. I suspect Mr. Kenny has no plans to leave behind a legacy of English *kyôgen*, especially since he has not groomed a successor to take over his company. His interests and curiosities will most probably guide the direction of English *kyôgen*. What he has left behind, however, is an opportunity for foreigners in Japan to encounter new cultural experiences because he managed to overcome numerous barriers, obstacles he was able to surmount because of the discursive space opened up by the revolutionary activities of the 1960's.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Allison Tokita for her insightful comments on this essay, and the generous financial support provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Government of Japan. Any mistakes herein are my own.

[2] A very brief bibliography of Mr. Keene's English-language work includes *Yoshimasa and the Silver Pavilion: the Creation of the Soul of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1993); *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984).

[3] In rehearsal for *Enemy of the People* during the Security Treaty crisis, Kara's troupe joined a demonstration in costume. Kara describes the activities of the demonstrators as theatrical, almost choreographed, creating a comical liveliness in contrast to the seriousness of the government and riot police.

[4] In fact, Terayama himself appeared at either a rehearsal or performance, but Emmert has forgotten which.

[5] An Off-Broadway production of *St. Francis* never materialised.

[6] For a broad, theoretical analysis on the historical development of authenticity discourse, please see Regina Bendix's *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). For a topical treatment of the issue, please see Marilyn Ivy's *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Jennifer Robertson's *Native and Newcomer: Making and Remaking a Japanese City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). In particular, Millie Creighton discusses how Japan's 'retro boom' and longing for a collective nostalgia was fuelled by authenticity concerns in her article 'Consuming Rural Japan: The Marketing of Tradition and Nostalgia in the Japanese Travel Industry' *Ethnology* 36. 3 (1997): 239-255.

[7] Their connections reached the Imperial Family of Japan. Little outlined his strategy for negotiating a viewing of the film version of the 1970 production of *St. Francis* for the Emperor of Japan in a letter written to Kenny:

I wrote to the Imperial Chamberlain, Yamamoto-san, telling him that you had the film of *St. Francis*, and giving him your address ... in the hope that he would summon you for showing the film to the Emperor. I have received no reply. A

group of us is going up to Chicago for a reception at the Japanese Consulate at the end of the month, and if it seems discrete [sic] to do so, I will ask the consul whether this should be followed up (Little, 1973).

No further documents reveal that the Emperor of Japan did indeed view the film, yet this exchange reveals the extent of Little's ambition.

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Editorial Note

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