

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater, Vol. 4

Translation by Jeff Tatum (DarkAngelAscends)

Edited by Daniel Koosed (Bright-Shadow)

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2011.4.22

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 163

撮影まであと七日

Seven Days Until the Shoot

Despite all my big talk and pretentious writing leading up to the shoot, the truth is that even with this “Talking Theater,” Nakahara Rutsu, producer of Tomoshibi and Director of the Sex Industry Museum, occasionally takes the helm, gently guiding my every step and subtly steering me in the right direction.

If she didn't do that, I, being capricious, frivolous, and restless, would veer off course the moment I let my guard down and, before I knew it, find myself plunged into a completely different direction.

Then, my original objective would become blurred. It's no good for the theme to become blurred.

She's the first to read the scripts for this “Talking Theater” series, and she occasionally offers her insights.

“...You should reread this part. Isn't this different from the view of SM, the ‘pleasure of bondage’ that Nureki Sensei always advocates? If you release this as is, people will misunderstand it as being at odds with his usual principles and arguments.”

Although there are slight differences in the nuances of her expression, she generally says something like this.

“Oh? Where exactly?” I'd say, and when I reread the passage she pointed out, sure enough, Director Nakahara was right.

I could give specific examples, but that would take too long, so I won't do that here. However, there are many times when I have no choice but to follow her advice.

The problem is, she's smarter than me, more logical, and her points are absolutely correct. Clearly, I'm the one who's wrong.

I have my own stubborn streak, and I won't rewrite my own text unless I'm convinced, but since she's right, there's nothing I can do about it.

Another problem is that, on top of being smarter than me, she has an extremely honest personality.

She's the type who's completely straightforward and honest.

(I've never met anyone this honest before.)

Whenever I felt frustrated by her perfectly reasonable arguments and tried to forcefully argue back, she would instantly raise her delicate eyebrows, her face contorting into a terrifying, hateful expression like that of a Hannya, and she would continue to point out my mistakes with sharp precision.

(A Hannya is a demoness with a terrifying face, but the term also refers to someone possessing sharp wisdom capable of discerning the truth.)

"Look, just look. Sensei wrote this before, 'A still photograph that utters no words actually speaks volumes.' I agree with this way of thinking..."

Since that's exactly right, I have no choice but to concede defeat.

As someone more than twice her age, simply giving in felt frustrating, so right in front of her, I wrote in large letters on a notepad, "Acting on impulse" and flaunted it in her face just to annoy her.

"Acting on impulse" means "acting exactly as one feels, without pretense or artifice."

I intended it as a bit of a sarcastic payback, but she just gave me a nonchalant "hmm" and didn't bat an eye.

But in the end, I revised the manuscript to my satisfaction, and as a result, my mistakes were corrected. I'm truly grateful for that.

To explain this a little further, here's what happened.

Having worked on numerous video shoots for a very long time, I had inadvertently come to believe, and consequently wrote, that video footage, rather than still photography, could more accurately capture the subtle changes in the subject's (that is, the bound and tormented model's) facial expressions and body movements.

In still photography, the character's movements are frozen, and naturally, their voices and dialogue cannot be heard.

Since their voices and dialogue cannot be heard, I wrote something along the lines of how it is difficult to express the subtle psychological interplay between the characters.

Essentially, the text could be interpreted as implying that video, with its sound, has an advantage.

Producer Rutsu's keen eye did not overlook that single line of text I had written.

"What are you saying? Are you saying that still photographs cannot express a person's inner emotions? Isn't that different from what you always say?"

I had written out the lines of the loan shark who appears in this photo book at great length in my shooting notes.

It seemed impossible to accurately convey the content of those long lines I had written within the confines of a still photograph, which is a frozen image.

So I ended up thinking that when the story gets complicated, video is better suited for explaining the relationships and positions of the characters.

Even at my age, I still act as recklessly and naively as ever.

Oh, how embarrassing.

Producer Rutsu's sharp eyes were instantly drawn to that one careless line I'd written, and her pointed criticism flew straight at me, piercing my heart.

Gah, ow!

As always, what came out of her mouth was pure common sense, and I couldn't argue a single word. All I could do was groan.

So, I rewrote it right away. I wrote what I truly felt.

(That became "Talking Theater" number 161.)

Producer Rutsu nodded and said, "Yeah, this is good. Let's go with this."

Ah, that was scary!

There was one more thing that Producer Rutsu pointed out to me this time. I'll write this down here as part of my own "shooting notes."

It's that my approach to filming tends to lean more toward creating something to please enthusiasts rather than creating a work for myself.

In other words, whenever I tie up a woman, my instinct is always to seek the empathy of fellow enthusiasts.

As a result, I end up being dominated by the desire to produce a product rather than the mindset of creating a work of art.

Given that 99.9% of the women I've tied up in the past were professional models, meaning I tied them up for the purpose of product creation, this is perhaps only natural.

For this upcoming Tomoshihi shoot, I must set aside this instinct to create products.

It would be truly disastrous if, out of past habit, my heart were to inadvertently lean toward merchandise production. This is one thing I absolutely must avoid.

This shoot must be entirely free from product creation and must remain strictly in line with my personal taste from start to finish.

If it starts to smell like a product, it will lose all value.

I really need to think this through more carefully, but as I've said many times before, I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed, so I can't seem to get my thoughts to go very deep.

It's simply that I've kept at this kind of work for a long time, relying on experience, which I've repeated over and over without growing tired of it, and on my gut feeling.

When you do the same thing for over fifty years, a kind of sediment inevitably builds up.

I wonder if I'll be able to scrape that sediment away during this shoot.

Well then, starting tonight, I'll take out the ropes I'll use to bind Hiromi Saotome in seven days and give them a thorough cleaning.

2011.4.29

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 164

撮影まであと三日

Three Days Until the Shoot

On the night three days before the shoot, producer Nakahara, photographer Sachi Yamanouchi, Hiromi Saotome, and I, a member of the Tomoshihi fan club, gathered in a room for our final meeting.

It's hard to put into words just how much fun we had during those three and a half hours of conversation.

Of course.

I was the only man there, surrounded by nothing but beautiful women, each excelling in her own field. I was like the king of a harem.

And everyone gathered that night shared an unwavering passion for bondage photography.

We were all burning with a strong desire to create great photographs.

In other words, without exaggeration, our hearts were united toward a single goal.

It was only natural that I spent every moment enveloped in an incredibly fulfilling, warm sense of happiness.

It might be seen as conceit or arrogance for me to say this here, but the members with whom I discussed things thoroughly and deeply this evening were all trustworthy individuals who share exactly the same sensibilities as I do regarding kinbaku.

I spoke with them without reservation. If Minomura Ko had been here that night, he would surely have shed tears of joy at the depth, height, and sharpness of their sense of the absurd.

As I spoke, I occasionally sensed Minomura Ko's presence. What we love is, after all, a conceptual world of thorough obsession. That is why we are always alone.

While conversing with them, I was calling out to Minomura Ko.

"Suma-san, forty years ago, no, fifty years ago, you bound your subjects and took countless photographs. Now, here, such enthusiastic, admirable women have gathered, loving those very photos and longing to take them themselves, chatting happily together. I wish I could have shown you in this scene, just once."

Suma is Minomura Ko's real name.

And then it suddenly occurred to me.

That's right, I'll take that photo from my album, the one from over forty years ago showing the four of us, Minomura Ko, Yoji Muku, Haruo Shimamoto, and myself, standing side by side, and hand it over to Director Nakahara Rutsu. When I eventually pass away, that photo will disappear too. It's best to keep it here in this Sex Industry Museum. Minomura Ko, Yoji Muku, and Haruo Shimamoto would surely be pleased in the afterlife.

That night, I said something along the lines of, "It's nothing short of a miracle that people united by a single will can gather in a room like this, chatting in such a friendly and harmonious atmosphere. I'm so happy. I'm so grateful."

I repeated those words several times.

That night, I was not alone.

It was a night of deep, substantive discussion among creators, far more than just a gathering of hobbyists.

Just as I finished writing this, I got a call from producer Nakahara Rutsu.

"...This is a continuation of what we discussed last night. Tamaru goes to the convenience store down the street to buy a bento box because he's worried about Hiromi being hungry, right? Left alone in the house, Hiromi struggles to find a way to escape while the man is away. But her hands are tied behind her back and tied to a pillar, so she can't escape. I want to express in detail Hiromi's determination to untie the ropes, her movements, the agonized struggle of a woman desperate to break free from the pillar that binds her, her expressions, and her various poses. And then, the disappointment, despair, resignation, and sorrow she feels when she realizes the ropes simply won't come undone. Furthermore, I want to convey scenes of her anger and hatred toward the man in minute detail. Precisely because these are silent photographs without dialogue, I believe that if I express them accurately, I can dramatically convey free and rich imagery to the viewers."

“Yeah, you’re right. Since that’s a key climactic moment, let’s have photographer Yamanouchi shoot it thoroughly and carefully.”

As I replied, my mind was already visualizing all the various movements Hiromi Sautome would make in that scene.

I believed that in three days’ time, Sautome would deliver a performance that surpassed even those images in my mind.

And, taking producer Rutsu’s words from that phone call as a hint, I was expanding on those images even further.

“...What’s the matter, honey? Aren’t you going to eat? I went all the way to the convenience store just to buy you a bento, so aren’t you hungry? Not eating is bad for your health, heheheh... I see. You’ve been tied up for so long that your wrists are numb and you can’t use them. All right, then, I’ll feed you myself.”

Tamaru uses disposable chopsticks to bring a grain of rice from the bento to Hiromi’s mouth.

Hiromi turns her face away in resistance. How frustrating (yeah, this is a great scene).

Tamaru is delighted to see Hiromi’s frustrated expression.

Furthermore, he teases her by pinching her tongue with the chopsticks . A close-up of the tip of the chopstick and Hiromi’s tongue (that image just popped into my head).

Next, the scene shifts to an image of him trying to make her drink tea from a plastic bottle.

A close-up of the tea spilling from the corner of Hiromi’s lips and running down her chin. Hiromi’s frustrated, pitiful expression.

Yeah, that’s right. Let’s make this guy named Tamaru someone who acts like a real jerk but is oddly polite and overly deferential when he speaks.

That way, his sleaziness and baseness really come through. In short, he’s a servile man, and a despicable one at that.

After taking a few sips of tea, Hiromi turned to Tamaru and said she needed to use the restroom.

Tamaru unties Hiromi from the pillar, grabs the end of the rope, and leads her to the restroom.

I don't want to film Hiromi urinating directly here. I absolutely do not want to.

This is because I believe it would destroy the magnificent, poignant, and endearing imagination and fantasies of urination and defecation enthusiasts, and betray their poetic romanticism.

I want to show Hiromi's expression of shame and resentment toward the man through the crack in the closed door after she's been shoved into the restroom. That's all I want to do.

From the conversation I had with producer Rutsu on the phone, images like this keep welling up one after another, and I can't stop them.

However, no matter how much I expand on these images, the precise movements and angles naturally won't be decided until the day of the shoot, when Saitome is actually on set and breathing life into the scene.

In three days, that day will arrive.

I'd better give the ropes another once-over.

Producer Rutsu also has some suggestions regarding this rope.

Since this despicable pervert named Tamaru is plotting from the start to tie Hiromi up, it stands to reason that he would bring along his own favorite hemp rope.

However, these days, you rarely see hemp rope anywhere. It simply doesn't exist.

There are photos and videos where hemp rope suddenly appears from places where it shouldn't exist, and the woman is tied up, and it certainly looks strange when you watch it. It feels off.

I don't think we need to take this kind of fetishistic photography and video that seriously, but there are times when it's inconvenient not to think about it.

As producer Rutsu says, there are certainly plenty of other types of rope and string that can express a sense of restraint in a sufficiently attractive and sensual way, even without using hemp rope intended for commercial bondage.

Insisting on using hemp rope for absolutely everything is truly like a broken record.

Huh? What did you say?

Are you suggesting that it was none other than Nureki Chimuo who first declared that hemp rope is the absolute best, and has been saying so for years?

Well, if you put it that way, I have no choice but to bow my head and say, “Yes, you’re right. I’m sorry, you’re absolutely correct.”

That is why I have always called myself a “hemp rope fetishist.”

But just recently, I saw a thin fabric scarf nearly three meters long being sold for 200 yen at a clothing store in town, and I bought it immediately. It’s about thirty centimeters wide.

At that time, I was walking with Rakka-san. An hour after buying the scarf, I was in a love hotel, using that very scarf to tie her hands behind her back.

“How does it feel to be tied up?” Before I even had a chance to ask, she was already half-fainting.

This is no lie.

It sounds like a joke, but it’s a true story.

In this case, the bondage wasn’t meant to be shown to others.

It was purely for private pleasure.

When it’s private, all that matters is that we both feel good.

No matter how much Tamaru ties her up or how cruelly he bullies her, Hiromi must never let herself feel good about it.

If Hiromi were to start enjoying it here, the story would take a completely different turn.

That said, if it were portrayed well, it could actually be quite interesting.

2011.5.9

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 165

満足度百点満点

100 Out of 100 for Satisfaction

I was extremely satisfied with both the shoot and the results.

I don't know how to express the sense of satisfaction I feel right now.

My poor writing skills are infuriating.

I am so satisfied and happy that I can't even find the words to describe it.

It's amazing that all three of them understood exactly what I was saying and what I wanted, and each of them took it in and acted on it.

All three of them went above and beyond.

It was nothing short of magnificent.

Even before they understood what I was saying, all three of them shared the same sensibilities and drive as I did. They charged ahead single-mindedly, without hesitation, aiming for the same goals and results.

As usual, I wrote about the purpose of this shoot quite persistently and repeatedly in this "Talking Theater."

All three of them really took the time to read it thoroughly. And they put it into practice.

No, putting it that way would be arrogant and disrespectful toward the three of them.

From the start, these three were exceptional talents who possessed the same aesthetic sense of bondage as I do.

They simply seized a perfect opportunity and blossomed all at once.

No, it wasn't something as gentle as blossoming. To my eyes, it seemed as though they had violently burst forth and exploded.

Aesthetic sense of bondage beauty is not something that can be taught, even if one tries. It is not something that can be conveyed, even if one tries.

For example, even when it comes to the use of a rope alone, even if they faithfully imitated what I taught and tied the knots, true bondage beauty could never be born.

At best, the result would merely resemble the form. The most essential soul is absent.

Knowing this full well, yet having explained rope techniques as if they were legitimate, such is my dishonest, careless nature. My despicable way of getting by.

However, I shall not speak of that here.

Hiromi Saotome was, as expected, outstanding.

She fully grasped my vision, made it her own, and brought to life the inner world of a bound woman.

I would like to record here the brilliance of every single aspect of Saotome's performance that day, but my writing skills are too poor to do it justice. It is a shame.

After the shoot, we went to an izakaya called Akazatsuya, had a few beers, and shared our thoughts on the day's events.

"When I took Saotome into the restroom, it was probably a good thing I didn't shoot any shots of her rolling up the hem of her clothes and straddling the toilet bowl," I said to the three of them, smug as ever, twitching the tip of my nose.

"Yeah, that part was great, great, really great!" said photographer Yamanouchi and producer Nakahara Rutsu in unison.

The excitement from the shoot still lingered with all of us.

The single remark Saotome muttered at that moment was perfect.

"In that scene, not having my skirt pulled up actually makes me feel more miserable and embarrassed."

If we stripped her naked, made her stick her butt out, and filmed the excretion scene directly, it would ruin the masochistic eroticism we'd worked so hard to build.

It's a huge mistake to think that just stripping someone naked is the answer.

"That's right. The masochistic beauty we're talking about lies not in showing your butt, but in standing frozen in the corner of a cramped, dimly lit restroom, bound with your hands behind your back while fully clothed. We proved that today."

Surrounded by three beautiful women and drinking beer, I feel myself growing more and more intoxicated.

I also wrote this in the 164th installment of "Talking Theater":

...after taking a few sips of tea, Hiromi turned to Tamaru and said she needed to use the restroom.

Tamaru unties Hiromi from the pillar, grabs the end of the rope, and leads her to the restroom.

I don't want to film Hiromi urinating directly here. I absolutely do not want to.

That would destroy the magnificent, poignant, and endearing imagination and fantasies of urination and defecation enthusiasts, and it would betray their poetic romanticism.

I want to show Hiromi's expression of shame and resentment toward the man through the crack in the closed door after she's been shoved into the restroom. That's all I want to do.

The actual shoot proceeded exactly as described.

In other words, it turned out exactly as I had envisioned.

It wasn't simply a matter of filming my script faithfully. All three of them truly connected with the script and poured their hearts into the performance.

Saotome said that being tied up fully clothed and made to stand next to a toilet made her feel more miserable and ashamed than having her skirt lifted and being forced into a defecation pose, and the final work captured that sense of masochistic emotion exactly as intended.

Not only in this toilet scene, but throughout every scene, they remained immaculate, moving briskly to capture the emotions I envisioned and intended, each pouring her soul into her work.

The one whose movements were the slowest and most sluggish was me, an elderly man.

From the very beginning, photographer Sachi Yamanouchi held her camera with confidence and continued to press the shutter with a steady, assured hand. She hardly spoke a word.

It was 100% natural light. No artificial lighting was used at all.

There was not the slightest hesitation or doubt in Yamanouchi's approach to her subjects.

It seemed as though she was focusing all her attention on the aesthetic sensibility she believed in.

In an effort to purely capture the masochistic beauty of the subject writhing before her, Sachi froze all her senses and did not move a muscle.

That unwavering presence put me at ease. I was happy. I thought to myself, "My eyes were not deceiving me."

I thought she was the best photographer for "Tomoshibi."

Photographer Sachi gave not a single instruction to Saotome, who lay bound and breathing right before her eyes.

In silence, she confronted the expression of Hiromi Saotome, the model.

I wrote this in the 160th installment of "Talking Theater:"

...let's proceed with the shoot as naturally as possible.

The photographer says to the model, "Look that way, look this way, lift your chin, lower your chin, furrow your brows, make a sad face!"

Let's all be careful to avoid taking photos like that at all costs.

Let's firmly remind ourselves once again that photos where the only thing you can sense is the photographer's voice giving instructions are the absolute worst kind of bondage photography.

Even if she hadn't read the kind of instructions I'd been harping on about, the photographer should have already been well aware of them.

The “foolishness” of a photographer who issues a barrage of detailed commands regarding the movements of a bound model, thereby stifling the model’s unique personality.

If one fails to express the inner tremors of a woman, instead suppressing her living personality and treating her like a doll, then the mood and emotion of bondage photography are lost.

Bondage photography is by no means cruel photography.

At times, it is photography steeped in sentimental romanticism.

The quality of the work produced that day by photographer Sachi Yamanouchi, who, from start to finish, shot in natural light, in silence , and with a blend of confidence and tension, would become clear four days later.

Producer Nakahara Rutsu enlarged the photos taken by photographer Sachi onto photographic paper, and we held a gathering to view them first, just among our close circle of friends.

I had intended to record here the words of admiration we each expressed that night, but I will refrain from doing so to avoid sounding like I’m patting myself on the back.

In the photos, there is a scene where Tamaru (Nureki) places a gag in Hiromi (Saotome)’s mouth. Producer Nakahara had specifically filmed this moment on video, and it was truly spectacular.

It possessed a tremendous intensity and authenticity unlike anything I had ever seen before. It was a magnificent and harrowing scene that could truly be described as nothing less than breathtaking (though, as expected, I’ve ended up patting myself on the back).

2011.5.10

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 166

フツーの人と、そうでない人

People Who Are Ordinary and Those Who Aren't

This is a continuation of the previous post.

I need to write a little more about what happened during the filming of the Tomoshihi group.

Having shot between five and six thousand bondage photos and videos for commercial purposes, this was the first time I had ever completed a shoot entirely of my own volition, by reaching out to trusted staff and models, and without compromising to anyone or anything.

After the shoot, while we were having our wrap party at an izakaya called Akazatsuya, I told my three companions about this.

“Today is the first time I’ve ever shot purely based on my own tastes and will, without the greedy thought of trying to sell to ‘normal’ people outside the fetish community. In that sense, today is a memorable day of rebirth for Nureki.”

I repeated something to that effect over and over, changing my wording slightly each time, while thanking them in my heart.

In 1959 (Showa 34), when Minomura Ko asked me to take over the editing of Uramado, everything, from the photographs to the novels and other reading material on the text pages, was intended solely for enthusiasts.

Although it was, of course, a commercial magazine from a business standpoint, its target audience was clearly limited to enthusiasts.

I edited Uramado with only our enthusiast readers in mind.

I paid absolutely no attention to the general reader.

I aimed to create a magazine that would not be interesting to the general reader.

I even felt it would be a source of shame if the general reader found it interesting.

The authorities who regulated and cracked down on erotic magazines would say, "I have absolutely no idea what's interesting about a magazine like this," and mock me.

There were times when I even took a certain pride in being dismissed as clueless and mocked as a pervert.

As the magazine became increasingly shunned and despised by the authorities, its unconventional content was welcomed by readers who possessed an unconventional sensibility.

Around this time, the editors at Uramado, Minomura Ko, Yoji Muku and myself, were all people who possessed both a normal sensibility and an unconventional one.

As times changed, one reason SM magazines began to feature content aimed at ordinary erotic enthusiasts was the fact that they came to be edited by people who possessed only a normal sensibility and lacked any sensibility beyond the ordinary.

Even SM magazines edited by people with only ordinary erotic sensibilities, who were merely imitating what they saw, sold well as long as they were a novelty. They brought in profits for the publishers.

However, it was inherently unreasonable to have people from the world of common sense, who possessed only ordinary sensibilities, edit SM magazines aimed at enthusiasts.

(When I spent time with them, there were so many instances of such misguided thinking that it made me want to cry.)

Editors with only ordinary sensibilities inevitably end up incorporating the eroticism of ordinary sensibilities into the magazine.

They'd try to lift up the hem of a woman's clothes to immediately show her butt, or make her spread her legs to shove something between her thighs...

Admittedly, for ordinary people, the eroticism of inserting something into a woman's crotch is easier to understand.

Because it's easy to grasp, it makes editing feel safe. It's unsettling to present something to readers that you yourself don't understand or can't comprehend.

Rather than publishing a photo while tilting your head in confusion, wondering why a woman sitting in seiza with her legs closed while fully clothed is better than one standing

completely naked with her legs spread wide, it's only natural to want to include the kind of eroticism you can clearly sense yourself.

Since I was involved with most of the SM magazines that were being published in large numbers at the time, I had a lot of dealings with editors like that.

Together with those editors, I've done thousands of bondage photo shoots.

Many of them were just working to get paid.

That's only natural, really.

This applies not only to print publications but also the video industry. If an AV director with only a run-of-the-mill sense of eroticism forces himself to shoot a video featuring bondage scenes just to make a profit, it will only leave enthusiasts cold.

Huh?

Somehow, the conversation has strayed off track again.

I've gone on and on, writing nothing but irrelevant nonsense.

Old people really are hopelessly grumpy.

What was it I wanted to say?

If I keep writing things like this, this piece won't be a "continuation of the previous one," will it?

It seems that bondage photos and videos that fail to excite enthusiasts are still circulating, and I've been hearing complaints from them.

So, at that point, I decided, fully aware of my own arrogance, to really put my all into it and take some bondage photos that perhaps only I would appreciate. That was the beginning of Tomoshihi.

So, let me make one thing clear from the start.

For those who prefer conventional erotic sensibilities, this will likely be a completely uninteresting photo collection that makes little sense.

(Though I have no intention of showing it to anyone outside my circle.)

The only ones who will find it entertaining are my friends who share my tastes.

That is why, in the photos I took this time, the model remains fully clothed throughout the entire process.

I won't even roll up the hems of her clothes.

There are absolutely no pointless, extremely unnatural acrobatic scenes, such as suspending her upside down.

I'll use no more than three or four ropes at most. Fewer ropes have a stronger presence and allow me to express a more tantalizing eroticism of bondage.

This kind of sensibility would be completely incomprehensible to ordinary people.

Of course, I don't expect them to understand. The fortress deep within our hearts is impregnable.

Because it is a sensory world that ordinary people could never possibly comprehend.

It is a sensory world that only enthusiasts, those possessing a flexible imagination, a rich sense of narrative, and a delicate, imaginative power capable of leaps of the mind, can accept and immerse themselves in with pleasure.

As I mentioned briefly last time, after tying Hiromi (Saotome) up against a pillar with her hands behind her back, Tamaru (Nureki) forced a double-knotted hand towel gag into her mouth. This scene really built up the tension and turned into something incredible, unlike anything we've seen before.

(For some reason, producer Nakahara was holding a video camera at this moment and recorded only this scene.)

First, I rolled up the handkerchief and shoved it into Hiromi's mouth.

I used my fingers to force it in tightly.

On top of that, I used a hand towel tied into a knot in the center to hold down the handkerchief stuffed into her mouth.

However, the knot was too big to fit inside Hiromi's mouth. Her mouth is small.

The handkerchief crammed between her teeth bulges out.

I pushed it back in with my fingertips.

Hiromi struggled, and the lump of the handkerchief bulged out again.

“The knot is too big. Let’s tear the hand towel lengthwise to make it thinner.”

In front of Hiromi’s face, I untied the knot and tore the long hand towel lengthwise in half to make it thinner.

This time, without making a knot, I placed the torn hand towel between Hiromi’s upper and lower teeth and tied it tightly over the handkerchief that was already stuffed inside.

The hand towel dug painfully into Hiromi’s cheeks on both sides.

Then, over that, I used another hand towel to tie a gag that covered half her face.

Hiromi’s expression as she writhed in agony, unable to breathe. After the shoot, Saotome told me, “My mouth is smaller than most people’s so I really struggled to breathe back then.”

As I wrote last time, producer Nakahara Rutsu captured this scene, which could be called one of the climaxes, accurately and delicately with a small video camera.

It is a passionate, clinging shot, focused on a close-up of Saotome’s upper body as she shakes her head up, down, left, and right, struggling to breathe and gasping for air.

When I watched the footage later, I was astonished by its eerie intensity.

I was truly impressed and thought to myself, “The person who shoots footage like this is no ordinary person.”

Come to think of it, this bondage scene is clearly the only punishment scene in this shoot.

I know of no other footage that portrays a scene involving simply having a gag forced into one’s mouth with such severity, brilliance, and a maniacal sense of realism.

There were many gag scenes in the Kinbiken videos I used to produce in the past, and while I’m sure they were filmed realistically and in detail, this time the footage is even more vivid, pulsating with a harrowing intensity steeped in the beauty of masochism.

Staring intently at Hiromi’s pitiful, masochism-drenched face as she writhed in agony from the tight gag, the two cameramen and I focused our attention as if possessed.

As she shook her head in distress, the gag loosened. I grabbed both ends of the hand towel once more and tightened the loosened gag with all my might.

Only this scene and a few other shots were recorded on video during this shoot. In that sense, this scene, with its extraordinary intensity, became a precious, exclusive asset of Tomoshibi.

Although the video only shows Hiromi Saotome's upper body (her breasts aren't even exposed) and the expression on her face, even when ordinary people see this gagging scene that has us trembling with delight, they'll likely just mutter with a frown, "What a horrible thing to do."

"What a pitiful thing to do."

"What's erotic or entertaining about doing something like this?"

"I just don't get it."

That's probably all they'd think.

That's exactly right.

Ordinary people just don't get it.

(And that's fine. After all, you are ordinary people.)

Even if we did something that ordinary people could understand, it would bring us no joy or satisfaction whatsoever.

Ordinary people possess neither the brilliant, abnormal imagination that allows us to expand and leap forward with such unbridled freedom, nor the power of fantasy to create tales of macabre romance in an instant.

We, who are not ordinary people, possess an extremely unique, unrestrained, one might even say perverse, ability that only we can possess.

That is why, in this scene of the gag, we can sense a dizzying eroticism ten times, no, a hundred or a thousand times greater than the eroticism ordinary people could ever dream of or act upon.

Huh? Are you saying you don't believe it?

I suppose so. I suppose you can't believe it.

Well, even if you can't believe it, that's fine, of course.

The content of our fantasies, to tell you the truth, is something terribly embarrassing that we could never carelessly share with others. Yet, it is also something we secretly take pride in.

Even if we're called perverts and sometimes looked down upon, since God has granted us the ability to experience such luxurious pleasure. I suppose we just have to put up with it.

Oh, I've gone off on a tangent again.

Since the first shoot for Tomoshibi went better than expected, we decided to go ahead and do the second shoot right away.

And the person advocating for this most enthusiastically and vocally is, believe it or not, producer Nakahara Rutsu.

"Write the script for the next shoot. Sensei, stop slacking off and get writing!"

Right now, I'm being strictly urged on every single day.

2011.5.18

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 167

「夕日の部屋」から「木賊の庭へ」

From “The Sunset Room” to “The Horsetail Garden”

The bondage photo book featuring Hiromi Saotome, planned and produced by Tomoshibi, has been titled “The Sunset Room” and our team is currently hard at work on the editing process with great enthusiasm.

Everyone is elated by the excitement and tension of Tomoshibi's first photo shoot, as well as the excellent results, which turned out just as expected, and their spirits are soaring.

And with their spirits high, everyone is already looking forward to the next shoot.

When the day's shoot ended and I was on my way home, I thought, “The atmosphere of the Yamanouchi residence, so full of charm and emotion, and the intense masochistic mood, a kind of vengeful eroticism, if you will, that radiates from Hiromi Saotome's inner self. There's still so much more we can shoot in this setting. No, we must shoot it!”)

Unlike a deserted rental studio filled with nothing but lifeless objects, the Yamanouchi residence is teeming with living, breathing backdrops.

The garden next to the entrance is overgrown with horsetails, a plant rarely seen these days.

You don't see it much anymore, but when I was a child, horsetails used to grow in clusters in backyards and vacant lots near the water.

I suppose there are fewer and fewer people who can read the characters for “horsetail (木賊)” and pronounce them as “tokusa.”

It may seem like a digression, but I'll look it up in the dictionary.

Tokusa “木賊” Meaning “horsetail.”

An evergreen perennial in the Equisataceae family of ferns. It grows wild in wetlands. The rhizome is tubular, and scale-like leaves grow in sheaths from the nodes. The leaves are hard and are used for polishing objects.

I didn't understand what "scale-like leaves" meant, so I looked up "scale" and found it.

"Rinpen" is "scales."

"Scale" ... A single scale. A thin fragment shaped like a scale.

I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, so there were many craftsmen's homes nearby. I often saw scenes in their workshops out front where they would bundle this horsetail and attach sanding blocks to it, then vigorously scrub the raw materials for wooden items like chests of drawers.

Basically, the stem is thin and hard, forming a tube, and since the surface is rough, it is used as a moderately flexible file.

The clumps of horsetail growing in the dark spot beside the entranceway at the ends of a narrow alley had a unique, harsh emotional quality, and it seemed like the perfect place to position the bound body of Saotome.

And then, the story goes on...

That's right, I'll make it a continuation of "The Sunset Room."

Machikin, that is, Tamaru, the local loan shark, continued to show up at Hiromi's house every two or three days, tying her up with rope and subjecting her to relentless, nagging abuse.

Hiromi endures it in silence because her husband feels guilty about having borrowed 1.5 million yen from Tamaru and then running away without paying it back.

Believing that her husband will eventually return to her, Hiromi endures the humiliation and keeps the house together.

Taking advantage of this, Tamaru comes to see Hiromi whenever he has a spare moment.

And he satisfies his own perverted desires.

"Heh heh heh... Well, madam, have you heard anything from your husband since then?

If you find out where he's hiding, let me know.

Honestly, as far as I'm concerned, I'm just happy as long as he pays me back what I lent him.

But if he runs off without paying back a single yen, our business is as good as over. I wouldn't be able to show my face to my friends.

So, sorry to say, but I'm going to have to tie you up again today. Don't worry, I'll just tie you up, I won't do anything else. You know that already, don't you? Heh heh heh...

Let's just say tying you up is the interest on the money I lent your husband.

That's right. If you just stay still while we tie you up, we'll let you off paying the interest. Don't you think that's a pretty sweet deal? Heh heh heh...

Oh my, as soon as I brought out the rope, you quietly put your hands behind your back today, heh heh heh... You're such an understanding, obedient wife. I like that.

It's precisely because I like you that I come to tie you up like this. If you were a woman I didn't like, I wouldn't feel like tying you up at all.

Oh, what cute wrists. What lovely wrists you have.

To cruelly bind such slender, lovely, wrists with rope... I really am a bad guy... heh heh heh...

Now, raise your wrists a little higher, up to your shoulders. That's it, that's good. Now, I'm going to tie you up tight.

How about it? How about it? Does it hurt? It doesn't hurt, does it?

If it hurts, just say so. I'll loosen it for you. Maybe the rope around your chest was hurting a little.

I don't want to hurt you. It's not like I hate you. It's your husband I hate. Leaving such a lovely wife at home and just disappearing somewhere like that.

Still, you're a strange woman, aren't you?

When I tie you up like this, you suddenly look so alluring.

From your neck to your shoulders, your chest, your waist, and down to your thighs, your whole body becomes soft and rounded, and you look all fluffy, melting, and sexy.

Just looking at you puts me in a good mood and gives me chills.

Ah, just now, you twisted your neck, turned around, and glared at me.

You glared at me with hatred. You glared at me with a look of contempt.

And yet, even that look is sexy.

Ah, I can't take it. Glare at me some more. You can look down on me all you want. I'm just a pervert anyway."

I've just jotted down some notes as they came to mind, but Hiromi and Tamaru's emotional arcs are pretty much the same as last time, so let's just shoot the rest while changing locations.

I still really want to capture Hiromi crouching in a pitiful pose in the garden of the horsetail plants.

I'm thinking it would be nice to place a woman's body amidst a cluster of horsetail, a plant with a somewhat unusual shape, to symbolize a sense of abnormality.

Photographer Sachi Yamanouchi has been hoping, ever since our first shoot, to realize a romantic vision, hanging two or three teru teru bozu (paper dolls to ward off rain) from the eaves on a rainy day and placing a bound Hiromi next to them. I, of course, am all for it. I'm totally, totally, totally for it.

(That teru teru bozu image perfectly aligns with the concept behind my bondage photos from my Uramado era.)

Producer Nakahara Rutsu said that since the video camerawork was sharp and excellent during the last shoot, we should have the climax scene filmed on video again.

Unlike the professional, practiced style of an AV cameraman, producer Nakahara makes the camera "breathe" in sync with the agonized breathing of the woman being tormented. (The scene where Hiromi is made to bite down on a hand towel tied into a gag.)

It transcends technical skill. This is not a craft that can be taught. It's safe to say it's a precious, innate sensibility.

Cameraman Yamanouchi excels at capturing the intense, sensual allure that Hiromi Saotome radiates in an instant as she writhes in bondage.

I discovered that when photographer Sachi points her camera at a bound female body, there is a particular shot she favors.

It is, as expected, the moment when the masochistic psychology within the bound woman reaches its peak and climaxes.

Photographer Sachi, too, possesses the instinct to attune herself to the subject's inner world, that is, the movements of her heart, before pressing the shutter.

I had noticed this before, but I am delighted to have confirmed it so clearly this time.

Even among photographers who claim to specialize in SM photography and call themselves SM photographers, there are many who capture only the surface and the form of the bound female body.

Compared to such people, both photographers at Tomoshihi accurately and keenly capture and express the mind of masochism.

They are truly reliable.

Now, I wonder how the second shoot will turn out.

There is still more I want to write about, so I'll save that for next time.

2011.5.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater 168

てるてる坊主とヒロミを並べて

Line up the Teru Teru Bozu¹ and Hiromi

As a follow-up to the previous installment of this “Talking Theater.” I’d like to jot down some notes from the photo shoot for Hiromi Saotome’s Kinbaku Photo Collection Vol. 2, “The Garden of Horsetails.”

Since these are just notes, I’ll write down whatever comes to mind, sort of like hints, in no particular order.

So, when we actually shoot, I don’t think we’ll stick strictly to these notes. We’ll probably adapt them freely as we go.

Just like the previous shoot, this one is also exclusively for the photo book and will not be filmed for video.

After reading the previous installment of “Talking Theater,” “From ‘The Sunset Room’ to ‘The Horsetail Garden,’” producer Nakahara Rutsu promptly sent me the following suggestions.

She suggested starting with a “Teru Teru Bozu” scene.

Yeah, that’s a good idea, I immediately agreed, and based on that suggestion, I began to envision the opening scene.

With the feeling of waiting for her husband, who has disappeared without a trace after running up debts, Hiromi is making a teru teru bozu on the veranda facing the garden.

A teru teru bozu is a simple doll hung under the eaves of a house, imbued with the wish for good weather the next day and the prayer that the long, persistent rain will stop. But in Hiromi’s case, along with her prayer for clear skies, there is also her longing for her husband’s return.

Just then, Tamaru, the moneylender, brazenly walked in from the garden.

¹ A teru teru bozu is a small cloth doll, resembling a ghost, to ward off rain.

Seeing what was on Hiromi's mind, Tamaru said, "If your husband doesn't come back, I'll be in trouble too. After all, I've lent him 1.5 million yen. I'll help you make a teru teru bozu so your husband comes back soon."

When Hiromi saw Tamaru, she instinctively tried to run away.

Tamaru grabbed Hiromi's wrist firmly and said, "Whoa, if you run away, I'll have absolutely no idea where your husband is. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to tie you up again so you can't move."

Tamaru took out a rope and, licking his lips with glee, tried to tie Hiromi's hands behind her back.

"Please, I won't run away, so please don't tie me up anymore," Hiromi pleads pitifully.

Tamaru grins wickedly as he twists Hiromi's wrists behind her back.

(The above scene takes place on the veranda facing the garden.)

Tamaru drags the bound Hiromi from the veranda into the room.

Hiromi instinctively struggles and cries out, "Help me! Someone, help me!"

She shouts at the top of her lungs. Tamaru panics and says, "Hey, hey, don't shout so loud. What if the neighbors hear us?"

As he says this, he gags Hiromi with a hand towel.

He stuffs it tightly into her mouth, gagging her carefully with two or three layers.

(Last time, he tied her to a pillar and gagged her, but this time he pins her down on the tatami mats, makes her crawl, and gags her while she's laying on her side. Hiromi writhes in agony in the prone position.)

Tamaru ties the end of the rope binding Hiromi to a pillar.

In front of the pillar, Hiromi struggles with anxiety and fear, writhing her entire body like a snake in an attempt to escape.

(We also shoot several variations of the sitting pose on the tatami mats.)

Before long, the end of the rope tied to the pillar loosens, and Hiromi, still bound, crawls away toward the entrance.

Tamaru grabs the end of the rope and tries to pull her back. The pitiful sight of Hiromi being dragged along.

Dirty shoes and other objects are placed in front of Hiromi's face as she collapses at the entrance. Hiromi's expression is one of utter humiliation.

(The entrance hall of the Yamanouchi residence is brimming with a vibrant sense of daily life, making it the perfect setting for a bound woman, so I want to shoot several variations.)

Hiromi, made of straw, hangs beneath the eaves alongside a teru teru bozu.

A pitiful sight, standing barefoot on tiptoes.

(I won't hang her upside down. There's no point in doing that.)

This scene would be perfect if it were raining, but even if it isn't, it's fine as long as it conveys a gloomy, overcast atmosphere.

(I feel that the whiteness of the teru teru bozu, made of white cloth, and Hiromi's white hand towel gag create an exquisite balance and an evocative connection. Since this is the climax and a symbolic scene in the story, I want to capture a great photo overflowing with a sense of victimhood.)

From this "teru teru bozu" scene, I'd like to move on to the "Horsetail Garden" scene.

(There is a garden with dense stands of horsetails right next to where the teru teru bozu is hung.)

When placing the bound woman in this strangely shaped horsetail garden, producer Nakahara envisioned having Hiromi's entire body completely soaked.

"That sounds great. If we can pull that off, it'll make for the ultimate masochistic photo. The horsetail will really come alive, that's perfect. I'd love to do it," I said, naturally agreeing.

The eroticism of thin, underwear-like fabric clinging tightly to bare skin when wet possesses a sensuality several levels above that of a completely naked female body.

(As I write this, I can immediately picture that scene with Hiromi Saotome in every detail. That imagination is several times more erotic than actually seeing the scene. This is the power of fantasy possessed by someone who is not ordinary. That said, I don't mean to brag. In short, this is probably what they call the "abnormal" sensation.)

However, while it would be fine on a rainy day, it seems strange for a woman's body to be soaking wet when it isn't raining.

It would be unnatural for Tamaru to suddenly subject Hiromi to water torture here.

I don't want to do anything meaningless.

Now, what should I do?

I think...

Tomoshihi was launched after we discussed among friends that we should stop producing those meaningless photo books that just list various aspects of bound female bodies in a rambling fashion.

I don't want to suddenly throw in some cheap, unnecessary water torture here.

I want to maintain our commitment to creating bondage photo books with a narrative.

The bathroom at the Yamanouchi residence is truly magnificent. A breathtaking scene imbued with a rare, evocative atmosphere. I find myself wondering if creating a story where we perform a water torture scene in the bathroom for some reason, and then drag her straight out into this garden of horsetail plants, might create a natural, organic connection.

Let's all get together at Tomoshihi to have a fun discussion about how to develop this idea and brainstorm some great concepts.

2011.6.1

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百六十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 169

ポーズ集にはしたくない

I Don't Want to Turn This Into a Collection of Poses

Continued from last time.

Producer Nakahara said to me with a stern expression,

“...But you see, Nureki Sensei, just because there's a garden full of horsetail growing near the eaves of a house where a teru teru bozu is hanging, I think it would be unnatural, given the flow of the entire photo book, to drag the heroine, Hirome, out into that horsetail garden while she's still tied up and roll her around in it. Dragging a bound woman's body outside like that is pretty awful. Unless there's a reason for it, even the worst kind of man wouldn't treat Hiromi that roughly.”

If we place models in meaningless positions just because the background looks good, without thinking about the story's logic, we'll end up with the same thing as the “bondage photo books” that have been flooding the industry these past few years. In other words, nothing more than a collection of poses featuring women tied up with ropes.

True bondage photography enthusiasts are no longer satisfied with that sort of thing.

The key point that stimulates enthusiasts lies in imagining the inevitable SM narrative hidden behind the bound and tormented body.

Of course, I completely agree.

For us at Tomoshibi, our primary goal in creating photo books is to first satisfy ourselves, to enjoy and get excited by the results.

They are not meant to be shown to anyone other than our close circle.

(However, I do have a desire to secretly show them to fellow enthusiasts, puff out my chest, and boast, “What do you think? Isn't it great? Isn't it amazing? This is what true

bondage photography is all about.” Come to think of it, I’ve lived my life so far finding my purpose in the happy faces of fellow enthusiasts.)

Simply raising a camera and snapping a quick shot of a woman bound in rope being rolled into a garden of horsetail would result in a bondage photograph lacking depth, in other words, one with little substance.

A lack of depth means that, for the viewer, the work offers little in the way of stimulation, excitement, or emotional impact.

After all, the viewer wants to know what is going on inside the mind of the woman being tormented. They want to feel it.

They want to enter the innermost depths of her mind and body. They want to empathize. The ability to empathize is the privilege of the connoisseur.

True bondage enthusiasts all possess a rich imagination and the power of fantasy.

An enthusiast who lacks imagination and the ability to fantasize cannot truly be called an enthusiast. Enthusiasts are a privileged class.

It is precisely because enthusiasts possess such rich imaginations and delusions that they become aroused and can surrender their hearts to a luxurious pleasure that ordinary people cannot experience.

That said, a single shallow bondage photograph that lacks any sense of narrative cannot stimulate their signature delusional powers.

They need a clue to spark their imagination.

We at Tomoshihi began by rejecting mere collections of poses devoid of narrative.

I imagine.

A woman named Hiromi, waiting alone for her husband to return, guarding the house.

Hiromi loves her gambling-addicted husband, who left home with a debt of 1.5 million yen to a loan shark and has since gone missing.

Tamaru, the loan shark, is naturally searching for Hiromi’s husband as well.

“Where is your husband right now? Tell me. If this keeps up, the interest on the debt will just keep piling up,” as he says this, Tamaru comes to Hiromi’s house time and time again.

And he ties up the stubborn Hiromi and threatens her.

Hiromi is made to stand under the eaves, bound, alongside a teru teru bozu.

Then, Hiromi is dragged into the garden of the Kiso family.

What is the reason that made Tamaru so agitated and extreme?

(Of course, Tamaru has always had those kinds of interests and preferences.)

That's right.

Actually, let's say Hiromi knows where her husband is hiding right now.

She knows, but she's keeping it a secret from Tamaru.

(Hiromi has a stubborn personality, and she also loves her husband.)

Tamaru opens a drawer in the dresser and finds an envelope containing cash.

Beside him, Hiromi, still tied up (or perhaps it would be better if she weren't), is trembling with a look on her face that says, "Oh no!"

An angry Tamaru thrust the 100,000 yen he found right in front of Hiromi's face.

"Hey, lady, where did this money come from? Your husband sent it to you, didn't he? Damn it, why didn't you say anything? Where is your husband?!"

"I don't know. That money is from my own earnings. It wasn't sent by him," Hiromi says, her face a picture of desperation.

"Fine, whatever. I'll just take this as part of the interest. Now, where is your husband? You know where he is, don't you? Tell me," Tamaru says threateningly.

He pinches Hiromi's chin with his fingertips, forcing her to look up.

"You know, don't you?"

Hiromi refuses to answer.

"Damn it, don't play dumb!" Tamaru rages.

And then, what if we set it up so he drags her into the garden of the Japanese horsetail?

That would be reason enough for Tamaru to get angry.

As with last time, I, that is Nureki, will play Tamaru. However, I'll make sure only my hands and feet appear on screen.

The scene of a few 10,000 yen bills scattered around the bound, terrified Hiromi (though it's a bit cliché) would be easy to understand and make for an interesting scene, wouldn't it?

Also, as with the last shoot, I expect producer Nakahara to refine the details and create a polished script.

Today is two days before filming.

The four of us will gather again at photographer Yamanouchi's house. I'm looking forward to it.

I wonder if that big, plump cat, so friendly, charming, and full of personality, is doing well. Getting to see that cat again is one of the things I'm looking forward to. I usually don't like cats or dogs, but for some reason, I really like that cat.

It just occurred to me, when we gag her, what if we stuff a toru toru bozu (paper doll) into Hiromi Saotome's mouth along with the cloth scraps? I feel like that would give it a cruel vibe?

I wrote out the scene carefully and visualized it, but this time, too, it's a photo shoot for a photo book, not a video.

We at Tomoshihi make sure to construct a solid narrative even for photo shoots. We write notes that are almost like a script to prepare ourselves mentally.

2011.6.24

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 170

撮影延期とテルシのこと

The Postponement of Shooting and the Matter of Terushi

The day of the shoot for “The Horsetail Garden.”

When I arrived at the coffee shop in front of the station thirty minutes before the meeting time, photographer Sachi Yamanouchi soon appeared and sat down in front of me, looking more nervous than usual.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, and she replied, “It’s a tragedy, the husband of our next-door neighbors passed away suddenly late last night.”

The house next door is attached to the Yamanouchi residence, and their gardens are connected.

Given that the husband had left for work in good health that morning only to pass away suddenly that night, the situation must be quite chaotic.

The Yamanouchi family surely had a daily relationship with the couple next door.

“Well, this isn’t exactly the time for a photo shoot,” I said, just as Producer Nakahara and model Hiromi Saotome arrived.

Both of them had already been informed of the incident at the house next to the Yamanouchi residence via their cell phones.

(Incidentally, I’m the only one who still doesn’t own a cell phone or a computer.)

We decided to cancel today’s shoot and discuss a date that works for all four of us.

Since we’re a close-knit group, we didn’t need to debate it. We reached an agreement right away and set the date for three weeks from now.

As soon as I arrived at this coffee shop, I placed something wrapped in a handkerchief in the center of the table, with a slightly meaningful look on my face.

Inside that handkerchief bundle were four “teru teru bozu” dolls, made yesterday from bleached cotton cloth, that I had prepared for today’s shoot.

The trick was that when the handkerchief was removed, four teru teru bozu would appear before Yamanouchi, Nakahara, and Saotome, their faces lined up and their bodies huddled together.

“All right, listen up. I’m going to unfold this handkerchief now, so none of you are going to let out ‘Whoa!’ or ‘Eek!’ or ‘Yikes!’ or anything like that. We’re in a coffee shop, after all, and there are other customers here.” As I spoke, I pinched the four corners of the handkerchief on the table with a dramatic flourish and unfolded it.

“Eek! Aaaah!” Of the three beautiful women, the one who let out the highest-pitched scream was, surprisingly, producer Nakahara.

“So cute!” Everyone exclaimed in unison as they peered at the dolls.

I stood silently, grinning to myself.

It was exactly the reaction I had expected.

The three beautiful women each took out a camera and began photographing the four teru teru bozu dolls lying on the table.

“Did you make these, Sensei?” they asked in unison.

Even without me answering, they were friends who had long known that I was the type of person who takes pleasure in making these kinds of intricate little props.

The table where the four of us were sitting became lively for a while.

The women, whose spirits had been dampened by an unexpected mishap, found their spirits lifted a little by the teru teru bozu made by an 81-year-old-man.

This is what direction from the person leading the troupe is all about, I thought to myself with a sense of pride.

At the same time, I’m also quietly smiling wryly, aware of my own frivolity and pettiness for taking pride in something like this.

A man who spent his entire life as a mere tinkerer, skilled only with his fingers.

No, am I being overly sensitive at this point? Is this too self-deprecating?

There was a neat little pasta restaurant in the same building as the coffee shop, so we all had lunch there, and that was the end of our outing for the day.

Although I felt bad about the tragedy that had befallen the family next door to the Yamanouchi residence, I found myself in a strangely relaxed mood and thoroughly enjoyed our lunch and conversation.

Even when we aren't working together on a photo shoot, we members of Tomoshibi get together and have a good time from time to time.

I always look forward to seeing everyone.

This is a secret, but in about four months, for example, these four of us will stand on the same stage in the same hall and perform storytelling in front of a large audience.

We agreed to meet again at that same coffee shop in three weeks, and then we went our separate ways.

Photographer Yamanouchi, naturally, headed home.

Saotome also headed home.

"Well, what shall we do? Should we use this time to go to the Togeki, or perhaps to a theater in Asakusa?" I asked Nakahara-san.

We're supposed to visit both places soon.

At the Togeki in Higashi-Ginza, they're screening the second installment of "Rakugo Research Society: Masters of the Showa Era" under the subtitle "Rakugo on the Screen: Cinema Rakugo."

Both Nakahara-san and I have seen the first installment.

This time, it features footage of the late Showa-era rakugo masters, Shincho, Bao, En'yo, and Shozo, a nostalgic lineup of performers captured on film.

Seeing them on stage, magnified two or three times larger than life-size, was incredibly powerful, and it was fascinating to clearly see the subtle nuances of their performances.

Live performances by real people on stage are different every single day.

Especially the plays that Nakahara-san and I enjoy seeing, once the day changes, we can never see the exact same thing again.

A few hours later, Nakahara-san and I were sitting in the audience at a theater in Asakusa, gazing at Terushi on stage.

Terushi was the actor both Nakahara-san and I had been eagerly awaiting.

Rather than saying we were “eagerly awaiting” her, it might be more accurate to say we were “longing” for her.

It was a troupe that would not have appeared before our eyes if we hadn’t been waiting.

I wrote “both Nakahara-san and I” rather carelessly, but since my heart is not one with hers, I cannot know how deeply Nakahara-san feels about Terushi.

It might be against her wishes for me to presume that our hearts, longing for her, are one and the same.

So, setting aside her feelings, I will write about Terushi exactly as I perceived her.

Terushi is an actress with a powerful personality.

Her overwhelming individuality is unlike anything else I have seen.

The image of Terushi rises before my eyes. She’s tall, nearly two meters. Slender, yet imposing. I’m always looking up at Terushi’s face.

...Having come this far, I’ve lost sight of how I should write about Terushi.

So, after thinking for a while, I’ve decided to continue writing.

2011.8.1

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 171

長身瘦躯のナルシシスト

A Tall, Slender Narcissist

Due to the unfortunate news that the husband of the family living next door to the Yamanouchi residence had passed away suddenly early that morning, we had to postpone the scheduled photo shoot at the Yamanouchi residence.

The Yamanouchi residence and the neighboring house are very close, separated only by a garden and a fence.

There is no way our filming would not cause some disturbance to the neighbors during such a hectic time.

We, the members of Tomoshihi, gathered at the coffee shop designated as our meeting place. For that reason, we had no choice but to cancel today's shoot. After having lunch together, we went our separate ways.

So, Producer Nakahara and I decided to go see the play with Terushi that afternoon, but this decision was not made merely for entertainment.

We wanted to be inspired by Terushi's heroic way of life.

Both Nakahara-san and I sense an aura in her work that resonates with our own filming and other activities.

The aura that radiates from Terushi's entire being is extraordinary.

It is likely called an aura precisely because it exudes an unusual, mysterious charm. But now, if we were to try to explain this word aura, a term we often use casually in our daily lives, in Japanese, how exactly should we put it?

It piqued my curiosity a bit, so I looked it up in a couple of dictionaries to verify.

Aura: (1) A fluid believed to emanate from living beings; a term in spiritualism; said to be photographable using special fluorescent plates. (2) A unique atmosphere; a subtle mood. (Shueisha, Dictionary of Foreign Words in Japanese)

Aura: The atmosphere a person possesses. Alternatively it refers to the vital energy emitted by living beings, which is said to be visible to certain individuals. (Dictionary of Katakana Terms, published by Nihon Jitsugyo Publishing)

Aura: The energy or mysterious atmosphere exuded by people or objects; in spiritualism, it refers to spiritual energy or aura. (Shueisha, Imidas Supplement: Dictionary of Foreign Words and Abbreviations)

So, while one of the dictionary definitions describes it as having a mysterious atmosphere, the real issue is what kind of mystery it is.

There is an indescribable eroticism in the mystery that Terushi seems to exude.

Even as a man, I feel a tingling sensation in a certain part of my brain and sense a bewitching allure, as if something were being drawn out of me.

This reaction isn't normal, and I find it a bit unsettling myself.

For example, I often watch kabuki. When I see a young, dashing leading man at the height of his popularity or a glamorous onnagata in her prime, I do find them beautiful, but I've never felt the kind of emotion I get from Terushi. An emotion akin to the pain of having the surface of my skin swiftly cut by a sharp blade.

I inadvertently wrote pain, but I don't actually feel pain. Even if I am wounded, it is a pain that doesn't hurt.

Far from being painful, it is actually pleasant. Rather than pain, perhaps a throbbing sensation would be more accurate.

Terushi is tall and slender overall, with supple movements in his limbs and waist. Not only is his form beautiful and impressive, but he is also a skilled actor. It is not a skill acquired through training, but rather a sharp, almost innate talent that he displays in an instant.

Is Terushi a handsome man?

He has a distinctive face, but he is undoubtedly handsome.

Despite standing over 180 centimeters tall, he plays female roles.

He performs elegant female-role dances with great skill, earning cheers from the audience.

Because his movements are so flexible, there is no awkwardness in his onnagata dancing, but his face has a somewhat stern look.

His cheekbones are high, and his nose is slightly hooked. His chin is pointed and slightly long.

His eye sockets are slightly sunken, and his gaze is sharp.

He casts a sidelong glance toward the audience. A look that is, in itself, sufficiently alluring and seductive. Yet the sharpness of his gaze cannot be concealed.

Nevertheless, combined with his skilled acting, he is beautiful.

The audience is entranced by his mysterious, sensual beauty, with that sharpness lingering in the corners of his eyes.

Nakahara-san, sitting next to me, is also gazing at him with a mesmerized expression. Being timid, I sense something dangerous in Terushi's beauty and occasionally look away from him.

Since he is this type of onnagata, he does not perform dances portraying virgins or young women. Most of his dances involve mature women who suggest intense romantic affairs. For example, those that carry the scent of an affair.

I've suddenly started writing about Terushi's onnagata dance, but the roles he looks best in are not those of an onnagata.

It is that of a ronin, dressed in a loose-fitting black habutae kimono, carrying two swords, a large and small one, sheathed at his sides.

Moreover, a ronin who has truly embraced the desolation of a life of lawlessness always harbors a hidden killing intent.

I have seen several of Terushi's dance shows, but there is one scene that I cannot get out of my mind.

Set to the song "Otonari Mujo," Terushi appears dressed as the ronin Hirate Zoshu. An aura of grim intensity instantly fills the stage.

As you know, he was once hailed as a prodigy at Chiba Shusaku's dojo in Kanda, Edo, but he was a master swordsman who fell into ruin due to his addiction to alcohol. Now, he is a pitiful figure, worn out by consumption and reduced to serving as a bodyguard for gamblers.

The setting is the embankment of the Tone River, the scene of a brawl between the Iioka and Sasagawa factions of gamblers.

Tall and gaunt, with a pale, ghastly face ravaged by consumption, he dances slightly.

From his left and right, the gamblers of the Iioka faction, his dueling opponents, appear.

Terushi places his hand on the hilt of his long sword, twists his waist slightly, and arches his back.

This moment of readiness is irresistibly cool. He extends one leg diagonally forward, arching it all the way to the tips of his bare toes in his straw sandals.

(Since this theater isn't very large, if you crane your neck, you can see the actor's toes from the audience.)

The yakuza, having drawn their swords, attack all at once.

Terushi draws his long sword and, in an instant, cuts down four or five of the yakuza.

There is no wasted motion or opening in his movements. His hand and footwork are brilliant and beautiful.

It is truly a refined sword fight.

In a single breath, he cuts down five men, and as he strikes a stylish pose, a voice immediately calls out from the audience, "Terushi!"

At that very moment, the body of the ill-fated swordsman, Hirate Mikku, is enveloped in an even denser aura, radiating a dazzling glow.

(Damn, he's good!)

I can't help but marvel inwardly.

Glancing discreetly at the seat next to me, I see that Nakahara-san, like me, is staring intently at Terushi without blinking. She, too, has been captivated by the ronin in his black double-layered kimono standing on the embankment of the Tone River.

The actor Terushi is likely skilled in swordplay. He exudes a confidence that's almost infuriating.

A performance calculated to make the most of his tall, slender frame, his chiseled features, and his piercing gaze that radiates an aura.

As I watch Terushi on stage, I imagine this actor secretly practicing late at night, alone, drawing his sword in front of a mirror, perfecting how to cut down his opponent with style.

He must know all too well, perhaps to a disturbing degree, just how the swordplay of a lonely swordsman, living in adversity and charging forward despite knowing his own doom, captivates the hearts of the audience.

All actors are narcissists, but this Terushi is an exceptionally, outrageously narcissistic one.

Carried away by his meticulous calculations (or rather, what is likely his innate sense), both Nakahara-san and I, and indeed the entire packed audience, are innocently intoxicated.

It feels good to be intoxicated. We're paying the admission fee to get drunk.

When he sees the audience intoxicated by his art, Terushi's own heart is simultaneously intoxicated on stage.

Is it that his self-absorption, wrapped in that narcissism, sometimes appears to our eyes as a sinister aura?

When I watch his swordplay, I am reminded of the swordplay in Shinkokugeki that I grew up with from childhood through middle age.

The various beautiful poses of Tatsumi and Shimada as they draw their swords come back to life behind my eyelids.

(To tell the truth, Terushi's swordplay, due to his young age and handsome appearance, sometimes surpasses that of Tatsumi and Shimada.)

Furthermore, though it was over sixty years ago now, I recall the swordplay of Osamu Kanai's troupe at the Asakusa Koen Theater, and my heart aches as I think of the swordplay of Noboru Umezawa's troupe at the Asakusa Showa-za during the same period.

What on earth am I rambling on about?

No matter how much I write about how cool Terushi's fight scenes are, it doesn't really get me any closer to the theme of this post, does it?

Well, maybe it gets me a little closer, but I should have written about Terushi's unique charm much sooner.

And yet, I ended up beating around the bush and taking the long way around for some strange reason.

I should have been honest from the start and written bluntly about why Nakahara-san and I are so captivated by the actor Terushi.

I must write frankly about why we took advantage of the postponement of our important Tomoshihi shoot to come see Terushi perform.

I should have written more directly about how the aura he exudes is so full of the allure of decadent beauty, and how he is an actor so obsessed with bleeding on stage.

Watching his performance and writing about it serves as an indispensable stimulus and a valuable learning experience for our own work.

So, I will write about that next, since you've likely already grasped his universal charm as an actor.

2011.8.3

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 172

「木賊の庭」撮影記

“The Horsetail Garden” Photo Essay

Damn it, what a mess.

I just can't bring myself to write about Terushi.

I try to write about him, but I just can't.

I want to write about him, but I can't.

What on earth is going on?

Is Terushi really that big of a deal?

No, I don't really think he is. Nor do I think he's a man with profound artistic talent.

I do think he's a man with quite capable acting skills, but I've never thought he was exceptionally good.

It's just that, to me, he's an actor who's on my mind.

Damn it, so why can't I write about him? It's frustrating.

He appears before us (Nakahara-san and me) with a mysterious, inexplicable charm that no other actor possesses.

What is that “something?”

It's a kind of unique atmosphere, different from the ordinary. More than an atmosphere, it's something more direct, a scent, a smell. It is, after all, an aura.

It's a smell that defies description, no matter how hard I try. That's why I've been struggling with this for nearly a month now.

I've made a living writing for a very long time, but it's been a while since I've struggled this much.

Since I'm a professional writer, no matter how troublesome the subject, if I receive a commission, I can usually gloss over it, make the pieces fit together, and write something that looks the part.

But with this Terushi, damn it, I'm really struggling.

No way. I lost. It's frustrating, but I am giving up. No, not giving up, I'm retreating.

For now, I'll distance myself from Terushi. I can't stay involved with him forever.

I'm busy, after all. I don't have time to keep writing about that actor who's like a vengeful spirit.

There are mountains of other things I need to write about. (Though, to tell the truth, Terushi's art and our world of art aren't entirely unrelated. There's a deep, intimate connection between them. That's why I'm so determined to take on Terushi.)

But, as frustrating as it is, for now, my abilities fall short of Terushi's.

For now, I'll step away from Terushi. If, after a while, Terushi still holds my heart, I'll reignite my fighting spirit and challenge that man once more.

Right now, rather than thinking about Terushi, I need to document the photo shoot for our group Tomoshibi's second photo book, "The Horsetail Garden."

Due to an unexpected incident at the home next door to photographer Sachi Yamanouchi, the shoot had been postponed, but it finally took place without a hitch a few days later.

To cut to the chase, it turned out wonderfully.

Since I wrote the script, directed the key scenes, and even appeared in the work myself, writing that it was "a wonderful result" would literally amount to cheap self-praise.

However, this is a secret, but even before I could boast about it myself, the voices of self-praise coming from the Tomoshibi members as they looked at the results of the shoot were even louder.

Let me be clear. Their self-praise is by no means shallow or frivolous. At times, they offer such sharp self-criticism that it leaves me speechless.

Each member, from their own perspective, offers a well-founded and substantive assessment. On set, they demonstrated swift and precise movements that surpassed even my own understanding and execution, despite my having devoted the past sixty years to this work, and this has yielded excellent results.

When I look at their work, it's clear they've observed even the minutest details I'd overlooked, and that delights me. A young sensibility is, after all, a precious thing.

Precisely because they are so much younger than I am, they all possess a sharp, keen sensitivity and a deep understanding of the difficulties of expression in this complex, bizarre, and labyrinthine world.

Honestly, I was impressed.

The highlight of the shoot was the scene where Hiromi Saotome, playing the character Hiromi (a married woman), and I, playing the role of Tamaru, a ruthless loan shark, forcefully made her bite down on a hand towel tied into a gag.

For me, it was a scene I'd done a thousand, two thousand, no, three thousand times before. I was well-practiced at it.

So, I instinctively set the staging quickly and went through the motions smoothly.

However, Nakahara-san would not allow it.

Nakahara-san's responsibilities include production, scheduling, and editing the photo book after filming wraps.

Yet, we members of the Tomoshibi group sometimes all become directors. And when we do, we turn into strict directors.

"No, no, no, Sensei. That won't do. That kind of half-hearted monkey's fist won't cut it!"

At Nakahara-san's earnest rebuke, my heart skipped a beat, and I instinctively stopped tying the monkey's fist.

(My heart skipped a beat because I had a premonition that she was going to say that.)

"There's no strength in your fingertips, Sensei. This is supposed to be a very thrilling scene for Tamaru and Hiromi, isn't it? The cloth isn't just for show, it serves the crucial purpose

of ‘preventing Hiromi from making a sound.’ Tamaru shouldn’t let his guard down for even a single moment until he’s finished tying the rope. We don’t want to take a portrait of a face with the cloth tied neatly, do we? We want to see that thrilling process described in your script. Sense, put yourself in Tamaru’s shoes and show us those powerful movements of your fingertips.

To make sure the cloth you’ve wedged behind Hiromi’s teeth doesn’t come out, press down harder with your fingertips, and push it deep into her mouth, then use a narrow strip of cloth to cut across the top in a straight line, clamp it firmly between her upper and lower teeth. First tie it tightly at the back of her head, then, using another hand towel, cover Hiromi’s entire mouth with a large gag, pulling it tight... harder, harder, harder!”

Since this is not a film, Director Nakahara’s voice is not recorded here.

“Is this right? Is this good enough?”

At this point, I am nothing more than a performer, moving exactly as the director instructs.

Of course, what this director says is correct, so I move earnestly, just as I am told.

Actually, at this moment, I am more concerned with the reaction of Hiromi Saotome, who plays the married woman Hiromi.

Saotome has a small face, and proportionally, her mouth is small as well. When I force the rolled-up white cloth deep into her mouth, it immediately reaches her throat, making it difficult for her to breathe.

Watching Saotome’s changing expression, I put my strength into my fingertips and performed the harsh gag scene as Director Nakahara intended.

When I tied the first hand towel, which I had wedged between her teeth, at the back of her neck, Saotome’s cheeks made a gurgling sound.

Whistling breaths escaped her, and I heard a low, gasping voice.

If a gag enthusiast were here, the sheer intensity of the scene would be mind-boggling.

It was a shame this wasn’t a shoot intended to capture sound and movement.

However, even without sound or movement, photographer Yamanouchi’s delicate, shadow-filled photographs fully convey the intensity of this gag scene.

Hiromi remains in this intense bondage position as the loan shark grabs the end of her rope and drags her around the room.

Along with the harsh movements of her entire body, agonized moans escaped from within the gag, making it an even more stimulating, sadistic scene.

Nakahara-san, this time acting as the videographer, filmed a portion of this scene.

(I didn't know at the time that she was filming with a video camera.)

Anyone interested in bondage who happens to see this footage will have encountered a scene that is both uniquely valuable and incredibly stimulating.

For that person, it is sure to be a legendary scene, one of such value that it will likely become a lifelong memory.

Hiromi Saotome is, after all, an actress. The spirit of the married woman Hiromi had truly taken hold of her. She did a great job. The filming of "The Horsetail Garden" continued on this day, just like this, for quite some time yet.

2011.8.4

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 173

ちがうですよ

That's Not It

I don't think this is worth writing down here, but just in case someone might misunderstand, I'll add a few extra words.

This refers to the scene in the previous chapter, "The Horsetail Garden" where I, playing the role of a ruthless loan shark, gag the victim, a married woman named Hiromi (played by Hiromi Saotome) with a hand towel.

I've been performing scenes like this with Hiromi Saotome countless times for over decades now, so I tend to fall back into the familiar, rehearsed movements.

At that moment, Nakahara Rutsu, who serves as the production coordinator for this drama and occasionally acts as the director, immediately let out a sharp cry.

"Sensei, even though this is just acting, please put a little more strength into your fingertips and do it with more force. Your fingers are too gentle. With such superficial technique, we'll never achieve a gag scene that is beautiful, pitiful, cruel, and sensual! Why is Tamaru gagging Hiromi in the first place?!"

Although the exact wording differs slightly, this is the gist of what Nakahara-san says as she scolds me.

(That is exactly it. It goes beyond a simple warning or instruction. It is the very voice of a scolding.)

I tense up as if I'd been smacked hard on the back of the head.

(All right, damn it, I'll show her!)

I put all my strength into my fingertips and tied the gag even tighter, with even greater care.

(Even back in my days at the Kinbiken, I never tied a gag this tight...)

In the end, thanks to Nakahara-san's direction, it turned into a wonderful rope-tying scene that even I was captivated by, and all of us at Tomoshihi were satisfied with the result.

Not just satisfied, but thoroughly satisfied.

In particular, the behind-the-scenes video Nakahara-san shot of this scene is absolutely spectacular.

Personally, I can't recall ever performing a bondage scene with such intensity and sensual beauty. It really made me groan from the bottom of my heart.

However, it was at this point that I thought I might be misunderstood.

After reading about the situation last time, I felt that some people might come to misunderstand it this way: "I see. So when it comes to SM-related shoots, whether it's bondage or gagging, you just have to get really into it, put your all into it, and do it seriously. That's the real deal. Only the real thing makes for a good production."

I doubt there are actually any such idiots out there, but just in case, I'll write the following unnecessary caution below.

No matter how fierce a look Director Nakahara might put on, or how harshly she might scold me, "The Horsetail Garden" is a drama, and the gag is just one scene written in the script.

And I am nothing more than an actor.

No matter how much I try to pursue realism, I have no intention of taking it 100 percent seriously and completely silencing Hiromi Saotome's voice and mouth, and Nakahara-san knows that from the start.

(As for Saotome, if she really started having trouble breathing, no matter how tightly her hands were tied behind her back, she would surely struggle, kick me, and run away.)

We are filming a bondage drama. We are taking a fictional scenario seriously.

I wrote the following in my previous post as well.

"...Actually, at that moment, I was more concerned with the reaction of Hiromi Saotome, who was playing the married woman Hiromi. Saotome has a small face, and her mouth is small as well. When I shoved the white cloth gag forcefully into her mouth, it immediately reached her throat, causing her to struggle to breathe.

Watching Saotome's expression change, I tensed my fingertips and performed the harsh gag scene Director Nakahara had intended..."

In every torture scene, I would stare intently at the woman's expression and act out the torture in this way, but among the directors of adult SM videos, there was one who took it seriously and took pride in repeating torture scenes for long periods of time.

"If I put this much effort into it, going at it relentlessly with no holds barred, even the most hardcore fans will be satisfied and buy it, don't you think?"

After filming wrapped up, that director said to me, puffing contentedly on a cigarette, but I didn't even reply. I just stuffed my ropes into my bag and quickly fled the set. I couldn't stand it.

There are others who, possessing nothing but this mindset and perspective, proudly declare, "I'm good at shooting SM videos." They exist not only in the world of video but also in the world of publishing.

The people on the production company side who prefer to use this kind of SM content creator also don't understand the true preferences of those called enthusiasts.

Because they don't understand, there was a time when they churned out one video after another that looked like a cruel torture and genital torment contest.

However, I have never heard of any product that featured such lower-body exposure torture shows as its main attraction actually performing well commercially.

There is a significant disconnect between the SM scenes envisioned by SM enthusiasts and the producers who believe that scenes involving spreading the legs and inserting foreign objects are the very essence of SM. While they may seem similar, they are fundamentally different.

This disconnect will never align, no matter what. No matter how far they go, they will never align.

One side is the so-called "normal" majority that worships nothing but the female genitalia, while the other side worships and fixates on areas other than the female genitalia.

Oh dear, somehow the conversation has strayed off topic again.

I wasn't supposed to be writing about this.

Maybe it's because I'm getting old, but I find myself writing nothing but complaints. And always the same old complaints, at that.

In “The Horsetail Garden,” the gag that the unscrupulous loan shark (that is, me) places in the mouth of the unfortunate married woman Hiromi, no matter how realistic it may seem, is merely an act.

If it weren’t an act, there’s no way the knot could be tied so neatly, so perfectly shaped, with such sensual beauty, and yet with such intense passion.

And as for Hiromi Saotome, the one having the handkerchief tied around her mouth, the passion of a helpless, ill-fated married woman is imbued in her expression and her entire body. Anyone with an eye for such things would surely recognize this as a remarkable performance.

(As usual, I’m indulging in a bit of self-praise here.)

No matter how seriously, forcefully, or violently someone who cannot understand the sensations and passions of our deeply held SM pleasure preferences attacks us, their actions are merely crude and grotesque, and cannot move the hearts of gag enthusiasts.

It’s absolutely impossible.

So, this is not the kind of thing where you can just say, “If I do it with all my might, it’ll be the best,” and then forcefully, stubbornly overpower your partner’s resistance and go at it violently and aggressively.

That’s not it at all.

That kind of thing just won’t work.

That’s not the kind of SM we imagine, the kind enveloped in that sweet, honey-like, dreamlike pleasure.

Now that I’ve come this far, I can’t help but feel that even writing this sentence was a terrible waste of time.

Isn’t this something everyone already knows, even without me pointing it out now?

No matter how much I ramble on about it, those who understand already know it from the start, and those who don’t won’t get it no matter how much I explain.

It’s the realm of intuition, so there’s nothing to be done. Explaining it is simply a waste. It’s a futile, empty effort.

That's why we mustn't talk about our world of pleasure to those who don't understand (and here I am, once again, thinking what I've believed for decades).

Rather than this, I've only written half of the shooting diary for "The Horsetail Garden."

I've finally finished the first half.

I wonder where I veered off course and lost my way.

Next time, I must write the second half of "The Horsetail Garden."

2011.8.5

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 174

引きずり回しの恐怖

The Terror of Being Dragged Around

The photo book we at Tomoshibi are currently producing is not a compilation of bondage photos originally published in magazines, a format that publishers frequently used in the past, but rather a collection of entirely new, original photographs that form a single narrative from beginning to end.

(Since we've included the script for this "Talking Theater" here, readers should already be familiar with it.)

Every single photograph featured here forms part of a coherent narrative.

The heroine being bound is the same person throughout.

When you think about it, this is an extremely rare kind of photo book. No publisher in the past has ever done anything like this.

I myself have no memory of ever creating something like this, nor of ever appearing in one.

Moreover, as things turned out, the story of the second work, "The Horsetail Garden," also serves as a continuation of "The Sunset Room."

And since I've gone this far, I'll just go ahead and mention it now. Preparations for the third work are already underway.

The story in this one is also neatly connected. It is the tale of a pitiful married woman tormented by a ruthless moneylender, and the title is "The Feel of Water."

The location for the shoot is the home of Photographer Sachi Yamanouchi.

The main reason this bondage drama, which was originally intended to be completed in a single shoot, suddenly turned into a trilogy in the blink of an eye lies, in fact, in the charm of the Yamanouchi residence.

It simply has such a rich, distinctive flavor.

That flavor, of course, is exactly the kind we love.

I've already written about the charm of the Yamanouchi residence in "Talking Theater," so I'll skip the details here, but when we're actually filming, an even deeper, subtle charm, or perhaps a sense of humanity, adds a dramatic mood and overwhelms us with an inexhaustible well of emotion.

After all, photographer Yamanouchi herself, peering through the camera's viewfinder, exclaims in such wonder and rapture, "Wow, this feels so fresh. It doesn't look like my room at all. Is this really the house I've lived in for years? Hmm, it looks completely different."

That said, even though it's a room she's used to, the way Hiromi Saotome is positioned in such a perfect composition makes it seem fresh.

Although it's not specifically for bondage shoots, they sometimes rent the Yamanouchi residence for photo sessions with other themes.

However, they say the impression of those works is completely different.

Photographer Yamanouchi says that simply adding Hiromi Saotome transforms a familiar room into a scene tinged with a sinister, immoral aura, an instantly stimulating spectacle.

"Well, part of it is that the presence of the unfortunate married woman portrayed by Saotome fits this room perfectly, but my SM sensibility comes into play when judging and deciding exactly which parts of this house to use and how to use them effectively," I assert, seizing the moment to make my point.

If I don't brag about things like this, I'll never be able to hold a candle to the exceptional gravitas of the women of Tomoshihi.

Hiromi, a married woman, has a husband who is hopelessly addicted to gambling. He borrowed 1.5 million yen from a loan shark named Tamaru but never paid it back. He ran away from home and his whereabouts are unknown.

The core of this photo story is that Tamaru is persistently hounding Hiromi, believing that if he can keep her under his thumb, he will eventually find out where her husband is.

About halfway through “The Horsetail Garden,” Tamaru opens a drawer in the room without permission and discovers an envelope containing cash.

It is 100,000 yen that Hiromi’s husband had sent her via mail.

Tamaru gets angry when he sees this.

“You know where that man is hiding, don’t you? Tell me?” Saying this, he grabs the end of Hiromi’s rope and drags her all over the room.

For some reason, Nakahara Rutsu was particularly fixated on this dragging scene, saying with a passionate voice, glaring at me with wide eyes, “Now, let’s really nail this part. If we don’t shoot this properly, this bondage drama won’t hold together, Nureki Sensei. You understand, right?”

While she is the production coordinator, at this moment she is unmistakably radiating the intensity of a director with her whole body. Scary!

Since this wasn’t moving video footage, I thought, and even said out loud, even for a dragging scene I could just take breaks in between and slowly strike poses that looked the part. But Director Nakahara’s passion wouldn’t allow for such a compromise.

“A scene where a woman bound with her hands behind her back is being dragged around pitifully, that doesn’t exist in any footage or photograph to date. Even if the binding method is the same, there’s nothing that captures that kind of scene. That’s exactly why we have to act it out and film it properly,” Director Nakahara said, still glaring at me with those wide eyes.

“But it’s going to hurt Saotome-san a lot, with her whole body scraping against the tatami mats,” I said. After all, I am a feminist.

“Saotome-san, please do your best. This is a scene filled with a deeply masochistic emotion, symbolizing the fate of an unfortunate and pitiful married woman. So even if it hurts a little, please endure it, don’t fake it, and let’s shoot this thoroughly.” Director Nakahara was unusually fired up.

Saotome is a seasoned veteran actress, so she simply nods in silence. Though, since her mouth is tightly gagged with a hand towel, she has no choice but to nod.

I lower my center of gravity slightly, brace my feet, take a deep breath, and begin dragging her around. I grip the rope tightly.

Saotome’s body is petite, but because she is bound and deprived of her freedom, she feels heavy. Moreover, she tries to strike a defiant pose whenever she sees an opening.

I have to put some real effort into it if I'm going to move this woman's body lying on the tatami mats. But even if I drag her with all my might, it won't result in a sensual pose full of SM appeal.

Naturally, grabbing the rope and dragging her is an act, and turning her body on the tatami mats is an art.

(I wrote about this in quite some detail last time.)

I must move her rope-bound body while consciously aiming for an alluring, sensual pose worthy of SM appreciation, and furthermore, I must repeat the dragging motion as if timing my breath, all while taking into account the position of the photographer Yamanouchi and the angles she is aiming for.

I must not rush, and of course I must not rely on brute force. Yet, I must remain Tamaru through and through.

Saotome also fully embodies the married woman Hiromi, writhing her entire body and expressing the eroticism of a masochistic woman through movements of agony. Agony and hatred toward the loan shark.

Since this was a dragging torture while the gag was firmly in place, she gasped as if her throat were being choked, creating an even more ruthless and harsh spectacle and bringing out the pitiful atmosphere of a woman enduring the pain.

A heart-wrenching gaze, a realistic sense of pain that makes her chest and throat tremble. She has really studied the script well.

What deserves special mention in Saotome's passionate performance in this intense scene is that not only the pitiable nature of the unfortunate woman, but also the resentment and hatred toward the ruthless loan shark are expressed in a tantalizing way through the eyes of the married woman, Hiromi, as a form of sensual allure.

Her frustration, resentment, hatred toward the man, anger, and resignation, as she attempts to flee only to be caught again, bound with her hands behind her back, and even gagged, are rendered with a mysterious intensity and added sensuality, thanks to Saotome's natural talent. It is this mix of resentment and hatred that brings the married woman to life.

Feeling compelled to mercilessly torment this vulnerable married woman, the man's movements continue to assault her body, yet at this moment, half of my consciousness is constantly observing the breathing and expressions of photographer Yamanouchi.

The moment the photographer shows “I want to shoot this!” in her breathing and makes her decision, I must stop my own movements and adjust the subject’s pose to match the photographer’s intent.

Thanks to the flawless cooperation of everyone involved (or rather, a clash of passions), this scene also turned out exceptionally well.

“Amazing, amazing, that’s it, that’s it, I’m so glad we pushed through, ah, that’s it!” Both Nakahara-san and photographer Yamanouchi let out heartfelt cheers.

Saotome, the heroine, is smiling while resting a short distance away.

Exhausted, I slumped down into a chair in the corner and panted heavily.

(I wonder how long I’ll be able to keep up with this tough team of women.)

I just want to lie down for a bit.

But I can’t say that out loud.

Even if I did, they wouldn’t let me.

Even at this stage, we’ve barely made it past the halfway point of “The Horsetail Garden.”

Now I had to re-tie Hiromi, drag her from the room to the entrance, and take her to the garden where the horsetail grew thickly.

2011.8.6

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 175

「ともしび」の情熱

The Passion of Tomoshibi

After tying up Hiromi, the married woman, with her hands bound behind her back and forcing a hand towel gag firmly into her mouth, I dragged her all over the tatami-mat room, then pulled her out to the entrance, opened the door, and led her out into the garden.

Hiromi looked pitiful, standing there barefoot.

This is where the scene from the title “The Horsetail Garden” begins, but there wasn’t much worth noting here.

In other words, using the clumps of horsetail as an effective backdrop, the shoot proceeded very smoothly, exactly as the entire Tomoshibi team had envisioned.

A snail was crawling through the grass. I picked it up with my finger and, feeling mischievous, placed it on Hiromi’s thigh.

Hiromi, the married woman, instantly reverted to being Hiromi Saotome and screamed, “Eek! No, no, I can’t stand that sort of thing!”

Photographer Yamanouchi was seriously filming even that moment, but well, that’s just part of the charm.

That’s right, there was one small episode that confirmed Saotome’s fear of insects.

Knowing that the climax of this shoot would take place in the garden, Saotome had bought her own bug repellent spray in advance.

It’s rare to see a film set where the heroine herself goes out to buy insect repellent. This is one of the great things about Tomoshibi.

Since we knew from the start that there was no assistant director, everyone would casually take on the AD's duties as needed.

This is another part of what makes it fun. No matter how skilled someone is at an AD's work, if they don't know SM, they can't be our assistant.

And so, even though on the surface it was a succession of cold-blooded, brutal, and gruesome scenes, the set was full of fun and a friendly, harmonious atmosphere, and filming wrapped up right on schedule just before 4 PM.

After all, the script had been completed over ten days ago, and everyone had already read it thoroughly, so they fully understood both the theme and the story.

The shoot proceeded extremely smoothly, without a moment's hesitation or confusion.

We left the Yamanouchi residence, where we had been staying, and returned to the area in front of the station. At the same izakaya where we had our wrap party last time, the four of us raised a toast in high spirits to celebrate our success.

(I haven't seen all the photos yet, but judging by photographer Yamanouchi's precise timing and choice of angles, I already know this project is a success.)

"I was thinking of taking a few shots of the bathroom today if I had the time and energy, but I'll give that some careful thought and save it for next time. The bathroom is great. My head is swirling with images of Hiromi in alluring poses as she's teased in the bathtub and shower area," I declared, my face flushed from a glass of draft beer as I spoke.

The bathroom at the Yamanouchi residence is wonderful no matter how many times I see it. Every time I look at it, I get a thrill.

It's rare to find a bathroom scene that draws out my imagination, stimulates me, and excites me like this.

It's something you'd never find in a neatly organized rental studio bathroom. The presence of a living human being drifts through the air, dense, mysterious, and with a slightly eerie emotional quality.

The way it glistens with a rough, unforgiving texture, soaked in human sweat and grease, pleasure and anguish, is irresistibly good.

Come to think of it, the original plan was to rent the Yamanouchi residence for just one day to shoot material for a small photo book.

But before I knew it, in my mind it had turned into a trilogy. A story starring Hiromi Saotome that makes full use of the Yamanouchi residence.

Following “The Sunset Room” comes “The Horsetail Garden,” and as for the title of the third photobook, though the shooting date hasn’t even been set yet, I’ve arbitrarily decided on “The Feel of Water.”

This is surely due to the unfathomable charm of the Yamanouchi residence, as well as Hiromi Saotome’s vivid presence as a woman bound by her circumstances.

Just as I finished writing that, I received a letter by fax from Hiromi Saotome.

Like mine, Saotome’s letter is also handwritten.

It is a review of the 174th chapter of “Talking Theater,” titled “The Terror of Being Dragged Around.”

Her sincere feelings are clearly expressed, and I believe this will be an interesting read for anyone with even the slightest interest in such topics. Therefore, I have omitted any potentially sensitive passages and present it below.

“Nureki Sensei, this is another masterpiece... no, it’s a passionate, intense piece!”

It really brings back memories of how tough it was to be drug around.

I think this is exactly what you meant when you said I enjoy being tied up during the Tomoshihi project.

Back in the heyday of SM magazines, when there were so many photo shoots, I certainly did my best to meet the photographers’ demands, and I always felt a sense of accomplishment afterward.

There was a sense of satisfaction in letting my body do as it was told and enduring those strict bondage sessions.

However, as the years went by, it became harder on my stamina and strength, and I started to wonder if I actually preferred just being walked on a rope, maybe I wasn’t really into bondage after all.

What I attempted in Tomoshihi was the inevitable bondage that arises from being in a situation where one is forced to be bound.

It was while shooting the first installment, ‘The Sunset Room,’ that I remembered.

Yes, my preference had always been for scenarios that emphasized the question, 'Why am I being bound?'

Even during glamour shoots, I was always thinking up fictional scenarios in my head.

Without a scenario, neither my mind nor my body would move.

It is precisely because there is a sense of inevitability that my body reacts to the restraints and I can cry.

I am truly glad that I was able to create a work to commemorate the launch of Tomoshibi.

Nakahara Rutso and Sachi Yamanouchi, both of them have completely transcended the confines of being women and are true comrades. I have confirmed that.

I hear you are currently writing your third work, titled, 'The Feel of Water.'

I'm looking forward to it.

I wonder what will become of Tamaru, the loan shark, and Hiromi, the married woman.

As she continues to be tormented by Tamaru, how will Hiromi's heart change?"

That is all.

The members of Tomoshibi (myself included) are currently busy preparing to film our third work, "The Feel of Water," and I find it so funny that I can't help but laugh.

Putting aside the task of compiling the completed works, such as "The Sunset Room" and "The Horsetail Garden," into a photo book to share with a wider audience, my mind is already focused on the next shoot.

But this is a good thing.

The fact that my passion is focused on shooting new work means that the flame of desire is burning within me to create something new and unknown.

It is precisely this kind of passion that I find most appealing.

But since we're at it, let's make some progress on editing and publishing the photo book too, Nakahara-san and Yamanouchi-san.

2011.8.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 176

監禁される人妻の心

The Mind of a Married Woman Held Captive

In the letter from Hiromi Sautome that I introduced last time;

“...Yes, my preference was for shoots that emphasized the premise of ‘why am I being tied up?’ Even on the set of photo shoots for SM magazines, I was always thinking up fictional scenarios in my head.

Without a premise, neither my mind nor my body would respond.

It is precisely because there is a sense of inevitability that my body reacts to the restraints and I can cry...”

There are a few lines like that.

Sautome writes this candidly and matter-of-factly, but in reality, these are important words carrying profound meaning.

(While they are important words, to tell the truth, they are actually quite obvious.)

One of the reasons we formed Tomoshibi was precisely this. To prioritize the setting and narrative leading up to the bondage itself.

It was Nakahara Rutsu who once again loudly advocated for this, and her advocacy was quite firm and compelling.

Both photographer Yamanouchi and I, of course, agreed.

Even if we don't raise our hands to agree now, that is the only way to approach bondage photography.

To put it more bluntly, bondage acts that lack a setting, that is, a narrative, and a sense of necessity are nothing more than rope sport.

Hiromi Saotome says that in shoots where the sole purpose is bondage, with no theme or story, she creates a story in her own head.

What a poignant, endearing heart.

For the photo book series starting with “The Sunset Room,” currently in production by Tomoshibi, I first write the script, and Nakahara-san reads it and fills in the gaps.

Nakahara-san also carefully adds details to any parts where the direction was insufficient.

Then, the finished script is specially bound in a stylish format for use on set, and handed out to each person individually (though there are only four of us).

And it is handed out well in advance, more than ten days before the shoot.

Because this mental preparation is so thorough, it’s only natural that Saotome took the time to thoroughly study the script and delivered a great performance, fully embodying the mindset of the married woman, Hiromi.

By the way, following “The Sunset Room” and “The Horsetail Garden,” next up is “The Feel of Water,” which we’ll be filming soon.

As for this title alone, even the strict Director Nakahara Rutsu (who, as everyone knows, is the Director of the Sex Industry Museum) praised it the moment she saw it, “That’s great! Let’s go with this!”

But the real problem is the script.

As I wrote last time, captivated by the mysterious atmosphere of the Yamanouchi residence’s bathroom, I’m determined to lock up the married woman Hiromi in that very spot and create some incredible bondage photos that will make my fellow enthusiasts go “Wow!”

The desire is like a karmic burden for me.

For now, rather than focusing on narrative, I’m obsessed with the allure of composing photos of a woman’s body in bondage, set against the backdrop of water in the bathroom.

However, since this is a shoot for Tomoshibi, where we place great importance on storytelling, aiming solely for interesting compositions would result in something shallow.

There is a well-defined backstory for the married woman Hiromi.

I must develop the story based on that backstory.

“The Feel of Water” must be connected to the story from “The Sunset Room.”

“So the main scene will be a confinement sequence set in the bathroom? That’s great. The image of confinement is excellent to begin with. I can really feel it. Confinement... a woman locked away in a single room... wonderful. There’s an emotional quality to it that suggests a narrative.” Director Nakahara, her large eyes gleaming darkly, is enthusiastic.

My vision for the bathroom shoot has been water torture from the start, but Director Nakahara’s vision is confinement or imprisonment.

I see. This difference in vision is interesting.

Each individual scene on set is already fully formed in my mind in concrete detail, but when it comes to writing the story leading up to those scenes into the script, that’s difficult.

It’s difficult, but I have to write it.

If I don’t write this and just shoot the torture scenes, the heroine, Saotome, will have to create the situation in her own mind and act as if it were real.

If that happens, there will be a disconnect between the actor’s mind and the director’s mind.

Likewise, if photographer Yamanouchi doesn’t genuinely empathize with the heroine, she won’t be able to take powerful, compelling photos that move the audience.

She must subtly adjust both the timing of the shot and the camera angle in accordance with the emotional shifts of the married woman, Hiromi.

Bondage photography must express the inner world of the woman being bound.

It’s not a world where simply photographing a naked crotch is enough.

When the loan shark, Tamaru, ties up the married woman, Hiromi, shoves her into the bathroom, and subjects her to water torture, his primary goal is to extract information about the hiding place of the man who borrowed money and then vanished.

At first glance, the married woman seems docile, but she actually has a stubborn personality and is tenaciously resisting the loan shark’s harassment and threats. This woman is infuriatingly stubborn.

The image I already have in my mind of a married woman being tormented is, after all, stereotypical and therefore somewhat conventional.

Although it is conventional, I believe it will make for a stimulating, good photograph for bondage enthusiasts. I am confident of this.

Even though it's a water torture scene in the bathroom, I won't strip the heroine naked.

If I strip her, the eroticism will be lost.

I tie up the married woman while she is fully clothed and subject her to the water torture. I pour water all over her body.

Or perhaps I'll tie her up while she's in just her underwear. I won't expose her breasts. I won't take off her panties either.

I'll tie her up while she's wearing a slip.

So, I have a request for Saotome.

On the day of the shoot, please bring a dress-like outfit made of thin fabric, something that clings to the body when wet.

By the way, I'll note this here. In both "The Sunset Room" and "The Horsetail Garden," the outfits worn by the married woman are Hiromi Saotome's own clothes. In other words, they are the clothes she wears in her daily life.

I am confident in my ability to stage the sight of a bound woman writhing in agony while soaking wet.

On set, both Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi will likely be taken aback by my direction.

I'll have photographer Yamanouchi take photos that perfectly capture the essence of bondage eroticism.

In "The Feel of Water," I will prove that bondage eroticism is not about spreading a woman's legs, but about closing them.

I'll create a photo so stunning that when Hiromi Saotome sees it, she'll exclaim "Huh? Is that me? I'm so sexy!"

But the real challenge lies in the dialogue and the heart of the scene between the married woman and the loan shark.

I must write that into the script.

Writing the characters' actions is easy.

But writing their inner thoughts is, as expected, difficult.

That's because the psychology of people involved in SM is inherently complex.

2011.8.10

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 177

「水の感触」撮影メモ

“The Feel of Water” Shooting Notes

I've been talking frequently with Director Nakahara Rutsu about the bondage photo book produced by Tomoshihi.

Before writing the script for “The Feel of Water,” I'll meet again with Hiromi, to discuss her relationship with the loan shark Tamaru and their respective psychological states.

“...Let's avoid a simplistic story where, as this rough relationship continues, with bondage and gagging, a special bond develops between Tamaru and Hiromi, and they gradually grow closer, Nureki Sensei.”

As always, Director Nakahara's words are sharp and to the point.

“Yeah, that kind of plot development is just too trite, it's like the kind of novel someone else has written a million times. I'd hate that.”

“Oh come on, Nureki Sensei, you write that kind of thing yourself from time to time.”

Director Nakahara's sharp tongue sometimes leaves me at a loss for words.

Stories where a man and a woman who hate each other start tying each other up and being tied up, and as they come into contact, they develop a feeling akin to familiarity, and before they know it, something resembling sadomasochistic pleasure creeps in... Stories like that are the most cliched and facile, and certainly the easiest to write as a script.

But now, stories like that are just too lowbrow, and as Director Nakahara says, they're not interesting.

Creating a photo book based on such a photo story would provide absolutely no stimulation.

Even if you made one, no one would be happy to look at it.

“I think it’s better if the relationship between a man and a woman doesn’t turn into mere familiarity until the very end,” Director Nakahara says, glaring at me with her large, shiny black eyes.

“Yeah, I think so too.” I end up bowing my head slightly.

It’s true, the moment a man and a woman become too comfortable with each other, the dramatic allure of that SM flavor vanishes.

From the very beginning of preparations for the first shoot of “The Sunset Room,” Director Nakahara has been actively and bluntly offering me these precise opinions and requests.

She keeps coming up with one innovative, great idea after another.

I am impressed.

“Ah, this person truly loves making SM dramas from the bottom of their heart,” I think to myself.

While I’m at it, let me say this. The reason SM pleasure is so interesting is precisely because the situation, that is, the drama, is so tightly intertwined with it.

SM without drama, that is, without conflict, is like a Terushi play where no matter how much you tie people up or get tied up, no blood ever flows (though, to be honest, this joke only makes sense to Director Nakahara and me).

Having worked in this industry for so long, I tend to fall into a rut, but Director Nakahara always stimulates and refreshes my perspective.

Let me make this clear. I’m not blindly following her opinions or advice (I’m not that kind of cute guy).

When she accidentally says something wrong, I seize the opportunity to fiercely push back.

(But, frustratingly, she almost never says anything wrong. She insists on nothing but the truth, to the point of being infuriating, and cuts right through me.)

There’s no end to this, so I’d better get started on the script for “The Feel of Water.”

Actually, no. I’m still at the synopsis stage, before I even get to the script.

Basically, it's nothing more than a rough draft.

"The Feel of Water" culminates in a water torture scene set in a bathroom.

As I wrote before, I'm confident in the specific techniques and various positions I'll use to subject Hiromi to water torture.

That said, there are almost instantaneous poses that can't be put into words.

I won't actually come up with them until I'm on set, placing Hiromi Saotome on that stage and directing her movements.

But I am confident.

Whether people call it a rut or say I'm just going through the motions, I have unshakable confidence in my ability to create vivid, magnificent, and stimulating scenes that resonate with bondage enthusiasts.

Let me show you that my experience so far has not been in vain.

That said, perhaps my confidence stems from the fact that my partner is Hiromi Saotome.

If she were a simple, dull model who didn't think for herself and merely struck poses that looked the part, even I wouldn't be able to direct her.

In any case, I want photographer Yamanouchi to capture images that will stand the test of time, proof that such bondage photography existed in 2011.

Now, anyway, this is what led to him dragging Hiromi into that bathroom and holding her captive.

It's inevitable.

If we were to say that both this man and woman were just SM enthusiasts who liked to play in the bathroom, it would lack any excitement or dramatic tension.

It wouldn't be interesting at all. It wouldn't be worth photographing.

We must absolutely avoid such low level, routine scenes.

After all, an SM drama is ultimately a fantasy, a figment of the imagination.

That said, a certain degree of realism is necessary.

Without it, neither the creators nor the viewers will get into the SM spirit.

We must think this through.

In the previous installment, “The Horsetail Garden,” Hiromi’s husband, who is on the run, sent her 100,000 yen in cash via mail.

Tamaru discovered it and confiscated it.

A few days later, that is, in this installment, let’s have her husband secretly send her some more money.

It’s probably money he earned gambling in some town while on the run.

Hiromi turns over the envelope of the mail-order package she received, but neither her husband’s address nor his name is written on it.

So Hiromi dashes out the front door and chases after the mail carrier.

(The sender’s name and address should be listed on the receipt the carrier is carrying.)

Seeing this, Tamaru hurriedly pounces from behind, grabs Hiromi’s wrist, and drags her back inside the entrance. He slams the door shut.

Hiromi screams and struggles.

Tamaru presses all five fingers of one hand over Hiromi’s mouth to silence her. A hand gag.

With half her face covered by the man’s thick fingers, Hiromi grimaces in distress, her eyes and nose contorting.

Tamaru snatches the envelope from Hiromi’s hand and presses it against her face.

“I know what this is. Another letter from your husband, isn’t it? Even a hopeless gambling addict like him is kind to you, isn’t he? There might be money in there again. If there is, I’ll take it. After all, I’m still owed 1.4 million yen by your husband.”

Hiromi writhes, trying to make a sound through the gaps between his fingers.

“Hey, hey, keep it down. If the neighbors find out a shady loan shark like me is hounding you, you’ll be embarrassed too, won’t you?”

“Mmm....”

And yet, Hiromi continues to struggle.

“Ugh, I told you to be quiet!” Tamaru, angry, takes out the rope again and ties Hiromi’s hands behind her back.

Let’s have photographer Yamanouchi carefully capture, one by one, the moment Hiromi’s left and right wrists are twisted behind her back and bound with rope.

In the previous “ Horsetail Garden,” we didn’t film this binding process in much detail, so this time, let’s make sure to properly capture how the rope is handled here.

After finishing the binding, Tamaru opens the envelope of the mail-order package that just arrived right in front of Hiromi’s face.

Then, he takes out five 10,000 yen bills from inside.

“Hmm, fifty thousand this time. Last time it was a hundred thousand. Oh well, I’ll take this too. That leaves one million three hundred fifty thousand in outstanding loans. And don’t forget the interest. Don’t forget that. When you lend money to your husband, you’re technically acting as a guarantor.” Tamaru shoves the five ten-thousand yen bills into his pocket.

Seeing this, Hiromi can’t help but exclaim, “No! Don’t take that! Stop it!”

She screams, her eyes filled with resentment and hatred.

Tamaru flinches at her loud voice, “Hey, hey, don’t shout so loud. If the neighbors hear you, you’ll be too embarrassed to live here anymore. That would be a problem, wouldn’t it? You’re living in this house because you believe your husband will come back here someday, and you’re waiting for him, right? Eh, isn’t that right? Or am I wrong?”

Even so, Hiromi tries to say something.

“You’re such a hopeless woman.” Tamaru takes out a worn hand towel and gags Hiromi with it.

First, he pries her lips apart and slips a thin gag between them.

Then, he covers half her face with another hand towel, as if to smother her.

Even so, Hiromi struggles, trying to make a sound.

She fixes Tamaru with a gaze of hatred and resentment, writhing violently to show her resistance.

A voice escapes from beneath the gag.

Tamaru clicks his tongue and says, "Shut up. How long are you going to keep thrashing around? Just give it up already."

As he speaks, his eyes suddenly drift toward the bathroom door.

"Go in there for a bit and cool off."

Tamaru forcibly drags the struggling Hiromi to the bathroom door.

Let's shoot this dragging scene with different poses and angles than last time.

Hiromi's expression of anxiety and fear in front of the bathroom door.

Shoved into the bathroom, she wonders, "What is this man going to do to me?!"

The door is half-open. The pose of Tamaru trying to push her in and Hiromi resisting.

The man gradually grows irritated by the stubborn housewife's resistance.

Usually, a weak woman would give up by now and do whatever he says, but despite her appearance, this woman is tenacious. Damn it, what should I do? Just wait and see!

The water torture that's about to begin is too detailed to be written out in the script.

For example, Terushi, dressed as a roving ronin like Ryunosuke Tsukue or Kyoshiro Nemuri, is surrounded by five or six enemies.

The enemies all draw their swords at once and attack Terushi alone.

With a single draw-and-strike, he cuts down five or six of them in a matter of seconds, snaps his sword back into its sheath, and strikes a cool pose.

Can you really write out in detail the choreography of this swordfight scene, which lasts only a few seconds (less than ten seconds)?

Well, it's not that I couldn't write it, but it wouldn't be all that interesting for the reader.

In most cases, both fight scenes and climactic confrontations are meant to be seen. Reading about them doesn't really get the blood pumping.

If you absolutely insist that I write it, I'll try writing out both the sword fight and the combat scene in a separate draft.

Actually, I'm quite capable of writing sword fight scenes myself.

(I seem to recall writing about this before in this "Talking Theater" column.)

Hiromi Saotome and I, following the impulses that flashed through our minds, kept changing our water-torture poses one after another in the bathroom, creating a scene that was both powerful and beautiful.

Hiromi, the married woman, writhes in agony as water is poured over her hair while she remains bound with a monkey's paw knot, leaving her soaking wet.

A close-up of her masochistic, pitiful yet beautiful, and harrowing expression.

Let's wrap up this shoot with the scene where, after striking various poses in the bathroom, Hiromi, now gasping for breath, crawls to Tamaru's feet and stares up at the man's face with eyes full of hatred.

I started writing this as a shooting log, essentially a director's notebook, but before I knew it, it had taken on a form closer to a script.

If Director Nakahara adds her meticulous touches to these notes, as she did last time, and we end up with a proper script, the entire Tomoshihi team will be raring to go again, and we'll be able to have a fun and fulfilling shoot.

2011.8.19

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 178

水責めの話あれこれ

All About Water Torture

I received a reply via fax from photographer Sachi Yamanouchi, who had read my previous "Talking Theater" piece.

I'm delighted by how quickly she responded.

It goes without saying that Sachi Yamanouchi is one of the key members of our Tomoshibi group.

She has also kindly offered her own home as a location for the photo books "The Sunset Room" and "The Horsetail Garden."

We are truly grateful to her.

Furthermore, we have made arrangements to borrow the Yamanouchi residence again for our upcoming shoot, "The Feel of Water."

In other words, all three photo books commemorating the launch of Tomoshibi will have been shot at the Yamanouchi residence.

And, of course, Yamanouchi-san herself will be the photographer.

I would like to share here the portion of the reply I received from photographer Yamanouchi regarding the upcoming "The Feel of Water" shoot.

“(Omitted)”

As for the water torture scene in the bathroom, I think that as long as Nureki Sensei and Hiromi Saotome fully immerse themselves in their roles, the finer details don't necessarily need to be in the script.

I believe we can leave it entirely up to Nureki Sensei and Saotome-san to portray the pitiful yet beautiful sight of Hiromi, the married woman, getting soaked to the skin.

However, what is the reason why the loan shark Tamaru pushes Hiromi into the bathroom and subjects her to water torture?

The drama leading up to that point between the two of them feels like it's there, yet not quite clear...

(I find it hard to visualize exactly where in the house this would be filmed, and how it would be shot, don't you agree?)

Hiromi absolutely does not want to be taken advantage of this time.

That's why I think she'll resist Tamaru even more stubbornly than last time.

On the other hand, Tamaru gets so frustrated that he does terrible things to Hiromi, but in a different way than last time. This time, I feel that unless we really focus on the intense struggle between Tamaru and Hiromi, it might not even lead up to the water torture in the bathroom.

Last time, he dragged Hiromi out into the garden. This time, he shoves Hiromi into the bathroom.

The water torture will be the main focus of this shoot, but before that, I want to clarify one more key element. I'll talk it over with Nakahara-san.

She might have something else in mind, though..."

That concludes the message from photographer Yamanouchi.

Each member of the Tomoshihi group pours their passion and dedication into the creation of this photo collection.

For a helpless person like myself, they are an invaluable and deeply appreciated presence. I must express my gratitude.

Both Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi seem somewhat puzzled by my fixation on water torture in the bathroom during our next shoot, so I'll write a bit about that.

To put it simply, I like water torture.

Or rather, I don't dislike it.

What I do dislike is striking or beating a woman's body to inflict pain.

In short, I dislike anything that actually leaves marks on a woman's skin.

I simply cannot bring myself to like a woman unless her skin is always smooth, silky, and clean, free of any scars.

Water torture, as long as she endures the cold, has a visually intense, almost ruthless impact.

No matter how much water is poured on her, it does not actually harm her skin.

The sight of her body drenched from head to toe, with water droplets dripping from the tips of her hair, has a particularly gruesome and brutal realism when the woman's body is bound.

Yet, the delicate, fluid reflections of the water evoke a sense of dramatic poetry.

It is cruel yet glamorous, and when captured skillfully by a photographer, it becomes an image that stirs the viewer's heart.

The movement of the flowing water and the female body reacting to it possess a dramatic quality that makes me feel elated just watching it. That's why I love it.

However, when it comes to water torture, the method of binding requires a bit of skill.

As long as you keep that in mind, the female body will not be injured.

To explain in detail, the ropes absorb water and harden, tightening as they do so and digging deeply into the woman's body, making them difficult to untie.

Depending on the type of rope, it can harden like metal and become impossible to untie.

You must measure in advance the degree to which it shrinks when it absorbs water and tie it with great care.

Therefore, it is safer for those without experience not to attempt this.

Visually, it has a realistic intensity and appears cruel, but when untying, you must use a method where the rope slips easily off the woman's body, even if it has become hard and shrunk from being wet.

I have written about this method in numerous magazines and demonstrated it in videos, so I will omit the details here.

The scene of a woman bound with her hands behind her back having water poured over her head is both tragic and beautiful.

There is no trickery in that moment. It is real. It is nothing but real.

The woman's expression at that moment, glowing with a masochistic beauty, is truly exquisite.

In "The Feel of Water," Hiromi, a married woman, is subjected to water torture while fully clothed.

She isn't even in her underwear. She remains just as she is in everyday life.

Given the flow of the drama, where an angry Tamaru drags Hiromi into the bathroom and subjects her to water torture, it would be odd to have her change into her underwear or get naked. There's no time.

Or rather, this is just my preference, but water torture while she's wearing her everyday clothes is actually more erotic than when she's naked or in her underwear.

(Come to think of it, getting naked in the bathroom is only natural. The appeal of SM lies in the rejection of the ordinary.)

I actually spent quite a bit of time thinking about the title "The Feel of Water."

I tried inserting all sorts of different words into the blank in "The (blank) of Water" and lined them up in front of me.

In the end, I settled on "feel."

It's a combination that seems familiar, yet isn't quite there.

The word "feel" here implies the way wet clothes cling to a woman's body, thereby clearly revealing her eroticism.

When she saw this title, Director Nakahara Rutsu said, "That's good, this is good!" But I don't know how the word "feel" appeared in her mind.

Before I knew it, the conversation had veered off track and turned into an insider discussion among the creators. Let's get back on track.

The reason why Tamaru, the loan shark, drags Hiromi into the bathroom is that he knows she could call for help if she really tried, even with a gag in her mouth, so he's afraid the neighbors will hear.

Of course, Tamaru also feels that it would be bad if anyone else saw this scene.

Hiromi, too, doesn't want the neighbors to find out the shameful truth that her husband has borrowed money from a shady loan shark and is now in hiding, on the run.

Therefore, even in the face of Tamaru's unreasonable behavior, she endures it silently, remaining passive no matter what he does to her, and trying not to make a sound.

Hiromi's husband is a hopeless gambling addict, but he is genuinely in love with Hiromi, and whenever he has made money, he has actually sent her money several times in the past.

Although Tamaru has discovered that money twice, there are other funds her husband has sent, which Hiromi is secretly hiding.

She plans to keep that money safely tucked away and, when the chance arises, take it and quietly flee far away from this house.

Behind Hiromi's stubbornness and resilience, such a resolve may well be lurking. It means she has already given up on her husband.

However, there is no need to explain that much right now, and it would be impossible to convey it through photographs.

With this storyline in the back of their minds, both the cast and crew are currently getting ready to shoot "The Feel of Water."

2011.9.24

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百七十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 179

最高のほめ言葉

The Highest Praise

Well, how should I put this? Ever since I wrote that post about “All About Water Torture” last time, I’ve been swamped with all sorts of weird and chaotic work, so I still haven’t gotten around to actually doing the water torture I was planning.

Even though the script has been ready for ages, I just haven’t had the time to start shooting “The Feel of Water” scenes.

Unfortunately, everyone on the Tomoshibi team has suddenly become swamped with their own work, so we no longer have the time to get everyone together for the shoot.

In the last “Talking Theater,” we were all fired up to start filming right away, but the truth is, we haven’t started a thing yet.

And, as of now, there’s not even a hint of it happening.

I pretty much saw this embarrassing situation coming from the start, so there’s no point in making excuses now.

I hope this doesn’t sound like I’m complaining, but the members of Tomoshibi are all capable individuals (except for me) with their own unique personalities. They take their responsibilities seriously in their respective workplaces and work harder than the average person.

(Well, since they’re capable people, they inevitably get busy and have no free time. People who aren’t capable aren’t busy. And the result is that we don’t really want people who aren’t busy and have free time in Tomoshibi.)

We wrapped up filming “The Sunset Room” and “The Horsetail Garden” without a hitch, but just as we were about to start on “The Feel of Water,” the final installment of the trilogy, we hit a snag.

We weren't aiming to publish a photo book for commercial sale. As I've written many times before, Tomoshibi is a group that came together with resolve to create something we ourselves could be satisfied with. Therefore, there was never any such thing as a deadline from the start.

It was a photo project started in a spirit of freedom by friends who found joy simply in seeing each other's faces.

However, no matter how busy we are, I feel it's wrong to let something we've already started fizzle out halfway through.

It wouldn't do for Tomoshibi to fade away without us even noticing.

Since we've been sharing updates on the progress of this "Talking Theater," including detailed scripts, we feel a certain responsibility to those of you reading this.

So, please allow me to offer a brief explanation.

Ironically, the four of us from Tomoshibi, Sachi Yamanouchi, Hiromi Saotome, Nakahara Rutsu, and myself, actually run into each other quite often outside of the Tomoshibi filming set.

When we do meet, we often chat, but those settings have nothing to do with Tomoshibi filming, and people who have nothing to do with SM work are usually present as well.

On those occasions, we have important topics to discuss in those settings, and we talk earnestly or take some kind of action.

Even when we're shooting together, there's no way we could discuss the next Tomoshibi shoot.

It would be awkward to talk about the "bondage photo book" shoot we're secretly working on if people with no connection to SM were present.

Or rather, I definitely wouldn't want to.

Well, that's how it is.

The fact that all four of us are busy isn't just lip service. We really are busy.

We're certainly not just pretending to be busy.

Amidst our hectic daily lives, there are some things I'd like to record here.

(For example, the other day there was an exhibition titled “Kyodo Miyabi Secret Art Exhibition: Spiders and Pistils” at a gallery in Ginza 6-Chome, and as part of that event, there was a talk show with the outrageous title “The Aesthetics of the Showa Mind,” in which I appeared alongside Hiromi Saotome.)

Even at times like this, when the members of Tomoshihi happen to run into each other through our respective connections, we just can’t seem to get around to talking about our photography.

I can’t bring myself to suddenly insert a story about the event at the Ginza gallery right in the middle of writing passionately about Tomoshihi photography in my “Talking Theater” column every time.

Actually, four of us from the doujin group are meeting up at a certain place tomorrow, too.

However, in addition to the four of us, there will be about a dozen other people there, and they are also fellow enthusiasts studying a different topic (though none of them have anything to do with SM).

So, it’s simply impossible for just the four of us from Tomoshihi to gather in one place and whisper about some suspicious photo shoot.

Once, after one of those meetings had ended, the four of us were huddled together in a corner of a restaurant, quietly discussing something, when one of the people from the gathering just moments before forcefully joined us and said quite brazenly, “That sounds interesting. Let me hear about it.”

“This is a meeting about our work,” I said.

“I won’t get in the way, I’ll just listen quietly,” he said, not budging, no matter how many times I told him. His face was a mask of raw curiosity. What a vulgar, coarse face!

There was no way I could discuss the specifics of a bondage photo shoot in front of someone like that.

I was really at a loss.

In the end, I got angry.

Tomorrow, the four of us will meet again at an event unrelated to SM, but once that’s over and night falls, I’ll be the only one who has to go to yet another gathering.

(This is another gathering completely unrelated to SM, but I feel a sense of responsibility to attend.)

So, even though the four of us will finally be together tomorrow, we still can't set a date for the shoot of "The Feel of Water" (Ah, I must say, that's a great title!).

Well, that's the story.

"If the four of us don't make an effort to find time to talk, this photo book will never get done!" said Nakahara Rutsu, Director of the Sex Industry Museum.

"But let's try not to push ourselves too hard and take our time. It's not like we have a deadline or anything. Let's take our time and get some great photos," I said.

The other day, the Sex Industry Museum hosted an event called "Shizuhiro Usui: A Slideshow of Forbidden Secret Art."

Nakahara Rutsu, who served as the event's planner, organizer, slide projector operator, and master of ceremonies, gave it her all once again that day.

The event was a huge success.

That night, after the event, I secretly showed a few photos I had taken at Tomoshihi to Mr. El Bondage², a painter and old acquaintance who had attended.

"Wow, this is obscene! What an obscene photo! This is truly obscene! This gag, it's amazing!"

Staring intently at the photos, Mr. El Bondage let out a deep groan.

Just to clarify, these are photos of Hiromi Saotome, fully clothed, with a hand towel tied around her mouth like a gag, and her hands are bound behind her back.

To reiterate, she is fully clothed. Her legs are also firmly closed.

"Is this really obscene?" I asked Mr. Bondage.

"It is obscene," Mr. Bondage replied in a low voice, as if trying to contain his excitement.

The concept of obscenity as defined by society and the obscenity we perceive were this different.

² El Bondage (エル・ボンデージ氏に), is a manga artist who draws various erotic SM themed manga.

After Mr. Bondage left, I spoke to photographer Sachi Yamanouchi, who was still at the venue, “Mr. El Bondage was really moved by this photo and called it obscene. He’s not the type to flatter people or tell lies. That’s great. He gave us the highest possible compliment.”

Yamanouchi-san is always a quiet, composed woman, and she simply nodded, saying in a low voice, “Oh, really?”

Unlike a frivolous person like me, she didn’t get all excited and make a fuss.

But at that moment, I clearly saw that Yamanouchi-san’s eyes were glistening.

2011.9.26

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十回

Nureki Chimuo’s Talking Theater Chapter 180

春雨ラーメンをたべながら

While Eating Glass Noodle Ramen

I met with Director Nakahara Rutsu at a certain location, and we discussed the bondage photo shoot for Tomoshihi.

The conversation turned to my script for “The Feel of Water,” which is scheduled to be the third photo book in the Tomoshihi series.

(Since none of the members have had the time, “The Feel of Water” has yet to be photographed. To put it in the vernacular of Edo’s lower-class neighborhoods, it’s “embarrassing beyond belief.”)

“I still have quite a few complaints about that script of yours, Nureki Sensei,” Director Nakahara said, her large eyes glaring and gleaming black. Her face was less than thirty centimeters from mine.

“Here it comes,” I thought to myself.

When it comes to bondage photography, I don’t know anyone else who’s as picky as this woman. She’s just so strict. And the problem is, she’s spot-on about every single point.

“Huh? Huh? What? What are you unhappy about? As for ‘The Feel of Water,’ I wrote a script that’s more than long enough, and in my mind it’s already been completed ages ago!” I said.

I remember writing down even the finer points of how to use the ropes during the water torture scene.

“In this ‘Talking Theater,’ I want to give the people who read the script you wrote a deeper sense of shock or emotion...”

“Hmm!” I groaned. This is tough!

Just then, Hiromi Saotome appeared and joined the conversation, nodding in agreement with Director Nakahara’s words.

At that moment, someone with no connection to Tomoshihi approached us, so the filming meeting was interrupted.

After the five hour gathering that day came to an end, the three of us, Director Nakahara, Hiromi Saotome, and I, went into a “Hidakaya” restaurant in front of a certain station on the Chiyoda Line for a light dinner.

It was a very inexpensive dinner. We ordered one serving of the Harusame Ramen Set and two plates of gyoza, which the three of us shared.

“So Harusame Ramen really means the noodles are glass noodles, hmm,” Saotome remarked with admiration.

Since I had rehearsal for my next play that day, I didn’t eat too much.

If I get too full, I can’t get my lines to stick in my head.

(To tell the truth, whether I’m full or hungry, my ability to memorize lines has gotten extremely poor. It’s because of my age.)

Next month, I have to perform on two different stages.

(For more details on my everyday life in the theater, including photos, please refer to Kyoichi Tsuzuki’s “Chin Nippon Chouroden” (Chikuma Bunko).)

Director Nakahara, Hiromi Saotome, and I were all present, but photographer Sachi Yamanouchi couldn’t make it that day due to her busy schedule.

Since we also want to use the Yamanouchi residence as a filming location for “The Feel of Water,” things won’t move forward unless she’s here.

However, we decided to go ahead and shoot at the end of next month for now.

If this date doesn’t work out due to the Yamanouchi residence’s schedule, we can just postpone it again.

“Hmm, but the night before the shoot, I have a Halloween party that goes late into the night,” Hiromi Sautome muttered, glancing at the schedule in her planner.

“I see. You’re still as busy as ever. That must be tough,” I said, looking at her face as I slurped down my harusame ramen.

Maybe it was just my imagination, but her small face seemed to have grown even smaller.

She might have lost a little weight. Her complexion doesn’t look very good either.

(Huh?)

I thought to myself. Amidst her somewhat haggard appearance, there was a strangely alluring aura.

To be honest, I’ve rarely thought of Sautome as alluring.

Maybe this was the first time, I thought.

Having aged without a break, and with her days filled with constant physical and mental busyness, her somewhat haggard expression carries a deep, profound eroticism of fatigue and loneliness that young people simply don’t possess.

In that instant, I pictured Sautome right before my eyes, bound and subjected to water torture in that bathroom at the Yamanouchi residence.

The deep, dark, and hauntingly beautiful scene of Sautome, bound with her hands behind her back with harsh ropes and having water poured over her head, was vividly etched in my mind as I viewed her from every angle.

I thought that if I could capture this very atmosphere as it was, I might achieve a profound, masochistic photograph, one that would shake the viewer’s soul, completely different from any Sautome had seen before.

That day, after finishing the play rehearsal that had started at seven in the evening and returning to my room late at night, I reread chapters 176, 177, and 178 of “Talking Theater.”

They contain the script for “The Feel of Water,” shooting notes, and my personal reflections.

I had been thinking about the words Director Nakahara had said when we met earlier that day.

“Yeah, it’s actually written quite neatly and in detail, isn’t it?” I thought to myself.

What else is there to write?

As far as I was concerned, it had been written exactly as I had envisioned.

Although filming hadn’t actually started yet, after reading it, I even felt a strange illusion that it was already over.

In my mind, the text for this “Talking Theater” was sufficient, but Director Nakahara must have had a different visual image for “The Feel of Water” and was determined to fill in those gaps.

The sense of fulfillment one feels regarding a single thematic vision, as well as the presence or absence of gaps, varies from person to person.

It’s only natural that they differ.

By filling the gaps and correcting the discrepancies in the images each person holds of the work, the final result becomes more substantial.

I plan to talk with Director Nakahara again soon to further explore the script for “The Feel of Water,” as well as the areas where my mindset during filming was lacking and my thinking was superficial.

It would be ideal if photographer Yamanouchi and Hiromi Saotome could be there, but given how busy they are right now, that’s probably not going to happen.

2011.10.6

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 181

「水の感触」撮影二週間前

Two Weeks Before Shooting “The Feel of Water”

As I mentioned briefly last time, I have to perform on a different stage twice this month.

We've been rehearsing for them almost every day. I don't really like to use the word “busy,” but basically, I'm swamped, and right now I just don't have enough time.

So, I asked Director Nakahara Rutsu and photographer Sachi Yamanouchi to help fill in the gaps in the script and structure I wrote for the yet-to-be-photographed photo book, “The Feel of Water.”

Both of them are as busy as ever, but they squeezed in a little time to get together and, just the two of them, thoroughly fleshed out the shooting script.

(Actually, I wish Hiromi Saotome could have joined us as well, but she, too, is facing an important performance with significant responsibility coming up soon, and she simply cannot adjust her schedule due to preparations and rehearsals. In any case, everyone at Tomoshibi is busy in their own way.)

On the day of the dance show in which Saotome was performing (and she was dancing a solo, no less, no matter how busy I was, as a fellow member, I simply had to see this). Director Nakahara, photographer Yamanouchi, and I gathered at a restaurant in Azabu-Juban near her performance venue two hours before the show started. While having dinner, we held another meeting to discuss the filming of “The Feel of Water.”

“Here are the shooting notes that Yamanouchi-san and I reviewed and added to the other day. Please take a look.”

Director Nakahara held out the neatly typed script in front of me, his face tense and grim.

It reads as follows, and as I read through it, I nodded in agreement one by one, giving my approval.

Tomoshibi Filming, Episode 3: “The Feel of Water” (Supplementary Notes from the Filming Locations from Nakahara and Yamanouchi)

I want to add some variety to the opening scene.

I want to create a thrilling and unsettling opening that is unique to “The Feel of Water” and different from the first two sessions we’ve filmed so far.

The inherent constraints of the narrative. Clearly define the characteristics of each story as part of this trilogy. Carefully and thoroughly capture the rich imagery and dramatic, intense rope bondage narrative through the psychological tug of war between the married woman Hiromi and her blackmailer, Tamaru, revealing their contrasting expressions and emotions.

This time, I want to avoid using money as a prop.

To ensure that the water torture serves a clear purpose, not merely Tamaru’s “mere anger,” but the “coercion of a confession,” the prop for this scene will be a letter from Hiromi’s husband.

—Scene 1: Outside the house

The beginning of “The Feel of Water.”

The moment of “capture” and “silencing.”

Unlike the situations of “being captured” and “having one’s voice silenced” that I’ve filmed with various expressions up to now, in this third work, I want to capture the tension and thrill of “that very moment.”

Hiromi returns from shopping. An atmosphere of modest daily life, as if she knows nothing.

Tamaru lies in wait for Hiromi behind cover (a propane tank). Tamaru has taken a letter from the mailbox without permission (it is a letter from Hiromi’s husband).

Tamaru suddenly emerges.

Hiromi is startled.

Hiromi instinctively turns her back and tries to run away.

At that moment, he pins Hiromi in a bear hug (or grabs her arm as she turns to flee) and forces a hand over her mouth (the moment she is captured).

He then drags Hiromi toward the door. He must make her unlock the door and enter the house.

He makes Hiromi unlock the door. Since they are outside and neighbors might see, she cannot make a scene. Hiromi remains solemn, suppressing her fear and revulsion.

At this point, Tamaru must not let go of Hiromi's arm (or wrist).

She isn't physically bound with rope, but Hiromi's hands are restrained by psychological coercion.

"Here you go," is of course, not an option.

"Twisting her arm." That's not it either. It's the quiet act of "having her hand held," an action that foreshadows what comes next.

The image of fear creeping up on her, little by little.

—Scene 2: Entering the house.

A scene where the two of them talk.

Make sure to capture Tamaru's anger, which leads to the water torture that follows, and Hiromi's expression, which amplifies it.

As soon as they enter the house, Hiromi brushes Tamaru's hand away.

Tamaru holds the letter from her husband that was in the mailbox (Hiromi does not know about this yet).

Enraged by Hiromi's attitude, Tamaru drags her toward a pillar and ties her up.

(This time, he ties her arms behind the pillar.)

This is not to leave her there, as in "The Sunset Room."

She is being tied up to be threatened (to make her confess her husband's hiding place).

(Her husband's name is on the back of the mailed envelope, but no address is written.)

I want to create a cruel atmosphere where the act of tying her up itself, rather than doing something to her after tying her up, serves as a form of torture to force a confession from Hiromi.

Tamaru takes out the letter he was holding and waves it in front of her. Hiromi is startled.

I don't want anyone to read this. It's a precious letter.

She wants it back. Hiromi struggles, driven by that desire.

"You're a stubborn woman," says Tamaru.

Hiromi's look of contempt toward Tamaru.

If he were just threatening her as before, demanding she "tell me where your husband is staying," it would be enough to simply tie her to the pillar and torment her relentlessly.

However, at this point, a “rage” arises within Hiromi that cannot be appeased by mere threats against Tamaru. To force a confession, Tamaru says, “I’ll punish you even more!” (This leads to water torture.)

Hiromi’s cold, contemptuous gaze toward the man is enough to make him think this.

—Scene 3: Bathroom (Water Torture)

This is not a place where Hiromi is dragged to be confined or imprisoned for an extended period, but rather to be subjected to water torture.

As she is dragged along, Hiromi’s fear of what is about to happen mixes with her anger toward Tamaru and her determination to protect her husband’s hiding place, and she struggles against it.

Her resistance is in vain, and Hiromi is tied to the faucet with a rope.

“This is what happens when you won’t tell the truth. If you don’t confess soon, things will get much worse for you,” says Tamaru as the water torture begins.

After reading through the “Shooting Notes” above, I got a general idea of what Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi were aiming for.

Since these are notes and not a script, they might be a bit hard to follow for anyone other than the crew, but they really bring the scene to life for us.

I, of course, agree with the points made in these notes. Let’s proceed exactly as outlined here.

Above all, I am delighted and grateful that the passion of Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi for this project is burning ever brighter, even amidst their busy schedules.

The idea of filming the scene where the blackmailer, Tamaru, appears from a different angle than before is also excellent.

However, since this is bondage photography and not video footage, it would be better not to emphasize the man’s body.

(Of course, I am the one playing the role of this blackmailer.)

As a general rule, it would be better to structure it like a one-woman show starring Hiromi Saotome.

Since the shooting location is the same as in Volumes 1 and 2 (currently in editing), the heroine and the situation are the same, and above all, since the story itself is a continuation of Volume 1, there isn't much difference in content from the script I wrote.

If there is any difference, it would be that I have more requests for the heroine, Saotome.

The married woman Hiromi must clearly and realistically express a wide range of emotions. Shock, anxiety, dread, fear, pain, hatred, contempt, resistance, endurance, curses, and various others.

She must draw upon every facial expression and the reactions of her entire body to the ropes, mobilizing all her senses to convey these emotions with intense depth.

(Come to think of it, this is only natural. The expressions of the models in bondage photos up until now have been far too stereotypical, emotionless and devoid of any sense of soul. What we, the producers and sellers of SM products, have been creating are merely hollow bondage photos and SM videos that fail to reveal any true soul.)

Along with the changing expressions of the woman being tormented, the mission of photographer Yamanouchi, who must accurately capture them, is also of the utmost importance.

It is not simply a matter of pointing the camera at the subject and pressing the shutter.

She must use her own unique personality and sensibility to express the subject's emotions more deeply and more keenly.

Ultimately, the success or failure of the work depends entirely on the photographer's skill.

"It's no easy task for you either. You have to focus on the tips of his fingers, the way you plant your feet, and put all your strength into your shoulders and hips. You have to pour your soul into it. No matter how convincing Saotome-san's expression is, if there's no soul in your rope work, it'll end up looking just like all the other bondage photos we've seen so far," said Director Nakahara, as stern as ever.

As I transcribed the shooting notes for "The Feel of Water," which Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi had jotted down while facing each other across a desk and debating various points, into this "Talking Theater," I finally began to grasp, even with my dull mind, the depth of their dedication.

The overly formulaic, uniform expressions, those emotionless faces, of the women appearing in conventional bondage photographs.

Or, expressions that look obviously fake and contrived (not just their faces, but their whole bodies look fake).

Neither Director Nakahara nor photographer Yamanouchi wanted to be part of that hollow collection of photographs under any circumstances.

These supplementary shooting notes were a manifestation of their earnest desire to break free from that kind of photography at all costs.

(Admittedly, due to my own long-standing habits, if I let my guard down even a little, I slip back into that old, easygoing mindset from past photo shoots.)

I understand.

My two comrades.

For this shoot, I too will focus intently on these “Supplementary Notes,” concentrate my mind, and demonstrate my true style of rope work.

(If this Tomoshibi production photo book ends up following the same trends as conventional bondage photo books, there would be nothing sadder for me. It would render meaningless the very reason I launched Tomoshibi in the first place.)

And then there’s Hiromi Saotome.

Saotome and I have spent many years in the same world, working together as a model and a bondage artist on the production of SM products.

We’ve taken hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of photographs.

But let me predict here that “The Sunset Room,” “The Horsetail Garden,” and this latest work, “The Feel of Water,” will be Hiromi Saotome’s true masterpieces.

Since these are Saotome’s masterpieces, they are masterpieces for me as well.

The shoot for “The Feel of Water” is just two weeks away.

2011.10.11

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 182

「葛の葉」妄想譚

“Kuzunoha”: A Tale of Delusion

As I briefly mentioned at the beginning of my last post, Director Nakahara, photographer Yamanouchi and I sat side by side to watch the dance performance “Harakiri Kuzunoha,” performed solo by Hiromi Saotome.

It was an interesting adaptation of the classic kabuki play “Ashiya Doman Ouchi Kagami,” reimagined with a modern twist.

Saotome also gave a passionate and spirited performance.

The next day, I received a fax from the editor-in-chief of the magazine where I have a serialized essay column.

Along with the proofs for the next issue, there was a review of the previous night's performance, written as follows:

“Saotome-san's performance last night was wonderful, as expected of Saotome-san. The packed house held its breath, mesmerized by her artistry, watching in silence as if in a trance. I was deeply moved.” He praised her highly.

First of all, the staging was excellent, and the music was superb.

The lighting was also enchanting and fantastical. It was wonderful.

I've seen Saotome-san's self-choreographed and self-performed dances several times before, but watching the performance sandwiched between two beautiful women, photographer Yamanouchi to my right and Director Nakahara to my left, was truly a delightful experience, and I felt compelled to record it.

In other words, although we were separated by the stage and the audience seats, the four of us from Tomoshibi were indeed gathered in a single space at that moment.

The first time I saw the play “Kuzunoha” was at the Kotobuki Theater in Honjo Midori-cho. I was an elementary school student at the time.

This kabuki theater in downtown Tokyo was tragically destroyed on March 10, 1945, due to indiscriminate bombing by the U.S. Air Force of the Honjo, Fukagawa, and Asakusa areas.

A young, beautiful, and popular onnagata named Nakamura Tsurutaro, whom I also admired, perished in the fire that night.

Until the theater was destroyed by fire, my father would take me, then in the lower grades of elementary school, to this theater almost every month, whenever the play changed.

Even as the war intensified, this theater continued to put on performances.

I watched the kabuki while wearing a cotton-padded air-raid hood.

My father was also wearing an air-raid hood.

Although they are now in tatters, I still have about ten copies of the Kotobuki Theater’s programs from that time, thin and made of poor-quality paper.

In the scene from “Kuzunoha: The Weaver” that I saw at this theater, Kuzunoha the Fox was played by Tsuruzo Bando, Abe Yasuna by Shinnosuke Ichikawa, and, naturally, Princess Kuzunoha was portrayed by Tsuruzo in a dual role with a quick change.

Tsuruzo had a plump, round build, and while I didn’t find him particularly handsome, his gestures and movements after revealing his true form as a fox were eerie, and his flamboyant, theatrical performance captivated my young elementary school heart.

Since then, even as an adult, I have continued to watch various actors perform “Kuzunoha” at major theaters.

The bizarre plot, in which a fox transforms into a human woman, marries a human man, and gives birth to a human child, was right up my alley.

Although the legend of “Kuzunoha” originally stems from the old Joruri tale “Shinoda-zuma,” I find myself inexplicably drawn to this kind of inter-species marriage. That is, tales of human-animal unions. I simply love them.

I have seen Sakata Tojuro’s “Kuzunoha” several times, dating back to his days as Senshaku.

I also saw the Bunraku production of “Ashiya Doman Ouchi no Kagami” just a few months ago at the National Small Theater.

In that performance, the fox's movements were frighteningly realistic and agile, and the moments when it leaped through the air were thrilling.

And then, the climax of Kuzunoha the Fox's sorrow after her true nature is revealed, the farewell scene where she leaves her own child behind with her husband...

"...Ah, how shameful, how disgraceful. All those years spent hiding my true nature have been for naught. Now that my true self has been revealed, I have become a man who must part ways with my wife and children, severing all ties with them. I wish to tell my father of this, but if we were to meet face to face, I would be too ashamed to speak of my situation. Please listen carefully to what I have to say and convey it to my father.

...I am not truly human. Six years ago in Shinda, I was hunted down by Akueemon, but my life was spared by Lord Yoshinaga. I am a fox, a fox that has blossomed anew like orchids and chrysanthemums, living for nearly a thousand years....

...To repay that debt of life, I transformed into the form of Princess Kuzunoha, ... (omitted) As I cared for and attended to her, the affection that grew between us, deeper than that of sisters, and the bond we formed as husband and wife made me realize that the importance and preciousness of a husband in this foolish, beastly world of the Three Realms is a hundred times greater than that of a human.

...Especially since she gave birth to a child, with her husband and child on her right and left, the sweet words exchanged as they slept together, as if last night's bed were their final resting place, even the supernatural powers of the wild fox seem to have vanished in the face of such tenderness and love... (omitted)"

There was an overwhelming sense of pathos in this scene of "parting from a child."

The sorrow expressed in the final lines of the Joruri excerpt presented here is particularly heart-wrenching.

"...Especially after giving birth to you, I had many happy nights sleeping with my husband and child on either side of me.

I never imagined that last night would be the end of that happiness.

Even the formidable supernatural powers, the extraordinary, mystical abilities granted by the gods and Buddhas, of a fox spirit like me, who has lived for a thousand years, seemed to have vanished because of my love for my child and my husband..."

And here's another thing I like about it.

It's the few lines starting with "...since the time when husband and wife were still young."

In other words, it's a scene where she laments that ever since she was embraced by her husband, her love and devotion for him, even though she is a fox, often called a beast, are a hundred times deeper and stronger than those of any human...

(Well, I suppose some might argue that being loved a hundred times more deeply and intensely than a human woman would be a problem, it would be exhausting.)

However, the very person who was born from the womb of Kuzunoha, a fox possessed of this excessive, obsessive love, and who later became Abe no Seimei, wielding the formidable skills of a Onmyoji, is none other than the young boy from that time.

The staging of Hiromi Saotome's dance drama "Kuzunoha" was particularly interesting, featuring three shoji screens set up on stage and making creative use of the shadows cast upon them.

Abe Yasuna, Kuzunoha's husband, and the child born to the couple appear as shadows cast upon the shoji screens.

When the curtain rises, Saotome herself provides a concise narration summarizing the story so far.

From there on, the drama unfolds through music and Saotome's dance alone. It is, quite literally, a one-woman show by Hiromi Saotome.

The highlight of the play is, of course, the message Kuzunoha leaves for her husband and child by writing on the shoji screens,

"If you miss me,
come and seek me out
in the forest of Shida,
where the spring flows,
among the bitter leaves of the kudzu"

This must be that scene. You'll understand what it means once you read it.

It is a note that says, "If you ever miss me, come visit me at Shinda Forest in Izumi Province, where I used to live. I'll be waiting for you there."

Since a fox's hands are different from human hands, they cannot hold a brush.

In past performances, the actor playing Kuzunoha would hold the brush in his mouth and write these characters on the shoji screen.

This is called “kyoku-aki” (writing the lyrics).

Furthermore, because he is a fox, he writes only the characters for “Shinda no Mori” in reverse. In other words, the characters cannot be read correctly as “Shinda no Mori” unless viewed from the other side of the sliding door.

This climax is truly characteristic of Hiromi Saotome.

Set to the music, she performed her seppuku with deep emotion, grabbed her entrails with one hand, and with blood dripping from between her fingers, wrote this song on the sliding door with vivid passion.

Her white costume, reminiscent of a fox’s white fur, was stained with fresh blood.

(At that moment, I was suddenly reminded of Terushi’s performance. In the play, Terushi immediately cuts his own belly. The moment he does so, he spits out the red liquid he had been holding in his mouth with a “pfft” and assumes an expression of ecstasy. Terushi, enveloped in a demonic, decadent beauty, performs in a state of intoxication. In my mind, the images of Saotome and Terushi overlapped.)

The audience held its breath at the sheer intensity of the performance, completely captivated by Saotome’s alluring and powerful acting.

Even if she had left a note saying, “If you miss me, come visit me in the forest of Shida,” if Kuzunoha were to commit seppuku and die right here, wouldn’t they never be able to meet again?

Isn’t that a contradiction?

But then again, she is an ancient fox who has lived for a thousand years.

The lights dim, the sliding doors covered in blood-red writing are removed, and the stage is left with only a black cloth. In other words, this is Shida Forest.

Kuzunoha appears there, her form shrouded in her original, pristine white robe.

Truly, she is an ancient fox who has lived for a thousand years and even given birth to a human child.

Even the scars from her seppuku have vanished using her supernatural powers.

Saotome expresses this through music and dance.

Yet what remains etched in her mind are her beloved husband, Yasuna, and her child.

The figure of Kuzunoha, Saotome Hiromi, dancing madly and mysteriously, her thoughts fixed on the two of them.

The performance ended amidst her passionate performance. Applause erupted from the audience, and at that moment, I snapped out of my reverie. Terushi was gone.

The stage was shrouded in darkness, the beautiful dreamlike dance had ended.

2011.10.15

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 183

信太狐か、信田狐か

Is it “Shinoda (信太)-Kitsune” or “Shinoda (信田)-Kitsune?”³

As always, I write the script for this “Talking Theater” by hand, penning every single character myself, and then R-san types it up on a word processor and carefully posts it on the website.

From the very first installment to this 183rd one, she has continued to type it up faithfully and tirelessly.

(I'm amazed she never got bored with all those words and kept at it without fail. I'd like to express my gratitude once again.)

In other words, the first person to read this manuscript is R-san.

She corrects typos, missing characters, and other errors, and even checks for any questionable parts in the content of the text, bringing them to my attention.

To me, she is the best reader there is.

Even after I sent the manuscript for the previous installment (No. 182) by fax, I immediately received an inquiry from R-san.

“...In your manuscript, the name of the land where Kitsune Kuzunoha was born and raised is written as ‘Shita no Mori’ in one place and ‘Shida no Mori’ in another. What is the reason for this?”

“Huh?”

Carelessly, even though I wrote it myself, I hadn't noticed that.

³ 信太 and 信田 are both pronounced “Shinoda.” As this section deals with a discussion over the proper kanji for this word, I'll annotate the proper writing in each instance.

In my mind, whenever I think of “Kuzunoha,” it has always been “Shinoda (信太) no Mori” for as long as I can remember. That’s just the way it is.

Yet, why did I write “Shinoda (信田) no Mori?”

I looked into it and found out.

In the script for “Ashiya Doman Uchi no Kagami,” published in Volume 3 of the “Masterpieces of Kabuki” series by Tokyo Sogensha, specifically in the “Marumoto Jidai-mono Collection II,” the location is consistently listed as “Shinoda (信田) no Mori.”

Because I transcribed it exactly as it was, only the Joruri portion ended up as “Shinoda (信田).”

The commentary on this play is by Koji Toita-san. In his commentary, Toita-san refers to the ancient Joruri version as “Shinoda (信太) no Mori,” but in his commentary on the Kabuki play “Kuzunoha,” he follows the script and uses “Shinoda (信田) no Mori.”

That is truly a thoughtful touch.

In comparison (though it’s wrong to compare), how sloppy I have been.

In my heart, I bowed my head to Toita Sensei, who is now in the afterlife.

I once met Toita Sensei in the lobby of the Kabuki-za and exchanged a few words with him.

He is also a Naoki Prize-winning author.

I was an avid reader of “Nakamura Gagaku’s Mystery Notebook⁴.”

Speaking of Nakamura Gagaku, the character is modeled after the late Nakamura Matagoro. Matador played the role of Gagaku.

The previous Nakamura Kansaburo, who played Gagaku after him, was also excellent, with a truly understated presence.

Both of the actors who portrayed Nakamura Gagaku, the kind-hearted, gentle master detective of the Kabuki-za, are no longer with us.

A wave of emotion wells up inside me.

I got sidetracked.

⁴ Nakamura Gagaku’s Mystery Notebook is a series of mystery novels written by Koji Toita.

According to the Iwami Japanese Dictionary, “Shinoda (信太)-zushi” (Shinoda sushi). Inari sushi. The name derives from a legend that a white fox lived in Shinoda (信太) Forest in Senshu (now southern Osaka Prefecture), and the fact that foxes are said to love fried tofu pouches.

The Obunsha Japanese Dictionary also notes, “Shinoda (信田)-zushi” (Shinoda sushi). Inari sushi. Named after a legend about foxes in the Shinoda (信太) Forest of Izumi Province (southern Osaka Prefecture).”

“Shinoda (信田)-maki” (Shinoda roll). A dish made by stuffing fried tofu pouches with seafood, vegetables, and meat and then simmering them.”

It states this, and this entry does not use the term “Shinoda (信太).”

Minoru Koizuka has written a comprehensive and in-depth book titled “Fox Tales” (published in 1982 by Sanichi Shobo), which extensively researches Japanese fox legends. In the section titled “The Fox of Shinoda (信太): The Grudge of the Kuzu Leaf” within that book, all the place names mentioned were written as “Shinoda (信太).”

Furthermore, the legend of “Shinoda (信太)-tsuma” is described in great detail.

Toward the end of this book, there is a section titled “The Fox Palindrome.”

A palindrome is a phrase that reads the same backward as forward. It is a kind of wordplay.

Even the short phrase “kitsune-tsuki⁵” (possessed by a fox) is already a palindrome.

It is interesting that many palindromes related to foxes are introduced. Among them, “The fox cub of Shinoda (信太), the joy of my beloved child falling asleep” is one such example. It reads the same from the bottom up.

Continuing from last time, Hiromi Saotome’s performance of “Kitsune Kuzunoha” was wonderful. It was both beautiful and charming, yet at its core, it possessed the fierce intensity of a demon beast.

It captivated the hearts of the packed audience.

Dressed in white and portraying a white fox, Saotome moved about on her tiptoes, lightly hopping as she walked. In Kabuki, this is called “fox-foot.”

⁵ In English, this is obviously not a palindrome. But in hiragana, きつねつき is a palindrome.

Her hands are held with the fingers together and slightly bent, the backs of her hands facing down, and at times, her palms facing up to create expressions. In kabuki, this is called “fox hands.”

Saotome’s fox darted from one corner of the stage to another, twisting her slender body violently to express the sorrow of parting from her child.

To my eyes, that image suddenly overlapped with the memory of Ennosuke in his prime.

How many times have I watched, thrilled and entranced, as Ennosuke’s Fox Tadanobu in the “Shinokiri” scene leapt lightly, ran, and finally danced while soaring high through the air?

It wasn’t just twenty or thirty times. I saw it far more than that. There was a time when I went to the third-floor seats at Mejiza every day.

Before its renovation, the third-floor seats at Mejiza had exposed, dirty concrete stairs for some reason, giving them a shabby look. They felt very much like the general admission section.

When I see Ennosuke in his wheelchair now, a wind of impermanence whistles through my chest. It feels as though even my own limbs are growing cold.

Even if Kamijiro were to succeed Ennosuke and present a more youthful, nimble Fox Tadanobu, I would never forget the current Ennosuke’s stage presence.

2011.11.4

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 184

「水の感触」撮影完了

“The Feel of Water” Filming Complete

If I write that I'm “so busy, so busy,” people might think, “Hmph, pretending to be busy in this recession? What a snarky guy.”

But everyone at Tomoshihi really was incredibly busy.

Even though we were busy, it's not like we were making any money from it.

We hardly ever do any work that actually pays.

Essentially, it's exactly what the old saying means, “the poor have no time to spare.”

It means that if we're asked to do a job and we like it, we immediately get absorbed in it, putting money aside.

That's my explanation for why the filming of “The Feel of Water” got delayed.

Even so, amidst all this busyness, Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi have managed to carve out time to work late into the night, editing the previously photographed “The Sunset Room” and “The Horsetail Garden” for inclusion in the photo book. Overall, things are progressing, but the photography for “The Feel of Water” is the only part that has fallen behind.

Although the photography had been delayed, the members of the Tomoshihi group maintained their enthusiasm and sense of urgency regarding “The Feel of Water” without interruption. This is only natural.

All four of us work in different places on a daily basis and do not see each other every day, but we are constantly in touch and connected by a passionate shared purpose, the creation of this photo book.

Well, even though we work in different places, our jobs are essentially the same, so it's easy to stay in touch.

From a geographical standpoint, and given the convenience of always being in a fixed location, Director Nakahara Rutsu inevitably became the central point of contact.

And (though I'd rather not state this too explicitly), all four of us share a hobby of performing on stage (though for Hiromi Sautome, it's not a hobby but her profession), so we often get together for that reason as well.

Naturally, I am the leader of that hobby, and it wouldn't be wrong to say that I'm the one dragging the other three around.

(To be fair, though, my "hobby" is essentially the same kind of spiritually uplifting activity as "bondage photography.")

I inadvertently wrote that Director Nakahara's location is convenient and easy to reach, but of course, that is not the only reason her presence is so important.

It's easy to assume that since the filming of "The Feel of Water" has been postponed, we should have more time to spare, but in reality, far from having more time, everyone has become even busier.

In other words, they're all highly capable individuals.

When a new project appears before them, their attention inevitably shifts toward it, and their hearts are moved.

This is only natural. It can't be helped.

At times like that, Director Nakahara is the one who immediately shouts a rallying cry, "The filming date for 'The Feel of Water' is approaching! Pay attention to this!"

Then, the other three nod to one another, their eyes sparkling, saying, "That's right, that's right, there's 'The Feel of Water!'"

And on the day of the shoot, Director Nakahara handed each of us a copy of the final draft of the script for "The Feel of Water," which I had written a month earlier, that she had personally revised to include more detailed descriptions of the characters' movements and inner thoughts, and which she had neatly bound.

The three of us received the final draft from Director Nakahara at the cafe in front of the station, where we had agreed to meet. It was such a stylish, perfectly put together volume that we couldn't help but exclaim in admiration, "Wow, really? It's beautiful! Amazing!"

(The fact that it was a script for a photo book, rather than a video drama or other visual media, is pretty amazing in itself.)

From the very moment I first conceived the idea, I had asked Director Nakahara to serve as the production producer for this photo book, so seeing that come to fruition left me thoroughly satisfied at this stage.

I would like to suggest to Director Nakahara that the scripts for “The Sunset Room,” “The Horsetail Garden,” and “The Feel of Water” be compiled into a single, sturdily bound volume and placed in the Sex Industry Museum.

I have come to truly appreciate the unwavering passion of the Tomoshihi members toward the creation of this photo collection, and I am confident that the most important, fundamental stance (one might even call it a philosophy) of “SM Drama” is encapsulated within these scripts.

By placing this script in the Sex Industry Museum, we will be leaving a record of the fact that, in 2011, there was a group that produced a bondage photo book with this mindset and enthusiasm.

In an era flooded with photos that gratuitously expose the crotch or depict cruel torture and endurance games, I hope this script will convey to future like-minded individuals that there was once a small group striving to create works like this.

Or perhaps the fruits of Nureki Chimuo’s fifty-year career in bondage are nothing more than these three scripts, compiled with content supplemented by Director Nakahara Rutsu.

(No, I’m not joking. It’s really true, it’s just these three scripts.)

The shoot went well.

It went very well.

It might never go any better than this, even for our Tomoshihi group.

The preparation period leading up to the shoot was long, and because of that, the story has had plenty of time to mature in each of our hearts.

What’s more, “The Sunset Room” is followed by “The Horsetail Garden,” and that is followed by “The Feel of Water.”

The stories are connected, and the cast consists only of Hiromi Saotome and myself. Just Hiromi, a married woman, and Tamaru, a moneylender.

Every member of the production team knows this drama inside and out, down to the very last detail, and has made it their own.

In a way, it's a truly luxurious way to shoot.

We are fundamentally different from those who shoot solely with the intention of making money.

And for all three shoots, we were allowed to use the Yamanouchi residence, a place where we all feel completely at home.

We were familiar with the atmosphere of each room in the house, as well as the layout and design of the space leading to the bathroom.

In short, we were accustomed to it as a filming location.

Becoming too accustomed to a place can dilute the sense of tension and often works against you, but that is not the kind of familiarity I am referring to here.

Although we had used the location twice before, the four of us, without saying a word, instinctively shared the mindset of using it more effectively and dramatically, creating a work with a fresh atmosphere, without ever letting that fact show.

These are the sharp-witted members of Tomoshihi possessing such keen reflexes and sensitivity.

Come to think of it, I was the kind of person who was insensitive to that sort of intuition, so I instinctively chose not to join them.

Even in silence, we move in the same direction, our hearts as one.

There is mutual trust.

Even without me saying a word, our focus converges perfectly on a single point.

With everything going smoothly, the shoot wrapped up without a hitch, and everyone left the Yamanouchi residence in high spirits.

We held our wrap party at an izakaya located in the same building as the coffee shop where we had gathered before the shoot.

We toasted with bottled beer.

“Great job, everyone!”

“Great job!”

A tempura platter.

Stir-fried eggs and wood ear mushrooms.

Potato salad.

Yaki udon.

Salted squid.

Garlic fried chicken.

Crab miso.

Squid tentacles with wasabi.

(Director Nakahara kept muttering to herself while looking at the menu on the wall, “What is geso-wasa⁶? What on earth is geso-wasa? What kind of dish is geso-wasa?” We all tried to explain it to her, but she still looked puzzled, so we ordered it.)

I feel like we ordered two or three other dishes as well, but I’ve forgotten what they were. Everyone had one serving each.

Finally, when we ordered fried horse mackerel, to our surprise, there was only one fish on the plate.

So photographer Yamanouchi tried to elegantly cut it into four pieces using disposable chopsticks, but she couldn’t cut it properly.

In the end, she grabbed it with her fingers and tore it into four pieces, which the four of us shared.

It was crispy and delicious.

Maybe it tasted even better because we ate it one bite at a time.

We had four or five bottles of Kirin Lager.

⁶ Squid tentacles with wasabi.

Hiromi Saotome and photographer Yamanouchi drank most of it, and we all parted ways in high spirits, feeling great.

2011.11.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 185

「水の感触」自画自賛

“The Feel of Water” Self-Praise

Whether it was during the filming of “The Sunset Room,” “The Horsetail Garden,” or this latest project, “The Feel of Water,” photographer Sachi Yamanouchi did not use any artificial lighting at all.

It was all natural light.

Without a word, she calmly and objectively captured the movements of Hiromi Saotome, the heroine of this drama. Unlike other cinematographers who would frantically shift positions, she remained still, quietly yet sharply pressing the shutter.

Photographer Yamanouchi rarely uttered the kind of noisy, meaningless, and wasteful (not just wasteful, but sometimes even counterproductive) calls to the model that are often heard from insecure photographers.

I sometimes forget that I am a character in the drama myself, and I watch the moment when photographer Yamanouchi presses the shutter.

At first glance, she appears to be standing there casually, in a daze, but that is not the case.

She possesses a vivid artistry that captures the subject's fleeting movements, much like a bird in flight snatching a fish from the water.

At the core of this artistry lies sensitivity. Without a special kind of sensitivity and reflexes, this artistry would not shine.

That special sensitivity is, needless to say, the talent to perceive the subtleties of bondage.

“I’m a veteran who’s been shooting SM photos for decades. That’s why there’s no mistake in the photos I take!”

No matter how much one boasts like this, after decades of shooting bondage photos, that photographer's sense has been mercilessly worn down and has become useless.

The sense of bondage that was fresh decades ago has been worn out and eroded, reduced to nothing more than a mere "hollow shell."

(I'm not talking about anyone else. I'm speaking to myself.)

Both Hiromi Saotome's movements and expressions as the subject are completely natural. There is not a trace of the exaggerated, forced poses or artificial expressions often seen these days, where models seem to be pandering solely to the photographer and crew.

(Though to say that is actually disrespectful and unfair of today's models. They are simply following the orders of the photographers and the men on set, posing obediently and faithfully.)

Saotome was not merely a model. During the shoot for "The Feel of Water," she became a true artist.

She didn't undress, nor did she spread her legs.

An unfortunate, married woman who, while concealing fear, anger, resignation, sorrow, and endurance within herself, continues to resist fiercely in her heart despite being subjected to unreasonable constraints.

She remained, from start to finish, an actress who avoided exaggerated acting as much as possible and focused on expressing her inner world.

(Come to think of it, Hiromi Saotome had long been a model with a strong sense of self and a distinct personality.)

She had read, understood, and thoroughly absorbed the script for "The Feel of Water," which I had written in broad strokes and Director Nakahara Rutsu had meticulously refined down to the details of each scene, well in advance, ten or twenty days before filming.

We at Tomoshihi avoided as much as possible photographs in which the bound and tormented model contorts her face excessively, twists her body unnaturally, and cries or screams, laying her emotions bare.

This is because we know all too well that such overly exaggerated, "sell-at-all-costs" photos elicit nothing but derision from true connoisseurs.

No, setting aside the preferences of other enthusiasts for the moment, if I may say so, what we wanted to create this time was a photo book that would satisfy us and make our hearts race.

Some of the photos from this “The Feel of Water” series will be featured in a magazine associated with photographer Yamanouchi.

Since it’s presented in a photo story format, the editorial department left a request in my office asking me to write an accompanying caption, and I agreed.

(Actually, that phone call came in while I was in the middle of writing the manuscript for “Talking Theater: Chapter 185.”)

The space allotted for explaining the story is extremely limited, but there are twelve photos spread across eight pages.

Since I originally shot “The Feel of Water” with the intention of compiling it into a single photo book, these twelve photos out of a large collection represent only a tiny fraction of the whole.

However, I believe that the atmosphere of this photo book, and our intentions, are conveyed sufficiently even through these twelve images alone.

(That said, I would like to reiterate that for those who perceive eroticism only in the exposed crotches of women, this series of photographs is completely irrelevant.)

I had already decided on the title “The Feel of Water” for the third photo book produced by Tomoshihi, and I was quite pleased with myself, thinking, “Hmm, I must say, that’s a pretty good title,” but I’m not sure it makes much sense to use “The Feel of Water” for the twelve-page spread in the magazine, which is being released ahead of the photo book.

After all, there isn’t a single drop of water in these twelve photos.

Due to editorial constraints, only one photo of the married woman Hiromi being water-tortured in the bathroom will be published in the magazine.

And that’s just a single photo from the final scene.

(The photo book will, however, include many more shots of this water torture scene.)

While that aspect leaves a bit to be desired, this single photo published in the magazine captures the deep, dark, grim, and chilling sense of masochism emanating from Hiromi, who has been drenched and confined.

I will have to write this repeatedly, but apart from the bondage photographs of Tomoshibi, which do not sell nudity, it is rare to see a married woman's entire body drenched in water while fully clothed, with the hem of her skirt slightly turned up (not intentionally, but naturally) and her right knee barely exposed. It is a piercing photograph.

How eerily erotic is the whiteness of her knee and thigh, rising just slightly from this scene submerged in gloomy hues.

(I would like to take this opportunity to once again praise photographer Sachi Yamanouchi for the sharpness and depth of her SM sensibility.)

Generally speaking, Hiromi Saotome is a woman who usually lacks any particular allure.

Yet, once placed in a unique situation, this seemingly unsexy woman instantly transforms into a being imbued with a mysterious allure, as if she were a completely different person.

She exudes a ghostly, alluring eroticism throughout her entire body, something no other woman possesses.

From a certain moment onward, Hiromi Saotome metamorphizes into a woman with a dangerous body heat that inspires all manner of lewd fantasies in men.

The dark, eerily damp air inside the bathroom, the gag made from a hand towel, thick and heavy from having absorbed the water used in the water torture.

The rope digging tightly and firmly into her chest. Her wet clothes, her skirt.

Leaning against the wall, enduring her unjust misfortune and cursing the man, a delicate yet intense masochistic eroticism emanates and wells up from the body of this married woman.

Just looking intently at this single image alone, I find myself becoming entranced. Writing such things, however, would be far too cliched self praise, and truly unbecoming.

But to tell the truth, Director Nakahara Rutsu is, deep down, even more entranced by the outcome of this shoot than I am.

"It's wonderful, it's wonderful, I really took some great photos. Don't you think, Sensei? Isn't it amazing? Hey, hey, Sensei, photography is so much fun, isn't it? It really is so much fun!"

"That's right, photography is fun. It's fun, which is why I've been doing it for fifty years without getting bored."

“I understand how you feel, Sensei. It’s so interesting, being able to take photos exactly the way you want them to be. It’s really interesting, incredibly interesting!”

Come to think of it, Director Nakahara was largely responsible for the on-site direction for this “The Feel of Water” project.

She was constantly raising her voice and running around, managing and coordinating the proceedings on set.

I was just playing the role of a somewhat sleazy loan shark named Tamaru.

Director Nakahara was more than just a director. This time, she took on the role of general director from the very beginning. She paid attention to every single detail, stood tall and confident, and gave us strong, loud instructions and orders.

For example, like this: “Sensei, that won’t do. Tamaru isn’t radiating energy from head to toe. You’re slacking off somewhere. When you grab the married woman Hiromi’s arm, grab her more roughly and violently, grip her tight. Harder, harder. Why are you holding back? You have to take this more seriously!”

I just obediently replied, “Yes, ma’am,” and meekly followed the director’s orders.

Since this director’s creative vision matches mine down to the finest details, I have nothing to worry about. I can simply move as she instructs with complete peace of mind.

Even so, being the timid person I am, I couldn’t quite pull off the role of a rough loan shark. As I fumbled around, she flew over to me, looking impatient, and said, “Take this more seriously and put some power into it, Sensei! We won’t get any good photos like this!”

Her big eyes darted about, and she said it just as if she were scolding a child.

However, thanks to that, this shoot went incredibly smoothly, without a moment’s hesitation or delay, progressing rhythmically in an intense atmosphere, and the results turned out to be far more substantial than I had anticipated.

Well, now that we’ve finished shooting enough material for three albums, it’s time to start editing.

Let’s edit these three cute, beautiful photo books with even more passion than we put into the shoot itself.

I’m counting on you, Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi.

2011.12.23

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 186

「七人の侍」と都築さんのトークショー

“Seven Samurai” and Tsuzuki-san's Talk Show

To my Acchitei Master,

I would like to give you an update on how things are going.

Yesterday, I went to Yurakucho to see “Seven Samurai.” I was accompanied by Director Nakahara.

She has been so kind to me, and I've long felt that taking her to see “Seven Samurai,” a film she hadn't seen yet, would be a way for me to thank her while I'm still alive, as well as a gift to her.

I saw this film when it first came out, and I've watched it repeatedly ever since whenever I've had the chance. I've probably seen it over a dozen times by now.

I've also seen it a few times on TV, and every detail of each scene is etched into my memory.

Even for each of the minor characters with almost no lines, memories from my own life decades ago, from each of those eras, came flooding back, and every time the face of such an actor appeared on the screen, I would briefly lose myself in those memories.

For example, whenever Akira Tani, with his beady eyes, appeared (He was an actor with real character, but I remember he committed suicide partway through his career. I don't know what troubles he faced as a Toho actor, but hanging himself is such a grim story), I found myself suddenly recalling my younger self, who was deeply shocked by that.

Whenever I saw Kichijiro Ueda, dressed as a bandit's henchman and being dragged around by the peasants, I was instantly reminded of Minomura Ko.

It is said that Minomura Ko, when he was very young, before joining “Kitan Club,” once worked as an extra at a film studio in Kyoto.

“You know, Uekichi-san, even though he has such a scary face, he’s actually a kind person. He was really nice to me and spoke to me kindly about all sorts of things,” and so on, and so on.

I also suddenly recalled stories about how Kichijiro Ueda and Kazuo Hasegawa were related by marriage.

That Kazuo Hasegawa’s wife was Kichijiro Ueda’s daughter. Or was it Seinen Hayashi’s?

I’ve forgotten. My memory is a bit hazy.

The gossip that a heartthrob whose fame echoed throughout the land and an actor who specialized in villains were close relatives was fascinating to my younger self, and it still lingers in the back of my mind.

Come to think of it, back then, I was quite good at imitating Kichijiro Ueda’s voice.

I can still do it. But even if I did it now, no one would listen anymore.

As for Hidari Bokuzan, I’ve actually seen him perform on stage many times.

Right after the war, when the Toyoko Department Store in Shibuya had nothing to sell and had converted the fifth and sixth floors entirely into movie theaters and performance halls, I saw Hidari Bokuzan quite often performing in light theater productions there.

(I was a fan of light comedy plays.)

Once, completely unrelated to the flow of the play, Hidari Bokuzan suddenly appeared on stage, looked around in bewilderment, said “Oh, I guess it wasn’t my turn yet,” and went backstage. It was so funny, just like that old peasant in “Seven Samurai,” that I laughed until my stomach ached.

He was that kind of actor, full of gossip and fun.

I also saw Saburozen at the Daito Theater in Asakusa and the Kagetsu Theater. Just seeing him appear was entertaining.

I also saw him at the Nichigeki Small Theater in Yurakucho.

He played the role of the temple priest, a key character in “Gokumonjima,” based on the novel by Seishi Yokomizo.

His unique, deadpan delivery at that time was strangely vivid and possessed a peculiar realism. It still rings clearly in my ears.

On that stage at the Nikkatsu Small Theater, I also saw Minoru Chiaki, who played one of the seven samurai in Akira Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai."

Minoru Chiaki was the leader of a theater troupe called the Barazaka, and he was performing a play titled "Tokyo Elegy," written by Kazuo Kikuta, alongside an actress named Tomoe Sasaki. Tomoe Sasaki was also Minoru Chiaki's wife.

(How on earth did I, a boy at the time, know all this? And why do I still remember it now that I'm 82?)

"Tokyo Elegy" is set against the backdrop of the ruins of Tokyo's entertainment district, which had been destroyed by American air raids.

Characters such as street urchins and prostitutes, known as "panpan girls," appear in the play.

It was a play that reflected the spirit of the era.

...Ah, if I keep writing about things like this, I'll never stop. I wasn't supposed to be writing about these old memories.

Just as I had expected, Director Nakahara was deeply moved by "Seven Samurai."

Actually, the extent of her emotion might have exceeded my expectations.

Actually, after watching "Seven Samurai" yesterday, I had planned to go with her to the exhibition of photographer Kyoichi Tsuzuki's work and the talk show featuring Tsuzuki-san and another guest (Akito Inui-san) held at the venue.

So, as soon as the movie ended, she and I immediately went outside the building where the theater was located.

I felt weighed down.

"I must have gotten tired from fighting the thirteen remaining rogue samurai in the pouring rain."

After watching nearly four hours of this intense film in one sitting (though there was a fifteen-minute intermission), I was feeling exhausted.

The theme music, rising and falling, had taken hold of my entire body, and Takashi Shimura's character, Kanbei Shimada, drawing his sword and bracing himself, had possessed me.

When she heard what I said, she understood immediately and said with a laugh, "I'm tired too."

It wasn't raining in front of Yurakucho Station, but right before my eyes, the rain was pouring down diagonally, and I could see a bandit on horseback galloping past, just inches from my nose, kicking up a spray of mud.

The venue for Tsuzuki-san's event, where we were headed, is located near Ebisu Station.

It's a venue called "Nadiff Apartment," a place neither she nor I had ever been to before.

(Dark Night Alley)

A talk event for a solo exhibition subtitled "Ueno-Asakusa Underground Cruise" was set to begin at six in the evening.

It sounded interesting.

If it has the word Asakusa in it, it's bound to be interesting.

Asakusa is my hometown.

(It's a coincidence, but I've recently been thinking of rereading Naoya Shiga's "Dark Night Journey," and I currently have the edition published by Chuo Koron-sha sitting on my bedside table.)

Kensaku Tokito.

To go see Tsuzuki-san, I have to take the train from Yurakucho Station and ride the Yamanote Line for about half a lap.

The invitation says it's about a six-minute walk from the station.

I'll have to walk using a map that's been stylized so neatly it looks hard to follow.

(It really is just like "Dark Night Alley.")

I muttered to myself.

“Let’s take a taxi,” I said to her, and hailed a cab that happened to be passing by.

I was surprised to see a large photo displayed in the venue’s exhibition room showing me standing on stage at Asakusa Kba-tei alongside the rakugo performer Umeko.

It is an honor to be portrayed in this way by an outstanding artist like Tsuzuki-san, who possesses such a resilient and authentic poetic spirit.

In fact, that evening, Director Nakahara and I were deeply moved by the exquisite artistry of Tsuzuki-san’s talk.

For me, that emotion was, in a sense, comparable to that of “Seven Samurai.”

So, even before I began writing, I had already decided on the title for this “Talking Theater,”: “‘Seven Samurai’ and Tsuzuki-san’s Talk Show.”

For the second half, I intended to write a piece wholeheartedly and with all my soul, praising Tsuzuki-san’s storytelling skills. It was truly an educational experience.

And last night, while eating Kikakata ramen, she and I had a passionate conversation about how wonderful it would be if we could emulate this warm, heartfelt atmosphere of Tsuzuki-san’s for our Tomoshihi photo album completion celebration, an event where my acchitei master is also well acquainted with our group.

I’ll report on how that went in my next post.

I’m grateful for my acchitei master for the long relationship we’ve built over time, almost without realizing it.

Even though I always try to sound like I know what I’m talking about, I’ve always been selfish and spoiled by my master.

This has turned into a bit of a rambling post.

Well, see you later. Sorry about that.

2011.12.27

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 187

話芸は結局人柄ですね

In the End, Storytelling Comes Down to One's Character

Since I had watched "Seven Samurai" all the way to the end before rushing to the venue, the talk event for Tsuzuki-san's photo exhibition in Ebisu had already been underway for about fifteen minutes.

When I pushed open the stylish stained glass door and stepped inside, I saw what appeared to be a group of about thirty people seated on chairs arranged in a space resembling an aisle between rows of bookshelves, facing the front of the room at the far end.

At the far end of the space, where the bookshelves stood packed tightly together, I could see Tsuzuki-san and his guest, Akihito Inui-san.

(Inui-san is a stranger to both me and Director Nakahara.)

The two of them were seated facing each other, holding microphones and in the middle of their conversation.

Behind them was a screen, and while slides were being projected, Tsuzuki-san was doing most of the talking.

Since both Director Nakahara and I were visiting for the first time, we weren't quite sure what to make of the place.

Upon closer inspection, the atmosphere suggested a bookstore specializing in expensive art books, with thick volumes, likely imported, packed tightly on the shelves.

It seemed the talk was reaching its climax. Quiet laughter rose from the audience, and a lively atmosphere was building. Drawn in by this, I stopped and turned my gaze toward Tsuzuki-san, who was standing a short distance away from where I stood.

The laughter continued.

It was a refined, reserved kind of laughter, filled with affection and warmth toward Tsuzuki-san.

We decided to postpone our visit to the underground gallery for later, and Director Nakahara and I sat in the back row among the thirty or so guests to listen to their conversation.

From Tsuzuki-san's vantage point, he could hardly see the two of us.

Director Nakahara did not sit in the chair offered by the staff but remained standing, her neck and back straight as always, her gaze fixed on Tsuzuki-san.

Her expression seemed to be focused on the conversation between the two men, while at the same time observing the scene in the room surrounded by this vast collection of art books.

She is someone who never lets her guard down as the director of the Sex Industry Museum.

Even at that moment, it seemed to me that she was contrasting the museum she manages and runs with the space she was standing in right then.

Her dedication to her work is truly formidable.

Of course, I find that very reassuring.

With a microphone in one hand, a gentle smile never leaving his face, and speaking in a natural, smooth tone, Tsuzuki-san appeared to be glowing brightly in a pinkish light, as if he were bathed in a spotlight.

(It wasn't just his head, his whole body was glowing.)

No, perhaps it wasn't artificial lighting at all, but an aura emanating from Tsuzuki-san's very being.

Images of the underground residents active in the Ueno and Asakusa areas were projected onto the screen, each with their own distinct personalities.

I suppose they were all Tsuzuki-san's creations.

He speaks with remarkable vitality about his experiences visiting and interacting with these delightful people, who possess a unique charm that ordinary people could never imitate.

I was captivated by his manner of speaking, seemingly plain and unassuming at first glance, yet possessing exquisite nuance.

It is a theme that could easily slip into mere curiosity or eccentricity if handled poorly, yet he never gives that impression. I sensed that this was due to Tsuzuki-san's character, his reverence for his subjects, and perhaps even a slight desire to identify with those people.

Though it may be presumptuous, I consider myself a small part of that group as well.

That is why I intuitively know that there is no pretense in the words Tsuzuki-san speaks or in the gentleness of his work.

I can clearly sense the sincere and pure curiosity wrapped in that genuine warmth.

The residents of the underground were all happily expressing themselves as they were photographed by Tsuzuki-san.

I instinctively feel wary of the many people who approach me with a sugary voice, saying things like, "I like you guys," "I really get you," or "I'm on your side."

If I let my guard down and accidentally flash a smile, I sometimes find myself suddenly tripped up, sent tumbling head over heels, and left with a bitter taste in my mouth.

Even if I don't get sent tumbling, I often end up having a really unpleasant experience.

Tsuzuki-san's smile is gentle.

It's a smile that doesn't feel forced.

There are people who approach us with fake smiles, sometimes even offering flattery, all while trying so hard not to hurt our feelings.

I can tell right away. Those who hurt us don't realize that it is precisely their words and actions that actually wound our hearts the most deeply and cruelly.

I'm usually very cautious, but after just a few words with Tsuzuki-san, I ended up baring the secrets of my private workroom.

Without a moment's hesitation, I said, "Oh, sure, go ahead and take pictures." I was actually surprised at myself for opening up like that.

"Huh, so I had this kind of trust in people after all," I thought.

My workroom is, at a glance, a veritable den of all my shame.

Oh, I guess I just ended up rambling.

I'm sure I had other thoughts about Tsuzuki-san's talk that night.

(It's a bit of a stretch, but it was something I shared with the emotions I felt after just watching "Seven Samurai.")

But I can't seem to put it into words.

I'm not very smart and I have no formal education, so rambling on like this is the only skill I have.

In short, I lack the ability to express myself.

In the gallery, a large, enlarged photo of me standing at the Koba-tei in Asakusa was on display.

(Oh, I wrote about this last time, didn't I?)

Since the talk seemed to be continuing, I decided to take a quick look around the basement gallery, go up the stairs, pass behind Tsuzukisan, and take my leave.

Sensing that Director Nakahara and I were passing by, Tsuzuki-san turned around.

He recognized us, so we exchanged a brief greeting. The talk was still in progress.

On the way from the gallery to the station, I had some Kitakata ramen.

We also ordered fried rice and split it between the two of us.

I chatted with Director Nakahara while we ate.

"To commemorate the publication of the Tomoshihi photo book, let's gather our supporters and hold a talk show like that. How wonderful it would be if we could do it just like Tsuzuki-san did," I said.

"That sounds great. When the time comes, let's hold it at our museum."

"Tsuzuki-san's talk felt very sincere, which was nice. It was a pleasure to listen to. That's some impressive storytelling. I'm truly impressed."

"The audience's reaction was also wonderful. You could sense a quiet, refined passion in them."

“It was great that the audience was made up entirely of people who understood and were interested in Tsuzuki-san’s work and his talk. The intellectual atmosphere was so fulfilling, a bit different from the typical public interest. I think it was Tsuzuki-san’s way of speaking that created such a refined and warm atmosphere in that venue. In the end, storytelling really comes down to the person’s character.”

“With your talk shows, you’re so focused on making the audience laugh right away that he end up straying from the main point at the very best moments.”

As always, Director Nakahara has some harsh words to say.

Actually, the other day, I held a talk show at a gallery in Ginza with a certain painter known for his unique style.

Including the host, Hiromi Saotome, it was a show featuring three people.

When I stand in front of a large audience, I reflexively feel an overwhelming urge to make them laugh.

When I manage to make them laugh, I get quite happy and end up feeling really good.

At times like that, when Director Nakahara tells me “You need to speak more seriously,” I can’t argue with her because she’s absolutely right.

The first volume of the “Tomoshihi Photo Collection,” titled “The Sunset Room,” was painstakingly edited by Director Nakahara and photographer Yamanouchi. They’ve finished that work and have reportedly just sent the manuscript to the printer.

Since everyone has their own busy jobs, the progress tends to lag behind schedule.

But in the end, we’ll have a wonderful record that truly embodies our photo collection.

After eating half a bowl of ramen and half a plate of fried rice, I headed toward Ebisu Station, but the area around the station, which had been my stomping grounds until a few years ago, had completely changed. It had become a truly tacky, dingy entertainment district, the kind you see everywhere.

Even though we could have easily found our way by asking for directions, we were so repelled by the sleazy atmosphere of the neighborhood that we ended up getting lost, as if we were walking through the dark of night.

We wandered around for a while, but eventually got on the bus that happened to be right in front of us and ended up at Shibuya Station.

And so ends the day of “Seven Samurai” and Tsuzuki-san’s Talk Show.

2012.1.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 188

「幕末太陽傳」と穴子井

“Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate”⁷ and Conger Eel Bowl

I went to see the Nikkatsu film “Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate.” As usual, Director Nakahara accompanied me.

It hasn't even been a week since I saw “Seven Samurai.”

I'm trying my best to convey the knowledge I currently possess, however limited it may be, to Director Nakahara.

I consider this my mission, even if it seems futile.

She receives and understands what I'm trying to convey with such sharp and rich sensitivity that she expands it two or threefold, which makes it all the more rewarding.

Watching “Seven Samurai” and “Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate” repeatedly is, of course, a learning experience for me. Ultimately, it is a study for my own sake.

Good works have a vitality that allows for new discoveries no matter how many times you watch them, and they have the power to stir up the spirit that tends to grow with age.

“Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate” is, as expected, fascinating and meticulously crafted. I couldn't take my eyes off the screen for even a second.

Just like “Seven Samurai,” I've watched it repeatedly since its 1957 release. Until now, I'd only been impressed by Frankie Sakai's witty and elegant performance, which perfectly embodied his role, but this time I was once again struck by the script's elaborate and flawless structure.

This story is based on “[Izorini Saheji](#),” one of the well-known kuruwa tales, and weaves together “[Sanmai Kisho](#)” and “[Shinagawa Shinju](#),” while also incorporating elements from

⁷ Ironically, this film is also called “The Last Samurai,” but this particular film was released in 1957.

“[Gonin Mawashi](#),” “[Osetu Tokusaburo](#),” and “[Omitate](#),” and includes a few episodes reminiscent of the Kamigata rakugo story “[Oyako Chaya](#).”

Furthermore, it even incorporates “[Bunshichi Motto](#)” in the mix, all done with remarkable skill and seamless integration.

The screenplay lists three names, one of whom was the future master, Shohei Imamura.

As for the character of Kanzo, the rental bookshop owner in “Shinagawa Shinju,” I found Shinsho’s portrayal of Kanzo at the Suehirotei in Shinjuku ten or twenty times more entertaining than Shoichi Ozawa’s, but since the film doesn’t focus on this story, there’s nothing to be done about it.

Director Nakahara watched it purely as a moviegoer and, as expected, was moved by it even more frankly than I was.

I trust her discerning eye more than anyone else’s.

After the screening, she bought a program that included a detailed blueprint of “Dozo Sagami,” the Shinagawa brothel featured in the film. I was impressed by this thoughtful and sincere editorial touch. It makes for excellent reference material.

It is a blueprint of the elaborate, two-story brothel set, which was meticulously constructed.

Both the blueprint and the actual set were meticulously crafted. They were solidly built with a pleasing sense of realism, and it was a joy just to look at them. However, I actually have experience working inside a real, old, large wooden building of that kind, preserved in Higashi-Kanagawa near Tokyo Bay.

A few years ago, I was allowed to use one for several days during a shoot by the video production company CineMagic.

We filmed a drama there, in the wide staircases and hallways made of old, glossy black wood that seemed to have absorbed the scent of hair pomade and powder, and in the large hall lined with dozens of tatami mats.

I was one of the crew members.

The old, large wooden house itself had such an overwhelming presence that I felt the drama we were creating paled in comparison.

It was a wide, long, polished wooden corridor where I could almost hear the thudding sound of the thick-soled straw sandals worn by the women who once worked here.

So entranced by that atmosphere that my head felt light, I forgot my role as a bondage specialist and presumptuously began offering the director all sorts of unsolicited advice on the customs and language of the red light district.

I'm sure he must have thought I was a real pain in the ass.

But if we're going to portray this specific world from that era, I felt it was only common sense that he should know at least this much...

Oh, if I keep writing like this, I'll stray from the main point and start sounding like "Old Man Kikukichi⁸."

So, back to the story.

The "meshimori joro" (prostitutes) of Shinagawa-juku depicted by Yuzo Kawashima in "Bakumatsu Taiyo-den," as well as the men who flock to them, and the poor peasants and samurai portrayed by Akira Kurosawa in "Seven Samurai," all of these could be described, from the perspective of the average person, as individuals who have strayed from the norm and fallen outside the mainstream.

Furthermore, the people that Tsuzuki-san so passionately depicts through his writing and photography are, just as the title suggests, the very inhabitants of the underground.

(This "underground" refers not to differences in wealth or social status, but to their spirit and way of life.)

To be honest, I actually sense a rich and profound element of sadomasochism in both "Seven Samurai" and "Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate."

If I didn't sense the pleasure of SM, I certainly wouldn't have been going to the theater every time they were shown, from their release over fifty years ago to the present day, and watched "Seven Samurai" and "Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate" over a dozen times, excitedly and with great enjoyment.

The essence of these films, to put it simply, lies in the way they portray, with deep insight, analytical skill, and profound sympathy and affection, the desperate struggles of people driven to the ultimate crisis of body and soul. Their thrashing, rampaging, wailing in terror as they flee, and their acts of resistance.

⁸ Old Man Kikukichi is a term used to describe older people who criticize actors and the stage based on a belief that the Meiji-era 9th generation Ichikawa Danjuro and 5th generation Onoe Kikugoro, or the pre-war 6th generation Onoe Kikugoro and 1st generation Nakamura Kichiemon, were the greatest actors of all time. Basically, a term for people who critique modern theater.

The more exceptional an artist's ability to concretely convey these joys, sorrows, and emotions, the greater the sense of tension and appeal, and the more engaging it is for the audience.

For me, as one member of the audience, it provides a form of sadomasochistic pleasure that excites me.

Both "Seven Samurai" and "Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate" were made long before Director Nakahara was even born.

Yet (or perhaps I should say, precisely because of that), the fact that she experiences an even stronger and more intense emotional response than I do after watching these works leads me to believe she shares the same sensibilities as I do.

Since the nature and content of our emotional responses are identical, I naturally feel a sense of joy, as if to say, "You've hit the nail on the head," and I want to clench my fist in delight.

That is the reason I ask her to accompany me to these kinds of films and plays.

Besides these two works, there are still many other old films that have given me a strong sense of SM stimulation (such as Mikio Naruse's ["Ukigumo"](#)). If a theater were to screen them, I think I would invite her again to go see them.

As I mentioned briefly in my previous two posts, after finishing "Seven Samurai," I went straight to Tsuzuki-san's photo exhibition and attended a talk show featuring him, where I experienced the same kind of emotional resonance as I did with the film.

Then, four or five days later, when I watched "Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate," I once again sensed that same kind of SM quality emanating from the film.

I believe Director Nakahara felt the same way.

(No, actually, I think she felt it even more strongly and deeply than I did. I've seen it many times in the past and have built up a sort of immunity, but this was her first time.)

Immediately after the movie ended, even with my immunity, I was still buzzing with excitement, so I lured Director Nakahara into "Omoide Yokocho" at the west exit of Shinjuku Station, and we sat in a corner at the counter of a shop where a hunched over old woman was working as a waitress.

We shared the conger eel tempura from the tempura rice bowl as our appetizer, and while I sipped a lemon highball and she sipped an oolong highball, we talked about the drama we'd just watched, in which the late-night Saheiji was in fine form.

But at that moment, as I picked up a piece of conger eel tempura with my chopsticks, I recalled a scene from the kabuki play “Kawachiyama to Naosamurai.” Specifically, the scene behind the soba shop in Iriya, where the fugitive Naojiro Kataoka and Ushimatsu, hidden in the darkness, converse out of sight of the other.

“Unlike the town, in Iriya, the only food stalls are soba shops.”

“Drinking without tempura or an egg on the side is just a cheap trick.”

I had those lines lingering in the back of my mind.

The final scene of “Bakumatsu Taiyo-den,” where Ibaraki Saheiji slips out of Shinagawa-juku and races toward the seaside to see Dr. Hepburn in Yokohama to cure his increasingly severe tuberculosis, the eerily overcast sky stretching out before him, strangely overlapped with the closing scene of “Iriya,” where Naojiro, pursued by officials and burdened by a dark fate, flees barefoot through the snow.

(Come to think of it, that heartbreaking and tragic farewell with Mitsuzo at the Iriya Lodge is a drama brimming with SM undertones.)

I am currently writing an essay titled “Nureki Chimuo’s Testament of Obscene Pleasure” for a site called Web Sniper.

It’s a piece that can only be read online. But I do get paid a proper fee for it.

It’s a monthly serial, and this is already the twenty-eighth installment.

Recently, I began confessing about my childhood days, how, in the immediate aftermath of the war, I would spend my days in a desolate corner of a scorched out movie theater, gazing at the screen while indulging in masturbation.

Even though it was a long time ago, this is incredibly embarrassing, and I couldn’t have written it without a great deal of courage.

It was actually Tsuzuki-san who gave me that courage.

(Although he himself may not be aware of it. I’m sure he isn’t.)

Tsuzuki-san came to the apartment where I live and took photos of the room where I write my manuscripts, as well as my bed, kitchen, and bathroom (please refer to the paperback book “[Chin Nippon Chouroden](#)” by Kyoichi Tsuzuki, published by Chikuma Shobo. It’s full of photos of me and my room). He looked at the materials from my past that I pointed out to him, saying earnestly, with a wonderful, charming smile full of kindness and understanding, “I’d like to know more about your original starting point.”

It was not the smile of an adversary, but clearly that of an ally, a sincere smile, and I was moved by its earnest intensity.

I have encountered far too many enemies who mask their lewd curiosity with fake smiles, pretend to be allies, and then get uncomfortably close. There was no trace of that in Tsuzuki-san.

“I’d like to know what first sparked your interest back when you were much younger.”

Although the phrasing was different, when I was asked something along those lines again, I decided to write about my most embarrassing experience on Web Sniper, so that Tsuzuki-san could read it.

Now that I’ve started writing that section, I’m glad I did. It has given me new courage.

I get intoxicated by the sense of SM in films like “Seven Samurai” and “Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate,” but at the same time, even when watching B or C-grade popular entertainment films, the kinds that critics completely dismiss, if a bondage scene appears for even a second or two, I’m in high spirits and get thoroughly excited.

That tendency was especially strong when I was young and full of energy.

The me who feels a sense of SM-like ecstasy and is electrified by “Sun in the Last Days of the Shogunate” and “Seven Samurai,” and the me who gets blatantly aroused and gets an erection from a single scene in a thoroughly popular swashbuckling film, I am, without a doubt, the same person.

Somehow, my thoughts have jumped all over the place, and this has turned into a rambling piece of writing.

I would be grateful if you could grasp the gist of what I am trying to say.

2012.1.9

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百八十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 189

たのしいお尻のなで方

Fun Ways to Stroke a Butt

When I wrap both arms around Rakka-san's hips from behind as she sits on the small chair in front of me, the firm, supple sensation becomes mine alone.

When I caress that butt, tightly encased in the thin fabric, with all my heart, it feels so good that I find myself lost in ecstasy.

The seat she's sitting on is circular, about twenty-odd centimeters in diameter, with a round hole in the center.

It is the cheapest, lightest, and most flimsy chair of all. Even I can hold it with one hand.

Of course, it has no backrest. It is a plain, unadorned chair.

However, in this theater, it serves as an extra seat whenever the house is full.

That is why it is always stacked in a corner of the audience area.

Right behind the round chair she sat down on is another round chair of the same design, where I am sitting.

They are practically touching.

In other words, with my legs spread apart, I am pressed tightly against Rakka-san's lower body from behind.

Behind us is a tin door, which serves as the emergency exit for this theater.

Since we're on the second floor, pushing that tin door reveals a rough concrete staircase leading straight down to the first floor.

To be fair, the staircase does have a roof, but that area is already outside the theater.

Opening the door on the opposite side of the emergency exit leads to the ticket booth connected to the main entrance.

It is a small theater that holds barely more than two hundred people even when packed to the brim, and by the time she and I arrived, the auditorium was nearly full.

There were no seats left in the regular seating area, so both she and I spent three and a half hours sitting on round, hard folding chairs, something that has happened several times, or perhaps a dozen times, over the past four or five years.

The folding chairs are placed in various locations, on the downstage right side next to the stage, on the upstage side with one's back to the emergency exit, and in the aisles between the rows of seats, and when the audience floods in, every available space is completely filled.

"Where would you like to sit?"

When asked by the usher, who seems unfriendly at first glance but is actually kind at heart, I often ask for a seat facing the emergency exit door.

The reason is that this spot acts as a sort of blind spot, hard to see from the other seats, so even if my hand is pressed tightly against Rakka-san's lower body, no one notices.

No, the patrons who come here are all, without exception, absolutely crazy about theater and love actors in full makeup, so the moment the curtain rises, no one even glances my way.

Even if they did sense my presence, the stage is far more interesting than the movements of my hands, so their eyes and hearts are immediately drawn to the beautiful faces and figures of the actors.

No matter how persistently I stroke Rakka-san's butt, she remains completely unfazed. She doesn't object or try to avoid it, rather, she stands her ground and lets me do as I please.

You could even call it a lack of reaction.

I wrote "no matter how persistently," but in reality, I'm not that persistent.

It's actually a light, refreshing touch.

Since she remains completely unfazed with her back straight, I always feel at ease and run both hands up from her butt to her waist and chest.

I'm becoming a little bolder.

Sometimes I wonder why she doesn't try to move my hands away.

Perhaps she knows that if she avoids me or shows any sign of displeasure, it would upset me.

There are women who, knowing that a man will become upset and lose interest, instinctively and reflexively avoid such situations.

There are women who believe they must twist their bodies to avoid contact in such moments, and so they do.

Such women are certainly unpleasant for a man.

That said, I have no desire to touch women of that sort from the very beginning.

I don't even feel like going to see a movie or a play with her.

No matter how sensual the shape of Rakka-san's butt may be, I don't stroke or rub her vigorously like a starving young man.

I won't do anything so crude or unsophisticated.

I touch her gently, slowly.

I feel better when I touch her gently.

Imagining the sight of her round butt, stripped down to just her panties, I gently savor them with my palm and fingers.

(The beauty of her round butt, tightly wrapped in panties, it's so erotic it's beyond words.)

This exquisite pleasure, savored secretly amidst the heated buzz of a packed auditorium, is nothing short of sublime.

It might even be more pleasurable than actually gazing at or touching her bare butt in a private room, just the two of us.

(Ah, I really am a pervert!)

Perhaps, at this moment, she, too, is experiencing the same kind of pleasure as I am.

Basically, we are accomplices.

It is difficult to describe the shape of her butt in words.

To be specific, it resembles the shape of the plump, rounded butt in a semi-nude photo of Norika Fujiwara (photographed by Koichiro Matsui) published in the January 21, 2012 issue of “Shukan Gendai,” where she stands in front of a large window, stretching upward in a diagonal back view.

It’s a beautiful, erotic butt that strikes a perfect balance with the black of her lingerie.

Note that while I wrote “butt” in the case of Rakka-san, I’ve used the informal “butt” without an honorific⁹ for Norika Fujiwara. That’s a subtle nuance of my “art” (laughs).

Norika Fujiwara must be exercising extreme self-restraint and putting a lot of effort into maintaining her figure. The flesh of her thighs, which should contribute to the roundness of her butt, is too thin.

If you saw these thighs in person, they would undoubtedly look a bit scrawny.

They might be fine for viewing, but if you were alone with her in a private room, a man might find them a bit lacking. Her arms, for instance, are quite muscular.

(Though they might be fine for men who prefer skinny women.)

Rakka-san’s thighs are more voluptuous, and the balance with her butt is exquisite and beautiful.

When I’m alone with her, overwhelmed by her beauty and the sheer eroticism of her butt and thighs, I always find myself letting out a moan and bowing in supplication as I say, “Please, I beg you, keep this beauty forever.”

I hold each of her thighs in both hands, rubbing my cheek against them and running my lips along them, begging her over and over again.

It’s not just once. If I count them up, it’s already thirty or forty times, every time I enter that private room and tie her up, I repeat the same words.

It’s not just the superficial beauty of her form.

I love the firm, taut firmness of Rakka-san’s butt, which holds a youthful elasticity.

That’s why, in a packed theater, sitting on a small round chair, my hand just can’t help but reach out to the butt of the girl sitting right in front of me.

⁹ Butt in Japanese is 尻 “shiri.” Adding an O indicates honorific, i.e. お尻.

For some reason, I don't really like soft butts that are flabby or squishy. They make me feel like the woman is ignorant, uncultured, and lacking in all sense of discipline.

(What a luxurious thing for a man who will turn eighty-two in five days to say!)

On stage, seven young male actors, beautifully made up and dressed in dazzling costumes, are dancing in a row to recorded music. The lighting shines brilliantly upon them.

Every single one of them is wearing their kimono perfectly, without a single flaw, looking incredibly stylish.

Each one is stylish in his own way. In this setting, being uncouth is a sin.

None of the actors are showing any bare skin.

They are fastidious.

They know the effect of being fastidious.

They wear pure white tabi socks on their feet. They are wearing a hip sash.

Occasionally, the hem of their kimono flips up, revealing just a glimpse of their shins.

The audience is overwhelmingly made up of middle-aged women.

As they follow the movements of their favorite actors with their eyes, their imaginations are stirred, their body temperatures rise in supreme pleasure, and they fill the hall with passionate cheers.

To my eyes, the young actors appear to be nothing but male genitalia, from the tops of their heads to the tips of their toes.

I lean close to Rakka-san's ear and whisper.

"This is practically a phallus show, isn't it?"

The play was of high quality, and the actors displayed extremely skillful acting, making it quite entertaining.

Both Rakka-san and I enjoyed it from the bottom of our hearts and laughed many times.

I was thoroughly impressed by the young actors' formidable artistry. Both the male and female actors were all highly skilled.

The other day, an old acquaintance of mine called and said, “I haven’t seen Rakka-san in the ‘Talking Theater’ lately. What’s going on? Have you two broken up?”

Written above is my reply. I can’t mention any specific names, like the theater, because I don’t want to cause any trouble, but this happened yesterday.

2012.1.30

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十回

Nureki Chimuo’s Talking Theater Chapter 190

凄いものを見た

I Saw Something Amazing

I saw something amazing.

Even if you say something is amazing, there are many different kinds of amazing, and unless you explain exactly what it is, you wouldn’t know what’s so amazing just from being told that out of the blue, would you?

So, I’m going to try to explain it now, but I’m not sure where to start.

There are so many things I find amazing all over the place that my poor little brain can’t seem to make sense of it all.

In this day and age, which has changed so drastically, the fact that the Asakusa theater performances I used to watch almost every day when I was a child (around 1935) have survived in almost exactly the same form is, first and foremost, something that fills me with awe.

Overwhelmed by emotion and feeling a bit dazed, I’ll write down the scenes that remain imprinted on the back of my eyelids, in no particular order, without trying to organize them.

It was a period drama, a so-called “wandering swordsman” story.

What left the deepest impression on me was the sight of two courtesans who had run away from the brothel where they were employed, comforting each other by the seaside.

The scene in which these two cheap courtesans, working in a port town in the north where the cold wind howls, appear staggering toward the camera exudes a sense of misfortune

and tragedy that foreshadows the story's conclusion, and has the power to instantly draw the audience into a sense of sorrow.

I was overwhelmed not so much by the atmosphere conveyed through their flimsy red kimonos, disheveled topknots, and unhealthy, sallow complexions, but by the inner lives of the two courtesans that were revealed.

It's not a superficial, gimmicky performance, but a strangely realistic and profound one.

Since they are professional actresses who perform on stage every day, it goes without saying that they should be able to convincingly portray any role given to them, whether it be a prostitute or a princess. Yet the two courtesans standing before me at that moment possessed a desolation that went beyond mere acting. They presented a harrowing sight, crushed by a life of misfortune and tragedy.

In short, it possessed a realism that made it hard to believe it was a play.

The two courtesans were named Oai and Oriku, but the younger one, Oai, was blind.

The older courtesan, Oriku, poured out affection for the pitiful Oai with such subtle tenderness that it felt truly human.

Oriku had a husband and a young son, and they lived in the same seaside town.

Her husband is the sort of man who lost money gambling with yakuza, ran up debts, and sold his wife to a brothel to pay them off. On top of that, he is a good-for-nothing who comes begging for money while bringing his child along.

Oriku clutches her child's hand, weeping, saying, "The day will surely come when we can return home, so please bear with it a little longer."

The acting in this scene is so familiar and straightforward that it could be called classical, yet there is not a trace of artificiality in the performance of the actress playing the mother. She is truly skilled.

The owner of the brothel is a yakuza boss who controls this entire area as his territory.

His henchmen came looking for the two prostitutes.

The henchmen grab Oai, who is about to throw herself into the sea in a desperate attempt to die, and drag her back.

“I won’t stand for you dying. I need you to work harder. There are customers who’ll be happy to sleep with a blind woman,” says the boss, slapping Oai across the face. His lines are powerful.

It’s the kind of line you’d never hear on TV.

The henchmen drag the two courtesans off the stage.

The tragic sight of the two prostitutes by the sea made such a strong impression on me that I wrote about it first, but before that, a lone wolf yakuza named Yataro had been wandering the country in search of his younger sister, who had been abducted by slave traders when she was a child. He came to this port town after hearing a rumor from a blind street musician playing the Tsugaru shamisen.

There is a scene where he happens upon Oriku, her husband, and their children in a moment of deep sorrow. He gives them some money, and from Oriku, he learns that his missing sister, Ochiyo, is being forced to work as a courtesan in this seaside town under the name Oai.

Yataro resolves to rescue his sister, even if it means clashing with the yakuza who run the brothel.

Yataro of Shimokita is usually the protagonist played by the troupe leader, so he is cool and strong.

(On the day I saw it, it happened to be the birthday of one of the troupe’s young leading men, so they had him play the hero, Yataro. Even though a birthday is a private matter for an actor, the way they forcibly draw the audience in and turn the entire performance into a celebratory event is amazing!)

I really like the swordfight scenes between Yataro and the yakuza. The action sequences, that is.

The way he draws his sword, his stance, the way he lowers his center of gravity, and how he plants his feet firmly. The form is excellent.

The swordplay sequences are short but effective, and they are repeated several times.

They’re well-trained and leave no openings.

The movements of each of the henchmen are lively and intense. It’s also exhilarating.

For a sword fight by a theater troupe of this kind, it’s outstanding. There’s no hesitation in the flow of the choreography.

(And I say this as a Shinkokugeki fan.)

It's clear that every member of the troupe practices seriously and enthusiastically, and just like the two courteans' compelling performances, this sword fight is truly amazing! You can tell this is a tightly knit troupe. Their core movements and interactions are perfectly in sync.

Yataro is reunited with his younger sister, Ochiyo. He hugs her tightly and says with conviction, "We're going to escape from this place and find happiness."

At first, Ochiyo, who is blind, refuses to believe that Yataro is her brother.

She simply cannot bring herself to believe it.

The performance of a blind courtesan, crushed by despair and resigned to the fact that such a helping hand will never appear before her again, is truly remarkable.

"I am utterly defiled. There is no other choice but to die," she pleads to her brother in a heart-wrenching voice.

Her pallid face, like that of a woman possessed by the Grim Reaper, possessed a sickly intensity so compelling it was hard to believe it was acting. It was both terrifying and captivating. Even the bruises on her face, inflicted by the yakuza, seemed alive. I know that when actors immerse themselves in roles like this, they can sometimes become immersed in a masochistic pleasure. They can become intoxicated by their own tragic fate.

It could be said that this is one of the true joys of being an actor.

Yataro continues to encourage Ochiyo, who cries that she wants to die, and carries her as they flee, but along the way they are surrounded by the brothel family, and another sword fight ensues.

(The henchmen who were cut down once keep coming back to life and reappearing, but I don't mind that. That's just how theater works.)

It's starting to snow.

An extravagant amount of snow is falling, far more than this small stage could ever handle.

A Tsugaru shamisen and a taiko drum appear on the left side of the stage, adding intensity to the final showdown.

In time with the falling snow, the sounds of the shamisen and taiko resound, sometimes high-pitched, sometimes low.

This is a luxurious touch for a troupe of this kind, and I think it's amazing that it never comes across as cheap.

When the swords clash, a clink-clink sound effect is added, but this too is seamlessly integrated and doesn't feel unnatural.

The beautiful visual spectacle and the auditory intensity amidst the swirling snow provide the audience with instant gratification. The audience is spellbound, their faces frozen in astonishment. Both the actors and the audience are entranced.

What follows is a plot development, and an ending, that differs somewhat from typical popular theater.

As is standard, after this grand swordfight, the siblings Uataro and Ochiyo manage to shake off the pursuit of the yakuza family and escape safely.

Then, forgetting their past hardships, the siblings would embrace with bright smiles, and the curtain would fall.

"Let's go to Edo and see a good doctor. If we do that, I'm sure your eyes will be able to see again," Yataro says cheerfully.

However, this play is different.

In the end, Ochiyo is killed by the yakuza.

Seeing this, Yataro flies into a rage and cuts down all the remaining yakuza.

Then, scooping up the fallen snow with both hands, he covers his sister's body in the center of the stage, crying out in anguish, sobbing, "This is your wedding dress."

Just when you think the curtain is about to fall, there is still one more boss remaining among the brothel family.

After a fierce battle, the boss slashes Yataro, and at the same moment, Yataro slashes the boss down.

With a voice barely above a whisper, Yataro calls out his sister's name as he collapses at the base of a large tree standing at the back center of the stage, where a sacred rope has been strung.

Then, the massive amount of snow that had accumulated on the tree's branches falls in a torrent onto Yataro's body, burying him, and as the music swells, the curtain falls.

Amazingly, both brother and sister are ultimately killed in the end.

In the scene preceding this, the older sister, the courtesan Oriku, had also been killed by the yakuza.

Of all the characters in this play, the only survivors are the pitiful man who sold his wife to a brother and his child.

It really is an incredible play.

It goes far beyond the conventional boundaries of popular theater.

There are absolutely no comic relief scenes, the kind that are always found in plays of this sort to elicit laughter from the audience.

From beginning to end, it's nothing but seriousness.

Each and every actor performs with a seriousness that borders on excessive.

One cannot help but feel that this troupe, starting with the troupe leader, is made up entirely of people who truly love the theater.

The curtain fell and the auditorium finally brightened.

I exchanged glances with Director Nakahara and said, "My, what a hopeless play this is..."

I laughed, feeling strangely betrayed and exhausted.

No, this troupe always pleasantly surprises us.

But for everyone to be so brutally slaughtered...

Along with that sense of betrayal, a strange, almost moving feeling welled up in my chest.

It was certainly a play worth seeing.

I already knew that Director Nakahara was moved even more deeply than I was.

She undoubtedly felt she had witnessed something even more extraordinary than I had.

I thought to myself that we must discuss this moving experience as soon as possible.

What was the true nature of this emotion? What was it that moved and excited Director Nakahara and me so deeply?

And then, a thought suddenly occurred to me.

As a child, I had watched sword-fighting plays like this, plays that seemed designed to immerse the audience in a sense of hopelessness and the thrill of destruction, countless times at the Asakusa Park Theater and the Showa-za. The roots of my love for theater actually lie in that era.

The Noboru Umezawa Troupe, and the Osamu Kanai Troupe.

This feeling is not merely a case of nostalgia on my part. Though the program for this troupe from seventy years ago is now tattered, it must still be tucked away somewhere on my bookshelf.

I must dig it out and read it again. I must show it to Director Nakahara as well.

I will go and meet the boy I once was.

There is still so much more to this theater company “Arakijo,” which performed “Yataro of Shimokita” today.

I must make a record of that as well while I’m at it.

“Please write it down,” Director Nakahara has also asked me.

Even if she hadn’t asked, I had already intended to write about it the moment the curtain fell on “Yataro.”

That is my duty.

To document the existence of a troupe that burns with such intense, single-minded, and pure passion for theater in a modest theater in a town far from the heart of Tokyo.

And this passage might, perhaps, become a part of the historical record for future generations.

2012.2.4

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 191

切腹が好きな一座

A Theater Troupe that Loves Seppuku

The role of Yataro of Shimkita, the protagonist of this play and one that the troupe leader is traditionally supposed to play, is entrusted to a young, handsome actor as a combination of a birthday celebration and a show of encouragement, simply because the performance happens to fall on his birthday.

I wrote last time that this kind of bold and fearless flexibility is, first and foremost, truly impressive.

(Is it flexibility, the leader's authority to act on his own, or should I call it dictatorial power?)

He goes ahead and makes this major casting change on a whim, without informing the audience.

The audience remains unaware of this until the curtain rises and the play begins.

Only after the curtain rises and the protagonist appears on stage do they finally realize the change: "Oh, wait, that's not the troupe leader. It's Masakazu Himeno."

The audience learns this out of the blue, with no prior warning or announcement, yet no one complains.

The audience, watching silently without complaint, or rather, with eyes sparkling with anticipation for the young leading man, is amazing in its own right.

For example, if in a major kabuki production, the role of Benkei in "Kanjincho," which should be played by Kichiemon, were suddenly given to Matagoro or Utaroku without any prior notice, the audience would be furious and it would be impossible for the play to proceed smoothly.

What I find even more impressive is how the young leading man stepping in for the troupe leader manages to perform the lead role in this play, a role that's demanding in terms of both dialogue and movement and can certainly be called a difficult part, with such distinction.

Given the actor's youth, he is far too handsome and dashing to convincingly portray a man who grew up facing adversity from a young age and ended up as a vagabond, wandering from place to place in search of his blind sister who was abducted.

His movements are fresh and light, showing no trace of the hardships that have seeped into the character's very being.

But then again, this is just a play.

And that's perfectly fine.

It would be wrong to point out that his straw-sandaled feet are always clean, free of mud and dust.

The troupe leader must have entrusted this young, handsome leading man with the lead role he usually plays himself precisely because he was convinced it would be fine.

(I forgot to mention this, but in this type of theater troupe, the troupe leader is always the director.)

Without that conviction, there's no way he could have put the actor on stage in front of his audience.

If the young actor failed, it would damage the troupe's reputation and the audience would stop coming.

And while the young leading man naturally lacks the gravitas of the troupe leader, the entire troupe, now in supporting roles, unites to support him and bring the performance to life.

I can feel the passion and affection in the way they build up the performance.

The supporting actors' passionate performances resonate with the audience and it feels wonderful.

Even though they're putting on such a sincere, well-crafted play with so much heart, this troupe doesn't have a program.

The only way to find out the cast members' names is from a single flyer.

That flyer lists the names and photos of all fifteen troupe members.

What's surprising is that there are two troupe leaders. On top of that, there's also a "young leader."

Furthermore, there are, believe it or not, three second-in-command members.

(The second-lead actor who played the lead role of Yataro is one of those second-in-command members.)

I suppose young lead is read as "wakagashira," but I was surprised by this title, which reminds me of the old-time "tobi" (construction workers) and "hikishi" (firefighters).

However, I believe there is a necessity for this troupe to use such titles, so both Director Nakahara and I have grown accustomed to them and, in fact, aren't all that surprised anymore.

There must be something about it that makes terms like executive or associate executive, used by other theater companies, inappropriate here.

With the troupe leader, young troupe leader, and young lead in place, the remaining actors are presumably considered regular members.

(The two actresses I raved about last time, who played the prostitutes murdered by the yakuza, are listed as regular members on this flyer. Their photos are also small.)

Since there's no program, the audience has no way of knowing the exact play title or cast.

Just before the curtain rises, the play's title is announced over the microphone, but the background noise is so loud and the speakers are of such poor quality that it's almost impossible to make out.

The audience has no choice but to concentrate intently and watch the action unfold on stage.

With a troupe like this, you simply can't put together a program, even if you tried.

That's because the play they perform is different every day. No, every single time.

In fact, when this troupe performs both a matinee and an evening show at the same venue on the same day, they stage a different play for each performance.

They never perform the same play twice.

When they perform twice a day, once in the afternoon and once in the evening, at the same venue for a month, they end up performing different plays a total of over sixty times. This is what is known as “daily-changing plays.”

In other words, fans who passionately love this troupe can enjoy sixty different plays over the course of a month, a different one every day and every performance.

While this is a joy for fans, for the performers it means they must present a different play to the audience every single time.

And they must not only perform it but give it their all.

Otherwise, the fans won’t be satisfied.

They’ll stop being fans in an instant.

(In fact, Director Nakahara and I, out of deep affection, secretly refer to the group of ardent fans who flock to see this troupe as “enthusiasts.” And since Director Nakahara and I have come to see this troupe five, six, or perhaps even seven times over the past few years, we might just be part of that group of enthusiasts ourselves.)

If this troupe were to go to the trouble of publishing a program, they would have to create a different one every day and for every performance.

Even if they were to create a large-scale production like “Yataro of Shimoka” with bold casting changes and a constant downpour of snow, and even if the entire cast gave passionate performances, this play would still only be performed once in this region.

We saw the matinee performance, but come evening, they would have to give their all in a completely different play.

It’s entertaining and moving for the audience, but I imagine the tension and energy required of the performers must be immense.

Even without a program, the die-hard fans never complain.

No matter how unusual the makeup, how elaborate the costume, or how outlandish the role, the die-hard fans can tell who the actor is at a single glance.

And the actors always captivate and satisfy those die-hard fans.

In this production of “Yataro of Shimokita” as well, the troupe leader has cast the second-in-command in the cool lead role, while he himself plays the teahouse owner who appears briefly at the very beginning of the prologue.

With his wrinkled, white-haired head, that old man exits almost immediately and I was so careless that I didn't realize he was the troupe leader.

(Director Nakahara, as expected, seemed to recognize him right away.)

I was impressed by the troupe leader appearing as a nondescript old man in a minor role, but when he properly made up for it during the speech after the play I was even more amazed.

You could simply call it a spirit of service to the audience but I can't help but be amazed by the subtle sense of balance they demonstrate in reading the psychology of their fans.

During that speech, the troupe leader explains to the audience with a sense of warmth that the young, handsome grandfather who played "Yataro" was once one of the troupe's leading actors.

Then, he went out of his way to project a large slide of that now-deceased grandfather's photo onto the screen in the center of the stage.

While explaining with a warm smile, the troupe leader subtly conveys to the audience the rigor of the artistic tradition passed down within this troupe and the strength of their unity.

Fans love hearing these behind-the-scenes stories about the troupe, told with a conversational flair that's as enjoyable as music (I love them too). The die-hard fans often laugh as they listen.

In addition to the two troupe leaders (who appear to be brothers) there is a young leader (who seems to be the child of one of the brothers) and the presence of three second-in-command figures with strikingly similar features conveys a sense of the strong bonds forged by blood ties.

Furthermore, I can vaguely imagine that the master-apprentice bonds passed down through generations have become the artistic tradition of this troupe and form the basis of its strong unity.

If they maintain strict standards for their performances and sustain a consistently positive mindset, there is no weapon stronger than the bonds of blood.

And even without relying on blood ties, if one's father and grandfather were both actors in the same troupe, the emotional bond among the members would naturally be strong.

It is enough to deeply move even a jaded, nitpicking theater lover like me. This troupe leader must possess an exceptional actor's spirit and the leadership to understand and inspire the hearts of his people.

There are actually still more reasons why Director Nakahara and I find them so amazing and are so intrigued by them.

That, perhaps, is the biggest reason why I'm writing this piece.

As mentioned earlier, in "Yataro of Shimokita," all the main characters whom the audience cheers for are ultimately killed by the villain.

That is indeed the case.

And it's not just this play.

This troupe particularly enjoys performing stories in which the protagonist meets a tragic or gruesome end in the final act.

To take it a step further, there are many scenes in which the lead character, or a character of equal importance, dies by committing seppuku.

They perform these seppuku scenes with considerable realism and meticulous care. They make it the highlight of the play, showcasing the vivid red color of blood.

Even in stories where seppuku isn't necessary, they'll suddenly grip a sword with their non-dominant hand and plunge it into their stomach. It's shocking.

Surprised by the unexpected turn of events, I've found myself thinking, "Wait, wait, wait, there's no need to commit seppuku right here..."

I've found myself screaming that in my head several times.

When the protagonist finds himself in a tight spot, for example, I whisper in Director Nakahara's ear, "He's going to suddenly draw his sword and commit seppuku right here, just watch."

And then, more often than not, that's exactly what happens.

I can't help but think, "Hmm, I guess I really do like this."

The fans in the audience also applaud and cheer the protagonist's passionate portrayal of death. Some are even wiping away tears.

I think this is simply the natural flow of the story, and neither the performers nor the audience have any clear, specific purpose in mind for the seppuku scene.

However, I feel compelled to write in detail and specifically about how this troupe features so many seppuku scenes and the dedication with which the actors perform them.

As a common rule in this kind of popular theater, there must be an ironclad principle that no matter how tragic or tear-jerking the scenes may be along the way, when the curtain falls, a happy ending must be forced, even if it's contrived, to send the audience off with bright, buoyant smiles.

I'd like to write about the unique characteristics of this troupe, which has gained popularity by subverting that rule, but since this has gotten too long, I'll leave it for now.

I'm sure I'll have a chance to write about it someday.

That's right. I finally managed to track down just two programs, one for Noboru Umezawa's troupe and one for Osamu Kanai's troupe.

They were published seventy-six years ago. The paper has discolored and is now in tatters.

These two flimsy programs contain the very source of the passion that drives me to continue watching plays like this with such fervor even now.

The Umezawa Noboru Troupe program is twenty-four pages long. The cover reads, "Umezawa Noboru Times," Showa 11, Issue No. 12, Edited by the Umezawa Literary Department, Shinryoku No. 2, Yoshimoto Kogyo General Partnership, Showa-za

The colophon has been torn off and is no longer visible.

The program for the Osamu Kanai Troupe also bears the words "Yoshimoto Kogyo General Partnership, Koen Theater" on its cover. It is listed as issue No. 7, priced at 10 sen per copy. This, too, was published in Showa 11.

Showa 11, that is, 1936, when I was six years old. My scribbles remain on the cover of this program.

Looking at this program now, I have learned that the set designer for Osamu Kanai's troupe was Seiu Itoh.

It turns out that I have been exposed to Seiu Itoh's work since I was six years old. I feel as if there is some kind of fate at play here. I think there will come a time when I write about the various memories I have associated with this program.

2012.2.18

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 192

豊饒無限の写真集「夕日の部屋」

“The Sunset Room” A Photobook of Boundless Abundance

In the March 2012 issue of “Mania Club,” Director Nakahara explains in simple, easy to understand language the rationale behind publishing this photo book, “The Sunset Room.” Among her remarks is the line “I want to create something with all my heart.”

In fact, even if we were to state this purpose now, this sentiment has long been present in the hearts of enthusiasts who have a passionate interest in bondage photography.

If I were to add a few extra words to Director Nakahara's explanation, the gist of it would be, “This is a photo book created by a group of people who truly love bondage photography and came together with the sincere intention of creating the staged bondage photos that we ourselves want to see.”

I'd like to elaborate on that sentiment a little more specifically.

As an experiment, let me pick up a magazine that's currently at hand.

It's a color photo of a beautiful model in a sailor uniform, tied up outdoors with her hands bound behind her back.

It's a bright, beautiful, and adorable shot.

This is, without a doubt, a staged shot. It is nothing other than a staged shot.

A young girl with cute makeup, bound with rope, is crouching quietly with a chubby face in the chilly outdoors.

There is absolutely no trace of a frightened expression or any sign that she is trying to escape.

There's no emotion whatsoever, nor any sense of drama.

It is clearly a staged scene where both the photographer and the subject are in complete agreement. There is no friction whatsoever.

However, while it's undoubtedly staged, for us at Tomoshihi, a group of bondage photography enthusiasts, this staged shot is completely unappealing, irrelevant, contrived, and boring.

The staged scene we're talking about has a slightly (no, significantly) different meaning.

With this photo of a girl in a sailor uniform, the photographer who took it, and the director who commissioned it, are essentially saying to the reader, "How about that? Look at this cute girl, forced to wear a sailor uniform with a red scarf, tied up and dragged outside. Isn't she pitiful? Isn't it amazing? Doesn't it get you going? This is what SM photography is all about."

That attitude is painfully obvious.

(I, and many bondage enthusiasts, absolutely hate that blatant attitude. We enthusiasts have our pride. It even feels as though that pride, the sense of being "the chosen ones," has been wounded. Contrary to the photographer's and editor's intentions, it just kills the mood.)

Why is it so obvious?

It's because this beautiful young woman's heart, even if it's just an act, is completely absent from this heart-wrenching situation.

Both the director and the photographer are only trying to capture the form.

The model's expression, her poses, and even the way the ropes are tied are all so masterfully hollow, nothing but form.

Do they really think that just showing the form will make enthusiasts happy?

(Huh? What's that? You're saying the photographer's eyes only see the form? No way!)

Bondage photography isn't just about capturing the form of a bound beautiful girl.

(Oh, man, I'm being so persistent. But the more persistent I am, the angrier I am.)

To put it bluntly, we enthusiasts are moved more by the heart than by the form.

(Come to think of it, "Yataro of Shimokita," which I have written about twice in a row in this "Talking Theater" column and still haven't finished covering, is a play I saw ten days ago that didn't feature any ropes or bondage at all. Yet it was precisely because it had heart that

both Director Nakahara and I were moved, and that emotion still hasn't faded. Which is why it's still smouldering within me.)

I think the reason photographers and directors who produce this kind of bondage photography end up looking down on us enthusiasts is that they're ultimately viewing us from a superior perspective. At the very least, they must be convinced that, "If I take photos like this, the enthusiasts are sure to be delighted."

On set, they probably give the model endless instructions. Do this, do that, make that face, and shoot based on their own subjective preferences, whatever suits the photographer best.

Every time a professional photographer orders the model to "look this way," "look that way," or "make a pained expression," the most alluring, sensual, and intriguing essence of SM, the very essence of a bound woman, fades away from both her expression and her posture.

Who would say, "Ah this is delicious," after being forced to drink stale bancha tea?

This photograph of a beautiful young girl in a sailor uniform, bound and crouching outdoors, is undoubtedly staged in its own right, but it's not the kind of staged imagery we at Tomoshibi refer to.

We must say that what we consider a staged image is something that "resembles the real thing but is not the real thing."

Huh? Yes, yes.

Okay, I didn't realize we'd gone off on a tangent.

I had actually started writing about the first photo book we published at Tomoshibi.

But thanks to all that extra chatter, I think you now have a concrete understanding that the bondage photos in "The Sunset Room" aren't just staged shots.

I've already covered the content several times throughout this "Talking Theater."

It's structured around a simple story.

Photographer Yamanouchi didn't say a single word to Hiromi Saotome, who was tied up by me, regarding her expressions or poses.

Even before the shoot began, Saotome had fully immersed herself in the role of the heroine.

Photographer Yamanouchi knew very well how instructions or requests given right before the shutter was pressed could ruin the atmosphere of submission.

The one at fault was me.

My habits from previous shoots came out, and I ended up saying unnecessary things and making clumsy, staged-looking, wasteful movements out of self-consciousness toward the camera.

Each time that happened, Director Nakahara would shout out a sharp, unsparing reprimand.

Director Nakahara, whose role had initially been that of a production coordinator on set, had, before I knew it, become a cutting-edge director.

Since her reprimands and instructions were always spot-on and reasonable, we had no choice but to follow them.

Both the photographer and Saotome began to follow her instructions to the letter.

Or rather, we had met and discussed the purpose and objectives of this photo book many times before the shoot even began.

Even without reaffirming it now, the four of us had been in complete agreement on our goals from the very beginning.

As for the content, let's stop rambling on about it any further.

Compared to commercially available photo books of this kind (though perhaps we shouldn't even compare them, this is a completely different kind of book), it may seem thin and meager at first glance, but the content is, without a doubt, nothing but a collection of exquisite bondage photographs, each one substantial and full of character.

Just to be clear, the model remains fully clothed throughout.

There isn't a single photo showing a model stripped naked, with her legs spread in an M-shape and a foreign object inserted. There isn't even a hint of that. There is zero skin exposure.

Furthermore, there are absolutely no decorative or patterned binding styles that might suggest rope play. The woman is bound with an extremely rough, realistic, and harsh intensity.

This is a photo book designed in such a way that it will hold absolutely no interest for those who prefer conventional, mainstream eroticism.

Only those with a broad and fertile imagination will be able to savor the unfathomable depths of pleasure offered by “The Sunset Room.”

Amid a palette of mostly dark tones, a single woman lies bound, gasping for breath.

This woman belongs only to you. A man appears and disappears beside her. For the sake of the story, it’s me who appears there, but in reality, it is you.

The woman, tied to a pillar, moans and writhes under a tight gag made of a hand towel.

Her heart-wrenching, ragged breathing seems to burst forth from the photographs.

The woman’s agony in that moment was more than just staged. It conveyed a realism that transcended the stage, resulting in a chilling photograph.

Just before she is gagged with two or three layers of cloth, her mouth is stuffed full of white rags.

Director Nakahara, who ordered me to do that, is incredible.

Saotome, who endured it while making pained throat sounds, is also incredible.

Photographer Yamanouchi, who captured it all with such composure and calm, is amazing.

Before editing, I showed just one copy of this gagged photograph to Ei Bondage-san. He took it in his hands, stared at it intently for a while, and then said, “It’s obscene! It’s obscene! I’ve never seen such an obscene photograph!”

The expression on this painter’s face as he let out that growl was also truly remarkable.

2012.3.21

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 193

濡木痴夢男の縄研究会

Nureki Chimuo's Rope Research Society

I was asked by “Black Heart” in Ginza, Tokyo, to host an event called “Nureki Chimuo's Rope Research Society.”

I can't say I don't have some reservations about taking on this kind of thing at my age... but the truth is, it was decided because Hiromi Sautome put in a good word for me.

Once Sautome gets involved, I simply can't refuse.

It's been over twenty years, believe it or not, since I first started working with her in this industry (though it's actually been even longer).

It's often the case with me that I meet people, get along well with them for a while, but eventually grow tired of them, drift apart, and end up cutting all ties.

(Well, most of the time, it's my fault.)

It's rare to have a connection that remains unchanged for such a long time, as with Sautome.

Come to think of it, Hiromi Sautome is the only person I address by her first name without any honorifics like this.

No matter how close a relationship becomes, I never address people by their first name. It's been that way since I was a child.

And yet, even when calling out to her in front of others, I naturally say things like, “Hey, Sautome” without hesitation.

Well, I suppose that just means I've let my guard down that much around her.

Living in this complex and troublesome world, we share the same goals and vision.

It's not often you find companions who share your vision and are driven by the same spirit.

That's why I've formed the group Tomoshibi with Hiromi Saotome, Director Nakahara Rutsu, photographer Yamanouchi, and other like-minded SM enthusiasts, and we've published the bondage photo book "The Sunset Room."

When you think about it (or even without thinking about it), there's nothing as complex, and at times as bizarre and diverse, as the world of SM.

Although I completely reject it, even making a woman strip naked, spread her legs, and have something inserted between her thighs (which I hate) could, strictly speaking, be called SM.

Even if you don't order a woman to spread her legs, and she spreads them on her own initiative, depending on how you interpret it, it could still be considered SM.

Well, in a sense, human life, and sexuality itself, could all be considered SM if you look at it that way.

But if I were to go that far, it would be the end of the discussion, so for now, I'm using ropes as my banner.

A banner is a crest, character, or symbol painted on a flag on the battlefield to serve as a landmark. It also refers to the ideals and goals that guide one's actions.

That said, there's no need to overcomplicate things with such elaborate interpretations. In short, it simply means I like rope.

Oh, what am I trying to say?

That's right, I need to write about the "Rope Research Society" event coming up on the second basement floor of a building in Ginza 6-chome.

It's by reservation only, and limited to 10 people. Hiromi Saotome said she'd be coming, too (or rather, is she the organizer?).

The flyers are already ready and apparently have been placed in the appropriate locations. I've only received a fax copy so far.

If you're interested, please try to find this flyer somewhere first.

For details such as the date and time, or a map to the venue, please check the flyer, give them a call, and ask the staff.

I suppose you could check online, but since I'm still someone who doesn't own a computer (I don't even have a cell phone), I'm not very good at providing information that way. Actually, it's not just that I'm not good at it. I can't do it at all.

(As I've written many times before, R-san handles everything for this "Talking Theater" as well.)

If you search for "Black Heart," this flyer should pop up.

The "Rope Research Society" session will run for three hours, from 1 PM to 4 PM. I'll ask someone to model for me and demonstrate the secrets of my "bondage" technique.

If anyone would like to be a model, please don't hesitate to volunteer. Anyone is welcome.

I will not do anything painful to the model. Therefore, if you're looking for something painful, this group isn't for you.

I will not undress the model. I will demonstrate the tying techniques while the model remains fully clothed. Therefore, this event is not for those who want to see a woman's naked body. It's also not for women who want to get naked.

Instead, I will carefully explain everything I know about ropes and bondage, no matter what the topic. While demonstrating, I'll take my time and repeat the explanations as many times as necessary.

Of course, participants are free to ask questions about how to tie the ropes.

Even if it's your first time handling rope, I'll take your hand and teach you step by step.

I've been involved in the production of commercial SM videos about 3,000 times, so if you're curious about any behind-the-scenes stories from those shoots, please feel free to ask me anything.

I have so much I want to talk about myself, in fact, I'm just itching to get started.

Even things I might accidentally let slip elsewhere, I feel comfortable talking about them here, among a group of people who truly love rope.

[illegible]

2012.3.28

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 194

時次郎が唄う追分節

“Oiwake-bushi,” Sung by Tokijiro

To my acchitei master.

Thank you very much for inviting me to Master Kikaku's gathering.

I heard that my acchitei Master and Miss M-ko will also be appearing as guest performers, so I thought I absolutely had to attend. But when I checked my calendar, I realized that this day happens to be the monthly meeting of our storytelling club.

Currently, I am rehearsing a dialogue-based performance for the silent film “Tokijiro Kutsukake,” produced in Showa 5, with Miss R-ko, whom you also know.

(I mainly play Tokijiro, and R-ko plays Okinu, the wife of Sanzo from Mutsuda.)

While it might be different if I were performing alone, this is a form of art where I must synchronize my timing with my partner, so I simply cannot miss this meeting.

So, as much as I regret it, I will not be able to attend Master Kikaku's performance.

I am truly looking forward to experiencing Master Kikaku's artistry again after such a long time. And wouldn't you know it, the invitation you sent me states that this will be the 156th performance in total.

156 performances! That's amazing! It's practically a solo performance series.

I imagine his artistry has been polished considerably since the time he performed at a venue in Hatchobori quite a while ago (I was taken there by my acchitei Master and Miss M-ko as well).

I'm filled with the desire to hear, no, to see you perform again after so long. For a frivolous person like me, who gets bored easily and lacks patience for anything, Master Kikaku is truly a figure worthy of respect.

While “Gohei Bosatsu” isn’t all that special since so many performers do it, I’d very much like to hear the ninth section of “Kan’ei Sanbasutsu” to learn exactly where it fits within the Sanbasutsu repertoire.

Of course, I’d also love to see my acchitei Master and Miss M-ko on stage again after so long. Just imagining it makes my heart race with excitement.

I was reminded of something Master Kikaku once told me: “Once you get a little better, I’ll let you perform at my event.”

Actually, I spent the whole day yesterday at the Bunkyo Civic Grand Hall.

As I’m sure you’re aware, my acchitei Master, there was a folk song competition focusing on songs from Sado and Echigo, and believe it or not, 71 folk songs were performed one after another.

I wanted to listen carefully to a song called “Oiwake-bushi” and etch it into my heart, so I sat in the audience for five hours, starting at 11 AM.

In the second half of “Tokijiro Kutsukake,” which I’ll be performing this fall, Tokijiro, a wondering yakuza who has discarded his long wakizashi and dice, ends up as a street performer, earning a meager living of a sen or two by having Okinu play the shamisen while he sings the “Oiwake-bushi.”

The word “Oiwake” also appears in the dialogue and plays an important role.

However, due to my own lack of preparation, I had never truly listened to that “Oiwake” in the past and hadn’t fully grasped it in my heart.

I’ve seen Shogo Shimada’s portrayal of Tokijiro in Shinkokugeki many times, but he’s just too cool. He simply strikes a crisp, well-formed, stylish pose and mimics singing a bit of “Oiwake.”

But now, experts in folk songs are set to appear one after another and perform a total of twelve “Oiwake” pieces, so there’s no way I can miss this.

The generally accepted theory is that what began as a melody sung by horse-drawn cart drivers on the Usui Pass was transformed into the shamisen song “Oiwake-bushi” by the hostesses of Oiwake, Kutsukake, and Karuizawa, commonly known as the “Three Inns of Asama.”

In other words, what began as a horse-herder’s song sung while leading horses along the Nakasendo Road was set to the shamisen accompaniment of the inn women. This then

spread to Echigo, becoming the “Echigo Oiwake,” and was further carried by ships across the Sea of Japan, spreading as the “Sakata Oiwake” and “Honjo Oiwake,” eventually reaching Hokkaido to become the famous “Esashi Oiwake.”

Perhaps the melody, imbued with a deep sense of sorrow, spread from mouth to mouth because it was passed down by women who lived bearing the burden of an unfortunate fate.

It is also said that the place name “Oiwake” originated from a point where a highway splits into two paths, or from the practice of driving cattle down separate paths at a fork in the road.

Come to think of it, there used to be a place called Oiwake even in Shinjuku, which has since become a bustling commercial district.

The Tokijiro Kutsukake portrayed by Denjiro Okochi in silent films was not the excessively dashing, pretentious street performer, often played by leading men like Kin’nosuke Yamanoya or Raizo Ichikawa, or on stage, who hid his face behind a half-open fan. Instead, he was a down-and-out, beggar-like door-to-door performer with a pitiful, unkempt stubble. He was short, with short legs.

I feel that is precisely the Tokijiro depicted by Shin Hasegawa, and it is with that mindset that I am currently rehearsing.

Since this twelve-song “Oiwake” suite is the final item on the program at the Civic Grand Hall, I’ll be sitting through five long hours of live song and dance, from the prologue to the finale.

However, in the end, it was a tremendously inspiring experience, and I learned a great deal.

Each and every one of the singers and dancers radiated the brilliance of a soul deeply devoted to their art.

Watching the performance by the studio of Hamo High School in Niigata, even someone like me, who’s usually jaded when it comes to the arts, found myself moved to tears.

More than twenty high school students, both boys and girls, played the shamisen, beat the taiko drums, blew the flutes, and sang and danced to folk songs such as “Kogi Okesa,” “Aikawa Ondo,” “Schichihama Jinku,” and “Sado Okesa.” Even in the tips of their fingers as they danced, there was a pure, earnest, and passionate young spirit completely immersed in the charm of traditional performing arts.

I experienced the same kind of exhilaration and ecstasy, the same resonance and harmony, that I feel when listening to a fine performance of Rakugo.

Even without the intricate storytelling found in Rakugo, I felt a power that penetrated deep into my heart, filled with rich emotion that went far beyond any simplistic narrative. Realizing the unfathomable depth of the charm inherent in traditional performing arts, my heart trembled.

It was a day where I learned what is most important for both those who appreciate the art and those who perform it.

Another performance that moved me to the core was a sumo jinku sung by a man who used to be a sumo wrestler.

The sense of sorrow he conveyed as he sang with such volume and emotion was several times more poignant than modern rakugo. I was truly overwhelmed. I was deeply moved. Once again, I found myself in tears.

It was also a surprise to see Kanju Kobayashi-san, who is said to be 80 years old, serve as the sole MC for the entire five-hour marathon without a single break (the content of his MCing was rich and very educational). He stood and spoke nonstop the entire time, and midway through, he even performed the Yagibushi piece “Kokutei Chuji” himself for about fifteen minutes, singing with a powerful voice and full of emotion.

Come to think of it, this was the first time I’d ever listened to a genuine 15-minute performance of the Yagibushi piece “Kokutei Chuji.” I was truly amazed by the intricate lyrics and melodies.

Kanju Kobayashi-san mentioned that telling the entire story would take over thirty minutes, but I definitely hope to hear it someday. Whether it’s sumo jinku or Yagibushi, the authentic versions are incredible. Truly incredible.

I learned firsthand that the performances of those who are diligently and steadily training in traditional arts in the provinces are far more moving than the routines performed by entertainers in Tokyo who have simply grown accustomed to their craft.

Come to think of it, a few days ago I saw Hisashi Inoue’s “Yuki ya Konkon” at the Kinokuniya Southern Theater. When the lead actress, Junko Takahata, who plays the head of a women’s sword-fighting troupe, stripped to the skin while performing a spirited tanka, the frailness of her bare shoulders and arms was so jarring that I almost wanted to cover my eyes.

Those were the shoulders and arms of a TV personality desperately dieting to stay thin. The shoulders and arms of a travelling female troupe leader should be much more robust and commanding, having withstood wind and snow.

Ahh, I’ve completely gone off on a tangent. I apologize once again for being unable to attend, despite your kind invitation.

2012.4.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 195

「東京右半分」の美しさ

The Beauty of “The Right Half of Tokyo”

Ms. N. M.

Thank you very much for the gift copy of “The Right Half of Tokyo” (by Kyoichi Tsuzuki).

It's a substantial book, heavy in the hand, printed on high-quality art paper, and 575 pages long (list price: 6000 yen). Not only is it physically weighty, but the gentle breath of the people living their lives within its pages also weighs heavily on the heart, touching me deeply and with great warmth. Ms. M., working alongside Tsuzuki-san, you've once again done a magnificent job.

When we met in Nihonbashi the other day, I was amazed by how beautiful, refined, and intellectually radiant you looked, but given the fulfilling and excellent work you're doing, I suppose that's only natural.

I thought about putting on the air of a proper critic and, for once, sitting up straight to share my thoughts on this book, but that wouldn't be like me, so I'll just write in my usual style.

What struck me most deeply was the sincerity of this book's content. There are no lies or exaggerations. Every single detail is accurate.

It made me realize once again, though it goes without saying, that a work of art is, after all, the very heart of its creator.

The authenticity of Tsuzuki-san's character is evident in the way his commitment to honestly portraying his subject matter naturally penetrates beyond mere sincerity to reach the very core of its truth.

In comparison (though making comparisons is generally a mistake), I'm always writing nothing but lies. Everything I do is nothing but lies. When I look at Tsuzuki-san's writing and photographs, I realize just how frivolous and deceitful I am.

Fully aware of my own frivolity and baseness, I make no effort to change. Instead, I continue to deceive the world with superficial cleverness, just as I always have.

That's why, when I'm confronted head-on with something genuine, like in this book, I'm completely lost.

My own ugliness, like rotten guts, is laid bare and I can't sit still.

That said, there's nothing I can do about this frivolity and baseness at this point. I'm getting on in years, after all. It's as if I'm already half-dead.

Oh, this isn't turning out to be a review of "The Right Half of Tokyo" at all. No, no, the true value of this book lies in the fact that it forces someone as arrogant and insolent as I am to lay bare such feelings of inferiority. So please accept this as a book review. The fact that this has unwittingly turned into a confession is entirely due to the overwhelming charm of this book.

By some stroke of fate, there's a page in "The Right Half of Tokyo" where I appear. There's a page showing my full figure, and there's also a small cut showing just the side profile of my nose.

There are even pages where, even if you can't see me, there's a subtle connection.

At the photo shoot, and even outside of it, I naturally met with the author, Kyoichi Tsuzuki, and the editor, Ms. M, and exchanged a few words with them.

As the person in charge of producing "The Right Hand of Tokyo," I've actually witnessed, albeit only in part, Ms. M.'s meticulous and energetic efforts behind the scenes, supporting the practical work and bringing it all together into this substantial volume.

By any standard, Ms. M. bravely, or perhaps nonchalantly, ventures into places that most people couldn't possibly enter. She has incredible strength. I can't hold a candle to her. I have no choice but to respect her.

An ordinary person like me, whenever I try to do even slightly better work, ends up wandering around trying to draw attention to myself. I can't possibly be satisfied with just being the unsung hero behind the scenes. Ms. M., you really are an extraordinary person. The way you remain fully committed to your role "behind the scenes" and never show your face in the spotlight is truly modest and refined.

I believe that because the people behind the scenes remain unseen, the 108 lovable characters who appear in "The Right Half of Tokyo" and the 85 stories celebrating humanity breathe even more vividly. They fly, they leap, and they truly make their presence felt.

(By the way, Tsuzuki-san, you're such a great photographer! You can really tell from these photos that you love your subjects!)

Oh my, I started writing this intending to be a private message to Ms. M., but before I knew it, I'd slipped back into my usual "Talking Theater" tone.

I suppose this is just another example of my less than noble character, someone who's gotten by in this world with nothing but a lack of discipline and superficial cleverness.

Tsuzuki-san's final piece in "The Right Half of Tokyo," titled "In Place of an Afterword: Winter Wind, Carry the Voices of the Uprising to the Tower," is beautiful.

I tried to write about exactly what makes it beautiful, but all I could come up with were cliched phrases, so I gave up.

P.S. To the readers of "Talking Theater."

In this volume of "The Right Half of Tokyo," there are over a dozen pages containing detailed depictions of the Sex Industry Museum, and it features a wealth of original artwork from the museum's collection (which is incredibly valuable in itself). However, on a page completely unrelated to the Sex Industry Museum, would you believe it, Director Nakahara actually makes an appearance. And not just once, but twice!

So, where are they? Anyone who guesses correctly will receive a reward from Nureki Chimuo. You'll never figure it out just by flipping through the book at a bookstore.

2012.4.27

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 196

カナさんへのお返事

A Reply to Kana-san

To Kana-san, who sent me an email.

Thank you very much. It was a wonderful letter. I'll try to explain what I liked about it below.

Thanks to having worked in this unique field for so long, I receive letters from many women, in various forms and on a wide range of topics.

Each one is a heartfelt, sincere email, sometimes filled with a tension so intense it's almost suffocating.

The letter I received from Kana-san this time gently and warmly wrapped my heart in warmth.

First, I'd like to thank Hiromi Saotome, who chose you as a model for my event this time.

She really introduced me to a wonderful model.

I've known Saotome-san for a long, long, long time. She's a kindred spirit who knows my feelings and preferences well, so I'm sure that's why she chose someone like you, an ideal model for my event.

At this gathering, Saotome-san was the first to serve as a model, and as you watched her, you wrote in your email, "...there was something utterly mesmerizing about seeing Saotome-san, dressed in her everyday clothes, being tied up."

That's exactly it, that's precisely the point, the secret message behind my gatherings...

It is precisely because I bind women in the very everyday clothes they wear, clothes that fit them perfectly and have become as natural to them as their own skin, that my rope comes alive and breathes.

What I've never quite understood is when, during promotional SM video shoots or photo sessions, staff go out of their way to dress models in brand-new panties or bras they've prepared, forcing them into outfits that the staff alone believe are sensational.

When I'm working with models like that, I feel a sense of emptiness, as if I'm tying up a doll rather than a human being.

In other words, it feels like I'm tying up a doll that has lost its body heat, its natural scent, and its pulse. A doll that has lost its soul.

(Unless, of course, there's some specific fetishistic significance to the outfits they went out of their way to have the model change into.)

There isn't necessarily any particular fetishistic effect involved. In commercial SM, it's almost always just a routine, pre-shoot procedure.

The other day, when we were working on the photo book "The Sunset Room," created by our close-knit group Tomoshibi, we all agreed to photograph Saotome-san exactly as she was, wearing the everyday clothes she normally wears.

So when I read in your email that "seeing Saotome-san tied up in her everyday clothes left me in a state of bliss," I felt as if you had read my mind, and not just me, but all of us in Tomoshibi are delighted.

While I'm at it, let me add that what I simply cannot bring myself to like are women wearing those stereotypical bondage-style outfits. Those truly disappoint me from the bottom of my heart.

Since those outfits are a kind of signboard for business purposes, I suppose they're effective to some extent in appealing to the general public, people other than enthusiasts, but when they sink that low into stereotype, it just leaves me feeling fed up.

To put it bluntly, when I see those kinds of signboard outfits, I feel nothing but disgust and rejection.

A certain bondage enthusiast, upon seeing a woman tied up while wearing plain, everyday clothes, said, "Wow, this is obscene! I can't help but get aroused when shown such a raw, unadorned sight. It's obscene!"

This is probably the same sensation Kana-san felt when she was entranced by the sight of Saotome being tied up right before her eyes while still in her everyday clothes.

Everyday clothes represent a very ordinary appearance. Since the world of bondage, an extraordinary realm that shouldn't exist, unfolds right in the midst of daily life, it's only natural that it's so stimulating.

And, if I may say so, the reason I tied up Saotome-san in her everyday clothes before tying you up was because I had a specific plan in mind.

In other words, my plan was to draw your heart into "Nureki Chimuo's World of Rope" and leave you in a state of ecstasy before tying up you, the main model of this session.

While I was tying up Saotome-san at the beginning, I was casually observing the expression on your face as you watched from right beside me.

You watched quietly from start to finish, maintaining your posture and exuding an air of neatness and refinement.

Your posture at that moment, with your back straight and upright, gave me a very pleasant, refreshing impression.

However, I noticed subtle, gradual changes in the expression on your face as you gazed at Saotome-san, and I was certain of something.

A few days after the event ended, you sent me an email saying, "There was something about it that left me in a state of ecstasy."

To me, that single line meant more than any flowery praise.

Toward the end of your email you said, "...if I write at length, the lingering feeling might lose its charm, so I'd like to wrap it up here."

This, too, was a heartfelt and genuine expression. More so than any flowery language, and it made me very happy.

As I've written before, I've received many different reactions from women, but this was the first time I'd ever heard the expression "the afterglow ceases to be an afterglow."

It might sound strange coming from me, but I think that's exactly the genuine feeling it captures. Feelings linger longer when kept unspoken and hidden deep within the heart. That said, come to think of it, we dispersed the moment the meeting ended that day. In hindsight, I do think we could have used some time for a debriefing or to share our thoughts with one another.

During that "Bondage Research Group" event, Director Nakahara of the Sex Industry Museum came to serve as my mentor, and I'm very grateful for her support. That day, it

occasionally turned into a sort of bondage talk show between Director Nakahara and me. It was a fun and relaxed moment that proved very effective. It's not just about tying and untying the model with rope, moments like those are important, too. That's because a subtle sense of bondage often comes through in the nuances of conversation.

Since my workplace is nearby, I pop into the Sex Industry Museum quite often.

The museum is currently storing the SM-related materials I've collected over the past few decades. I haven't been able to bring everything over yet, so I'm making frequent trips there. Please come visit the museum sometime.

If you see me there, please don't hesitate to say hello. Next time, let's have a leisurely chat over a cup of tea. Let's talk about the various aspects of bondage that we in the Tomoshihi group idealize while looking through the materials.

2012.5.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 197

市馬の「首提灯」

Ichiba's "The Head Lantern"

Ryutei Ichiba's "The Head Lantern" was scary.

The protagonist is a native of Edo, and the second half consists almost entirely of this character's monologue. In other words, it's set in the world of period dramas.

If I had to say what was so terrifying, it was first and foremost the situation of a person whose head had been severed without their knowledge, with the head and torso now separated, yet who remained oblivious to it, walking along while talking to themselves.

I inadvertently wrote "cut off," but it wasn't cut and then dropped. Although the neck was swiftly severed by a sword, it didn't fall to the ground. Instead, it remained perched atop the torso.

In other words, because the samurai who struck the blow was so skilled, the head remains still, does not tilt, and stays perched on top of the torso. As a result, the person who was beheaded remains unaware of the fact that they've been beheaded and simply continues walking while muttering to themselves. That is the whole story.

That is the story in its entirety. The setting is Shiba-sandai. It takes place on a dark night.

The samurai who beheaded the Edo native simply walks away, leaving the Edo native alone on stage.

As the Edo native walks along, muttering to himself, his head begins to rotate slowly to the right (as seen from the audience). The torso remains stationary. In other words, while his body stays facing forward, only his head turns to the right.

The Edo man notices this and mutters, "Huh, something's strange here," just as his face turns completely to the side.

With his face turned to the side, he can't walk straight.

The Edo man holds his neck with both hands from either side, rotates it, and turns his face back to face forward.

Then he starts walking again.

But then his neck begins to rotate little by little to the left (as seen from the audience's perspective), and eventually turns completely sideways.

"That's strange," he mutters, and once again, the Edo native grips his neck with both hands from either side to turn his face back to the front.

Eventually, realizing that his neck is moving, the Edo man grabs it, holds it up in front of his eyes, and uses it as a lantern as he dashes down the night street. That's the premise of this story.

When it comes to absurdity, there is no story more absurd than this. It goes beyond mere wit or sophistication.

Ichiba performed this surreal story with terrifying seriousness and realism. It is, quite literally, surrealism.

He offers absolutely no unnecessary explanation.

Ichiba has absolutely no intention of making the audience laugh.

He doesn't utter a single word or perform a single gesture intended to elicit laughter.

He performs it with utter seriousness. He performs it with deadly seriousness until the very end. He performs it while remaining seated in seiza.

He carries the performance through to the punchline with a stoic, almost hyper-realistic intensity. Had he broken this stance even once, the story would have amounted to nothing more than a flat, run-of-the-mill comedy.

(I once saw this story performed by Tachikawa Danshi at the Toho Meijin-kai, but the performer's attitude toward the audience, as if to say, "Well, isn't that an amazing story? Did that surprise you?" was painfully obvious, and that came across as condescending, leaving me with nothing but a sense of discomfort.)

Ryutei Ichiba's "The Head Lantern" was magnificent. I was thoroughly impressed.

In fact, that day, I was sitting in the center of the front row, right in front of the stage. Drawn into the world of the story, I fell under the illusion that I could see a single red line, like a thread severed by a samurai's sword, running around Ichiba's neck.

When I wrote earlier that it was scary, I was referring to Ichiba's attitude toward the audience, he performed from start to finish without a single thought of making them laugh. That is, without resorting to any cheap gags for laughs. That's what I meant by scary.

(Even En'o VI would sometimes make gestures toward the audience that resembled forced smiles.)

Rakugo storytellers take the stage with the sole and ultimate goal of getting a laugh from the audience. Getting a laugh is everything for a performer.

I was in awe of Ichiba's artistry, the way he achieved that goal without ever making the audience aware of it.

Needless to say, rakugo is a world of imagination. The world that the performer brings to life while seated on a zabuton¹⁰ is one that the listener expands within their own mind.

The performer's skill lies in how richly, vividly, and, at times, meticulously they can expand the images in the audience's minds.

My consciousness had become completely immersed in a single scene unfolding within the Shibasandai district one night in the late Edo period.

On that day, Director Nakahara was actually sitting right next to me.

Since Ichiba was the finale of the evening performance, he delivered his closing remarks, the curtain closed, and the closing drumbeat sounded. I said to Director Nakahara, "It's over, isn't it?"

Then I stood up and went outside.

I had thought about saying something witty about Ichiba's performance, but I decided against it.

If I were to say it now, "the lingering afterglow would lose its magic."

So I remained silent. These words actually come from an email I received from Kana, a model, after my gathering the other day (see previous entry).

¹⁰ Japanese floor cushion.

I stepped out onto Shinjuku-dori, hailed a taxi, and went to Yotsua Station. From there, I took the JR line. She accompanied me part of the way. We didn't exchange many words even on the train.

I'm planning to see "Shibahama no Kawazaifu" and "Narukami," performed by the Zenshinza at the National Theater, as well as the Bunraku performances of "Hachijin Shugo no Honjo" and "Keisei Yamato Zoshi" at the National Theater's Small Theater in the near future, and I needed to discuss the details, but I didn't even have the energy to bring that up.

It's frustrating, but I had been completely blown away by Ryutei Ichiba's "The Head Lantern."

2012.7.8

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 198

大田黒氏からの手紙

A Letter from Mr. Otagura

I received a letter from Mr. Akiyoshi Otaguro.

I am reprinting that letter here.

Mr. Otaguro's letters are always handwritten, in his own hand, in meticulous regular script, with not a single stroke out of place.

Naturally, I find myself sitting up straight as I read them.

It was placed in an envelope with a properly affixed postage stamp, passed from Mr. Otaguro's hands through the hands of several strangers, and finally delivered to my mailbox by the mail carrier.

It has, without a doubt, been on a little journey.

It is different from the characters that appear on the recipient's screen the moment you tap a key with your fingertips.

Of course, I have obtained the author's permission to present this letter here, and I have taken great care to omit any passages that might be even slightly offensive.

For example, although the author stated that it would be fine to publish their real name, I have used a pseudonym out of concern for any potential inconvenience.

Nureki Chimuo Sensei.

I am writing to inform you that, through a fortunate turn of events, I have been offered a position at a certain publishing company in Chiyoda Ward.

Once I have settled into my new position, I plan to resume my research on "Uramado" (I continued my research on a small scale even while job hunting, and in March of this year I

presented my findings at the regular meeting of the Shin Seinen Research Society), so I would appreciate your continued guidance.

Through recent research, I have confirmed that Mr. Akira Iwasaki also contributed to “Masterpiece Club,” and I have determined that Mr. Hikaru Iwahori, who was active in “Uramado” from Showa 31 to Showa 32, is the same person as Mr. Taizo Iwahori, who was active in “Liberal” and other publications (though the true identity of the crucial figure, Hikaru Iwahori, remains unknown...).

I also found “Yomikiri Zasshi,” the magazine that featured a short story by Nureki Sensei published under a pseudonym (I believe it was Toba Juro), in an antiquarian book catalog, so the research yielded some decent results.

I’ve placed an order for it, so if I can get my hands on a physical copy (since the catalog is a bit old, I can only hope it hasn’t sold out yet), I’ll send you a copy.

Better late than never, I finally read the historical novel “The Tengu’s Mischief” by Rokuroku Tabata¹¹, who won the “Yasuo Uchida Mystery Literature Award.”

It hooks the reader from the very beginning with an enigmatic mystery, carefully depicts deduction scenes centered on interviews, and resolves the case with a clever twist so that no one gets hurt.

As always, the structure was superb and the writing was solid, so I read it in one sitting.

It was a true display of professional craftsmanship.

The truth revealed in Section 8 was full of surprises (I was taken aback by Yokichi’s confession on page 251, lines 13-17), and the final chapter, which concludes the case as a prank by a tengu, left a satisfying aftertaste characteristic of your works.

Reading this work made me want to reread your detective stories from the “Uramado” serialization (even though I just reread your historical novel collection the other day...).

First of all, I’d like to announce that I’ve secured a job at a publishing company.

If you have the chance, please tell me more about those days (your time at Kubo Shoten). I look forward to your continued guidance in the future.

Akiyoshi Otaguro

The above is the first letter from Mr. Akiyoshi Otaguro, with whom I have recently been exchanging correspondence.

¹¹ Tabata Rokuroku is a pen name of Nureki Chimuo.

When I received this letter, I happened to be in the middle of writing a sequel to “The Tengu’s Mischief” and was struggling to come up with a plot twist leading up to the climax.

To be honest, I was at my wits’ end.

I was trying to create a situation that no one had ever written about before, one that would be even more unexpected than the previous work. I agonized over every detail. This won’t work, that won’t work, and in the end, I was on the verge of despair over the poverty of my own talent.

That state of mind had continued for over a week.

(Even a foolish person like me, arrogant, boastful, and always brimming with confidence, has moments like this from time to time.)

It was at a time like this that I received a well-meaning review of my previous work, “The Tengu’s Mischief,” from Mr. Otaguro.

(There were even more complimentary words than what I’ve included here, but I omitted them because, frankly, they made me feel a bit embarrassed.)

I was truly grateful for this.

It gave me courage.

I wrote a thank you note to Mr. Otaguro and returned to my manuscript.

(Of course, all my manuscripts are handwritten. I still don’t own a computer, a word processor, or even a cell phone.)

I’ve written mostly about “The Tengu’s Mischief” but I’m also grateful for Mr. Otaguro’s research on “Uramado” (these days, there’s no one else who cares so passionately about “Uramado”), and for the fact that he mentions “Masterpiece Club” and “Yomikiri Zasshi” published by Futabasha, as well as Mr. Akira Iwasaki and Juro Toba.

I’m truly grateful.

(Even someone like me has done work that will remain in people’s memories, at least a little!)

When I moved to my current address, I actually threw away about 150 issues of “Masterpiece Club,” “Yomikiri Zasshi,” and several other popular entertainment magazines of that era, the ones known as “club magazines” at the time!

(My work had been published in those very issues. I hadn't recognized any value whatsoever in the work I'd done!)

Ah. But I'll stop throwing things away now.

Mr. Otaguro, I'll give you my draft notebook for "The Tengu's Mischief."

Also, I found a photo from a trip during my time at Kubo Shoten featuring Haruo Shimamoto, Minomura Ko, and myself, so I'll give that to you as well. (I'll make a copy for you.)

As for Mr. Hikaru Iwahori, it would take too long to write about him here, so I'll tell you about it the next time we meet.

2012.7.10

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第百九十九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 199

大田黒氏からの第二信

The Second Letter from Mr. Otaguro

Last time, I wrote that I'm currently working on "The Tengu's Mischief: Continued" and have been struggling through a week or more of sheer agony...

To tell the truth, it's been far longer than a week. In fact, it's been going on for over a month, nearly two months. I just can't seem to find a breakthrough.

The fact that I wrote that this struggle had been going on for a week might be another example of my foolish vanity.

It might be one of the traits of a boastful, arrogant fool.

It's not just "might be." It is.

I'm a fool through and through.

No matter how far I go, I remain arrogant.

Vanity is a form of arrogance.

I wrote that I am currently exchanging letters with Mr. Otaguro, but in my letters to him I'm, unusually for me, venting my frustrations.

I hope you can imagine what kind of complaints someone as arrogant as I am might be voicing.

With his permission, I am reprinting Mr. Otaguro's second letter here.

Nureki Chimuo Sensei.

Thank you very much for your thoughtful reply, even though I'm currently struggling with a particularly difficult manuscript that just won't move forward no matter how hard I concentrate.

I understand you're going through a serious creative slump, and I would be delighted if my letter helped you break out of it.

"The Tengu's Mischief: Continued." I'd definitely love to read that. As for your writing... I apologize for using such a cliché, but... please keep up the good work.

I've analyzed that your works almost always offer redemption in the end, and I believe that, unlike the works of Dan Oniroku or Tadao Chigusa, is the secret to why your stories are so comforting to read.

(Please forgive me for being so presumptuous.)

I'm not denying the works or style of Dan-san or Chigusa-san, but among the aesthetic and erotic literature, which is often branded as "perverted novels that do nothing but torment women" (and is generally lumped together by the public as SM novels or adult perverted fiction), it is a fact that I feel your works possess a charm that draws readers in not only with a dark atmosphere but also with a bright, refreshing sense of catharsis.

Not limited to "The Tengu's Mischief," the detective and historical novels you published in "Uramado" and "Abument" are of exceptionally high quality, in particular, the "Isaburo of Hanakawado" series was a masterpiece on par with Seishi Yokomizo's "The Adventures of Ningyo Sashichi."

I absolutely love your full-length historical novel "The Legend of the Demon's Breasts." It is just as entertaining as Akimitsu Takagi's full-length historical novels "The Demon Comes" and "The Wild Furisode."

Your talent, writing novels that stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the masterpieces of full-time authors while working as an editor, is truly rare.

I look forward to your future creative endeavors, not just "The Tengu's Mischief: Continued." Please keep up the good work. As a fan, I'm rooting for you.

Regarding my recent decision to join a publishing company, I apologize to you for any worry or inconvenience this may have caused. I was able to join the publisher I had hoped for, and from now on, I intend to work tirelessly to achieve results.

If our mystery-related publishing activities, which had been on hiatus, get back on track, we may also be able to release the "Uramado" Masterpiece Collection (featuring works by authors such as Kon Marikoji and Haruo Shimamoto, among others).

At a recent “Shin Seinen” Research Group meeting, I presented a summary of our research to date on “Uramado” and “Suspense Magazine.”

While I regret not having been able to fully utilize the valuable information you taught me, it was a good experience for me personally. I hope to make a comeback with my next presentation, taking into account the lessons learned from last time, I aim to make it an even better research presentation.

There are many other things I'd like to write about, but since it might end up sounding disjointed, I'll put down my pen for now.

I'm so excited about the letter I received from you that my writing has become rather messy and disorganized. I look forward to the day we can meet.

Akiyoshi Otaguro.

To Mr. Akiyoshi Otaguro. From Nureki Chimuo.

Thanks to your letters, this one and the previous one, I've finally begun to understand your point of view a little better.

That's because you included a few of your impressions after encountering the works of Dan Oniroku-san and Tadao Chigusa-san.

Until now, I hadn't understood anything at all.

For example, “I love, love, love the magazine ‘Shin Seinen!’”

Just saying that left me completely in the dark about what you were thinking, what you actually liked, and exactly what aspects of “Shin Seinen” you found appealing.

Why do you like it? And not just “Shin Seinen,” why do you like “Uramado?”

Why are you so eager to know about the “Uramado” era and the past? As the person being asked, it feels unsettling not to understand your reasons. I honestly can't bring myself to reply.

Actually, besides you, there are others who ask me to tell them about the past and who are eager to know more and more.

Since I don't understand why they want to know, neither the reason nor the purpose, I have no choice but to ignore them. It just feels creepy.

I think it's a very selfish and rude attitude to want to get something from me without even trying to convey your own feelings to me.

Don't you agree?

(There may be a certain type of know-it-all who wants to know absolutely everything, but to me, they're just creepy. I, that is, Nureki Chimuo, have had the experience of being stalked and hounded by a middle-aged woman who wanted to know absolutely everything about me. She was a truly creepy and terrifying presence.)

In your latest letter, you once again mentioned wanting to know more about Hikaru Iwahori-san.

"No matter how much I research, I can't find any details, and I'm at a loss," you wrote. Depending on how you look at it, this goes beyond just being creepy. It's downright scary.

Why are you so persistently and endlessly eager to ask about Hikaru Iwahori-san? (Sure you're not seeking revenge for a parent's death, are you?) What exactly do you want to know about him? (I assume it's about his novels.) What are you going to do with that information? What is your purpose in wanting to know? I have absolutely no idea what's going on inside your head.

Unless you clearly explain your purpose and reasons to me and convince me, I cannot, from my position, say anything without thinking it through.

In fact, I still haven't grasped what exactly you find so appealing about "Shin Seinen" that you continue your enthusiastic research. Please be sure to tell me that in your next letter.

It seems the conversation has veered off in a different direction partway through, but since it was on my mind, I ended up writing something unnecessary.

Thank you for praising my novel.

Personally, I'm quite fond of my own historical mystery novel, "Nakibei Machi-bayashi."

If you haven't read it yet, it's available at the Sex Industry Museum, so please do take a look.

Thanks to you, I can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel for "The Tengu's Mischief: Continued." I'm truly grateful and would like to express my thanks.

2012.7.22

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 200

大田黒明良さんへの手紙

A Letter to Akiyoshi Otaguro

To Akiyoshi Otaguro-san.

This morning, as I was flipping through the morning paper and looking at the classifieds, I came across an announcement of an upcoming book from the publishing company where you've started working.

When I read it, I thought, "Ah, so that's it," and "Hmm, I see."

And (if I may say so), my trust in you grew significantly.

To be honest, up until now, I'd thought you were just pursuing some sort of dream of your own, all on your own. I'd thought you were the kind of person whose head was full of nothing but hopes and dreams, with no sense of reality (again, my apologies).

Reading this publisher's ad, I can clearly see that it perfectly matches the literary world you envision.

And I was truly impressed that you managed to find and join such a, shall we say, niche, low-key publishing house.

Especially in these tough job market times. I feel like I wrote about the saying "Where there's a will, there's a way" just the other day, but it came to mind again.

For a weak-willed person like me, someone with low aspirations who gives up on everything so easily, someone with your tenacious spirit is truly worthy of my respect.

In an era like this, where so many publishers are solely focused on the pursuit of profit, a company like the one you joined, one that publishes only down-to-earth, unassuming, and, so to speak, understated books, seems like a truly precious entity.

If you'll forgive my colloquial expression, I'm simply amazed that you managed to find a publisher like this and successfully "sneak your way in" (my apologies again!). Isn't this exactly the right publisher for you?

I wouldn't go so far as to call it "understated," but it reminds me of the atmosphere at Kubo Shoten, a small company where I once worked. Yes, that's right, Kubo Shoten, where Haruo Shimamoto wrote novels, Yoji Muku painted, Minomura Ko both wrote novels and painted, and I worked, all under the same roof.

Going even further back, I was reminded of the small publishing company where my father worked during the era when the Pacific War was intensifying.

It was also located in a corner of Kanda's publishing district. When I'd stop by that small editorial department on my way home from school, the editors, fewer than ten of them, would dote on me, treating me to sweet red bean soup and taking me on group hikes on their days off.

I still remember how much fun it was when, on our hikes to Chichibu and Nagatoro, we'd all walk along singing in unison "Junjo Duet" by Mieko Takamine, which was popular at the time.

Believe it or not, the company's employee trip was a climb up Mount Fuji, and I was invited to join them. Unlike today, we climbed step by step starting from the first station.

There were three or four female employees as well, and spending the night huddled together in a mountain hut near the summit was a lot of fun.

The joy of the close-knit, family-like relationships among the employees at that small publishing house in Kanda-Jimbocho remains vivid in my memory to this day.

A few years later, after the war, the publishing house that put out the monthly magazine "Fuzoku Kitan" was also located very close to the company where you would later work.

In addition to "Fuzoku Kitan," that publishing house also published a fiction magazine modeled after Futabasha's club magazines, and I wrote mystery-style short stories for every issue of that magazine as well. This was before I started working at Kubo Shoten. The young man who edited this magazine was a passionate literary enthusiast, and he gave me plenty of stern encouragement and guidance, teaching me a great deal. The magazine ceased publication after about a year and a half. You probably can't get a copy of it anymore. I don't have one myself either.

This morning, as I was flipping through the morning paper, I happened to catch sight of a small ad that introduced me to part of the sales catalog from the publishing house where you work, and it made me want to congratulate you all over again.

But I wanted to hear about this publishing house directly from you. How happy I would have been if you could have sent me some information about their publications, for example.

That said, a publisher that would compile a collection of Udao Oshita's novels and release it with a list price of 3,780 yen is, of course, a source of great joy for me. Still, I can't help but worry about how many copies will actually sell.

It must be a publisher that operates on the principle of "we publish because we want to, not for profit." I find that very reassuring.

Please do publish a collection of masterful short stories titled "Uramado." I'd be delighted to assist you.

Since progress on "The Tengu's Mischief: Continued" continues to be slow, I wrote four short play scripts partly to get the project moving again. These are for a theater company I'm involved with, and they're basically like skits.

I also wrote a short essay out of necessity. I wrote this with the same intention of getting the creative juices flowing. Neither the scripts nor the essay have anything to do with SM.

I'm sending you these unedited drafts.

If you don't think you need them, feel free to throw them away. I have copies on my end.

I've just finished writing two essays for my monthly serialized column (these are SM-related pieces) and have finally caught my breath.

From here on out, I plan to get back to work on "The Tengu's Mischief: Continued," which has been stalled.

I managed to write the opening part quite entertainingly, but the crucial incident hasn't happened yet.

I'm struggling with how to write the beginning of that incident.

I have a feeling this period of struggling and tossing and turning will continue for a while yet.

I'll take encouragement from having readers like you and do my best to keep writing.

2012.8.5

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 201

たくさんの御本、ありがとう

Thank You for All the Books

“Nureki Chimuo Sensei. Akiyoshi Otaguro

Thank you very much for your kind letter and your handwritten manuscript.

I will read the five short manuscripts (scripts) you sent me carefully and at my leisure at a later date, and I will write my impressions at that time.

However, just one thing.

One of the short, sketch-style scripts, ‘The Sea and the Millet Dumplings,’ is based on the Momotaro tale but its unconventional ideas and the ending, filled with irony and pathos, truly remind me of the sketches from the early Showa period in ‘Shin Seinen.’

The remark by Momotaro's three companions, ‘We won't work unless you feed us,’ and Momotaro's attitude as he tries to push through a pay-later deal by saying, ‘I'll let you do whatever you want once we've defeated the ogres.’ This exchange is exactly the kind of sketch you'd find in ‘Shin Seinen!’

These handwritten manuscripts you sent me, Nureki Sensei, were the most delightful welcome gift I could have received upon joining the company.

The publishing company I've just joined is a small business with a total of ten employees (including external staff and the president), but as you said, ‘Amid so many publishers that pursue nothing but profit, this is a company that publishes books that may be unassuming but are well worth reading.’

I've been hoping to join them for several years now.

Although they were only hiring one person this time, I was successfully hired, and I'm truly delighted.

I am grateful to the president for recognizing my enthusiasm, rather than just my individual skills (including my career as a publisher), and for hiring me. From now on, I will work with unwavering dedication and do my very best.

I apologize to you for causing him concern and inconvenience, but I have taken a step forward toward realizing my dream, the reevaluation of 'Uramado' and the reprinting of sexy detective fiction.

If I have the opportunity to meet you in person someday, I would be happy to tell you more about our company in detail.

Although this is just a brief company profile, I have enclosed an article about our company that was recently featured in the South Korean media, so please take a look at that first.

The original was in Hangul, but I used translation software to generate the text and then corrected any awkward phrasing and book titles myself.

Since we only have internal copies of our publishing brochures and catalogs, I will send those in a separate mailing.

If there are any books you would like, Nureki Sensei, please let me know. Depending on the title and quantity, I may be able to provide you with a complimentary copy.

I will send you the hardcover edition of Udao Oshita's work mentioned in your letter to me (we only have Volume 2 in our internal inventory) and 'Selected Detective Stories' by Seishi Yokomizo II. My name is listed as a contributor in the 'introduction' to this book.

I will also include a series of classic erotic literature by an anonymous translator (a five-volume series that was discontinued). This series is a precious collection that served as the catalyst for me to meet the president.

I apologize that all of these are bulky hardcover books, but please accept them with a smile.

Along with the separately mailed list of publications, I've also included a copy of the 'introduction' to our company's 'Mystery Series,' to which I contributed. I would be delighted if this gave you a sense of the connection I had with the company even before joining.

About seven volumes of Haruo Kano's collected works, which you had encountered some thirty-odd years ago (though, of course, they were originally from a rental bookstore), were on sale at a manga-specialty used bookstore for between 1,500 and 2,000 yen each.

I'll be getting my monthly salary next month, so I plan to buy them right away. If I manage to get my hands on them, I'd definitely like you to read them.

I'm looking forward to the day when I can meet you again at the Sex Industry Museum and ask him all sorts of questions.

I imagine writing 'The Tengu's Mischief: Continued' must be quite a challenge, but please keep up the good work. I look forward to your continued support."

The above is the latest letter we received from Akiyoshi Otaguro, but the actual content is about twice as long.

Along with this handwritten letter, heavy new books were delivered via courier and landed with a thud at the entrance to my office.

They were all new books, thick, hardcover volumes with elegant bindings.

In addition, I received a catalog of publications intended for internal use.

The newspaper ad I happened to come across the other day was a small space that featured only a limited number of new book announcements, but after reviewing the complete catalog I realized that books with content far more substantial and valuable than I had imagined are being published across a wide range of fields.

I deeply regretted having made a flippant assumption about the caliber of a single publisher based solely on that small newspaper ad. It was a publishing house with an impressive track record.

At the same time, I wrote another letter of congratulations to Mr. Otaguro, who had joined this editorial department, and expressed my gratitude for the splendid book he had sent me.

A few days later, another splendid new hardcover book was delivered by courier.

It was the main volume and sequel to "The Tale of a Sentimental Fool" by Matsutaro Kawaguchi, an author I have admired since my boyhood.

Additionally, there was Minoru Betsuyaku's collection of short stories, "Godo Has Arrived." All three titles were listed in the publication catalog that had been sent to me.

I have a special attachment to these three books.

In fact, my play, "Talking Theater" is sometimes based on Matsutaro Kawaguchi's "The Tale of a Sentimental Fool."

And when I was a boy (that is, during the Pacific War), I actually appeared in a stage production of “Captain Wakabayashi,” a play written by Matsutaro Kawaguchi.

Furthermore, after the war, I became completely captivated by the world of theater created by Matsutaro Kawaguchi and became a regular at Shinpa theater performances...

Of course, it wasn't until several years after the war, when I had already reached middle age, that I was introduced to Minoru Betsuyaku's body of work, but I became utterly intoxicated by the same emotional depth found in Kawaguchi's works (yes, for me, just as with Kawaguchi's world, Minoru Betsuyaku's absurdist plays are also a world of sentiment and emotion).

Just the other day, I presented my short play “The Sea and Kibidango” to Akiyoshi Otaguro. To be honest, if I were to reveal the secret, it is actually based on Minoru Betsuyaku's work.

I'd like to write about these matters in greater detail, but right now I simply must focus my attention on “The Tengu's Mischief: Continued.”

(I still haven't been able to write it. Oh, how pathetic!)

I've been neglecting so many people, but please, please, forgive me.

Ah, but even so, I'm a selfish person, no matter where I go or what I do.

2012.11.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 202

お勉強の季節がきた！

It's Time to Study!

I've been working single-mindedly and with total dedication to clear away the mountain of work that loomed before me, and now I've finally reached a point where things have settled down a bit.

Over the past three-plus months, even though I knew I was pushing myself too hard, I somehow managed to work really hard.

To put it dramatically, I feel like every day is a frantic struggle that pushed me beyond my physical limits.

(As a result, I've completely neglected this "Talking Theater" as well.)

An elderly man who's about to turn eighty-three was, just a week ago, standing on stage acting, and not just in one role, but in five!

(Although, to be precise, this might not exactly count as work.)

I played five roles. A runaway bus driver, a retired elderly politician, a high school girl, an elderly man with dementia wandering the town, and Jam-Oji-san chasing after Anpanman.¹²

(As you can tell from the character names, it was a lighthearted play made up of a collection of skits.)

I'm not lying. There are plenty of witnesses.

I sent invitations to everyone who's always worried about my mental and physical wellbeing and asked them to come watch. These are my witnesses.

¹² Anpanman is a popular children's comic that features a living piece of bread.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anpanman>

First, the Director of the Sex Industry Museum, and Mr. Akiyoshi Otaguro, who has been appearing frequently in this “Talking Theater” lately.

Well, Mr. Otaguro is a very dedicated professional. He watched the matinee performance that day, but during the two and a half hours before the evening performance began, while we were chatting in the hall’s lobby, he didn’t mention a single word about the play I had just performed. He talked exclusively about our upcoming publishing projects together.

(I was hoping he’d praise my acting, though.)

He really, really is a serious man. He loves his work as a publishing editor so much he can’t get enough of it. He’s the kind of person who’s completely absorbed in his craft.

Actually, Director Nakahara watched me during the final dress rehearsal the day before the performance.

She watched the entire production from the audience, the set, the lighting, music, and costumes, all exactly as they would be on opening night, but her feedback at the time was, my goodness, truly harsh.

With a stern expression, she ruthlessly and without the slightest mercy tore to shreds the performance of an aging actor, who’s about to turn eighty-three, who was giving it his all (or maybe not quite that much).

The substance of her harsh criticism was actually something I agreed with myself, so I couldn’t even argue with it.

All I could do was nod and say, “Yes, yes, you’re absolutely right.”

The Director is, well, an honest woman. I was reminded once again that she is a woman of steel who cannot tell lies or offer flattery.

However, on opening night, both the matinee and evening performances were sold out. The stage was energized by the enthusiasm of the audience who love our theater company. They laughed a lot, and overall the show was a huge success so I was relieved.

For this production, I commuted by train to the rehearsal space almost every day right up until opening night. At the same time, as I wrote in my letter to Mr. Otaguro, I was also pouring my heart and soul into my work in my main profession.

On top of that, this summer saw a record-breaking heat wave.

In short, over these past three months, I had pushed my 83-year-old body and mind to the limit, leaving me completely exhausted.

After huffing and puffing my way through all those tasks, the intense heat finally subsided, and the season arrived when I could finally catch my breath.

Oh my, I'm still alive, I'm still breathing, and I can still move my arms and legs.

As soon as I truly realized that, the season for me to accompany the Museum Director and study ways to keep my mind sharp arrived as if it had been waiting just for me.

If I neglect this study to keep my mind sharp, not only I, but also the Director, will fall into a kind of mental starvation.

"Come on, let's go!"

"Let's go!"

First up, we headed to a photo exhibition by a certain photographer being held at a studio in Shinjuku.

We wrapped things up there early, then made our way from Shinjuku to Higashi-Ginza and headed to the Togekijo Theater.

We watched the Cinema Kabuki production "Kago Tsuru-be: Sato no Yoizame."

The cast was fascinating. Nakamura Kanzaburo as Sano Jirozaemon, Bando Tamasaburo as Yatsushashi, Kataoka Nizaemon as Shigeyama Einosuke, and Kataoka Gato as Tachibana-ya Chobei. And Nakamura Kantaro (now Kankuro) played the servant Jiroku.

Although it wasn't a live stage performance but rather Kabuki projected on a screen, it's not something to be taken lightly. It's by no means a trivial affair.

As I watched, I soon lost the ability to distinguish between the real stage and the film.

Both the cinematographer and the editor (in other words, the director) of Cinema Kabuki are well versed in the characteristics and appeal of kabuki theater itself.

There were moments when I found myself even more drawn into the actors' performances than when watching a live stage production.

While there is a distance between the audience and the stage in a theater, that distance does not exist on the screen.

The reason the film version is clearly superior is that actors' subtle facial expressions, the position of their eyes, the movement of their gaze, the movement of their mouths, that is,

their vocal delivery, and other psychological expressions conveyed through the movements of various parts of their bodies can sometimes be observed clearly from the audience through close-ups.

For the viewer, this allows for a deep and accurate understanding of the essence of the play and the individual roles played by the actors.

While the precision of the film camera leaves performers with no room for even a split-second lapse in concentration, for the audience it provides a remarkably detailed and meticulous explanation, a welcome feature that allows us to deeply savor the drama's appeal.

In this production of "Kago Tsuribune," I found Kantaro's portrayal of the servant Jiroku particularly fascinating.

It was the first time I had ever seen a Jiroku who was so young and full of life (which means that neither the Director nor I had seen this production of "Kago Tsuribune" on stage. I do recall seeing Matsumoto Koshiro's Jirozaemon in a previous production at the Kabuki-za. That performance featured a grand fight scene on the roof of the rear second-story balcony during the climax).

Kantaro's portrayal of Jiroku was refreshing, passionately conveying the emotions of a loyal retainer concerned for his master, who is consumed by lust.

However, he was a bit too energetic, which made him lack that rustic, country-boy vibe. I watched the performance with great enjoyment, wondering if, in a few years, Kantaro might take on the role of Jirozaemon, and if so, would Yatsushiro be played by Shichinosuke?

On the way home, at "Hachinohe" next to the Kabuki-za, which was undergoing renovations at the time, we ate curry rice along with some separately ordered fried oysters and, while sipping coffee, we chatted about the performance of "Kago Tsuribune" we had just seen.

This marked the first step in my return to my studies, and at the same time the resumption of the "Talking Theater" I'd been neglecting.

After that, spurred on by Director Nakahara, I continued watching plays and movies at a breakneck pace to make up for the days of study I'd missed.

Namely, the dance numbers from Asakusa's Jun Koikawa Troupe's "Rakuda no Uma" and "Ipponto Dohyo-iri," as well as the dance form "Tojuro no Koi."

In Hobiya, the American film "The Magnificent Seven" and the spaghetti western "A Fistful of Dollars."

At the National Theater, “Ukiyo-zuka Hiyoku no Imazuma” starring Koshiro and Fukusuke.

More details next time.

2012.11.23

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 203

すがすがしいエロティシズム

Refreshing Eroticism

The more than forty paintings on display at “Masagoten” left a surprisingly deep impression on me.

Huh? What did you say?

You're asking if I really feel that way even about paintings that don't depict ropes?

Come on, come on, come on, you can't be serious.

Rope is nothing more than a medium that leads my imagination into the sensual world of SM.

The physical object known as rope is merely one of the tools that lures me into a dreamlike paradise filled with the intense scent of fetishism.

Besides, could someone who's only interested in rope really edit an SM magazine?

While I'm at it, let me just say this. Looking at photos that lack any imagery or soul, photos that just clutter the female body with ropes and ostentatiously spread her legs wide, doesn't stimulate my SM sensibilities in the slightest.

To me, those kinds of photos are nothing more than live coverage of a crude, straightforward torture and endurance contest. All I feel when I look at them is revulsion.

Huh? What did you say?

Are you saying that the fact I feel nothing when faced with those obvious erotic photos of some thick object shoved into a woman's crotch means I've already aged to the point of no return?

Well, considering my age, I suppose I can't really argue with that, but when the Director of the Sex Industry Museum showed me the "Masagoten" on display there, I was unmistakably moved.

And it was, even by my own standards, a youthful, vibrant emotion. For a moment, hot blood rushed through my entire body.

For example, the image of a schoolgirl from behind, standing in the hallway, holding buckets of water in both hands.

The delicate, poignant vulnerability of the girl's submissive pose, with her head bowed slightly forward, is unbearably endearing, masochistic, and erotic.

(The feeling of endearment is one of the essential elements of SM sensuality.)

The white socks on this schoolgirl's feet. And her white sneakers.

Oh, what a modest, dainty pair of sneakers they are. Simple, unadorned sneakers with nothing but three red stripes.

Even just looking at her feet, I feel a dizzying sense of eroticism. The depiction of the sneakers, with their left and right heels positioned slightly offset from one another, is precise and remarkable. Drawn at an exquisite angle, it showcases the artist's meticulous draftsmanship, imbued with her deep emotion.

The scent of the girl's feet, wrapped in pure white, clean cotton socks with cuffs, and the eroticism that wafts tantalizingly from the sneakers, where the scent of her five toes is trapped, possess a presence that envelops the viewer's entire body in sweet fantasy.

More than the scent emanating from her genitals themselves, the girl's sensuality oozes out intensely. This section, featuring the socks and sneakers, closes in on the viewer, stimulating lust. The artist's obsession is conveyed directly to the viewer's heart. This is fetishism at its core.

Her panties are pulled down to just below the curve of her butt, the raw, vivid texture of the wrinkles in that small white piece of fabric.

The two exposed mounds of flesh are already red and swollen from being scolded, punished, and spanked by the teacher.

Of course, the shape of the girl's butt is not that of an old woman. In other words, it is modest, endearing, and cute.

The color of the swollen areas from the spanking is a dreamlike, fleeting redness, yet it never loses its realism. This cruel sensation is exquisite. It's a vivid color that makes you feel a tingling sensation as you stare at it, making you want to rub your cheek against it without thinking.

It forms a delicate red pattern that invites fantasies and evokes so many stories that you could lose yourself in the pleasure of those fantasies forever.

Not only this depiction of a schoolgirl carrying buckets in both hands, but all of the more than forty works displayed at "Masagoten" are free of the kind of sludge that often clings to art created solely for financial gain.

There is the artist's most pure, passionate, and single-minded dedication, the simple act of painting what he wanted to paint. There is a soul.

That soul has come to magnificent fruition through the artist's highly skilled craftsmanship, making this "Masagoten" exhibition truly refreshing.

It is this refreshing eroticism that has revived the youthfulness of my aging mind and body.

I understand this all too well. There was a time when I edited SM magazines and I also have a past of writing countless SM novels.

The works I wrote, pouring my heart and soul into what I wanted to write without a second thought, were well received.

The pieces I wrote simply to earn a fee, tailoring them to the magazine's style and tone, received only a meager response.

It was the heyday of SM magazines, so long as you had a certain level of technique, anything could be published and you could earn a fee. I wrote and wrote and wrote for over a dozen SM magazines.

An editor-in-chief of one SM magazine once told me, "Nureki-san, your writing is more interesting and full of power and momentum when the handwriting is a bit messy."

I still remember those words to this day.

I'm something of a handwriting fetishist. I always write my manuscripts by hand on manuscript paper, making each character as clear and neat as possible, even more so than necessary (as is the case with this very manuscript).

However, when a deadline was looming and I was getting carried away by what I was writing, my handwriting would become sloppy and rough, and there were times when I handed in manuscripts to the editor with missing characters.

Oh, I've gone off on a tangent.

(My manuscripts for "Talking Theater" are always like this.)

Unlike novel manuscripts, the moment an illustration leaves the artist's hands, the illustration itself becomes a finished work.

In visual art that requires delicate technique, no matter how excited you are, your hand must not falter while you're creating.

So, while it's not comparable to a novel manuscript, there's a common thread in the mindset.

Every painting on display at "Masagoten" is imbued with the artist's passionate and unwavering dedication.

That stirs and shakes my soul. It revives the erotic sensibility of a true connoisseur.

Back when I was editing an SM magazine, the contributors, though they had subtle differences in their specific areas of interest, were all people driven by pure passion.

When I, as the editor, tried to hand them their honoraria, "Wait, I get to write about what I love, the way I want, have it published in print, have everyone read it, and get paid for it? I'm so grateful," one contributor said. It was the same with the painters.

There was a time when only such passionate contributors would gather and talk through the night.

I'm sure they still exist today. Just like this artist, Masago Koshino.

2012.12.7

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 204

六十年前の詩

A Poem from Sixty Years Ago

I am a third-rate writer (san-mon).

For those who don't know what "san-mon" means, I'll look it up in the dictionary I have on hand.

"San-mon": The price of three mon coins. An extremely low price. When attached to other words, it conveys meanings such as "cheap," "of low value," or "poor quality." Examples include "ban," "novel," and "writer."

A "san-mon writer" refers to an inferior writer, or is a derogatory term for a writer.

To belittle myself by calling myself a "third-rate writer" or the like feels rather self-deprecating and embarrassing. But deep down, that is truly how I feel.

Even though I feel that way, I've been writing for a long time to make a living, so I do take a little pride in it, and when I'm praised occasionally it makes me happy. It makes me feel as if I've reached the heavens.

In May 2008, Nakahara Rutsu-san of the Sex Industry Museum wrote an essay titled "Another Side of Nureki Chimuo: A Life of Frenzied Writing" for the "Commentary" section of my sixth paperback book, which was published in quick succession by Kawade Shobo Shinsha around that time and I was truly delighted by it.

It wasn't just perfunctory, formulaic praise. She had painstakingly read through my past writings (which, if nothing else, are incredibly numerous) and I was deeply grateful for that.

I was so moved by Nakahara Rutsu-san's "Commentary" that I felt I would gladly take the reins of this person's horse and, as a mere servant, die in battle right in front of the horse if war were to break out.

I reread it over and over again and it filled my heart with warmth. While I felt a bit embarrassed that the praise might be excessive, I was deeply grateful from the bottom of my heart.

In particular, the brilliance of the few lines Nakahara Rutsu-san wrote at the very end of this “Commentary” still captivates me to this day.

“... The reason why ‘Nureki’s Kinbaku Diary,’ included in this book, ‘Bondage: As Long as I Live,’ resonates so realistically with enthusiasts is not merely due to the meticulously rendered details or the skillful writing alone, just as with the numerous novels I’ve briefly introduced so far. A work that deeply explores its author’s world of pleasure resonates with readers who share the same vibrations of pleasure, conveying the softness of pale skin, the sweet fragrance rising richly in the air, the moist texture to the touch, the suppleness of the wrists, and the ecstasy and rapture that feel as if the blood is surging backward throughout the body.”

I was both surprised and filled with admiration for Nakahara-san’s flexible sensibility as a writer, which led her to describe my clumsy writing as “the suppleness of the wrists.” This commentary on my novel has become something I will never forget for the rest of my life.

Now, four years later, a new reader has emerged who is reading and evaluating my past novels from a slightly different perspective and standpoint.

It is Mr. Akiyoshi Otaguro, who frequently appears in this “Talking Theater.”

(This is a pseudonym I gave him, and partway through, I began writing his surname as “Akiyoshi (秋良)” instead of “Akiyoshi (明良).” It’s closer to his real name. However, in a manuscript he recently sent me, his signature reads “Akiyoshi (秋良).” I suppose he prefers “Akiyoshi (秋良)” to “Akiyoshi (明良).” Therefore, I will refer to him as “Akiyoshi (秋良)” from now on.)

I realized that Mr. Otaguro has been meticulously and sincerely examining my intellectual history, from the past to the present, as well as all of my works.

As I approach the advanced age of eighty-three and have become quite senile, he gave my forehead a sharp tap with his folding fan, awakening my half-dead brain.

I wrote “intellectual history of the past” somewhat grandly, but this is not merely the past.

He has dragged my writings out from beyond the memories of a time long, long ago, memories that I myself had completely forgotten and cast aside.

I was stunned.

In 1952 (sixty years ago), my poem had been published in a monthly magazine called “Jinsei Techo” (Life Notebook), published by Bunri Shoin, a publishing house located in Kikui-cho, Shinjuku, and Mr. Otaguro had managed to track it down.

I will transcribe that poem here.

The Death of a Young Woman

Haru-chan

Even after you drew your last breath,
Even after you were taken to the morgue
The chamber pot and toilet you used
Are still left there, abandoned in the corner of the bathroom

How much pain must you have been in?

Haru-chan

Your voice, struggling to endure the pain
Could be heard all the way to my hospital room across the hall
Your broken, choked cries calling for the nurse
Squeezed my heart every night

“We’re short staffed,

So please don’t call us too often”

An elderly nurse

Hurled those words at you with a sharp tone
And I trembled with seething rage
Every time I heard them

Using a dirty toilet

And having to ask a nurse to help with that

Haru-chan

Since you’re a woman, and a young woman at that
How agonizing it must have been
Your death face, frozen in agony
Spoke volumes about it

And tonight, I can hear it again

That deafening roar

That made you cover your ears in sheer madness

That piercing

Sound of a fighter jet in a steep dive.

Amid the foreign roar of explosions, gritting my teeth
I think

We tuberculosis patients think
About your death, about the reason for your death
And about those who killed you
About them, those who, in this hospital where we cannot move
Are choking the very throat of this place
Kicking us straight from our beds into a cold grave
Those hateful enemies of ours.

Haru-chan
The urinal and chamber pot you left behind
Are once again tonight
Emitting a dull glow in the corner of the bathroom

Of course, I wrote this poem under my real name. The year, 1952, was Showa 27, and I was twenty-two years old.

The following year, that is, in the November 1953 issue of "Kitan Club," I published a short story titled "The Traveling Actor of Pleasure and Torment" under the pen name Aoyama Mieyoshi. This was the first novel for which I received a writing fee.

During that time, I was also writing other pieces, such as anti-war poetry. At the same time, however, I was the kind of person who had begun writing SM novels.

Mr. Akiyoshi Otaguro, naturally knowing my real name, was the one who tracked down this poem.

"I thought it might be someone else with the same name, but I decided to bring a copy anyway so I could show it to you," Mr. Otaguro said.

"That's my poem, no doubt about it. It brings back memories. You did a great job finding it," I replied.

I was sitting across from Mr. Otaguro at a coffee shop near my workplace.

He had found a poem I wrote sixty years ago, perhaps in another magazine, and made a copy to bring to me.

I plan to write about it next time.

2013.2.3

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百五回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 205

喫茶店「白蘭」で

At the “Hakuran” Coffee Shop

Two months ago, no, even long before that, when we passed by, Rakka-san had shown interest in the old-fashioned atmosphere of that coffee shop's facade and said, “I'd like to go inside.”

I grunted and shook my head, making it clear that I didn't want to go in. Then we quickly walked right past the shop.

It's a coffee shop located on the second floor of a corner building that looks as if it were built right after the war, that is, sixty or seventy years ago, a building that's far too dilapidated. To put it dramatically, it's half ruined.

Just by looking at it from the outside, I can sense the dark, stagnant atmosphere inside and the taste of that thick, murky coffee.

I wrote “the shop's facade,” but from the street, all you can see are the old-fashioned decorative elements on the second floor windows. A sign bearing the shop's name, “Hakuran,” hangs next to the window. I can see the upper bodies of the customers sitting by the window.

There is a wooden staircase right next to the street, and to the left of the entrance is an old-fashioned, weathered display window.

I don't dislike this kind of atmosphere. In fact, I rather like it.

More than whether I like it or not, I was born in the working class district and raised in its slums.

Because of that, I knew all too well the “flavor” of coffee shops with this kind of atmosphere.

So, I said to Rakka-san, “When you go up those wooden stairs, the first thing that hits you, even before the smell of coffee, is the pungent smell of tomato ketchup sizzling in a frying

pan as they stir-fry spaghetti. The coffee is absolutely awful. And the vinyl-covered, sticky chairs have holes patched up with duct tape.”

But she got more and more excited, at times even gasping, saying in a tone like a spoiled child, “Wow, I’d love to go in there.”

Over the past few years, she and I have gotten off at this JR station more than a dozen times, passing by that coffee shop located at the entrance to a shopping district that still retains the atmosphere of a postwar black market.

Even though it’s just old-fashioned, lacking any real charm and giving off a somewhat shady, dingy vibe, every time we walk by she says “I want to go in” and I shake my head.

However, on this day, after we’d finished what we’d come to this town to do, on our way back to the station four hours later, it suddenly occurred to me: “That’s right, let’s stop by that cafe today.”

That would fulfill Rakka-san’s long-held wish from the past few years. I decided to grant her that wish.

No, it’s not that grand. Calling it her “long-held wish” is an overstatement. For her, it’s probably just a casual thing. A shop that catches her eyes and piques her curiosity every time she walks by.

To begin with, the reason she and I came to this town was to see a play. That’s all there is to it.

We took the train to see the play, met at the station, and walked through the town’s row of shabby, old-fashioned shops that seemed stuck in a bygone era.

The play that had captured my and Rakka-san’s hearts and wouldn’t let go was inside a building located down the street to the right, after passing through a shopping district that resembled a black market.

Yes, the reason I thought “Let’s stop by that coffee shop on the way home today” was probably because I had a feeling that we might not be coming back to this town again.

On my way home after watching the nearly four-hour play, I had the chance to exchange a few words with an actor named Terushi, who was standing there to see the audience off.

“What’s wrong? You seem to have lost your energy,” I said, standing right in front of him and speaking to him out of the blue.

For some reason, the unexpected shock I felt at his reply and the urge I felt to climb the stairs to that second-floor coffee shop, “Hakuran,” are somehow connected in my mind.

In a sense, Terushi’s reply to me at that moment was what prompted me to head up to “Hakuran.”

No, I said to Terushi, “No, the whole troupe’s energy is flagging.”

Depending on the situation, that should have been a rather rude criticism.

But he responded honestly, replying immediately in a low, quiet voice.

“I know. It’s cancer. My spleen is bad. I really should be hospitalized.”

My heart sank and I groaned.

Right next to me, Rakka-san was listening to that as well.

“That’s terrible,” I said, but I couldn’t find the words to say anything else. The shock was too great.

I seem to recall saying something like, “Please take care of yourself.”

Rakka-san, standing nearby, said something along the lines of “This person really loves your performances.”

By “this person,” she meant me.

Since he was still wearing his stage makeup, I couldn’t quite make out his complexion, but I think his expression was indeed somber.

Terushi is officially the troupe leader. There is another troupe leader in this company, Terushi’s biological older brother, but even he lacked his usual vigor and charm.

Naturally, if the troupe leader falls ill to the point of needing hospitalization, it would affect the morale of the entire troupe of fifteen or sixteen members. Terushi is a popular actor. Come to think of it, both Rakka-san and I had come here specifically to see Terushi.

Speechless, I walked away from him. I’d spoken with him for only two or three minutes.

But I couldn’t get him out of my head.

Complex, surging waves churned within my heart, and to distract myself from them I found myself climbing the stairs to “Hakuran,” located on the way back to the station.

What possible connection could there be between learning of Terushi's illness and the coffee at "Hakuran?"

Just because Terushi had cancer and his performances on stage had lost their sparkle, what does that have to do with me? I asked myself these questions over and over.

There shouldn't be any connection at all, should there?

For one thing, this was the first time I'd ever exchanged a word with Terushi.

Until then, I had been nothing more than one of the many audience members who came to the troupe's plays.

I'd never once given him a tip. I'm poor so even if I wanted to I couldn't afford to tip the actors.

I'd never even sent him a fan letter.

However, when they performed in the Tokyo area, Rakka-san invited me and I went to see them twice in a row.

As an audience member, I never did anything to stand out. I was just one of the many spectators. To him, my existence must be practically nonexistent.

If I had to describe it, I suppose my impression on him was that of a mysterious, middle-aged man with a potbelly (that's me) who occasionally appeared in the audience alongside a young beauty (Rakka-san).

So why, just because I approached him, did he talk so openly and naturally about what's important to him?

First I was deeply moved by that, and then I was even more shocked by the gravity of what he revealed.

After the play ended, we parted ways with Terushi, who had seen us off, and Rakka-san and I headed for the station. We were on our way home.

"Are we taking the usual route?" I asked her.

"Of course," she replied firmly.

"I really like this," I murmured.

That narrow alley she loved ran along the back side of the main street we'd walked on the way there.

On both sides of the narrow, dark, winding alley, low-ceilinged, shack-like cheap bars were packed tightly together.

It's a neighborhood even more steeped in the colors and smells of that era than the main street, where cheap establishments with their doors and windows wide open, belching out smoke from grilled offal, are haphazardly lined up one on top of the other, preserving the atmosphere of a postwar black market.

The second floors of most of these bars seem to be occupied by shops offering massages, hand rubs, foot rubs, and body scrubs, with signs crammed together everywhere. The buildings themselves look rather shady.

Facing the street are narrow, steep wooden staircases leading to the entrances, with women of unknown nationality dressed in dresses standing nearby. They lure drunken patrons with an intonation distinct from Japanese.

Since I'm walking right behind Rakka-san, those women don't call out to me.

"Hakuran" is located on the second floor of the building on the left, at the end of that alley, which exudes a stimulating yet slightly frightening, decadent beauty, leading out to the street in front of the station.

Over the past few years, Rakka-san has expressed interest in going there many times and suggested we go in, but I've always shaken my head and refused, precisely because that cafe is located right in the heart of that kind of neighborhood. The truth is, I'm actually a very timid person. To me, it looks like the entrance to the underworld.

No, now is not the time to be describing such a scary alley.

What kind of feelings have Rakka-san and I had as we've continued to watch the actor Terushi and the plays performed by the troupe he belongs to? I must write about that.

To put it simply, their performances possess a decadent beauty, like a mud painting, that's utterly captivating and imbued with a distinct local flavor that cannot be experienced anywhere else.

They are probably not even aware of this themselves. The fact that they perform without being aware of it is what makes it interesting. It's amazing. It's fun. If I don't write about this now, you won't understand the state of mind in which I (and Rakka-san) were left reeling by his illness.

I'll start by writing about the cheer Rakka-san let out when she pushed open the door of the "Hakuran" coffee shop after climbing the old wooden stairs that creaked with every step.

Just as I predicted, the moment the door opened, the lukewarm, tomato-ketchup-scented steam from the Napolitan pasta inside the cafe hit my face in a wave. I'll note that much first.

2013.3.1

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百六回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 206

平手造酒の最期

Hirate's Final Moments

I had Rakka-san read the script for the previous episode of this "Talking Theater."

"Back then, did Terushi tell the Sensei that his illness was cancer?" she asked me.

By "sensei," she meant me. I'm certainly no sensei to her, but for some reason, she's been calling me that out of habit for as long as I can remember.

"He did. He said he had cancer and his spleen was bad. He said he'd have to be hospitalized and have surgery, so I was really shocked," I replied.

If it had just been a problem with his pancreas, I wouldn't have been so shocked. He said that to me while pressing his right hand against his stomach.

"It didn't sound like 'cancer' to me. I heard 'pancreas,' though," she said.

It was a conversation with her over the phone, not a face-to-face chat. She was supposed to have been at work at the time.

After the play ended, during the curtain call, I approached Terushi, who had come down from the stage and was standing there still in his makeup and costume, and spoke to him. Rakka-san was standing a little ways off to my left.

There was still a buzz of conversation from the other audience members around us and his voice was low and hard to make out.

But to my ears, it sounded like "cancer."

His expression was listless and somber. I didn't sense even the slightest hint of a joke or lighthearted banter.

That's why I was genuinely shocked. But no matter how shocked I was, there was nothing I could do about it.

Both Rakka-san and I only get to see their plays a few times a year. At most, we're irresponsible patrons who fill just two seats in the audience for two or three days a year, hardly what you'd call loyal fans. I'm not saying this to put myself down, but we're no different from passersby.

He must know that, of course.

Still, it's true that when they came to this town, Rakka-san and I both took multiple trains from our respective homes and spent time traveling to see their performance. Even so, compared to the fans who lavishly stuff cash gifts into their pockets, we're still closer to being mere passersby. Both she and I know that their livelihood is supported by those cash gifts. And yet I said, "You've been losing your edge lately."

It was a blunt, even rude and irresponsible criticism. He nodded quietly, saying, "I know," with such sincerity and humility that I, too, was genuinely moved by his character.

And I could tell that Rakka-san, just like me, was also moved by his reaction.

"This man, he really likes your acting. He says it's the best of all the plays that come here," Rakka-san said to Terushi from beside me. I was surprised, as I'd always thought of her as a reserved person who wouldn't say things like that. Terushi turned his gaze toward her and bowed his head slightly.

The "this person" she was referring to was me. Of course, I'm not the only one who likes his plays. She, in fact, liked his troupe even more than I did.

To put it bluntly, I come to see Terushi's troupe's plays because she drags me along.

Terushi's charm, to put it simply, lies in the indescribable air of decadence that seeps from his very being.

It's not something he consciously tries to project, it's more like a natural scent that's part of who he is.

He holds the position of Artistic Director of this troupe alongside his older brother (who appears to be his biological brother), Shingo (as printed on the flyer).

The audience has, without even realizing it, grown accustomed to this dual-leader structure. Or rather, they've been conditioned to accept it. But come to think of it, even at Shinkokugeki, Ryutaro Tatsumi and Shogo Shimada are effectively the leaders.

Actors belonging to theater companies of this type almost universally take on female roles on stage, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

They play female roles, act, and dance. It makes one wonder if, in this world, an actor isn't considered qualified unless they can take on a female role.

In their cross-dressing, I sense a kind of perverse quality that transcends the tradition of onnagata established on the kabuki stage. It seems they express female eroticism by exaggerating it further and adding a touch of coquettishness. Yet there is nothing vulgar about it.

In other words, it is more realistic and beautiful than traditional onnagata. It is coquettish.

Watching from the audience, I noticed that Shingo, the older brother and troupe leader, has more refined features than Terushi. He is beautiful whether playing a leading man or a female role. He is also a skilled actor.

Both brothers are tall. The older brother is a typical handsome man, but Terushi has a hooked nose and a slightly long, narrow chin. Moreover, he has an underbite.

He has the kind of face that's perfectly suited for playing strong-willed, seemingly spiteful characters. Even when wearing female makeup, his hooked nose with its distinct ridges and his protruding, pointed chin remain unmistakable. At first glance, his face doesn't inspire much warmth.

And yet, he sometimes received more tips and gifts passed directly from the audience onto the stage than his older brother, a handsome man who charms everyone.

I suspect that such popularity stems from the fact that the audience is unconsciously captivated and drawn to an eroticism, one that harbors a decadent quality unique to Terushi and absent in other actors, that only he possesses.

Even during the send-off, Terushi always stands quietly two or three steps behind the other actors. He never smiles or tries to be charming.

That's not to say he's aloof. Rather, his demeanor is reserved, like that of a timid, shy person.

There is a scene where the troupe members sit on stage in their natural state and deliver their opening remarks, that is, their greetings. The older brother, who serves as the troupe leader, is full of charm and talks a lot, but the younger brother remains in that reserved position and speaks very little. He gives the impression that he doesn't want to speak unless it's part of

the play's script. You could even call him unfriendly. It seems as though he is shirking his responsibilities as the troupe leader.

However, there's a catch.

When he takes on a role, he changes completely and becomes bold.

There's a scene I'll never forget.

This troupe performs a dance show at the end of their performances. They dance only the climaxes of well-known plays as a treat for the audience.

About a year ago (or maybe it's been two years now), Terushi played the role of Hirate Zoshu in "Tenpo Suikoden." Naturally, this was the scene depicting "Hirate's Final Moments," the confrontation between Sasagawa and Iioka on the banks of the Tone River, as depicted in rakugo and rokkoku storytelling.

It is a tragic scene in which Hirate Zoshu, once hailed as a prodigy at Chiba Shusaku's dojo but who fell into ruin because of his drinking, ends up as a yakuza bodyguard and, further weakened by severe consumption, fights to the death for Sasagawa Shigezo, to whom he owed a debt of gratitude.

The tall, hook-nosed Terushi, with his sharp cheekbones, looks perfectly at home in the casual kimono of a ronin, his hair grown out in a sakayaki¹³ style and his tall feathers withered.

After deftly cutting down several of Iioka's henchmen (this troupe excels at swordplay), Hirate retreats offstage to the left while coughing violently, only to reappear on stage once more.

The Iioka gangsters, brandishing their long wakizashi, surround him all at once.

The ailing Hirate is already exhausted and has no strength left to fight.

Seeing this, the boss Iioka Sukegoro, played by the senior troupe leader, emerges from atop the earthen embankment on the stage right. And so, the final showdown between the sword master Hirate Zoshu and Iioka Sukegoro begins.

However, Boss Sukegoro suddenly took on the face of the senior troupe leader, Shingo, and said, "Ah, here we go, here we go! Watch out, you're going to get your costume dirty!"

Not only his face, but his voice and tone had also reverted to his true self. Then, as his younger brother, the stage director, approached him with his long sword drawn he backed away as if frightened.

¹³ A shaven pate required of the samurai of the early Edo period.

At that moment, I realized what was happening.

Readers may find this hard to believe, but I had already anticipated every single exchange that would unfold on stage from that point on.

And just as I had foreseen, the play unfolded exactly as I had imagined.

After briefly hiding offstage to the left, Terushi returned with his mouth full of red liquid, blood makeup, and reappeared on stage. Hirate Zoshu's cheek was clearly swollen and rounded.

"I'm going to spit it out! I'm going to spit it out! Watch out!"

Ilioka Sukegoro, the senior actor, spoke these words, breaking from his lines. As he spoke, he gestured with his hand to stop the henchmen who were about to attack, pushing them away from Hirate.

Furthermore, the elder stage director turned to the younger stage director, waved the palm of one hand sideways, and said with a laugh, "Stop it, hey, stop it."

In response, the younger stage director also chuckled slightly and shook his head. It was a mischievous expression. That's right, for Terushi, this was a kind of prank. Though it was a prank, it made for excellent theater, perfectly fitting for "Hirate's Final Moments."

Here, the wandering swordsman Hirate Zoshu is slain by Sukegoro, the boss of the gamblers. Suffering from severe consumption (tuberculosis), Hirate fights a large number of enemies, grows exhausted, is finally cut down, and, with his body pierced by several bamboo spears, dies while coughing up blood.

At that very moment, if he dramatically spits out the fake blood he's been holding in his mouth with a loud gush, it creates a powerful and cool theatrical moment. The audience gasps in surprise and can't help but applaud.

However, in this troupe, there's no need to go that far with realism. All he has to do is act out a painful, wheezing cough and tear at his chest as if coughing up blood. That's all it takes.

Troupes in this genre must change both their kyogen skits and dance performances every single month. The dance show "Hirate's Last Moments" is a production that can never be performed again in this town.

If you spit out fake blood, your costume gets dirty first of all. You have to wash it and let it dry. It's a lot of trouble.

More importantly, spitting fake blood all over the place stains the stage.

While stains on costumes can be washed out, if the stage is stained with red fake blood, cleaning it up afterward is a huge hassle.

Even after wiping away the red sticky substance, stains remain. The costumes belong to the actors, but the stage belongs to the theater owner. The theater owner hates it when the stage gets dirty. Restoring it to its original condition seems like it would take even more effort than washing the costumes.

Of course, Terushi must have been well aware of all this. Even knowing that, Terushi still wanted to do it.

And so, he did.

The troupe leader leaped backward to avoid the red splatter hitting him. As he leaped, he slashed sideways at Hirate Zoshu.

Hirate writhed in agony, let out a death cry that sounded almost pleasurable, struck a dramatic pose, and the curtain fell.

That's right.

Dying on stage, especially being killed, feels good. You want to writhe in agony more than necessary, more than the script calls for. This desire is, in fact, similar to a sexual impulse. I've experienced it myself.

That's why I understand Terushi's feelings so well. The moment he steps offstage and takes a mouthful of the fake blood he's prepared, the instant he's about to spit it out already flashes before his eyes and he's overcome by a kind of euphoria.

That sense of ecstasy comes through to me as well. And, to put it bluntly, this sensation is also reaching Rakka-san. It is precisely because it reaches her that she takes an interest in Terushi as an actor and resonates with the decadence that flows through this troupe's performances.

Furthermore, I am astonished by, and find myself feeling a sense of intimacy with, the shrewdness of this troupe which incorporates even what might be called backstage gags into their performances without hiding them.

"Hirate's Final Moments" is a dance show lasting no more than fifteen minutes, but this troupe also performs a play titled "Tabaru-zaka."

It dramatizes the fierce battles of the well-known Seinan War, and features a harrowing scene in which the characters commit seppuku one after another, a performance that seems to have left a strong impression on Rakka-san.

If I were to describe that play here and now, it would take too long and stray even further from the theme of this installment, so I'll save it for a later opportunity.

I had intended to write about "Hirate's Final Moments" more briefly and concisely, but it ended up getting rather long. Even so, I feel as though I haven't even covered half of what I want to say about the mysterious, decadent charm of this troupe.

Why did I, still reeling from the shock of Terushi's diagnosis of cancer, invite Rakka-san to a coffee shop called "Hakuran?"

I was supposed to write about that, but I ended up going off on a tangent halfway through.

I had always just walked past that place, and even when Rakka-san said "I'm interested in that shop. I'd like to go inside," I would shake my head and refuse. So why, after hearing about Terushi's illness, did I suddenly feel like climbing those old wooden stairs? To be honest, I don't really know myself.

I'm writing this now, hoping that perhaps I'll figure something out as I go along.

No, wait. It's not that I don't know. I mustn't beat around the bush. I do know.

Whether I'm writing about the interior of that dilapidated old coffee shop or about Terushi, it all stems from my determination to write about Rakka-san, the feeling that I must write about her.

And in trying to write about Rakka-san, I am, in the end, trying to write about myself. A record of my own life.

2013.3.20

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百七回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 207

隅田川をさかのぼった日

The Day I Traveled Up the Sumida River

First, I'd like to explain something.

There's a reason why I've used somewhat confusing katakana names like Terushi and Shingo, and why I've kept the details of the circumstances surrounding their activities vague rather than using easily recognizable proper nouns.

There are people (and it's safe to say most of them) who, just by looking at the commonly used names, immediately conjure up the conventional, popular stereotypes circulating in society and fall prey to facile prejudices.

It is my hostility toward such frivolous people, who refuse to see the reality of these individuals with their own eyes, that compels me to write this way. I don't want those philistines to understand who they really are.

Even if I make a sincere effort to help them understand, it usually ends in futility.

Some even grimaced and said, as if spitting out the words, that they had seen something terrible.

Yet within that "terrible thing" they speak of exists something wonderful that sparkles, but there's no point in explaining that to such philistines. They wouldn't understand anyway.

(Ah, so this person's capacity was only this limited after all.)

I feel disheartened and think, "I can't continue associating with this person any further."

No matter how much you show it to them or explain it to them in the most detailed and careful way possible, those who don't understand simply won't get it. That's right, in that respect, it's similar to the world of SM.

In fact, many scenes common to SM psychology appear on Terushi and Shingo's stage (to be honest, both Rakka-san and I always go to see them with our hearts racing, hoping to encounter just such scenes).

To be even more blunt, compared to today's commercial SM products, which clumsily imitate the form without any regard for the deep psychology of enthusiasts, Terushi and Shingo present us with hot scenes that perfectly resonate with our sensibilities as enthusiasts, making our hearts ache with that familiar pang.

(What I find wonderful is that they act out these scenes within their stories without being consciously aware that they're doing SM at all.)

Well, what do you think? Rather than SM that's proudly displayed with a "Look, this is SM, isn't it amazing?" attitude, it's the SM scenes that are performed suddenly and effortlessly, without any hint of it, that really send shivers down a fan's spine.

What do you think? Do you understand, everyone involved in the SM industry?

Huh? You don't get it?

Hmm, well, I suppose that's to be expected.

It's okay if you don't get it.

That's just how the world works. If you did understand it, that would actually be a problem.

Why is it a problem? Because it would affect the rarity and value of the genuine SM experience. It would mean that what's rare would no longer be rare.

How could we possibly let something so precious and rare, something we hold close to our hearts and can never let go of for the rest of our lives, be so easily replicated? Don't you think? We have a little pride of our own, after all.

Oh, I've gone off on a tangent.

I need to get back to the topic of Terushi.

So, the tension I felt when I showed them to Rakka-san for the first time, it was truly overwhelming. What if, after showing them to her, she said "You've shown me something awful" or something like that? What if she showered me with words of contempt?

My trust in her, or rather, her trust in me, might be severed right then and there.

It wouldn't mean that all trust would be severed, but the thickest thread connecting us would snap clean through.

So on that day, at that moment, that is, once I found myself in that situation, the entire time I was traveling from Ariake Pier at Tokyo Big Sight aboard a Tokyo Waterfront Line steamboat, sailing up the Sumida River via the Ariake Canal to reach them, I was constantly nervous and worried.

(I'd like to explain why I suddenly ended up at Big Sight and boarded a steamboat, but since writing that out would make this too long, I'll omit it here. This episode at Big Sight was also a decisive incident that vividly illustrates the essence of Rakka-san's sensibilities and way of life, so I'll write about it later.)

It was six or seven years ago that I took a boat from Tokyo Bay and traveled upstream on the Sumida River.

On that day, the person I asked Rakka-san to look at was neither Terushi nor Shingo. It was neither Takeya nor Kyoka. It was neither Narunojo nor Kyonosuke. It was neither Sentaro nor Noru, nor George, nor Tsuyoshi, nor Ryotaro.

I don't remember exactly who it was, but in any case, she was moved after seeing him just once. I don't think it was sarcasm or mockery. It was pure emotion.

She felt the same kind of emotion, and to the same degree, that I usually get from them. It must certainly have been a kind of culture shock for her.

I think she simply couldn't believe that something like this existed in this world. She was born and raised in an environment completely unrelated to things like this.

As for me, I've been breathing and living under the same roof as things like this. I think that's why I have this inescapable sense of inferiority.

What made me happy was that she embraced their unique sense of SM with warmth, without a shred of disgust or contempt.

It is actually very difficult to accurately describe the emotional reality and psychology between her and me in this regard. My clumsy writing skills are simply not enough to do it justice. But I cannot help but write about it.

From that point on, she came to love their performances even more than I did. If I hesitated even slightly, she would slap my butt and drag me over to them.

She and I would enjoy the scent of SM wafting from their stage, drawing our hearts closer together and pressing our bodies tightly against one another.

I'd like to write about this in greater detail and with more precision but my limited expressive ability prevents me from describing it well, which is a great regret. Still, I've written about it, albeit only a tiny fraction, in this "Talking Theater" and other manuscripts.

And now, I'll talk about Terushi's recent illness.

Even though I've been rooting for him with such deep feelings, hearing that he's sick, there's nothing I can do for him. No matter how much I talk about this and that, as a poor and powerless person there's nothing I can do. It's a heartless world. Or perhaps, it's a world of impermanence.

Perhaps the reason I walked into "Harukan," a coffee shop I wasn't particularly keen on, was to distract myself from the shock of Terushi's illness.

2013.3.22

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百八回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 208

いま八十三歳の私のプロフィール

My Profile: I am Now 83 Years Old

Dear ○○○○-sama. This is in response to your message.

I have indeed received, addressed to me, Nureki Chimuo, an envelope labeled “Japan Post Letter Pack Light” containing a beautifully prepared document, twenty-four sheets of A4-size paper with small text neatly arranged.

Inside was a letter from you, typed on a word processor.

“I would like to discuss this matter with Nureki Sensei,” it stated. However, I am truly sorry, but I am currently tied up with work and it seems unlikely that I will be able to meet your expectations.

I felt it would be rude to simply say I am busy, so I decided to take a look at my schedule for the next few months.

Right now, my desk and my mind are in utter chaos and I've reached a point where even I don't know where to begin, so I thought I'd take this opportunity to try to get things organized a bit.

First, I'll make a quick note of the manuscripts I need to write within the next week starting today.

First, there's the article titled “Dear Editor, This is Nureki Chimuo, Bondage Specialist,” which appears in every issue of the bimonthly magazine “SM Net.” I need to write the twenty-ninth installment of this serialized column.

Next is the essay “Nureki Chimuo's Testament of Obscene Pleasure,” a monthly serial I write for WEB Sniper. The next installment will be the forty-third.

Furthermore, although it's technically my personal website, the title is “Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater.”

For this, Director Nakahara of the Sex Industry Museum takes care of all the tedious computer work, everything from start to finish, except for writing the manuscript itself, and this will be the 208th installment.

Since I know absolutely nothing about computers, I don't use word processors at all. I write all my manuscripts by hand on 400-character manuscript paper. Director Nakahara is the one who formats them for the computer and posts them online.

I started writing this "Talking Theater" six or seven years ago and it has now reached 2,800 pages. Thankfully, a representative from a certain publishing house has offered to compile and publish it as a book, and discussions are currently underway.

Each of the three types of serialized essays mentioned above is about ten pages long per installment. In the early days of "Talking Theater" there were episodes that were nearly twenty pages long.

In 1953 (Showa 28), when I was twenty-three years old, I published a novel in "Kitan Club," Japan's first monthly SM magazine. Since then, for the past sixty years, I have been involved in SM-related work. The essays I mentioned are autobiographical accounts of my childhood, my approach to and thoughts on SM, my experiences, and other topics, all written with great care to avoid causing any inconvenience to the people who have been kind to me.

Apart from these serialized works, I have been writing a full-length biography titled "The Story of Minomura Ko" (working title) for several years now.

To date, I have completed about 350 sheets of 400-character manuscript paper, but this, too, requires a bit more refinement.

This manuscript chronicles the achievements of Minomura Ko, who founded "Kitan Club,"¹⁴ a commercial magazine specializing in SM, in the midst of the chaotic social climate immediately following Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, complete with a chronology, and also includes a record of my own journey.

I have already handed over the manuscript, enough for a single book, to the publisher's editorial department, and I am scheduled to write an additional 300 sheets or more for the second volume. I must now immediately begin compiling the chronologies of Minomura Ko and myself, Nureki Chimuo.

¹⁴ This is a matter of some debate. It's known Minoru Yoshida was the actual founder of Kitan Club, but the issues before Minomura Ko's involvement are not in the Nawa Art archive. In the 1989 documentary "Jo-En: The World of Minomura Ko," directed by Yukimura Haruki, Minomura Ko says that Kitan Club didn't include SM content until he convinced Minoru Yoshida to include it.

The same publisher has been releasing a modest yet solid series titled “Interviews with Publishers,” which has continued for nine volumes to date, and my life story is set to be included in one of the volumes in that series.

At first I said, “I don’t have the background or track record to be called a publisher,” declining the offer. However, after being persuaded again and gradually won over by their enthusiasm, I came to see it as a privilege and mustered the courage to accept.

I am mentally prepared to begin concrete discussions about turning this into a book as soon as our schedules align.

To ensure this book is as substantial as possible, I intend to put my heart and soul into creating an even more detailed and accurate chronology of my own life.

For the time being, I will continue to visit the Sex Industry Museum in Iidabashi and rely on the support of Director Nakahara. Director Nakahara, I know this may be an inconvenience for you, but I would greatly appreciate your continued assistance.

All of the above relates to publishing work but I am also somewhat involved in theater production, which is taking up quite a bit of my time as well.

In fact, I am currently in the process of writing a play called “Momotaro by the Sea.”

While this has no direct connection to SM, it is an important project for me so I must see it through to completion.

Momotaro, the most famous character in Japanese folklore, accompanied by a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant, comes to the seashore in search of a boat to defeat the ogres living on Ogre Island.

However, the sea has been contaminated by radiation, making it impossible to cross. Not only the sea, but the land as well is gradually being engulfed by the ashes of death.

Before Momotaro and his companions, standing on the seashore, characters from fairy tales, such as Kintaro of Mount Ashigara, the monkey and crab from “The Battle of The Monkey and the Crab,” and Issun-boshi and the princess, appear one after another.

The area is shrouded in the ashes of death, and the play explores what will become of Momotaro and his companions’ quest to defeat the ogres. I’ve written about thirty pages so far. It’s still unfinished.

Every time I finish writing a scene, this script is copied, and the actors in my theater company read it aloud during a script reading.

I'm currently thinking about how to end this play, whether to leave even a glimmer of hope at the very end, or to bring about the extinction of humanity. When it's finished, I intend to appear in the play myself as an actor. I'm a show-off, so I always show up for the script readings.

In addition to my activities with this theater company, I also belong to a group dedicated to a certain unique traditional storytelling art form. Not only do I attend the monthly study sessions, but for the past twenty years I've also taken the stage every year to perform.

I seem to have rambled on a bit here. If I'm not careful, writing things like this might make me sound like a foolish old man who's still busy at the age of eighty-three, just bragging about himself.

That's not my intention at all. When you've lived for eighty-three years, nothing you do is worth bragging about and you don't get disappointed even if people speak ill of you.

After all, I'll be dead soon and then it'll all be over.

Speaking of bragging, for the past few years I've been indulging in what is, for me, truly ideal SM pleasure play, and I'm currently right in the thick of it. Though it's only a tiny part of it, I occasionally confess even the embarrassing details honestly in the three series of essays I mentioned earlier.

I would be most grateful if you would read them.

I believe that this SM-style pleasure play, which will likely be the last of my life (though I detest the frivolous term play and prefer not to use it), is the pure and supreme form of play, free from financial or commercial bargaining, that I have finally discovered after pursuing it tirelessly for the past eighty years.

That is why I spare no time or energy for this ongoing experience alone. Even at the expense of my other work, I lavish my time and energy on it.

With that, I have at length explained my personal circumstances, which may not meet your expectations, without regard for any potential offense.

Dear ○○○○-sama. I would be most grateful if you could understand this, even just a little.

2013.3.26

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百九回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 209

やさしく、あたたかく

Gently, Warmly

The ability to see the endearing human nature that lies hidden behind the negative, the delicate sensibility and keen eye that allow one to perceive truths, subtle charm, humor, and even beauty, things found nowhere else, within what everyone else frowns upon and dismisses as ugly.

Minomura Ko was a man who possessed that sensibility.

In the previous installment of this series, I wrote a reply to Mr. ○○○○, who had called and written to me. Mr. ○○○○ was a complete stranger to me.

In that reply, I touched upon the work I am currently engaged in, and Minomura Ko's name came up.

Since Minomura Ko's presence has been deeply and significantly intertwined with my work up to this point, this was only natural.

Although this wasn't the case at the beginning of my reply to Mr. ○○○○, before I knew it I found myself writing while vaguely picturing Minomura Ko in my mind.

Before long, Minomura Ko's face, the sound of his voice, the way he walked, and the image of him working side by side with me at our desks came vividly back to me.

And in connection with Minomura Ko, Director Nakahara's name also appeared in my reply to Mr. ○○○○.

Like Minomura Ko, Director Nakahara is also closely connected to my work.

However, Director Nakahara did not appear on the scene until several years after Minomura Ko's death. The two never met.

Suddenly, it dawned on me. Ah, I see. That's right. That's exactly it. There's no doubt about it.

The way they approach SM is the same. The warmth of Minomura Ko and the warmth with which Director Nakahara immerses herself in SM are one and the same.

Even though I say they're the same, there are differences between men and women so naturally there are differences in how they express their passion and the ways they show their devotion. But to my sensibilities, the two are strikingly similar.

When it was decided that "Abument," the monthly SM magazine Minomura-san and I had launched, would be discontinued due to poor sales, Minomura took the original artwork for illustrations that had already been published in "Uramado" and "Suspense Magazine," one by one, and, cradling each piece tenderly in both hands with an expression as if he were about to cry, placed them into a cardboard box.

Those boxes, containing hundreds of original illustrations, were eventually destined to be moved to the warehouse of the publisher that put out "SM Select."

"Abument" was devastated, and the editorial department had no choice but to disband. We, who had been editing "Uramado," were under the relentless scrutiny of those in power. The original illustrations were destroyed in a fire. All of them were lost.

Decades later, in a room at the Sex Industry Museum in Fukagawa Sagacho, I can still vividly picture Director Nakahara, wearing cotton work pants, alone, carefully placing each old SM magazine, one by one, into cardboard boxes with tender care from a mountain of them piled high. (She wasn't the Director at the time; the Director was no longer there. She was the only one present.) That image still resurfaces behind my eyelids, overlapping with Minomura Ko.

This took place before the museum moved to its current location in Iidabashi. At that time, no clear decision had been made regarding whether to keep the Sex Industry Museum open.

"No," she said, her eyes shining, standing tall and resolute, "I want to keep it going no matter what, and I will."

Minomura Ko was a pure and honest person. He never once betrayed me. I was always relying on him.

Director Nakahara is even more pure-hearted than Minomura Ko, an honest person who never lies. Sometimes her honesty is almost frightening. Furthermore, she possesses a tenacious mental strength that Minomura Ko lacked.

(Minomura Ko was prone to tears and would sometimes let his emotions get the better of him.)

I'm not joking. Women are stronger than men. They're more resilient. Men are creatures whose bodies and hearts are more fragile than women's.

And Director Nakahara possesses the sensitivity to see the lovable human nature lurking behind defeat, a delicate sensibility and keen gaze that allow her to perceive the truth of humanity, a "subtle charm," tenderness, and even beauty in things that everyone else frowns upon and dismisses as ugly. In short, she is a woman who shares the same sensibility as Minomura Ko.

Wait, what am I writing here? This is no time to be sketching a portrait of Director Nakahara.

I am truly sorry, but the phone call and fax I received suddenly and without warning from Mr. ○○○○, followed by the twenty-four color-printer statements of purpose mailed to me the next day, served as a veritable cautionary tale for me.

It reminded me of Minomura Ko's kindness and warmth when interacting with SM enthusiasts.

I also reaffirmed just how deeply Director Nakahara understands and empathizes with these enthusiasts, and how kind and warm-hearted she is toward them.

A kind and warm heart is possessed only by those who possess deep understanding, strong will, and a spirit of tolerance.

Though my efforts may be modest, I must fulfill my role in conveying Minomura Ko's will to Director Nakahara and serving as the bridge between them.

Compared to these two, I am, unfortunately, a philistine. I am impure, insincere, and quite a liar.

Nevertheless, as someone caught between the generations of Minomura Ko and Director Nakahara, and who knows both of them, I must do my best to serve as a bridge between them.

A bridge that conveys the fact that there is such a thing as gentle, pure, and warm SM, not just for the sake of profit and commercial strategy.

With the intention of becoming that bridge, I must write "The Story of Minomura Ko," who lived a life of gentle SM.

2013.3.28

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百十回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 210

なるほどなるほどなるほど！

I See, I See, I See!

Director Nakahara gave a blunt critique right in front of me of the “Talking Theater” I’d been writing over the past month or two.

“Sensei, please go back to the substance of your early ‘Talking Theater,’ from when you first started writing them.”

“Huh? What? Has my ‘Talking Theater’ changed that much lately? I hadn’t noticed. Wow, really?”

“Go ahead and reread them,” Director Nakahara said with a stern expression. It was a website that had been launched based on her idea and under her guidance.

“Uh-huh, I understand.”

I don’t really think they’ve changed that much, though... I returned to my office, steadied my unsteady legs, a result of my advancing age, and climbed onto my desk.

Then, from among the dozen or so large paper bags hanging high up on the wall, just below the ceiling directly above the desk, I pulled out a bound volume containing issues one through ten of “Talking Theater.”

It may sound like I’m repeating myself, but since all my manuscripts are handwritten, Director Nakahara types them up one by one on a word processor, formats them for the computer, and publishes them for me.

It was also Director Nakahara who went to the trouble of printing them out, folding each sheet of paper, aligning them and binding them, all to create a beautifully bound book.

In terms of character count, that comes to $400 \times 2,800 = 112,000$ characters.

She moved her fingers 112,000 times just for the manuscripts I wrote (though her eyes probably got more tired than her fingers).

I am so grateful. I can't find the words to express my thanks.

I took a booklet, a collection of chapters 1 through 10 of "Talking Theater," a meticulously handcrafted volume where thoughtful attention to detail is evident in every corner, out of my bag for the first time in a long while. When I opened it with both hands, the warmth of its texture made a wave of emotion well up in my chest.

I could sense Director Nakahara's intention to preserve my humble writings as a record of this negative world, as one more piece of reference material for SM enthusiasts.

Even though I wrote it myself, when I hold this booklet in my hands again and see the tireless, soul-pouring effort Director Nakahara put into it, I realize it's a volume I simply cannot take lightly.

(The character "ada" here is written as "徒")

Director Nakahara said to me with a slightly stern expression, "Why don't you read what you wrote back in the early days?"

To be honest, I've already forgotten what I wrote back then. (I'm sorry!)

When I say "the early days," it was quite a long time ago.

So, I opened the volume I'd painstakingly taken down from the ceiling and, feeling a bit timid, began to read.

It's dated August 11, 2007. That means I wrote it six years ago. It must have been during the heat of summer.

...Wow, this is interesting!

I know it sounds silly to praise my own writing so unreservedly, but it really is interesting.

Just look at the youthful energy in this piece!

Was I really writing such interesting, dynamic, and stimulating prose back then?

It's not just entertaining. It has a raw, vivid realism that feels intensely alive, and there are sharp insights that dig deep into the human psyche.

Hmm, Nureki Chimuo, looking at it this way, I realize he's no ordinary guy.

That's what self-praise is all about.

I know. I'm just a boastful, arrogant fool.

But I also fully understood what Director Nakahara was saying.

I see, I see, I see!

That's exactly right.

I see, I see, I see, I see!

...I've been writing about my bondage play with Rakka-san in quite a persistent and detailed manner.

(I absolutely hate this term "play." It's far too simplistic, shallow, vulgar, and trite, but since there's no other suitable expression, I have no choice but to use it.)

What made me think "I see" is that even though the descriptions are quite explicit, that is, blatant, there isn't much of a sense of vulgar eroticism.

Just look at the unclouded brightness of this writing and the light, rhythmic flow of the expression.

Despite the relentless detail, the overall impression is one of subtle, muted tones. It's passionate yet cool-headed. Brilliant.

I'm impressed (yet again, I'm patting myself on the back).

I was reminded once again of something Minoru Yoshida, the editor-in-chief of "Kitan Club" back in the 1950s, once told me.

"No matter what you write, your novels exude a bright romanticism, which serves as a saving grace for a magazine like ours that tends to be rather grim, so please keep writing."

I was reminded of that again.

He also told me, "If you change your pen name, I'll publish as many stories as you want in a single issue," so I got carried away and wrote like crazy. I was twenty-three at the time. This is the origin of my having so many pen names.

From the first to about the tenth chapter of "Talking Theater," it was almost entirely a series of bold and adventurous bondage scenes with Rakka-san.

They are clear, energetic, and at times exhilarating. This clarity might be a reflection of my personality.

Perhaps it's because of this clear-cut personality that I've been able to successfully complete over 6,000 bondage photo shoots to date (come on, now that I've gone this far with self-praise, I might as well say more.)

I see. So this is what she meant by "the early days of 'Talking Theater.'" I nodded in understanding.

Okay. I'll write it. I'll write about what happened with Rakka-san.

Well, in my other serialized story, "Nureki Chimuo's Testament of Obscene Pleasure," Rakka-san still appears frequently, but lately I've been writing about my time with her more in connection with the plays we've seen together. I'm putting more effort into describing the plays than the sessions.

I am actually quite fond of plays, that is, theater. Since that world is more closely tied to reality for me, I can't help but write about plays.

Even when I spend a day out with Rakka-san, our time gets taken up by plays and movies.

But writing is my calling, too. If I'm told to write, I have to write. Isn't it a blessing to still be asked to write?

...All right, it's decided!

This time, without seeing any plays or movies, once we meet at our usual spot let's head straight, without hesitation, to a love hotel!

And let's spend the whole day there, at that love hotel with the hinoki cypress bath!

Why didn't I think of something this simple before? It's because Rakka-san also loves theater and movies. She loves them even more than I do. Whenever an actor she wants to see comes near our territory, her feet just naturally head in that direction.

But the moment we meet at our usual spot this time, I'll say this:

"Today, let's skip Terushi, Shingo, Harunojo, Tsukinosuke, Takeshi, and Sentaro. Let's go straight to a love hotel and be alone together!"

Ah, at my age, what a clueless blockhead I was, unable to understand the feelings of my comrades. What a tasteless person I was. As someone named Nureki Chimuo, I'm ashamed.

...That's the story, Director Nakahara.

Next time, I'll write a scene like that, one that's all about Rakka-san, with no drama.

When it comes to Rakka-san, I'm the kind of person who can't write about it unless I actually do it.

...Please rest assured.

Whether I turn eighty or ninety, as long as I have a single rope, I can spend the whole day dreaming of the Pure Land¹⁵ with her.

Huh? You already know that?

That's right, you did know, didn't you?

There's no way Director Nakahara wouldn't know. Or perhaps you know even better than Rakka-san herself.

After all, you are the director of the Sex Industry Museum, a woman of both intellect and emotion, capable of seeing beauty in ugliness, a woman who possesses both form and substance.

Ah, that's a great suggestion.

Let's do it!

¹⁵ Essentially, the Mahayana Buddhist heaven.

2013.4.15

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百十一回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 211

「年譜」を書く代わりに

Instead of Writing a “Chronology”

Even someone as insignificant as I am occasionally catches someone's eye, and they go out of their way to look up my background, or something like a brief biography, and write about it.

That's sometimes published in magazines and other places in the form of a feature article.

No matter what anyone says, my work is essentially in the service industry, and being featured in any form, and thus coming to the public's attention, is a form of publicity, so I have to be grateful for it. That's what being professional is all about.

I am well aware that I am in a position where I cannot simply refute things even if they are written slightly inaccurately.

That said, since this is a line of work that's easily misunderstood, there are times when I feel annoyed, thinking, “They just don't get it.”

(Of course, since I'm doing something truly unconventional and hard to understand, it's only natural that some people don't get it.)

Conversely, when I come across a piece that clearly understands the nature of my work, it makes me happy.

In Mr. Kyochi Tsuzuki's book, “The Strange Tales of Super-Elderly Japan” (Chikuma Bunko), I, that is, Nureki Chimuo, appear over the course of 50 pages. The author truly captured my spirit and wrote about me very well. I'm grateful. And I'm happy.

The author masterfully selected and highlighted the very points I most wanted to express and convey, drawing from my several published books to date as well as the 2,700 sheets of 400-character manuscript paper's worth of text I've posted on my website.

It truly brings my way of life into sharp relief.

“So that’s it, this is the kind of life I’ve led,” I thought, feeling deeply moved.

Mr. Kyoichi Tsuzuki is a poet.

He has authored many books on his work as a photographer and interviewer, and his energetic activities span a wide range of fields, but at his core he is a poet.

In all of his work I sense an intellect as sharp and polished as a razor’s edge, along with the soul of a poet who loves humanity with an almost unbearable passion.

From the top of his head to the tips of his toes, his poetic spirit is packed into every nook and cranny, as fine as singing sand.

If you don’t believe me, just open his book “Yoroshiku: Contemporary Poetry” (Chikuma Bunko) and see for yourself.

Even someone who has despaired of life and was about to hang themselves would, after reading this book, think “All right, I’ll try to live for another three days or so.” If you can survive those three days, you’ll be able to live until your predetermined lifespan runs out.

Oh, I’ve gone off on a tangent again. Now is not the time to be introducing Mr. Tsuzuki’s book.

There’s also another piece that chronicles my career so far, “The Other Face of Nureki Chimuo: A Life of Fierce Writing.”

This is a text written by Nakahara Rutsu as the “Commentary” to my book “Bondage: As Long as I Live” (Kawade Bunko).

Spanning thirteen pages, it carefully analyzes my work and even touches on aspects of my way of life.

The commentary written by Nakahara Rutsu-san, director of the Sex Industry Museum, records the publishing landscape of SM magazines, including their rise and fall, with remarkable accuracy, clarity, and sincerity, though I am slightly concerned about her excessive praise of my work.

Along with the accuracy of the facts, the vivid intensity of the prose and the richness and sharpness of her sensibility left me with a thrill bordering on awe upon my first reading.

It is a text of such power and substance. To put it dramatically, immediately after reading this essay, I thought, “I’m so glad to be alive!”

Up until then, I had lacked confidence in everything I wrote and my work, mired in feelings of inferiority, was filled with nothing but shame.

At first, I thought Nakahara Rutsu-san's praise for my writing fell into the category of what is commonly known as flattery.

However, as I interacted with Nakahara-san more frequently, I came to realize that she was not the type of person to offer flattery.

Far from flattery, no, she is strict, rigorous, and demanding about absolutely everything!

Her eye for discerning, scrutinizing, and critiquing her subject is razor-sharp. Her tongue cuts straight to the heart with no mercy (especially when the subject is me).

In short, she is a pure and honest person. She is someone who cannot tell a lie.

For someone like me, a naturally frivolous liar, my trust in a person like her only grows deeper and deeper.

Faced with such a principled person, a vulgar person like me...

No, now is not the time to be saying things like this.

I'm currently searching for records of the rise and fall of SM publications, primarily SM magazines. As for why I'm looking into the history of the SM industry now, the reason is exactly as I wrote a few episodes ago in this "Talking Theater" series.

I've been graciously offered the opportunity to be featured in a book series titled "Interviews with Publishers," published by a certain publishing house.

At first, I declined, saying, "I'm no publisher, I'm just a powerless hired editor," but I accepted thanks to the enthusiastic recommendation of the editor in charge.

In preparation for that, and as a reference, I rashly promised to write something like a chronology of my life.

However, I can't write it.

As mentioned earlier, I've always believed that what I've written has no value to the general public. That's why I haven't kept any accurate records.

Even when I occasionally jot down the titles or page counts of my novels in a notebook on a whim it's just a passing fancy, more for fun than anything else (though of course I write with all my might; after all, if I don't write something interesting, I won't make any money).

For someone like me to even think of imitating something a full-fledged writer would do, like compiling a chronology, at this late stage was a mistake from the very beginning. I'm truly ashamed.

In addition to the commentary "The Other Face of Nureki Chimuo: A Life of Fierce Writing" in my book "Bondage: As Long as I Live," published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha in May 2008, there is another compilation of my written works that Director Nakahara Rutsu kindly organized and put together a year earlier, in November 2007.

It is titled "Chronological List of Nureki Chimuo's Works: 1953-1971."

"We put that together at the museum, and we actually handed it over to you six years ago," said Director Nakahara, raising her thin eyebrows and staring at me with her large eyes.

"Huh? Huh? Huh? Did I actually receive something like that?" I was flustered.

"We gave it to you. We definitely gave it to you. Take a good look around your room."

"Well, I'm not the type to dwell on the past, you know. I tend to forget things from before right away."

"What are you talking about? It's a record of your own important work!"

It's scary when she says, "What are you talking about?" Director Nakahara's expression gradually becomes more serious and stern. This woman's mind is structured with a precision far surpassing that of most people. In situations like this, her memory is absolutely flawless. Not a single mistake in a thousand.

"Go look for it thoroughly!" She snapped again. Her eyes were gleaming. It was scary.

"Ah, but you see, my room is a total mess and I have no idea where things I received six years ago have crawled off to!"

It was two years ago that over a dozen photos of my study, bed, bathroom, and other areas were published in the photo section of "Rare Japan: Tales of the Super-Elderly," but now the books are piled three times as high as they were back then. Everything is scattered and chaotic, leaving no room to even set a foot down.

As I bowed my head in a deep apology for having lost the gift she had so kindly given me, Director Nakahara cast a slightly pitying glance my way and nodded with an expression that said, “Well, well, what can you do?”

Then, when we met the next day, she handed me the newly printed copies, neatly tucked into a clear plastic case.

“I’m so sorry. Thank you. Thank you, always!”

I accepted them gratefully. It’s a bit intimidating, but I’m truly grateful. This is the “Chronological List of Works by Nureki Chimuo, 1953-1971,” printed on eleven sheets of A4 paper, densely packed with tiny text.

It’s laid out clearly, accurately, and thoughtfully. Reading this gives me a clear chronological picture of the publishing houses I’ve been involved with over the years.

It is truly a chronology. It even includes a list of my pen names. When I counted them, I was surprised to find there were over thirty. Since each pen name has its own meaning, I have clear memories of the names I chose myself.

“This list is merely the tip of the iceberg of Nureki’s creative activities.”

It even includes this note. That’s right, I have several works that have nothing to do with the Sex Industry Museum.

One more thing. I heard through the grapevine that there’s a section on the internet called “Nureki Chimuo.” It’s filled with all sorts of things and says “Provided by SM Pedia.” I have absolutely no idea how such a section came to exist, but I had them print that out for me as well. Since I don’t own a computer or a cell phone, I have the staff at the Sex Industry Museum handle all these kinds of tasks for me whenever I visit.

However, this “Nureki Chimuo” entry is riddled with errors and is of no use whatsoever.

To give one example, “Enjoji Tatsu” is listed as my pen name, but this is actually the pseudonym Minomura Ko used when writing historical fiction. Since it’s a pen name he’s been using since his days at “Kitan Club,” all my readers should be familiar with it.

To give another example, it states that I, that is, Nureki Chimuo, appeared in the 1946 film “My Father,” directed by Yutaka Abe, but this came as a complete surprise to me. I have absolutely no memory of it. This is exactly what they mean by “out of the blue.”

I don’t know who conducted this research or how, but in this busy world what’s the point of writing such preposterous nonsense? There are plenty of other errors as well, but I suppose I have no choice but to ignore them.

I write "Talking Theater" with the intention of studying creative writing.

Therefore, it is not a journal. It is not what is commonly called fact (though it is truth for me). Consequently, it has no documentary value (and because it lacks this, it is of no use when compiling a chronology).

In the thirteenth installment of "Talking Theater," I wrote, "I'm always, everywhere, just putting on plays." That's right. Everything I write is a play meant to be performed on stage.

(Come to think of it, my late father always referred to plays as "shibaya." All the theater-loving adults living in the working-class neighborhoods of the early Showa era used to say "shibaya." I wonder why plays are called "shibaya." I wish I'd asked him.)

To put it another way, novelists are natural-born liars. You can't become a writer unless you're a liar. Since I'm a third-rate hack, my lies are frivolous. I can only tell shallow, superficial lies.

And so, Akira Kuroda-san, I'll bring "Rare Japan: Tales of the Super-Elderly," "The Other Face of Nureki Chimuo," and "Chronological List of Nureki Chimuo's Works: 1953-1971."

If I bring these three books with me as reference materials, I believe I'll be able to answer most of the questions from whoever is putting the chronology together. What do you think? I believe these three books will serve not just as a substitute for a chronology, but rather as source material.

As for any gaps in the materials, I'll leave that up to you, Kuroda-san.

I have read the introductory essay you wrote for "Selected Detective Novels by Seishi Yokomizo" (published by Ronosha, list price 3,200 yen plus tax). I have complete confidence in your steadfast and tenacious approach, as well as your sincere writing style.

2013.4.25

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百十二回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 212

幻影の街で

In the City of Illusions

Rakka-san and I went to the City of Illusions together.

The phrase "City of Illusions" sounds rather trite, cliched, and unoriginal, but I can't think of a better way to describe it.

"Today, I'm going to take you to a certain place for about four hours. When the four hours are up, I'll take you home," I said to Rakka-san in front of the Kabuki-za, which had just reopened to a bustling crowd following its lavish renovation.

"Four hours?" she replied, looking up at me.

She didn't ask anything else.

For a moment she wore a puzzled expression, but it wasn't one of anxiety.

Rakka-san and I were standing in line with the other audience members to get seats in the balcony.

Even though it was called "The City of Illusions," I wasn't picturing a kabuki stage.

A theater usher, holding a small counter, was counting the number of people in line.

"Will we be able to get in?" I asked the young man in the black suit.

"You can get in, but it'll be standing room only. There are no more seats available," the young man, who hadn't yet adopted the air of someone who worked at this theater, replied simply, though somewhat brusquely.

It was a line of audience members waiting to see a single act of "[Benten Musume Meo no Shiranami](#)." Kikugoro as Benten, Sadanji as Nango, and Kichiemon as Nihon Daemon. From the Hamamatsuya scene to the Namekawa Dobashi scene. Two thousand yen.

But I wasn't standing in line to watch the play. I had absolutely no intention of watching it that day. I was just pretending to be a customer there to see a single act.

Going along with my whim, Rakka-san was silently standing in line with me.

We'd have to wait in line for over an hour yet to see the stage. At this hour, they should have been performing the first act of Kichigoro's "[Kumagai Jinya](#)." (By now, they're probably around the second half of Midaroku's entrance.)

If I had stayed in line, would she have intended to stand there silently with me? I wouldn't know unless I asked her.

Actually, on that day we had already finished watching a fairly long movie. It was a somewhat tiring movie.

I had intended to take a break, which was why I'd joined the line of people waiting to catch the curtain call. So, after about ten minutes I left the line.

Next to the main entrance, there was an escalator leading down to the newly opened second basement level, so I got on it.

Along the way, souvenir shops hung with colorful lanterns, as if they were directly connected to the Kabuki-za lobby, lined the area, loudly calling out to customers.

"Wow, this place has really become lively. I'm surprised," I exclaimed without thinking. Passing through the souvenir shops, I emerged at the Higashi-Ginza Station on the Metro.

From the ticket gates, I took another escalator down a few meters to the underground platform, transferred trains, and, taking Rakka-san with me, headed for the City of Illusions.

That day, I had been reading a detective novel for children, supposedly written by Seishi Yokomizo in 1928, and my mind had gone a little haywire.

It was a large, sturdy, thick book titled "Selected Detective Novels by Seishi Yokomizo," priced at 3,200 yen and containing 570 pages. Because it was so heavy, I had put it in my backpack to read.

While reading the story "The Swirling Thick Fog" inside it, I, a circus enthusiast, started to lose my mind.

The year 1928 was two years before I was born. In other words, it was over eighty years ago.

It was a time shortly after the transition from the Taisho to the Showa era, when social trends were still heavily influenced by the “Taisho Romanticism,” or rather, the “[Taisho erotic-grotesque-nansensu](#)” movement.

In the imaginations of children, the legends of the circus, filled with those eerie yet sweet hues, were still vividly alive.

It was an era when men and women, who had spent their lives watching the faces of those in power, finally gained a free vitality. At times, they smeared themselves with garish mud-like paint and danced out into the streets, exuding an air of decadence and eroticism.

The Showa Circus Troupe, as it was called, set up its big top within the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine in Kudan, which was bustling with the Soul-Summoning Festival.

There, boys and girls, some kidnapped, others sold into servitude, were being trained in their acts by a ringmaster called “One-Eyed Tiger,” dressed in a gaudy gold outfit as he lashed them with a long leather whip stained with the blood of countless victims.

On a night of fierce rain and wind, the boys and girls who escaped from the big top were caught as they descended the [Kudan slope](#) and were subjected to a terrifying punishment.

“The pitiful fugitives were stripped nearly naked and thrown onto the ground. The troupe leader, One-Eyed Tiger, stands there like a demon from hell. The leather whip lashes through the air with a whoosh. Each time, the fugitives let out screams like dying patients. Whether on their chests or backs, their bodies are covered in welts like earthworms. In places, the skin is torn and the flesh is split open like a pomegranate.

‘Hey, everyone!’ the master said, his blind eye gleaming white as he laughed with obvious pleasure.

‘This is the punishment for a fugitive. Watch closely.’”

From this point on, he recounts the story in an entertaining manner, occasionally interweaving a touch of nostalgia.

“Come to think of it, there used to be rumors about circus troupes like that,” he says. But when I was a child, it wasn’t a legend or a fictional story. There were stories that circus troupes would abduct boys and girls wherever they traveled and train them to be performers. We half-believed it.

Even Seishi Yokomizo, author of “[The Village of Eight Graves](#),” wrote a serious novel about such traveling circus troupes aimed at young readers as early as 1928.

Fujio and Michio join hands and flee from the terrifying big top. The circus gangsters are hot on their heels.

The two boys fled for their lives, hiding deep within the alleys of the town. They heard a voice behind them.

“Hey, aren’t they in there?”

“That might be it. We could still see them just a moment ago, but now they’ve suddenly disappeared, haven’t they?” In the phantom town where Rakka-san and I got off the train, there was a small shop selling boiled beans. It was an old wooden building that also sold steamed sweet potatoes. The back was dark, and we couldn’t see a thing.

At that shop, I bought some boiled green peas. I remembered the taste of those salt-boiled peas very clearly.

A bag of red peas cost 120 yen.

A bag of black peas cost 100 yen.

Both were packed in bags made of old newspaper, not clear plastic bags.

The owner of the pea shop was a surly man in his fifties who looked like the ringmaster of a traveling circus.

I handed the bag of red peas to Rakka-san and put the bag of black peas into the backpack I was carrying.

“Oh, thank you.” Rakka-san said. We started walking again.

There was a used bookstore. Although the entrance was narrow, the interior was long and narrow. It was the kind of used bookstore that seemed to go on forever without ever reaching a dead end.

I bought two old magazines lined up at the storefront. Then we turned left at the intersection. I’d been to this town with Rakka-san several times before, and I knew that when night fell men in black suits would gather and stand on street corners.

Since I’m always with Rakka-san the men don’t hit on me, but if I were alone they’d definitely come up to me.

Next, we turned right and went deeper into the neighborhood. The scenery began to change. The buildings looked increasingly old. It was a corner where the low-eaved, soot-stained shops and bars stood in a haphazard row, and the air was thick and damp.

There was a narrow alley. After confirming the sign visible at the end of the alley, I stepped inside.

In Seishi Yokomizo's time, it was written as “露地,” and I used to write it as “路次” myself, but now I write it as “路地.”¹⁶

I walked ahead and Rakka-san followed behind me. It was so narrow that the two of us couldn't walk side by side. I thought to myself, “Aren't we on some kind of amazing adventure right now?”

Perhaps those thugs from the circus troupe might chase us all the way to the end of this alley. I quickened my pace.

On the right side of the alley, doors that appeared to be back entrances to various buildings lined the street in a bleak row, while on the left, a tall, gray wall of rough concrete stretched on.

After proceeding about fifteen meters, the entrance to the building I was aiming for suddenly opened up before me, revealing a narrow lobby.

I stepped inside as if drawn in. Rakka-san followed close behind.

There was a reception desk. I peered inside but no one was there. It was deserted. On the wall right next to the desk, a dozen or so postcard-sized slides depicting the bedrooms in each room were lined up.

The lights were on in three or four of them. A lit room meant it was available. Below each slide was a sign indicating the rate per hour.

When I tapped the slide of a room on the fourth floor with my fingertip, the light went out.

I leaned closer to the counter once more and called out, but there was no sign of anyone inside. Based on my past experience, the person on the other side of the counter would usually hand me the room key.

But neither a person nor a key appeared. Instead, a thin strip of paper slid out from the bottom of the slide where the light had just gone out.

When I picked up the strip of paper, it read, “Welcome. Your room is No. 402. Please make yourself at home.”

¹⁶ This is the Japanese writings for “roji,” which means alley, as it has evolved.

I was surprised. In short, I could enter the room I wanted without ever seeing a person or exchanging a word.

After taking five or six steps back from the lobby, I found a small elevator.

I got off on the fourth floor and looked for my room. The light above the door to Room 402 was blinking on and off.

"This place feels just like it used to," I muttered. The door was already open.

I was surprised again. When I opened the door, right in front of me, just a stone's throw away, was an automatic room fee payment machine mounted on the wall. It was set up so that when I finished my business and left the room, I would insert money into the machine.

"I wonder what would happen if I didn't put money in here when I leave?" I muttered.

"I guess the door wouldn't open," said Rakka-san.

"If I didn't have any money, would I be locked inside this room? That's scary," I said.

"Would you mind spending just four more hours with me today?"

I remembered saying that to Rakka-san in front of the Kabuki-za. Of those four hours, one had already passed.

"They must have fled somewhere around here."

The members of the circus troupe were still shouting somewhere.

2013.5.4

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百十三回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 213

「變態演劇雜考」と「ナナ」

“Miscellaneous Essays on Perverted Theater” and “Nana”

Mr. Akira Kuroda.

Thank you very much for sending me “Miscellaneous Essays on Perverted Theater (Complete Edition)” by Koichi Hata from the “Perverted Literature Series, Volume 8,” as well as “Nana,” translated by Mitsuo Oda and published by your company.

“Miscellaneous Essays on Perverted Theater,” published in September Showa 3, is a rare book and I imagine it must have been quite expensive. I will be sure to return it after I have finished reading it. Please let me borrow it for a while.

Published shortly after the transition from the Taisho to the Showa era, this old-fashioned, 100-page, sewn-bound book, bound in the traditional Japanese style with hemp string, lists the “Literary Materials Research Society” at 34 Nishi-Gokencho, Ushigome Ward, Tokyo City, as the publisher. The publisher and printer is listed as Fukutaro Fukuyama, with the same address, and the printing house is listed as Fukuyama Printing, also located at the same address.

In my personal opinion, this extremely small-scale publishing model appears to have been emulated later by establishments such as “Suikodo” (13 Maruyama Fukuyama-cho, Bunkyo Ward), which was organized and managed by Keiji Itoh (Chikusu).

In other words, I get the impression that the operations of “Suikodo,” a small publishing house that continued until the early Showa 30s, were directly modeled after the methods of this “Literary Materials Research Society.”

In short, this was one approach to publishing content with strong sexual overtones while keeping a watchful eye on the repressive measures of those in power.

After the war, following “Kitan Club” and “Uramado,” the magazine “Fuzoku Kitan,” which focused primarily on the abnormal, was launched and the name of the publisher for this monthly magazine was “Fuzoku Shiryo Kankokai.”

At the time, the president of “Amatoria-sha,” who had picked up a copy of this new magazine “Fuzoku Kitan,” said in a tone of exasperation, “Publishers who put out magazines like this all give themselves similar names, don’t they? There used to be something called the Literary Materials Research Society, too.”

I remember this clearly because I was standing right in front of him at the time.

As you probably know, the president of “Amatoria-sha” was none other than Mr. Tokichi Kubo, who was also the president of “Kubo Shoten.” And “Kubo Shoten” was the publisher of “Uramado.”

“Amatoria-sha” and “Kubo Shoten” were located in the same building. In fact, the desks of the editorial departments of both companies were lined up side by side in the same room.

Mr. Hajime Takakura, who launched “Fuzoku Kitan,” was slightly younger than Mr. Tokichi Kubo, but I believe he was born during the Taisho era. I imagine the name “Literary Materials Research Society,” which could be considered a pioneer in this genre of publishing, held a particularly strong and enduring place in Mr. Takakura’s mind.

As I belong to a generation even younger than Mr. Tokichi Kubo and Mr. Hajime Takakura, I did not feel particularly close to the name “Literary Materials Research Society,” which exuded a subtle luster in this genre of publishing.

There was another publishing house that appeared to have taken over Suikodo’s operations, and I had some brief contact with its owner when I was young. I recall his name was something like Atsushi Sakamoto.

I have written about my relationship with the owner of Suikodo in the section titled “Takusui of Asukayama” in the Kawade Bunko publication “‘Kitan Club’ and Its Surroundings.”

Just the other day, while running an errand, I climbed Asukayama in Oji, Kita Ward, with Director Nakahara of the Sex Industry Museum. On the way down from Asukayama, I found myself reminiscing about the times I had visited the home of Mr. Chikusu Itoh, the owner of Suikodo, together with the late Minomura Ko. It feels as if it were only yesterday that I met Mr. Chikusu, dressed in his traditional cotton-padded coat, but when I count the years, it turns out to have been more than fifty years ago.

Several of the punishment photographs I received from Mr. Chikusu at that time are still preserved at the Sex Industry Museum. They are not printed copies, but original photographs.

The “Miscellaneous Essays on Perverted Theater” that Mr. Kuroda sent me this time is “Volume 8 of the Perverted Literature Series,” published by the Literary Materials Research Society. The very fact that they managed to publish such a daring work, at least by the

standards of the time, up to Volume 8 seems to me to be evidence of a remarkable achievement.

This volume, bound in the traditional Japanese style with hemp thread and looking decidedly suspicious even from its cover alone, is indeed a valuable item. I will read it with great care, savoring its texture in both hands.

The other book is Emile Zola's "Nana," a substantial, luxurious volume of 600 pages, painstakingly and beautifully crafted, with a list price of 4,800 yen. It contains over fifty captivating illustrations from the original work, and it is a rare and immense privilege to receive such a substantial and magnificent volume from the translator himself, Mr. Mitsuo Oda. I am deeply honored and would like to express my sincere gratitude.

It reminded me of the memorable narration from the final scene of the film "Izakaya," which I saw in Shinjuku long ago while writing a serialized novel for "Uramado."

"This girl will eventually grow up to become that actress, Nana."

Perhaps I saw this French film with Minomura Ko. Back then, at Minomura Ko's invitation, I would go to movie theaters in Shibuya and Shinjuku about once a week.

Immediately after seeing that film, "Izakaya," I read a sort of abridged version of this literary giant's novel and thought I understood the story, but taking this opportunity to receive the book, I have now taken the time to sit down and study it thoroughly.

I realized once again that this is a magnificent novel, extremely detailed, bold, and possessing a stimulating sense of reality.

Right from the beginning, I was overwhelmed by the description of Nana's chemise slipping off as she lay slumped on the bed, the sensual scent of her bare arms seemed to seep right out from between the lines.

Yukio Mishima read this "Nana" in Showa 16, when he was sixteen years old, and said, "That tenacity, that strength, that speed... Where in Japanese fiction can one find such a microcosm?"

Indeed, I found that such relentless and effective eroticism, along with the other meticulous portrayals of human nature, are rarely seen in Japanese fiction.

Even if one could imitate certain elements, I feel that viscous, foul odor emanating from flesh, fat, and sweat, with its intense, palpable heat, simply cannot arise from the Japanese constitution.

I've finally made it past the first half of this book after reading it carefully, and from here on out I imagine a diverse array of depictions, including sadism, masochism, fetishes, lesbianism, and lolicon, will unfold in a lavish and dazzling display of thoroughly decadent beauty, imbued with a profound realism that lies beyond the expressive capabilities of the Japanese. The very thought of it sends shivers down my spine.

The stench and eerie hues emanating from the blood, fat, and flesh, corrupted by the desires of men and women teeming through the various strata of French high society in the 1850s, come vividly to life, reaching even we who dwell in this distant island nation.

Indeed, the land of "Nana" is a leading nation in every respect. By comparison, Japan's so-called "decadent beauty" is nothing more than a superficial trick performed in a seedy sideshow. We simply cannot hold a candle to it.

Japan's erotic decadence scene is far too small and meager. Everything they do is nothing but petty, empty posturing.

Unless those foolish people in power collapse and the sleazy wealthy, who've made their fortunes through unjust means, become utterly sexually corrupt, Japan will never become a free country where people can truly savor pleasure, will it?

I feel this novel possesses such a powerful force that it makes one leap to that conclusion.

I haven't yet had the chance to read every page, but I've already received a superb, wonderful stimulus. Thank you very much.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Mitsuo Oda.

2013.6.15

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百十四回

Nureki Chimuo's Talking Theater Chapter 214

速記講談から大衆小説へ

From Shorthand Storytelling to Popular Novels

○○○○-san.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the five-page printout of valuable materials regarding “Kodan = Koshaku”¹⁷ that you kindly sent me.

I was truly amazed by the numerous detailed and substantial printed materials. I had no idea they existed.

Although I've spoken and written at length about kodan (and have even, at times, had the audacity to take the stage and perform it myself), I've realized how ignorant I've been regarding related publications. I feel like I could crawl into a hole¹⁸ (that's an old expression!).

I've been forced to admit that I'm not a researcher or anything of the sort, but merely a kodan fan who's been nothing more than a curious onlooker.

That said, regarding the masterpiece “Kodan Hakubutsushi” by Koichiro Nijima, whom you mentioned, I was astonished by the depth of its content and the vastness of its scope even before I had the chance to see the actual book.

I was struck not only by the sheer magnitude of Mr. Koichiro Nijima's effort and dedication, but also by the fact that so many publishers, even among those known as “red-cover publishers,” numbering about 150, had released such a vast number of “Complete Works of Kodan” collections spanning the Meiji, Taisho, pre-war Showa, and post-war periods.

Had printed kodan, clearly intended to be enjoyed by reading, rather than as auditory entertainment, really become so widespread and established as a business in society?

It is astonishing that kodan works were so widely supported during the Meiji period, when print culture was only just beginning to take hold.

¹⁷ Kodan is a form of traditional storytelling. Koshaku is an Edo period term for storytelling.

¹⁸ Japanese, “穴があったら入りたい” ana ga attara hairitai.

Were these dramatic stories, filled with the subtleties of human emotion and the full range of human feelings, joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure, truly embraced by the common people?

I myself have several volumes of “Kodan: Complete Collections” published in the pre-war Showa period that I’ve purchased from used bookstores over the past few years, including some from the “en-bon” era.¹⁹

Admittedly, they aren’t as old as those published by Okawayama Shoten. They’re all editions from the “Dainippon Yubenkai Kodansha,” but even so, they were all published before I was born.

Looking at the colophon again now, I was surprised to see that the publisher, Dainippon Yubenkai Kodansha,” was located at 48 Komagome-sakashita, Hongo Ward, at that time.

This is right near where I live now. It’s the neighborhood I’m always wandering around in. I couldn’t help but feel a sense of fate.

The painter Seiu Itoh also lived here, and when he passed away, Minomura Ko rushed to his side and sketched his face, whom he regarded as his mentor, at that very house in Komagome Sakashita.

Well, that aside, the contents of Volume 10 of the Kodansha Complete Collection of Rakugo, a thick 1,200-page volume in the “en-bon” format that I bought at a used bookstore three or four years ago for 700 yen, consist of four long stories: “Sekitori Senryo Nobori,” “Genna San Yushi,” “Sasagawa Shigezo,” and “Higo to Komegata.”

It also includes four short stories: “Monk Shonin,” “The Certificate of Success,” “Sakamoto Ryoma,” and “The Spirit of the Edo Kid.”

The last story, “The Spirit of the Edo Kid,” features a plot that could be described as the prototype for the human-interest tale “Bunshichi Motoyui,” which was later adapted into a kabuki play.

There are countless plays, such as “Hatasui-in Chobei,” that have been adapted from rakugo and performed on the kabuki stage, but I believe that so-called “popular theater” has an even deeper connection to rakugo than kabuki does.

The performances I saw as a child by traveling theater troupes consisted almost entirely of rakugo stories.

¹⁹ 円本, en-bon, meaning one-yen book published during the Showa era.

While rakugo is a sole art form performed at a shakuba,²⁰ the traveling theater productions I enjoyed watching were essentially three-dimensional rakugo, with several male and female actors in authentic costumes moving about on stage.

As time went on, yakuza stories, represented by Shin Hasegawa and the “Shin Kokuageki,” emerged, and these were joined by masterpieces of the “Shinpa”²¹ school, leading to the tradition that continues to this day...

(Just the other day, I saw a flyer at the Mokuba-kan in Asakusa advertising “Tomorrow’s Play: Terushi’s Version of Tsuruhachi and Tsurujiro.”)

...When it comes to this world, I tend to ramble on endlessly, so I’ll stop here. I’ll save the rest for another time.

As I mentioned when we met the other day at Ronsosha in Kanda, the people who particularly influenced me as a child were Mikihiro Nagata, Mantaro Kubota, and Jun’ichiro Tanazaki, among others. However, the deeply evocative field of “Tsuruhachi Tsurujiro,” written by Matsutaro Kawaguchi and performed by Shotaro Hanayagi and Yaeko Mizutani (the previous generation) of the “Shinpa,” left me utterly spellbound. From the time I was fifteen or sixteen until today, at the age of eighty-three, I have remained spellbound ever since.

If I were to delve into the many famous “Kawaguchi-Shinpa” plays that were incorporated into traveling theater troupes (though, in reality, these were unauthorized screenings, essentially “stolen performances”), I could go on and on, so I’ll stop here.

Novels like “Rice and Soup” and “All or Nothing,” which could be described as Matsutaro Kawaguchi’s autobiographical works, as well as the full-length novels known as the “Nobuyoshi series,” are among my favorite books. I’ve read them over and over again. These are the novels that comforted my soul in my youth.

The other day, when Mr. Akira Kuroda sent me the two-volume set, the main story and its sequel, of Matsutaro Kawaguchi’s “The Story of a Sentimental Fool” published by Ronsosha, I was so grateful that tears welled up in my eyes.

It had been a long time since I’d encountered Matsutaro’s distinctive style, and I was captivated by his writing, which evokes a master of the “sewa” storytelling tradition with its crisp, rhythmic prose characteristic of the working-class neighborhoods.

At the beginning of “The Story of a Sentimental Fool,” the story of how popular novels emerged from “shorthand rakugo” is described succinctly and to the point. So for my own study, I’ll transcribe that passage here once again.

²⁰ A traditional storytelling venue.

²¹ A modern form of theater in Japan.

“...Engaku’s real name was Yoshisaburo Namikami and he was a rakugo storyteller under the tutelage of Kahuen Matsubayashi.”

“Matsubayashi Hakuen was a master who created rakugo stories such as ‘Kozaru Schichinosuke’ and ‘Nezumi Kozo.’ He was not merely an entertainer but a distinguished creator. Had Hakuen lived in the present day, none of us would have held a candle to him as a popular writer. The plays adapted from Hakuen’s original rakugo stories by Kawakaku Mokuan were all smashing hits, and kabuki continues to benefit from them to this day. Because it was an era when original works were not respected, Hakuen’s name was buried and only Mokuan’s fame remained. However, ‘Shimachidori’ by Akashi no Shimazo and Matsushima Chita, as well as the ‘Spring New Form’ version of ‘Nezumi Kozo,’ all of these were based on Hakuen’s original works, and Mokuan was merely the adapter.”

“Engaku was a disciple of that Hakuen. Initially known as Matsubayashi Engaku, he later called himself Gudo-ken. Due to poor health, he retired from the performing arts, learned shorthand, and attempted serialized transcriptions of rakugo stories in the newspapers and magazines of the time, which became a huge hit and served as a valuable breeding ground for the development of popular fiction.”

“...When it came to evening newspaper serials up until the mid-Taisho period, they were invariably kodan stenography, and the majority of entertainment magazines were filled to the brim with them. Unfortunately, since they lacked the creative power of Hakuen, after continuing for several years, they ran out of ideas and ended up repeating the same material. Consequently, both magazines and newspapers sought to come up with new kodan stories and commissioned third-rate writers to pen them. From among these efforts emerged the authors and works that formed the early popular novels, leading to the prosperity we see today. In other words, Engaku was, in effect, the benefactor of popular fiction.”

It seems that “Kodan Hakubutsushi” by Koichiro Nijima, whom you recently introduced to me, contains even more detailed accounts of the shorthand kodan (and perhaps fictional kodan as well) performed in this area, as well as the circumstances surrounding their publication. I’m really intrigued by this.

Mr. Akira Kuroda, who is aware that the novels by Mikihiro Nagata, such as “Zero-raku” and “The Story of Ogi no Noboru,” which I read as a child and which feature traveling actors, had a profound influence on me later in life, has once again sent me some rare materials.

It’s a copy of a booklet titled “Kodan and Rakugo,” which was published as a supplement to the “Tokyo Nichi-Nichi Shimbun” on May 5, Taisho 14.

It features a piece titled “The Wandering Monk Unkai,” written by Mikihiro Nagata, a true “new-style kodan.”

A glance at the table of contents reveals that this volume contains three traditional kodan stories, three rakugo performances, and other compelling works such as waka poems by Akiko Yosano. However, the volume opens with an original kodan-style historical tale, labeled as original, in which a handsome but evil monk works behind the scenes to kidnap a beautiful woman.

The content is reminiscent of “The Transition from Shorthand Kodan to Popular Novels” by Godoken Engaku, as featured in “The Tale of the Sentimental Fool.”

In this issue of the “Tokyo Nichi-Nichi Shimbun” from Taisho 14, we clearly see a concrete example of how traditional kodan, transcribed in shorthand as a service to readers, and new kodan were published in newspapers.

Come to think of it, in my prewar home we had a complete collection of back issues of “Engei Gaho,” a magazine my father loved to read, and other theater magazines focused primarily on kabuki. Every issue invariably featured kodan and rakugo.

Partly because there were no other books available during the war, I became familiar with rakugo, kodan, and kabuki through the printed word from the time I was in elementary school.

Koichiro Nijima’s “Kodan Hakubutsushi” appears to be based on meticulous research into the vast number of publishers, both in the east and west, that compiled and published kodan stories transcribed in shorthand and edited into readable form. Here in my own circle there is also one person who has collected and researched a large number of historical materials on kodan.

In this age when all manner of information flies around the internet as if by magic (though I have absolutely no connection to the IT world), you are probably already familiar with him. His name is Hideaki Yoshizawa and he resides in Saitama Prefecture.

He has accomplished the astonishing feat of compiling an encyclopedia that lists the names, backgrounds, and brief storylines of the countless characters appearing in each individual kodan, as well as the names of the storytellers who performed them in each era.

Just by opening a single page, you can grasp the profound charm of the kodan, and the passion of a researcher who loves and pursues this art with fervor surges forth with tremendous intensity. It is a magnificent book, lavish and splendid, with meticulous attention to detail extending to every corner.

Since he has already published several volumes as private editions and is known even among active kodan storytellers, I’m sure you’re already aware of him, but I thought I’d mention it just in case.

I would like to share specific thoughts on just how grateful I am to have been able to draw upon his “Encyclopedia of Kodan Works” (Volumes 1-3), “A Survey of Meiji-Era Stenographic Kodan Manuscripts,” and “Draft Chronology of the Second-Generation Matsubayashi Hakuen” in my own writing, but as this could go on endlessly, I will stop here for now.

Just now, there was a knock at the front door, and a package from Ronsosha was delivered. When I opened the thick package, it appeared to contain a copy of the tape recording from that interview you arranged for me the other day. It seems I ended up rambling about all sorts of random things again during that interview, so I’m feeling a bit unsure and anxious, but there’s nothing I can do about it now. With my heart pounding, I’m going to go through it right away. This has turned into a rather half-hearted thank-you note. Please forgive my rudeness.

2013.7.19

濡木痴夢男のおしゃべり芝居 第二百十五回

Nureki Chimuo’s Talking Theater Chapter 215

圧巻！「日本女装史」

A Masterpiece! “History of Japanese Women's Attire”

My friend Mr. K gave me a large, beautifully bound book titled “History of Japanese Women's Attire.”

Although it’s called a “History of Women’s Attire,” it’s not a history of the hobby of men dressing as women.²²

It is, quite simply and frankly, a history of women’s clothing, including hairstyles, dating back to the ancient Yamato period.

It is a 230-page deluxe volume printed on high-quality art paper and featuring scholarly commentary and rich, detailed photographs.

It features a foreword by the Director of the Tokyo National Museum and the price is not specifically listed. It may be a book distributed exclusively to special members and not sold to the general public. The publisher is listed as the All-Japan Doll Masters Association.

²² The term 女装 is used here, and can be translated as either female attire or cross-dressing.

When I received it, I immediately spread its substantial pages with both hands and I couldn't help but exclaim, "Oh, this will come in handy when I write historical fiction!"

In other words, it is a truly easy-to-understand and invaluable resource for historical research.

I happened to be writing a historical novel at the time. I was in the midst of devising the design for a silver hairpin worn by a woman, formerly the wife of a samurai, now working at a tea house, and I immediately turned to this book for reference.

This unique silver hairpin, worn by the former samurai's wife, is a crucial prop. It is found discarded in a river near the scene of a murder, and the perpetrator is identified through it.

So, I was grateful to be able to put it to immediate use in the historical novel I was writing. But at that moment I also happened to notice something else.

Had Mr. K given me this thick, valuable reference book with the intention of providing material for my historical novel?

No, I wondered, it couldn't have been just that.

I gazed once more at each and every page of this substantial book.

With every turn of the high-quality art paper, something gradually appealed to my five senses, and eventually it swelled into a troubling, three-dimensional sensation.

Then, without hesitation, my doubts vanished and I felt a surge of joy.

I didn't try to understand the hidden charm of this specialized book and then come to understand it, I simply grasped it quite naturally. That charm had subtly begun to emanate from the pages.

There are probably around twenty models featured in this "History of Japanese Women's Clothing." The same person plays multiple roles. They are all young women with distinct, well-defined features and neat, clean appearances.

There are not the kind of modern beauties with wide, wide-open eyes and high noses, the stereotypical model-like idols frequently seen in today's television, movies, and glossy magazines.

Since the costumes and hairstyles are (I believe) faithful recreations of those from various eras in Japan, the models are all women with purely Japanese features that suit those styles.

This series of photographs, featuring women who exude an air of grace and refinement, standing effortlessly while wearing traditional Japanese attire, some of which is quite formal, is nothing short of breathtaking.

To put it bluntly, without beating around the bush, the images are brimming with a certain sensuality.

Precisely because the clothing minimizes skin exposure, it allows the viewer to imagine the hidden female form with a sense of mystery, making it infinitely erotic.

It is often said that the ultimate eroticism lies in the imagination, but how alluring and sensual are the casual poses of these women, dressed properly and formally in traditional Japanese attire!

I'm tempted to call it magnificent and resplendent.

Let's flip through the table of contents and look at an example.

On the color pages, that is, the pages with full-color illustrations, there is,

- Yamato Era: A Remnant of the Past
- Heian Era: Sashi-afugi
- Momoyama Era: Courtesan with a Karawari Chonmage
- Early Edo Era: Courtesan with a Hyogo Chonmage
- Mid-Edo Era: Wheel-shaped Hat
- Late Edo Era: A Tayu²³ from Shimabara
- Late Edo Era: A court lady's maid wearing a single-layered kimono
- Late Edo Era: A court lady's maid wearing a curtain-style rope

On the black-and-white illustration pages,

- Nara Era: A Lady of the Nara Imperial Court
- Heian Era: Court Ladies in Literary Tales
- Early Edo Era: Courtesan in "Uchikake²⁴ and Maebito²⁵"
- Early Edo Era: Young Girl in "Kosode²⁶ and Maebito"
- Mid-Edo Era: Kamigata Courtesan in "Uchikake"
- Mid-Edo Era: Edo Bride in a "Yukata"
- Late Edo Era: A maiden from a respectable Edo family in a "kosode"
- Late Edo Era: A courtesan from Edo's Yoshiwara district in an "uchikake"

²³ A high ranking courtesan during the Edo era.

²⁴ A woman's bridal robe

²⁵ An ornate knot in the front of a kimono

²⁶ A short-sleeved kimono

Meiji Era: A young girl from Tokyo's lower-class neighborhoods in a "kosode"
Meiji Era: A bride from a respectable family in a "kosode"
Taisho Era: A bride from a respectable family in a "kosode"

Since it goes on and on like this, I'll omit the rest. There are 105 illustrations in total, and in addition the front and back endpapers feature more than 70 plates depicting hairstyles from "Hyakunin Nyojo Hinotei" ("A ranking of One Hundred Courtesans") by the Kyoto artist Yushin Nishikawa, which were copied by the book's editor, Kanpo Yoshikawa. These, too, are valuable historical materials.

As I turned the substantial pages of this "History of Japanese Women's Attire," I quite naturally found myself recalling Yasuhiko Itatsu's book, "Yoriki, Doshin, Jitte, and Capture Ropes."

I was recalling the fascinating 27-page section in that book titled "Traditional Arrest Rope Techniques."

Starting with the second installment of "Talking Theater," I had been endlessly praising the pages on "Traditional Rope-Binding Techniques" over the course of five installments.

"Traditional Rope-Binding Techniques" features sixty black-and-white photographs accompanied by explanatory text.

The female model in those black-and-white bondage photographs is dressed in what appears to be a white prison uniform and are bound.

This prison-like garment cover the model's skin generously. It is baggy and oversized. In other words, designed not to fit the female form. It might resemble a judo uniform.

How incredibly erotic this model is. A girl with still-innocent features who is clearly an amateur at first glance (meaning she is not a professional model), dressed in those baggy prison-like garments and bound with rope.

Moved and excited by that series of black and white photographs, which are supremely provocative precisely because they are so simple, so understated, and so niche, I wrote passionately about them at the beginning of this "Talking Theater" six years ago.

As I look at this "History of Japanese Women's Attire" now, I'm experiencing the same kind of emotion I felt when I wrote enthusiastically about the wonders of "Traditional Rope-Binding Techniques."

The sensuality of women modestly draped in traditional garments made from ancient Japanese fabrics shares an undeniable commonality, even without rope.

In Fumiko Enchi's novel, was it "Onna-men" or "Onna-zaka?" There is a psychological portrayal of a woman who prefers to wear traditional kimono.

When I was young, I was deeply moved by a passage suggesting that the formal kimono attire of Japanese women, wrapped in numerous cords and sashes, might be a sensation that leads directly to masochism.

Ah, I finally realized. While providing historical materials, Mr. K must have also wanted to convey to me this sense of wonder, one that is difficult for the general public to understand.

"I finally found this book. I'd like to give it to you, Sensei," he said as he handed it to me, and the fact that I didn't realize it right away was probably due to my own senses being dull. I must apologize to Mr. K.

The kimono, the traditional garment of Japanese women, has been shaped and passed down through a refined sense of beauty.

The bodies of Japanese women, concealed within the kimono, cannot be easily seen from the outside precisely because they are hidden and veiled.

Yet those with a talent for imagination can perceive the color of the blood flowing within her and hear the sound of her breathing.

How incredibly sensual is that vivid color of blood and the warmth of her flesh!

The tantalizing sound of a woman's breathing, which cannot be heard in a nude photograph with her legs spread wide, can be clearly sensed in this photograph of her fully clothed.

It is one's freedom to fantasize, and it is supremely alluring. It even stimulates and excites my own, aging eroticism.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude, albeit belatedly, to Mr. K for giving me this precious volume.

Furthermore, I plan to deposit this "History of Japanese Women's Attire," along with Yasuhiko Iatsu's "Yoriki, Doshin, Jitte, and Capture Ropes," at the Sex Industry Museum when the time is right.

I sincerely hope that fellow enthusiasts, who harbor reverence, admiration, and passion for the sight of women properly dressed in kimono, and who can sense the sensuality within, will take the time to flip through its pages.

Addendum

Translation from the event page for the Sex Industry Museum's showing of Shizuhiro Usui's paintings

The event was a huge success.

The venue was packed to capacity, with so many people in attendance that we were at the very limit of our capacity, even having some guests standing.

We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience caused to those who had to stand during the performance.

Thank you to everyone who attended.



Shizuhiro Usui: A Slideshow of Forbidden Art

~A one-night-only nightmare banquet where the darkness of the Showa era is resurrected. You must never speak of this night to anyone else.~

Date: Thursday, September 1, 2011

Time: 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM (Doors open at 6.45 PM)

Admission: 500 yen (limited capacity)

Venue: Museum of Adult Entertainment

As this is a small library, seating is limited. If capacity is exceeded, standing room only will be available.

Thank you for your understanding.



Twenty years ago, Shizuhiro Usui's slideshow was held just once at the Sex Industry Museum, a

secret gathering exclusively for members. To commemorate the release of “The Secret Scroll of Cruelty: Shizuhiko Usui, Takashi Shima, Kazunori Kanze, Selected Works from the Sex Industry Museum's Hidden Collection Vol. 2,” published by Atelier Third, we are reviving this event for one night only this summer. Over 160 secret images not included in the art book will be projected onto the screen using a nostalgic magic lantern. After the slide show, you will also have the opportunity to view the powerful original hand-painted artwork.

Scheduled Screening (from Shizuhiko Usui's Original Sketches)

Three works: “The Woman's Auction Market,” “The Cruel Scenes of Torture,” and “The Tragic Scroll of the Diva.”

This is not a digital screening. On the day of the event, we will manually project the original film frames one by one using the magic lantern.

Please enjoy the original artwork emerging from the darkness accompanied by the nostalgic sound of “click, click.”

The Sex Industry Museum is normally a members-only library, but the general public is welcome to attend this lantern slide show.

Please note, however, that you will not be able to view the library's collection other than the original artwork on display.

From “Mania Club” (Sanwa Publishing, Issue No. 273, September 2011, Vol. 26)

From the Sex Industry Museum Newsletter

The World of Shizuhiko Usui's Cruel Pictures and the Magic Lantern Shows

Text by Nakahara Rutsu (Director, Sex Industry Museum)

Do you recall the illustrations by the artist Shizuhiko Usui that were published in “Mania Club” a while back? These unique, cruel picture stories, based on very old works created from shortly after the war through the 1950s and brought back to life in the present through a timeless collaboration with Hiromi Oka, were something I personally looked forward to in every issue.

Those paintings were, in fact, a secret collection commissioned by a single connoisseur who entrusted his desires and fantasies to the painter Shizuhiko Usui, asking him to create them exclusively for his own enjoyment. The collection is vast, comprising over a hundred scrapbooks, each containing about fifty pieces. These were not works created for publication, nor were they intended for public release. They were an extremely private collection meant solely for the secret enjoyment of the two of them. Miraculously escaping dispersal, they

remained hidden away for a long time, kept exclusively within the walls of the Sex Industry Museum.

While Shizuhiro Usui's body of work includes single illustrations, most of it consists of serialized stories reminiscent of kamishibai. Female prisoners in dire circumstances, the traps of ruthless criminal organizations, kidnapping, confinement, human trafficking... each is a terrifyingly cruel tale that mercilessly torments women. The bondage is filled with humiliation, and the faces contorted by pain show not a trace of ecstasy. The torture inflicted on the face is particularly relentless. Chemical burns, noses being sliced off, eyeballs being gouged out, acts of cruelty beyond imagination. Casts and bandages that can only be described as torture devices, the humiliating shaving of heads, and bizarre forms of forced labor. The amputation of limbs and vigilante punishments that sometimes lead to death are carried out with utter nonchalance.

In an era when read-made SM gear didn't exist, the array of restraints, all drawn from pure imagination and fantasy, is truly breathtaking. The tools, meticulously devised solely to torment women effectively, are ingenious and sometimes even evoke a sense of humor. Perhaps it's the uncompromising joy of weaving a single narrative world. Every work leaves you breathless with its dizzying, relentless pace. Filled with bitter resentment, the women repeatedly seek opportunities to escape or exact revenge. Yet with each capture, the gears of fate grind further out of alignment, their faint glimmers of hope are trampled underfoot. Trembling with the terror of being cornered and bound hand and foot by inescapable misfortune, the stories hurtle headlong toward a hopeless conclusion.

What is depicted here is, of course, not SM play. Neither the image of "SM practiced consensually with pleasure as the premise" nor any context linking it to positive human relationships, such as love or trust, exists in this fictional world. What lies there is a raw, cruel fantasy that has likely been stirring deep within the heart since a time when one couldn't even distinguish whether it was a sexual shock or something else.

It was an era where dark desires could not be spoken of even more than they are now. What thoughts must have filled the minds of these two as they miraculously met and shared their dreams? They must have stoked each other's desires and fantasies, immersing themselves in this secret creative endeavor. I envy their fervent obsession, their pure passion, as they continued to express their fantasies and delusions with such directness, and the happiness of their relationship. How meticulously, how lovingly, every corner of this work is rendered. Though its content is incompatible with the romantic with the romantic love ideology that pervades the world, I feel compelled to call this sentiment love as well. I believe the utterly ruthless pictorial scroll left behind by Shizuhiro Usui is a romantic work brimming with dreams and a longing so poignant it aches.

This summer, the Sex Industry Museum will host the "Shizuhiro Usui Magic Lantern Show" for the first time in twenty years. A one-night-only, nightmarish feast emerging from the darkness. Fans captivated by Shizuhiro Usui's poison, please do come and join us.