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Compromise in Noh Theater Performance: The Relationship between Actor and Audience in the Fifteenth Century

1 Introduction

When we speak of compromise, our thoughts immediately turn to the sociopolitical sphere. It is said to be an agreement between two or more parties who make mutual concessions to achieve a desired purpose (see the introduction to this volume). Such discourse contains some very interesting implications, including ethical ones.[1] We might, however, talk about compromise in a very different sphere, which likewise certainly has to do with sociopolitics, but which has its own specific reasons for and idiosyncratic ways of "concluding" an agreement or compromise: the arts. Specifically, I am alluding to the ancient Japanese performance art of the fifteenth century referred to as Noh theater. In order to answer one of the many research questions that were asked as part of the "Cultures of Compromise" project, namely, whether compromise was an exclusive feature of the political field, I have argued in my studies on the art history of medieval Japan that there are also numerous examples of compromise in the arts, especially in performance art, and specifically in Noh.

Different kinds of compromises are reached in the arts: those between art and politics, and art and its audiences, and sometimes even compromises that the conflicted artist makes with themselves. I will focus on these different types of "conflict" in order to understand whether compromise in Noh exhibits positive or negative characteristics. To do so, I will answer a few questions that have guided me in the writing of this chapter: What kind of compromise can or should performance come to? Do compromises between art and its audience change depending on the type of audience?[2] Does the audience know that it is taking part in a compromise? How do artists feel that free fields such as art and creativity can or should be subjected to compromise, and what is the artists' role?

1 "Because compromising and bargaining are not valued as part of honest behavior if we are concerned with values or duties" (Cejudo 2010: 301).

2 In other words, does the audience in question correspond to the noble public or not? Yes, in part. The noble audience, the most powerful one, consists of important figures such as the shogun and his court, and can guarantee the financial future of Noh schools.

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2 Key Features of Noh Theater

I will begin by giving a brief introduction to the subject. Let us start by considering what Noh theater is. Noh is one of the oldest performance genres in Japan, alongside Jōruri[3] and Kabuki.[4] It is the oldest and most traditional form of theatrical entertainment. It derives directly from shamanic, land-related Japanese rituals and from court and folk entertainment imported from China. Its main features are a stage with specific characteristics[5] and a performance based on song and dance involving only two actors, both men, one of whom (the main one, referred to as *shite* in Japanese) wears a mask. Troupes are organized into schools, or *za* in Japanese, each of which secretly passes down its own style.[6]

One of the most prominent figures in the history of Noh theater was Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443).[7]

He was the head of the Kanze School and was the first actor, teacher, and playwright to write about the rules of Noh. He is also credited with much of the dramatic corpus that is still performed today. What gave him the title "founder of Noh theater," however, was the great efforts he made in attempting to theorize and put in writing the basic pillars of Noh performance. Zeami wrote more theoretical texts on Noh theory than anyone else – twenty-one in total.[8] His words

3 *Jōruri* was the major narrative genre of the Edo period (1603–1867). It is a form of entertainment characterized by the use of puppets operated by handlers. It is a very refined and complex art form (Salz 2016: 155–192).

4 Kabuki enjoyed its greatest popularity in the Edo period. It is a popular form of entertainment performed by actors wearing brightly colored kimonos and very heavy makeup. Kabuki involves engaging performances with powerful movements and sounds (Salz 2016: 102–150).

5 The stage in Noh consists of a central area called *butai*, connected to the backstage area by a side aisle on the left called *hashigakari*. The whole area is topped by a wooden roof, which is still used today, even on indoor stages, as a nod to tradition, as performances were originally held outdoors (Salz 2016: 26–27).

6 Some of the original Noh schools still exist today, and, as in the past, they continue to pass on knowledge to their students. These are for all intents and purposes schools that have family bonds within them. Today's official troupes are the Kanze, Komparu, Hōshō, Kongō, and Kita schools.

7 In Japanese, people's names are given as surnames first, followed by the given name. This order is respected for names in this chapter. It should also be noted that the names of actors or artists are frequently pseudonyms or attributes that they have received or given themselves. They often describe their abilities and relate to the religious sphere. Zeami was born with the name Kiyomoto. After he began acting, he was renamed as Zeami Motokiyo, but also went by the name Kanze Motokiyo or Kanze Zeami (Ortolani 1998: 119).

8 His successor in the art form, Komparu Zenchiku, also wrote some very interesting theoretical texts based on the critical texts of his master Zeami (Ruperti 2015: 68–69).

allow us to better understand the compromises made in Noh. In fact, his texts speak about what Noh is in practical educational, performative, and philosophical terms.

It is especially in the first category that Zeami proves to be not only very didactic but also especially straightforward. It should be emphasized that the only readers for whom his texts were intended were the members of his school. Indeed, starting in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, competition for patronage among the Noh schools became fierce. Noh performances were supported and financed by the temples, which called on the schools to put on the usual performances during sacred rituals. They were also sponsored by nobles for private ceremonies – by the shoguns in particular,[9] who had Noh performed for official ceremonies. Entering the shogunal court as a favored school ensured actors' fame and even a fair amount of income – not to mention opportunities to build relationships with other notable personalities of the time as well as artists, including writers and poets. It was also an excellent opportunity for personal and cultural growth, all of which helped to foster the development of an increasingly refined art form.

But this was undoubtedly a delicate position to maintain. From 1374, Zeami became the favorite Noh performer of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), a shogun from the ruling Ashikaga clan in the Muromachi period (1338–1573). This position brought Zeami and his troupe great prestige and many opportunities. Unfortunately, upon Yoshimitsu's death, Zeami's position changed. Yoshimitsu's successor Yoshimochi (1386–1428) openly supported another school, and, from then on, Zeami began his "battle" for survival. It was at that point that he began to write much of his literature (Ruperti 2015: 57–60), and it is in this context that I will begin my discussion of compromise.

3 Defining Compromise and Its Role in Noh

A compromise is a technique of regulating social conflicts, which mitigates a confrontation between colliding claims by means of an arrangement in which all conflict parties accept that parts of their claims are not realized, without giving up on their claims as such (see Introduction and the article by Ulrich Willems). Com-

9 The shogun was the authority that ruled the country through a military-style regime, the *bakufu*. The emperor retained the highest official function but was more representative than actually in charge. From the Kamakura period (1185–1333) to the Meiji period, Japan was a country divided into feudal domains ruled by the shogunal court (Pinnington 2019: 5–9).

promise is seen as the *diminutio* of both parties and is an adjustment based on power relations. Often, outcomes derived from compromise are not judged on their own merits. There are three types of agreement: the first is consensus, where the disputing parties actually agree on relevant issues by changing their positions; the second, the deal, is an agreement where both sides gain an advantage; and the third, compromise, is an agreement that requires significant, possibly painful, concessions for both sides without resolving fundamental differences.

The case discussed here seems to be somewhere between a deal and a compromise. Both sides, the performers and the audience, benefit from the agreement, but at the same time, the concessions made mean that the artists cannot consistently adhere to their ideal. More interesting than the question of where concessions to the audience can be found in early Noh theater is another matter: the fact that there is no direct negotiation between the two sides. Rather, Zeami's plays are a reaction to the imagined wishes of the audience. He is therefore prepared to make concessions without being confronted with explicit demands. Instead, he responds to the audience's expectations, which are to some extent fictitious. Nevertheless, he is prepared to make concessions and to adapt his performances to the imagined needs of the audience; an agreement is reached that has aspects of a deal and a compromise, with the artist ultimately representing both sides. The agreement is then realized in the performance, which is why the author repeatedly states that performance must adapt to different circumstances.

4 Case Studies on Compromise in Noh

4.1 Examples of Compromise in the *Fūshikaden*

There are several important concepts that Zeami enunciates and then readjusts based on practical needs. Let us begin with the most important concept, which to a certain extent underlies all performing arts: *mimesis*. The concept of imitation, *monomane* in Japanese (Miner et al. 1985: 276), is explained in the second chapter of the author's first treatise, the *Fūshikaden* (1400–1418):[10]

10 The *Fūshikaden*, "Transmitting the Flower Through the Effects and Attitudes" (Zeami 2008), was Zeami's first treatise, which he wrote over a period of around twenty years, from about 1400 to 1420. Zeami's main motivation for writing this treatise was to put on paper the teachings of his

> It is impossible to write about all the types of dramatic imitation. All the same, since it is of utmost importance to this vocation, you should take great care in this regard. Now, the main point is to present a comprehensive likeness of the object portrayed. But be clear on this: the degree to which imitation is appropriate depends on the object of imitation. [. . .] [I]t's not good to imitate too closely the vulgar habits of bumpkins and louts. [. . .] [D]on't imitate every last detail of even lower occupations. It would be unseemly to bring them before the eyes of high-ranking spectators. Presenting them with such a sight would be too vulgar and would offer nothing to draw their interest. Make sure you give this due consideration. (Zeami 2008: 31)

Imitation for Zeami is the allegorical reproduction of certain human types and categories (the woman, the old man, the warrior, the demon, etc.) and characters from Japanese folklore. However, the important thing, he says, is that imitation is not too similar to the truth. The kind of performance itself helps in this respect: in Noh,[11] acting takes the form of dancing and singing, which encourages unrealistic imitation. The author argues that the actor must therefore only hint at the general characteristics of a character. The goal is to be *interesting* – *omoshiroi* (Miner et al. 1985: 293) – in the eyes of the audience, and to do so, the actor must embody *elegance* – *yūgen* (Miner et al. 1985: 304). In order to be elegant, a character, like an elder, demon, or woman, must not be portrayed in detail – the first two because they have connotations that are too strong and unattractive to see; the third, the woman, because, generally speaking, the women who are imitated are noblewomen, who remain hidden in the inner halls of palaces and are rarely encountered by actors – in addition to the fact that it is male actors who play them. Shortly, we will see a detailed example one of these roles from the text.

We can already see an initial compromise taking shape between the aesthetics of the performance and its largely upper-class spectators. We can speak of compromise because, although the *Fūshikaden* is the first text to precisely state the techniques of imitation in Noh, we understand that these teachings are the result of a long creative process that has taken audience reactions to performances into consideration. We also know that, previously, until the early fourteenth century, Noh had not been stylized so ineffably, almost ascetically; rather, it had favored direct and more realistic imitation (see note 17).

Let us now consider a specific case: the elderly man. The elder, along with the demon, are the two most controversial roles in *monomane*, imitation, for they make it difficult to appear elegant and graceful. If an actor must portray the

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father Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333–1384). The text consists of seven chapters and a short introduction in which the origins of Noh are described (Ruperti 2015: 52).

11 The terms *Nōgaku* and *Sarugaku* are the terms by which Noh was referred to before the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912).

movements of an elder who has difficulty moving, or an enraged demon, it makes it difficult to observe the teachings of maintaining *yūgen*, elegance.

Let us see what Zeami writes about this:

> In general, the presentation of an old man bent over at the waist and lame in the knees loses the *flower* and looks decrepit. And there's little of interest in that. Above all, don't fidget and fuss; comport yourself with grace.
>
> Most important of all is the dance of an old man. Your problem is how to look old and yet retain the flower – it's just as if blossoms were to come into bloom on an ancient tree. (Zeami 2008: 33, emphasis added)

In this quote, we find another key concept of Noh aesthetics: the *flower*, *hana*. The blooming flower is a metaphor for fulfilling the purpose of the actor's performance, which is to "hook" the audience's attention and develop a deep connection (Miner et al. 1985: 276). This is achieved through the actor's ability to make himself elegant and interesting. Again, what Zeami is advocating is to forego realistic imitation for the pleasure of the audience. However, this does not mean totally doing away with the character's essence. The metaphor concluding the paragraph confirms that balance is necessary: "it's just as if blossoms were to come into bloom on an ancient tree." Simply put, new flowers must be made to bloom, even on an old tree. Zeami seems to have struck a good balance between imitation and keeping the audience entertained. He describes it as simply self-evident that the character must first be pleasing and then realistic. The compromise lies in considering a character that has nothing that the audience or the poetics of the *flower* might find interesting or capable of generating enjoyment, and rendering it the opposite, while being careful not to completely alter its nature. Even though this is a compromise, ostensibly to the benefit of the audience and to the detriment of the character – who is considered unsuitable and lacking in *yūgen* – Zeami welcomes it, as he never separates the aesthetics of Noh from the basic building blocks of this art form: *omoshiroi* (what is interesting) and *yūgen* (elegance).

Nevertheless, later in the sixth chapter of *Fūshikaden* we find an intriguing passage:

> If you don't fully recognize this but simply try to make everything express *yūgen*, then you will be giving short shrift to the imitation itself and won't resemble its object. To imagine your performance expresses *yūgen* without realizing that it doesn't resemble the object of imitation is weak. [. . .] You should just think of imitating your object. [. . .]
>
> There is, however, something you should be aware of. Since this vocation regards the audience as fundamental, you should, in accordance with the times, adjust the imitation of something strong (*tsuyoi*) a bit toward the direction of *yūgen* when you are in front of an audience that enjoys *yūgen*. (Zeami 2008: 61)

Whereas before we spoke of gestures being subordinate to elegance, Zeami now explicitly states that, from an aesthetic and theoretical point of view, the balance between the two parts is essential. Indeed, "You should just think of imitating your object" would almost seem to imply that there is an overcoming of realistic imitation in *yūgen*.

Two lines later, though, Zeami immediately reminds his readers, who, we must recall, can only be members of his school, that the public is actually the essence of the performative activity. And *mimesis* must adapt and make exceptions to Zeami's statements, depending on the kind of audience in front of it. Again, in order to synthesize, a compromise must be found.

> What's more, people's tastes vary, and whether it's a matter of song or movement or dramatic imitation, they are different from place to place, so it is necessary to master many different forms of expression. Mastering a truly diverse repertory, then, is like having in your hands the seeds necessary to bring into bloom any flower from the full year's cycle, from the plums of early spring to autumn chrysanthemums. (Zeami 2008: 65)

Here, it is interesting to note that the compromise must be sought and found by the actor alone. The audience in this case seems to play a passive role, or rather, appears to be unaware of the actor's attempt to get the performance to succeed. The viewers directly benefit from a successful performance.

Again, finding agreement does not seem to weigh heavily on Zeami, since he establishes it as part of the actor's training. Knowing how to reach a compromise between technique and practice during a performance is a fundamental skill that must be learned.

4.2 Examples of Compromise in *Shikadō*

I would now like to focus on some specific statements that Zeami makes about performance in *Shikadō*,[12] a text he composed around 1420, which once more confirms the compromise that exists between technique, art, and audience:

> You see, the technique of this rank of great virtuosity is a form of artistry that occasionally appears through the power of intent of an expert actor who, over years of training from his youth all the way to advanced age, has, in an exhaustive mastery, distilled the right and eliminated the wrong and raised himself above it. It's a matter of tempering the right way

12 *Shikadō*, "A Course to Attain the Flower" (Zeami 2008), was written by Zeami in 1420 and is one of the shorter treatises. This text deals with topics relating to singing and dancing, as well as innovative topics such as the actor's classification system for levels of artistic competence (Ruperti 2015: 67).

> to perform with the admixture of a small degree of the wrong way to perform, which the actor has managed to isolate and eliminate from his performance through the long years of his training. Why, you ask, should an expert actor perform in the wrong way? – this relates to the ingenuity of the expert actor. He would not be an expert unless he performed in the right way. That being the case, though, there is nothing fresh about his performing correctly, and the audience is likely to grow rather too familiar with how he looks, but on the rare occasions when he mixes in something wrong, it serves as a fresh attraction precisely because he is an expert. (Zeami 2008: 132–133)

In this passage, the emphasis on compromise is quite explicit. In fact, after years of meticulous study of the correct "way," the compromise goes so far as to consider resuming the wrong movements that were so strenuously eliminated by the actor during his training. Even Zeami asks himself in the text: Why do such an extreme thing? The reason is always the same: the success of the performance in the eyes of the audience. The audience, in fact, may even get bored with the artistic perfection of the performance. If you consciously add errors, they might be positively impressed and find it much more interesting.

The author is keen to point out that, in order to achieve this result, the only one who can successfully implement the compromise between right and wrong is the experienced actor. He alone is able to assess the quality and quantity of the impure elements to be added to the performance. After all, this balancing act is very delicate, and there is a risk of putting on a performance that is completely lacking in audience interest and appreciation. Thus, it would be a good idea for us to clarify what kind of audience Zeami needed to entertain in his time, so that we are also aware of who the other party to these compromises was.

Later in the *Shikadō*, Zeami gives us a rather disenchanted and very pragmatic description of his audience and how he saw Noh in the early 1420s:[13]

> The various articles regarding training in this, both shallow and profound, were not so much in evidence in the old days. Among performers in the antique style were a few greatly accomplished actors who attained this sort of artistic strength on their own. In those days, in the assessments of aristocrats and the exalted, the good alone was noticed and celebrated, and the bad, for its part, was not criticized. These days, however, the critical eye of the audience is highly refined, and they criticize the slightest fault, so unless the play is an elegant one, a polished gem or carefully selected flower, it is not likely to conform to their standard. As a consequence, there are few really accomplished actors. I fear that the vocation is already waning, and if we neglect instruction of this sort, the vocation might be discontinued, so I have simply made a general statement of those matters in the art that are in my pur-

13 We must recall that, at that time, after the death of Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1408), Zeami's Kanze school was banished from the shogunal court. The new shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimochi, preferred another branch of the Kanze school, namely, the one led by Zōami (Zeami's nephew), which was known specifically for its elegant performances (Ruperti 2015: 59).

> view. There are still, in addition to this, secret transmissions to be made face to face to those aspirants in the art who have capacity to understand them. (Zeami 2008: 137)

From these words, we see once again that Zeami has a disillusioned view of the compromise between performance and audience. Compromise is something inherent in the very essence of performance. In his warning to actors, he reveals that the audiences of the time have gained more expertise in the art of Noh. Actors therefore have to maintain the audience's expectation that they will see something unexpected, something worth going to the theater for, in order to ensure that they will keep being invited to perform on religious occasions and at court ceremonies. Moreover, Zeami views the art of Noh as something dynamic (very different to how Noh is understood today). The dynamism of fifteenth-century Noh is demonstrated a number of times in Zeami's questioning of certain terminologies and concepts, which he reworks, changes, and contradicts, even as a proponent of Noh. It is common knowledge in the research field that all of this makes Zeami's writings quite difficult to read and to translate into both modern Japanese and foreign languages.

Indeed, the quote above contains a trace of this dynamism. Zeami repeatedly refers to the oral transmission of certain teachings, reminding us once more that the transmission of texts and teachings was jealously preserved within the schools. Such a reference to practice suggests that what was written down was later adapted according to contingent needs – in short, that there was also a compromise between theory and practice.

4.3 Examples of Compromise in *Kakyō*

As previously mentioned, Zeami also came up with innovative techniques for Noh performance. His texts contain a number of principles relating to aesthetics and technique as well as neologisms. In the context of compromise, it is worth noting the concept of *riken no ken*.[14] This concept is as difficult to translate as it is to grasp. Authors and translators have given different translations of *riken no ken*, all of them trying to do justice to the idea that Zeami intended to communicate. Michiko Yusa translates it as "the seeing of detached perception" (1987: 331), Thomas Rimer and Masakazu Yamazaki as "Movement beyond Consciousness"

14 As Nose Asaji said about the expression *riken no ken*, "I am irresistibly drawn to this phrase riken no ken. Zeami was one of those people who boldly create new terms. Creation of new terms implies the birth of new ideas, ideas previously unknown and unthought, in the minds of human beings" (Yusa 1987: 331).

(1984: 81), and Tom Hare as "Vantage from Vision Apart" (Zeami 2008: 103). It proves almost impossible to translate certain principles unambiguously, with scholars never completely agreeing on the exact meaning to be given to the various concepts.[15] This deep and complicated thought, *riken no ken*, takes on different meanings in Zeami's writings. Several interpretations have been advanced by scholar Omote Akira, who describes at least two major differences in the use of the concept (Yusa 1987: 332).

The first meaning of *riken no ken* is what the audience sees of the actor, while the second meaning is the quality of the art conveyed by the actor himself, but observed through the audience's perception. The expression *riken no ken* or *ken* only seems to appear six times in Zeami's writings, and its meaning is polyvalent (Yusa 1987: 332).

Depending on the context, there are further interpretations: it could refer to the spectators' faculties of aesthetic judgment, the actor's awareness of the audience appreciating his performance, or the innate ability that the actor has to detect the audience's sense of contentment with the general performance. It can also refer to the ontological dimension of aesthetic sensitivity: the audience's ability to grasp and recognize artistic quality. In any case, it is a concept that reflects a matter that pervades all Zeami's texts, which is achieving a synergy between the actor and the spectators during the performance.

The aspect that I am interested in analyzing here is one highlighted by Omote Akira and reported by Yusa (1987), namely the complex technique that involves rendering the self abstract in order to see oneself through the eyes of the audience. This technique is described in *Kakyō*[16] in 1424. The actor must have awareness, *ken*, of how he appears through the eyes of the spectators, who observe him on stage, *riken*. He becomes aware of this by viewing himself in a detached manner, his own *riken no ken*. This is achieved by practicing the precept of *mokuzen shingo* (Yusa 1987: 333), which literally means "ahead of the eyes and behind the heart."

Let us now examine in more detail how this concept is revealed through Zeami's words in the sixth paragraph of *Kakyō*:

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15 Once having clarified the substance of the concept, I generally tend to leave the classical Japanese expression.

16 *Kakyō*, "A Mirror to the Flower" (Zeami 2008), was concluded around 1424. We find in this text many of the themes addressed in *Fūshikaden*, but whereas the latter was premised on Zeami's reporting only the teachings transmitted by his father, in *Kakyō* he provides deep personal reflections on the view of performative processes. The years it took Zeami to write *Kakyō* – about twenty – were the most significant of his life, as they saw the rise and fall of his popularity with the the shogunal court (Ruperti 2015: 61–66).

> Also in Dance, we say: eyes ahead, mind behind. That is, "look to the front with your eyes; put your mind to the back." This is the cognitive manifestation in your manner of expression on the basis of the aforementioned knowledge of dance. As seen by the audience, your attitude is a vision apart from your own, but what your own eyes see is your own vision. It is not a Vantage from Vision Apart. To see with the Vantage of Vision Apart is, in effect, to see with the same mind as the audience does. At that time, you achieve a vantage on your own attitude. If you can clearly see yourself, you also will see what is to your right and left, what is before you, and what is behind. Although you already know about seeing in front and to the right and left, have you failed so far to see your attitude from the back? Unless you perceive how you look from the back, you will be unable to tell what is vulgar in your attitude. For this reason, you need to present a graceful form through your entire body by seeing from the Vantage from Vision Apart, taking on the same vision as the audience and learning how you look in places where you cannot yourself see. Isn't this what it means to speak of putting your mind to the back? I'll say it over and over again: achieve the clearest possible Vantage from Vision Apart [. . .]. (Zeami 2008: 103)

This principle is fundamental and functional for our purposes in as much as it confirms to us once again that art and compromise are continually mixing, even in the mind of the actor, and turning him into the work of art himself. The technique of *riken no ken* is the actor's ultimate performance technique and allows him to see himself through the eyes of the audience, without attempting to overlap with it. It is an almost ascetic view of oneself, through which the actor spiritually leaves his own body and observes himself from the outside – from a third point of view. By gaining a comprehensive view of his body, his motives and his appearance, the actor is able to immediately modify his behavior on stage according to the public's tastes.

In summary, the actor, by developing an external view of himself through the technique of *riken no ken*, is transformed into two entities that play two different, but fundamental roles in the enactment of the compromise. First, he becomes a work of art himself, modified for the pleasure of the audience, which is the goal of the compromise. Second, he transforms himself into what is referred to as "consensus" in the introduction to this volume – that is, the medium through which the compromise is enacted. The actor, in fact, observes and understands what the needs of the audience are and accommodates them in his performance, thereby facilitating general, unanimous agreement.

4.4 Examples of Compromise in "a Day of Noh"

As I have said, there are many aspects of Noh that involve compromise. We have seen its use regarding mimesis in Zeami's first treatise, *Fūshikaden*. The imitation of the object to be represented on stage must not be too similar to the real thing.

We then saw what it means to apply this compromise between imitation in theory and performance in practice by looking at the example of the most controversial role: that of the elderly man. Later in the text we observed how certain practical advice in the staging of roles is entirely subordinate to the audience's pleasure and the refinement of its tastes. Then, in the text known as *Shikadō*, we saw compromise materialize in an even more explicit way. Zeami even pushes actors to consciously perform errors in their role, as long as they reflect the audience's taste. He also states that the audience of his time is itself becoming more and more knowledgeable and demanding. The last example was provided by the text *Kakyō* and concerns a refined acting technique, *riken no ken* – an ingenious technique, used only by the most experienced actors, who aim to observe themselves as seen by the audience by modifying themselves and their posture.

A final example I would like to mention pertains not to the aesthetics or practice of Noh but to the actual staging of a day of Noh performances. Originally, Noh performances took place over the course of a day, with the staging of five dramas, *goban date*, belonging to certain categories in the prescribed thematic sequence of deity, man, woman, madness, and demon.[17] This was a fixed schedule, but Zeami, again, did not believe it should always be applied. Let us take a look at another passage from *Fūshikaden*:

> Sarugaku,[18] though, depends on the attendance of the elite, so if they arrive early, you must begin right away. On such an occasion, the house will not yet have settled down; latecomers will be jostling their way in and people will still be in commotion; and not everyone's mind will be ready for the performance. It thus will be no small matter to capture their attention. On such an occasion, even though you are all made up for the first play of the day, you should exaggerate your movements, sing in a louder voice than normal, stomp your feet a bit higher than usual, and perform with such vitality that you seize the audience's attention. You should do this in order to get the audience settled down. Furthermore, you should perform in such a way as to appeal particularly to the minds of the elite. When this is the case, a *waki* play[19] is unlikely to be entirely successful. All the same, it is crucially important because, above all, you have to appeal to the expectations of the most important members of the audience.

17 It was then officially regulated in the Edo period (1603–1868) (Ruperti 2015: 69–70).

18 *Sarugaku* is the term that was used in Zeami's time to refer to Noh. *Sarugaku* was originally known as a very raw form of entertainment, with circus numbers and a predominantly comic nature. Over time, it became intertwined with Shinto rites and Earth-related cults (e.g., *dengaku*), as well as court entertainments from China (e.g., *gagaku* and *bugaku*), taking on the more refined characteristics that we are familiar with today (Ruperti 2015: 23–33).

19 The *Waki* play is the main play: the first drama that was generally performed after the propitiatory ritual drama known as *Shikisanban*, a three-part drama dedicated to three different deities. Today, only the first part, known as *Okina*, is usually performed (Ruperti 2015: 53–54).

> Nonetheless, if your audience has already settled down and has by itself created an expectant silence, you can hardly go wrong. Even so, it's no small matter to diagnose the audience readiness for the performance unless you are well experienced in the business of prediction.
>
> Also, things can be quite different in an evening performance. In the evening, you begin later, so of course, the audience will be more settled. That being the case, a play that would work well in second place on a daytime program should be put first on the evening program. But if the first piece of the evening gets bogged down, the performance won't get back on track, and you will need a finely honed performance of a high-quality play. (Zeami 2008: 38)

It is clear from the very first lines of this quotation that compromise can also be found in the staging of a day of performances. First, the passage opens with the phrase, "Sarugaku, though, depends on the attendance of the elite [. . .]." This again confirms that, whatever the rule is, it all depends on the audience. However, it is no longer just any kind of audience that he is talking about, but an elite audience: the kind that is very familiar with Noh and actually finances the performances.

Above all, the moment the drama is supposed to begin is subject to compromise. The troupe must figure out whether to anticipate, postpone, or even change the regular sequence of the pieces to be performed. Here we are faced with another kind of compromise that no longer involves the aesthetic and philosophical sphere of art and imitation, but the logistics of staging a sequence of plays. In this passage Zeami's statement about respecting the times and moods of noble versus humble audiences becomes more explicit. This is an affirmation that had previously remained implicit by always hinting at the refined taste of the audience, but not explicitly at social status.

5 Conclusions

The question that has guided this chapter is: What kind of compromise can or should performance come to? The conclusion that we must draw is surely that there are all kinds of compromises involved in performance. We encountered a compromise in the very essence of Noh, that is, at the heart of imitation, in *Fūshikaden*: mimesis must not be too similar to reality, otherwise it will not be interesting to the audience. We have seen compromise in the techniques involved in interpreting a role, and, in this specific case, I analyzed the figure of the elder and noted what tricks are used to render the role aesthetically pleasing and interesting. Zeami reiterates that the audience's taste is more important than the rules

for performing a role, and that *yūgen,* elegance, is the primary attribute for an actor playing any role. In *Shikadō*, Zeami even justifies performing mistakes, or gestures inappropriate to the role, as long as they are elegant and hold the audience's attention. Finally, even the staging of a day of Noh performances must bow to the will and disposition of the audience.

Thus, the answer to the second question – Does the compromise between art and audience change depending on the type of audience? – is yes, absolutely. The audience that the actor needs to satisfy and enter into a compromise with is the one with the ability to patronize the Noh schools. Whether it is the shogun or the nobles at court ceremonies and religious ceremonies, the most important thing is that the audience – which was becoming increasingly aware of what Noh is – is entertained and amazed.

We must be aware, however, that there was a period when Zeami also took into account the less educated spectators who came to see Noh, for example, during rural ceremonies. We read this in the previously cited passage from *Fūshikaden*: "What's more, people's tastes vary, and whether it's a matter of song or movement or dramatic imitation, they are different from place to place, so it is necessary to master many different forms of expression" (Zeami 2008: 65). Here, Zeami is deliberately not emphasizing that the audience must be cultured, which he always does in other passages. This text was, in fact, written in the period between the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a time when Zeami still enjoyed the favor of Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. As I already mentioned, after the Shogun's death in 1408, a period of struggle with the other schools began for Zeami, and it was then that his focus on *yūgen* and the taste of the noble public intensified.

The third question is, in my opinion, the most important one because it highlights the specific features of compromise in Noh: Does the audience know that it is taking part in making a compromise? In most cases, the answer is no – at least not consciously. It is clear that elite audiences knew that the fate of actors depended on the success of the performance within their circle. But they were not aware of all the ploys that Zeami admits to using in his writings. One example of this is *riken no ken*, which is the actor's ability to disengage from his body in order to perceive himself through the eyes of the audience and modulate his performance accordingly. The audience is not aware of this compromise. For most of the performance, the audience benefits from states of aesthetic fulfillment – the flower, *hana*; elegance, *yūgen*; and what is interesting, *omoshiroi* – without being aware of the actor's efforts to modulate himself for them. This is itself an art.

And so, we come to the last consideration: How does the artist feel that free fields such as art and creativity can or should be subjected to compromise? We have seen that Zeami, though on the surface always striving to seek a new artistic

compromise to please his audience, actually does not perceive this as "diminishing" the power of art itself. On the contrary, Noh, as a very dynamic art form, is open to having all of its principles questioned.

There is one final aspect that cannot be overlooked, which concerns the social status of the actor in the medieval and premodern eras. Between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and throughout the Edo period, Noh did not have the elitist connotations that it later acquired during the Meiji period (1868–1912), when it became one of the symbols of Japanese identity, with actors also gaining a certain social status. At that time, Noh was battling with other forms of entertainment for popularity, and, within the genre, Noh schools were fighting each other for the support of the powerful. Actors themselves were considered outcasts (Ruperti 2015: 58–60), and the only way to raise their status was to secure as many influential patrons as possible. In this reality, Zeami was conscious of his social status; he knew that he was starting from scratch, and being able to reach a compromise between aesthetics and performance practice was by no means a *diminutio* but rather a desirable goal – after all, the survival of his Noh school was on the line. Zeami did not encounter compromise with bitterness about any perceived undermining of theater aesthetics, but recognized it as a disarming truth that had to be pursued above all else. Realizing this objective proved to be the real achievement.

We have seen that compromise in Noh has various nuances depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. We saw an initial compromise, where Noh transformed itself from a more carefree form of entertainment to one that paid particular attention to the audience's taste. This shift ensured its survival with political support, money, and fame – resulting in an agreement that involved both parties making concessions.

Another type of agreement pertains more to the artistic and aesthetic sphere, which grants benefits to both parties. We see this realized in the appreciation and success of the performance. However, it is worth reemphasizing the effort the actors must make to position themselves not only as part of the agreement but also as its intermediaries, anticipating the audience's demands. This probably means that compromise in the art of Noh falls into the series of cases mentioned in the introduction to this volume, where "mixed forms of compromise" are discussed. There is no conflict involved in these forms of compromise, and the parties are not always aware of each other's efforts. Rather, they generate and form the basis for other agreements – in this case, those that are made on the aesthetic and artistic levels – which, according to Zeami, do not lead to the parties making any uncomfortable concessions.

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