

N-SPHERE

a world behind curtains | june 2012

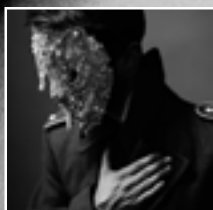
FEATURING



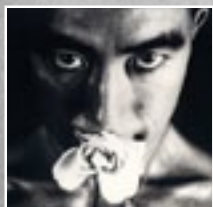
RAMIRO TAPIA



TOSHIO MATSUMOTO



THOMAS SING



YUKIO MISHIMA



PATRICK LORÉA



HELEN WARNER

EDITORIAL

TRANQUILIZERS

A world is a sphere. Inside, the most eclectic actors break barriers and create the chaos which is existence: the *It*, life itself; the *Rose*, a mask inside a mirror; the *Death*, for which we'd lie to break our skulls; and *You*. Alone in a sea of you-s. »A sort of rupture [...] leaves us at the limit of tears: in such a case we lose ourselves [...] and communicate with an elusive beyond.«

How better to access the ethereal, than to stare into the representations of life. The human expects serendipity. What lies behind the *It*, however, the train of vision cannot detect until the rails have ended. The *It*, in its diffuse ontology, sometimes takes shapes: the supreme beings of *Taida Celi*, the sensuous fairies of Helen Warner, or the earthly pleasures of *Adriaen van Utrecht*. »Like kids trying to find a gap in a fence, [we] try to look through the cracks in the world.«

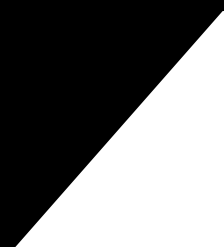
»The need to go astray, to be destroyed, is an extremely private, distant, passionate, turbulent truth.« Oh, our *Rose*, how you call to be broken. But what makes one liable, in the face of verity, to shed the skin? The same that makes one express the private need of self-dissection in a less intrusive man-

ner. The methods of *Thomas Sing* and *Patrick Loréa*, in exclusive interviews, might shed some light... from the inside out.

»The power of death signifies that this real world can only have a neutral image of life.« In 1969, *Toshio Matsumoto's Funeral Procession of Roses* stirred the question of images as masks, in a blood-bathed struggle to be the self one was meant to be. There, derision was absent, replaced only by a subtle portrayal of who's-afraid-to-look-behind-the-mask. »[...] that life's intimacy does not reveal it's dazzling consumption until the moment it gives out.« Around the same time, during the 1960's and 70's, *Yukio Mishima* merged the character and the actor through the latter's guise. There was no need to look behind the mask, as the mask became its wearer, unveiled by *Death* and *Death* alone.

It is a perfectly translucent truth, that, when the mask to which we succumb and when the rose in which You're buried are all stripped away, the human shape is but a grain of sand on a concrete slab: »sovereignty, loyalty, and solitude.«

Quotes | Georges Bataille



VEL THORA

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SHOWCASE
AIDA CELI

WHAT LURKS BENEATH THE SURFACE

Name:

Taida Celi

Location:

Norway

Occupation:

Photographer

Definition of personal sphere:

A concrete definition is still too confusing to describe, but I would say something like:

What lurks beneath the surface, penetrating the unknown. An never-ending journey which challenges and wonders.

Artwork in 4 words:

Transformation, intuitive, transcendental, eclectic

What is inspirational for you:

Knowing that everything is a remix, and there are no limits. Inspiration is for me when applying ordinary tools of thoughts to existing materials. Picking up knowl-

edge from the masters, but also from great underrated artists. On the other side: a great painting always stir my imagination more often than a photograph.

Currently favourite artists

Edvard Munch, my all time favorite artist it is long since he perished, but there are many contemporary artists whose work I adore, and Viviane Sassen is one of them.

Tools of trade:

To this day only digital, but maybe film also someday.

Current obsessions:

Currently things we cannot escape, and always too much sugar in my coffee.

Personal temptation:

Unpredictable melancholy.

Ingress:

taidaceli.com



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
First Taste. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011. Gaze.**
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Metamorphosis. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Whipping. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Disturbari. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Unconscious.
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi.**
Sullen.
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Ophelia.
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Birth.
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Cocoon. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Corner. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Åsa. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Taida Celi. 2011.**
Invasion.
Courtesy of the artist

AD

STONE
SHOWCASE
**RIAEN VAN
UTRECHT**

O QUAM CITO TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI

Name:

Adriaen van Utrecht

Lived:

1599-1652

Location:

Antwerp, Belgium

Occupation:

Painter

Influences:

Frans Snyder, Jan Fyt, human vanity, decaying matter, the passing of time

Influenced:

Philip Gyselaer, Jan Davidsz de Heem, Evaristo Baschenis, Nicolas de Largillière

Symbolic elements:

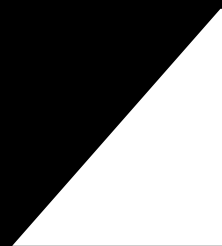
Flowers, dead fauna, fruit, human skulls, wine, candlesticks, books, time pieces, musical instruments, jewelry, masks

Associated with:

The Antwerp school, Flemish Baroque still life

Obsessions:

Vanitas paintings



VEL THORA

quote | **Thomas * Kempis. *The Imitation of Christ*. 1418**



photo | **Adriaen van Utrecht. 1642.**
Vanitas: Still Life with Bouquet and Skull.
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Adriaen van Utrecht. 1646-1649**
Still-Life with Hare and Birds on a Ring.
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Adriaen van Utrecht.**
First Half of the XVIIth Century. Fishmonger's Stall.
Courtesy of the artist

**T
BUTTE**

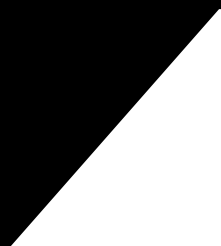
MOVING
SHOWCASE
HE SECRET
RFLY OF M.

I'M A WOUND AND A SWORD A VICTIM AND AN EXECUTIONER

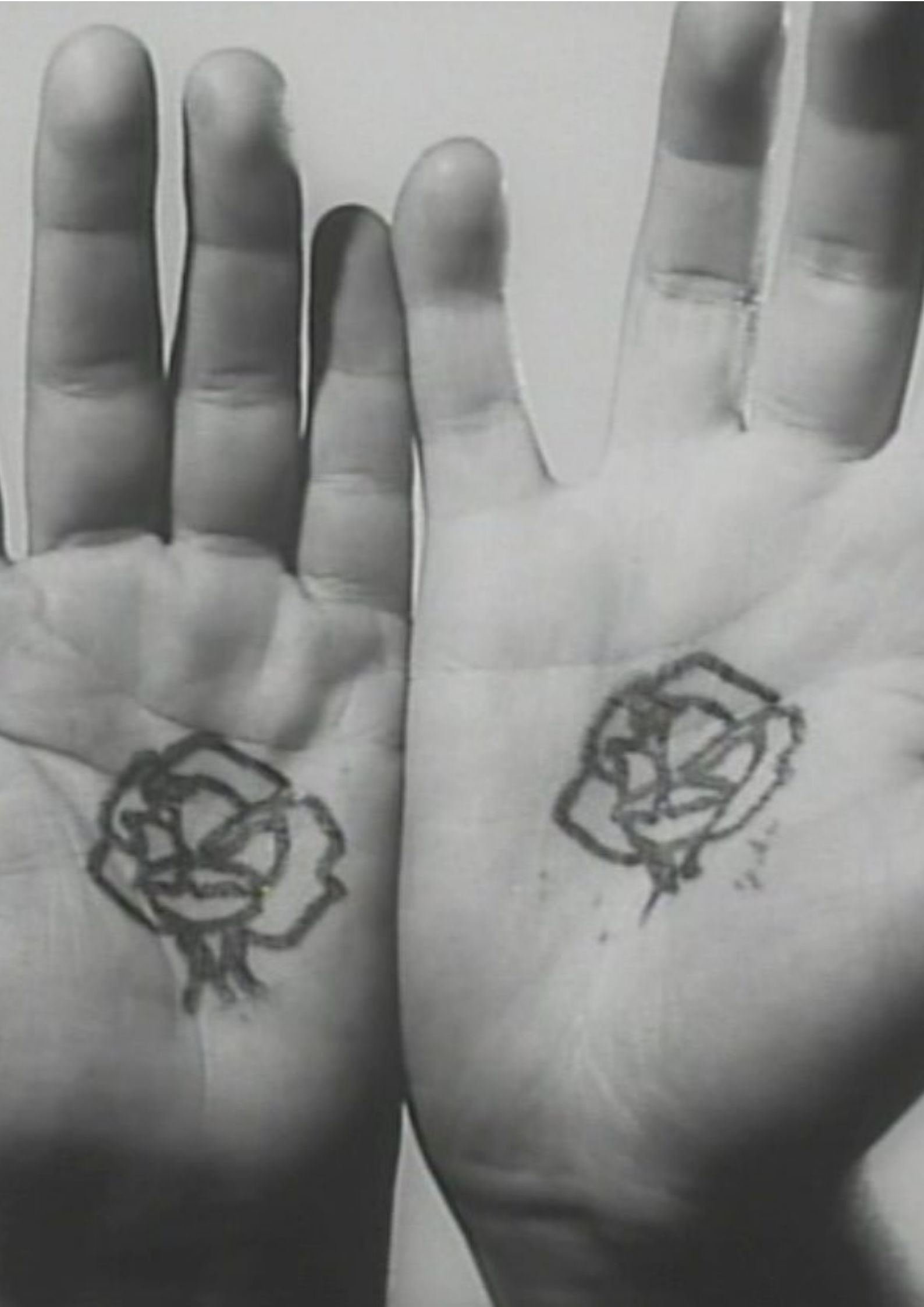
Japanese cinema has always seemed to work best at its most outlandish and I am certain there are no surprises here since many Japanese films are regarded as »rather eccentric« at least, and one may say the same thing about their entire culture.

What fascinated me about Japanese cinema (and partially their culture) was its whole »peculiar« erotic tension, even and especially in the many cases where a proper erotic/sexual act is not involved.

Leaving androgyny aside, one can notice that many (experimental) Japanese films are a visual feast. *Pistol opera* (Suzuki), *Funeral Parade of Roses* (Matsumoto), *Branded to kill* (Suzuki) and even more »friendly« works such as *So-seiji* (Tsukamoto), *Izo* (Miike) are such examples. But indeed, the same can be said about works of directors such as *Paradjanov*, *Tarkovski*, *Sokurov* and so forth. The essential difference between the first and the former, besides narratives/themes and so forth is the approach itself. The former group



SHADE





brings together films that are, ultimately relatively straightforward by means of tone. We can tell where a *Tarkovski* film is going just by looking at its first 15 minutes, for example.

But we cannot say the same about directors such as *Miike*, *Tsukamoto* or *Matsumoto*. Here, the beautiful and the extremely disturbing are blended together: does anyone remember *Imprint* (*Takashi Miike*)? You may not discern much from the plot, you may – in my opinion – rightfully complain about the quality of *Drago's* performance, but you cannot deny its mesmeric landscapes, blended with frightening characters and a very disturbing... torture scene.

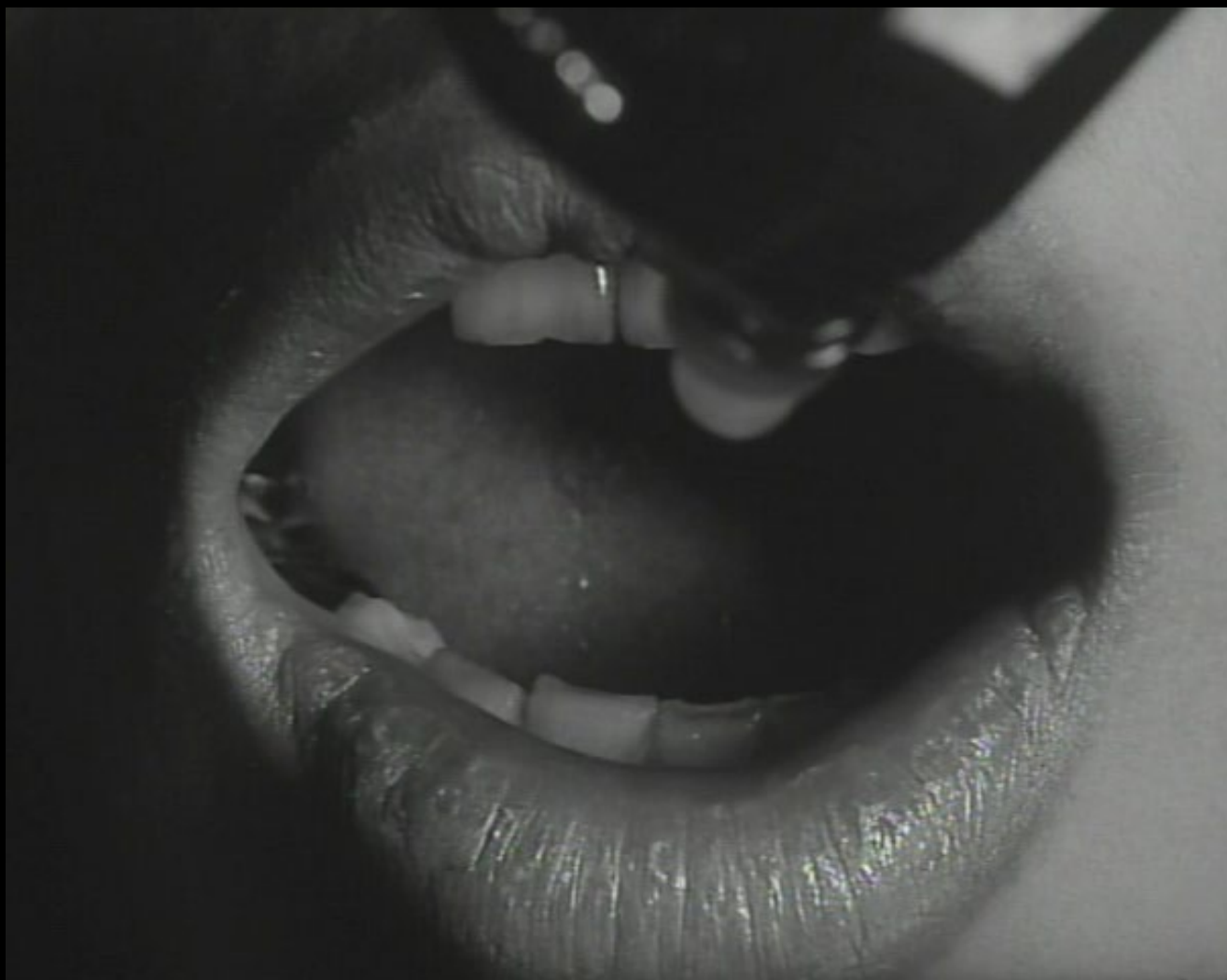
In *Tsukamoto's Soseiji* the slums are visualised in a nearly »poetic« manner.

Somehow all these make me think about an androgynous extension of sorts: it is no longer about the masculine and feminine blended together, but also the beautiful and the frightening/disturbing.

And this collision is even more delicious, because the first one mainly presents two rigid forms/ideas, we are given a myth and so forth, but in the end what we experience from it may be more or less related to the source material which is but a mere sketch.

The latter, however, threads more organic grounds because

it is no longer linked to objects, but to what we directly experience and if you think that terror can't be erotic, you may very well be denying the existence of all those S&M lovers, toy dolls and so forth. This is indeed a thin example because it is barely touching base, but works very well for a start. There is a line to be drawn between the disturbing and the unpleasant. Because what I think that bothers most people about disturbing experiences is related to that unpleasant layer. If one can physically achieve perfection, by being a whole, what about the experiences themselves. What happens to them? Are we to assume that the Androgyny myth implies also a marriage between opposite emotions? Would seem



at least tempting to think so. And to go even further: how would our stories look like in such a set-up? Would they still be a sum of chronologically sorted events if they are to be projected on some screen? I think not. An interesting example here is the animation *Beladonna of Sadness/Kanashimi no Beladonna* (Yamamoto), loosely based on/related to the *Jeanne d'Arc* story.

And speaking about opposite nuances, one cannot rule out Butoh (the dance of darkness) which combines the eerie grace with ghoulish appearances in maybe one of the most outlandish forms of dance in history.

As a side-note, there is pre-/

Cronenbergian approach to some Japanese films. No surprises here, since neither *Nagasaki* nor *Hiroshima* were to go away quietly. *Imprint* again serves as a good example, and another good one would be *Tokyo First* (Tsukamoto).

THE MIRRORS OF TOSHIO MATSUMOTO

A GLIMPSE ON
A FUNERAL PARADE OF ROSES

Perhaps the best place to approach *Matsumoto's Funeral Parade of Roses* is by approaching its imagery and juxtapositions and give less time to its story.

On the one hand, the film is, visually at least, very well crafted.

Many of its images may linger in one's mind long after *Funeral Parade of Roses* has finished because on the one hand they feel authentic on the other hand, however, they feel unearthly and some of them have the advantage of not being shown for too long. Hence this may give some viewers the feeling they are witnessing some supernatural phenomena.

On the other hand the film's stylistic *menage-à-trois*, if you may, is at least interesting because we have two genres that go well hand in hand: documentary and neo-realism, and a third which is in a diametrically opposed neighborhood: avant-garde.

However, in *Funeral Parade of*

Roses this combination is effective because there are moments in which nuances change: for example some documentary scenes don't feel like documentary scenes at all, but more like dream scenes or mood pieces. Others feel like extensions to a previous scene or to a particular feeling that a scene wants to depict.

This is why it works. Because it is well crafted enough so that you know that there is a payoff, but loose enough so the entire material does not feel like an academic exercise, vague enough to be eerie, but tight enough to work as some sort of a twisted story as well.

Of course, one cannot ignore the period in which this film was made, a period of revolt against the »formal wisdom« so to speak, against hypocritical and shallow mannerism and presumingly, since we are talking about Japan, this revolt was even more »passionate« here.

However, the film itself does not necessarily transpire this revolt, it is not a freak-show and for more than a second we forget we are »dealing« with gay people/transvestites.

all photos & page quote |
Bara no Soretsu /
Funeral Parade of Roses. 1969.
Toshio Matsumoto

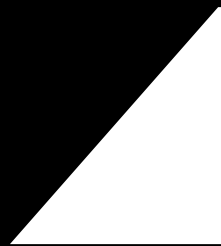




S
THO

ABUSE
HOWCASE!
MAS SING

CENTRIFUGAL GAMES OF FORMS AND METAMOR- PHOSES



DIANA DAIA

:: Hallo, Thomas, and welcome to the Spheres. We were happy to come across your visual work. When and how did you start doing photography?

The pleasure is all mine. I'm happy to be featured in such a creative company of outstanding artists.

Unlike most photographers, my professional and artistic interest in photography came up quite late, in my mid-twenties. After working solely with words all my life (I got my degree in literature, philosophy & psychology in 2004), I was looking for another medium to express myself, and I found

out I had some talent for photography. I was looking for a job, but I didn't want to do one boring internship after another, so I decided to make my living with photography – which seemed crazy and impossible first, but it worked out over the years. I'm completely self-taught.

:: Have you also worked with analogue? Does digital photography offer more advantages in this field? When I started, digital was just at the point where you could achieve quite good results on the technical side, so I went for digital.



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
Self-Portrait. Courtesy of the artist

But the further I get with my work (esp. the artistic projects), the more I miss something... right now I'm mostly shooting with digital medium format (which produces a truly brilliant picture quality), but all I do then is to destroy this technical brilliance by adding high-contrasts, grain, and so on. Shooting analogue will be the next step. It also interests me from a theoretical point of view because it's more direct and aleatoric than the binary logic of digital. The *effet de réel* seems stronger to me on analogue photographs – which is quite strange because from an iconic standpoint, analogue depicts reality worse than a *state-of-the-art* digital camera. But it becomes quite clear when you see a photograph primarily as an index, like e.g. Roland Barthes understood it with his concept of the »punctum«. Metonymy is so much stronger than metaphor!

:: You currently reside and work in Augsburg, Germany. How is it living there and what projects are you working on at the moment?

It's in the middle of Bavaria... what can I say... there's a lot of history, pork and beer... I'm living in a nice place on the outskirts in a part of an old villa once inhabited by the owners of a huge textile industry... I have large and high rooms which is quite good for taking pictures, and I have my huge haunted fairy-garden... so I'm quite in my own Sphere... though I travel a lot, I feel most comfortable when I'm in a big city.

There are lots of new projects coming during the next months. I don't want to reveal too much, but many of them will have one common theme: deconstruction of binary gender concepts. I've also started a new surrealistic cycle called *Hypnos & Psyche* where I

depict images that appear in my dreams or that come into being by following a non-conscious dream-logic. The first ones are already up on my Tumblr, among them a portrait of my old friend Alexander Sterzel who was already featured in the *Spheres*.

»METONYMY IS SO MUCH STRONGER THAN METAPHOR«

:: Turning to the photos featured in this issue: you intended to name your series *Deterritorializations*, following Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. How do these ideas surface in your works and why were they of relevance here?

A *Thousand Plateaus* is one of the books that had an extraordinary influence on my way to think and to work: a jocund, crazy and exceedingly intelligent revolt against the patriarchal, binary and teleological principles of western culture. Since ancient times, we tend to think in dichotomies like good-bad, sane-ill, inside-outside, male-female, and so on; our whole linguistic system is organized that way, we even discipline our bodies to function according to this scheme. Everyone has their as-

signed place, their »territory«. And everything outside the known, speakable and knowable system is considered as alien, hostile or negligible.

It is this *otherness* that always fascinated me, everything that couldn't be classified within a known linguistic or social taxonomy. I was always convinced that life in all its shapes, varieties and strangest mutations was far too magnificent to be forced into simplifying structures. And I always refused to be classified myself in whatever way, so discovering the *Thousand Plateaus* was one of the most striking intellectual occurrences of my life. I had read de Sade, Nietzsche and Bataille before, and each of them has deeply coined my way to think, but all the three of them are still strongly bound to the dispositives they were writing against: de Sade and Nietzsche to the christian god, Bataille to god, Nietzsche and Hegel. Deleuze & Guattari instead appeared to me as the »free spirits« Nietzsche was foreseeing and desiring through all his works. Aren't their exuberant, sometimes playful, yet always highly concentrated reflections the most *gaia scienza* possible? In their paratactic-rhizomatic way to rethink what it means to be human (a way without subjectivations, but more than a thousand connecting points) – a way on which they even took out the modern substitute of god, the Freudian father –, they pointed out the most brilliant »lines of flight« to escape the global dilemma of being a pre-defined subject *and nothing else...* – *tertium nondatur*: the Law of the Excluded Middle respectively as one of the most fatal sentences ever passed...!

Following Deleuze & Guattari's thought means leaving behind what I »am«, i.e. what I'm supposed



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Sigurd @ tune-models.com**
styling | **Chiara Padovan**
make-up & hair | **Maren Endrass**
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Sigurd @ tune-models.com**
styling | **Chiara Padovan**
make-up & hair | **Maren Endrass**
Courtesy of the artist

to be (*detrterritorialization*), letting »myself« go and becoming something else (*reterritorialization*), a semiotic process which never comes to an end.

Transferred to the photos in this feature: I wanted to put myself and my models into these centrifugal games of »forms and metamorphoses« in which they'd become something else, something loosely related to sub-conscious images, but something not recognizable through a classifying psychoanalytical approach. I wanted to short-circuit different image-spheres in order to transform the bodies into something different (their *otherness-es*) by playing out their existing but not obvious possibilities.

:: *How do props and clothing convey those ideas?*

They are on the one hand indispensable because they form the rhizomatic syntax of the picture by building a »plane of consistency« together with the body. On the other hand their combination is quite instinctive: most of these pictures came into being like a surrealist artwork, like an *écriture automatique*. It was important to have a huge repertoire from which we then could associatively select. I wanted to create detrterritorialized bodies that would somehow touch the subconsciousness of their viewers, but as a mere notion, not as a clearly recognizable archetype. For all the self-portraits I was completely alone, letting myself go while the camera was set to shoot sequences.

:: *With whom have you collaborated for this series?*

I've only worked with people I already knew. First of all my partner, *Chiara Padovan*, who usu-



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
Self-Portrait. Courtesy of the artist

ally is the first person who hears about my plans and ideas and accompanies me from the conception till the publication. Beyond that, she's the only one who understands my often cryptic way to think and to articulate myself, and she's brilliant in translating my theoretical concepts into moodboards for a photoshoot. She's also done a lot of styling work for the *Deterritorializations*,

together with an old friend of ours, the creative genius-designer-stylist-performer *Lorand Lajos*. We worked together countless times since we all started with photography / fashion, so we know what we can expect from each other. Besides that, we all have this fascination for dark and creepy but beautiful things. Just look at Lorand's jewel mask or his crocheted full-body suit, both

worn by a wold-class dancer (who by the way just starts an amazing career as a choreographer, with guest shows in the *Paris Opera*, *Moscow's Bolshoy*, ecc.): *Stephen Delattre*. I met him when he was engaged in Augsburg years ago, and since then we come together at least once a year for a photo-shoot.

The girl with the iron spades is *Kate Welsh* (*Major Models*), a fashion model working in New York, Paris and Munich. I met her when she came for a test shoot in my studio last year, since then I don't miss a chance to work with her, as she's a real artist/performer who can wonderfully interpret any role you give her. *Sigurd* is a newcomer from my area, he also came for a test in 2010, whereupon I sent him to *TUNE Models* in Munich to start as a fashion model. The make-up was done by *Maren Endrass*, a friend and make-up artist from Augsburg with whom I regularly work.

:: Is it easy explaining the people you work with where you want to go with specific works?

It's not necessary to explain the full concepts to the whole staff involved in a shoot. It isn't relevant for a model or a stylist or a make-up artist to get a sketch of occidental philosophy in order to do a great job. The important thing is to invent a good story. Everyone has to get into the spirit of such a project. We also do a lot of mood-boards.

The most crucial moment though is when you're on the set. A perfect picture is just a side-effect of a perfect situation. It needs the utmost awareness and concentration, you have to create an atmosphere between the model and yourself where everything is possible. Noone ever explained

that (although in another context) more beautifully than *Georges Bataille*: »Communication demands a flaw, a *fault*: it enters, like

»I WANTED TO SHORT-CIRCUIT DIFFERENT IMAGE- SPHERES IN ORDER TO TRANSFORM THE BODIES INTO SOMETHING DIFFERENT«

death, by a chink in the armor. It demands a coincidence between two lacerations, in me and in the other.« [z]

:: Would you argue that fashion today could be regarded as a trigger for achieving a »body without organs«, as Deleuze formulates it? Yes, totally. That's what I love so much about fashion, and that's why fashion plays such an important role in my shoots. I

don't mean the most commercial branches of it, but labels like *Rick Owens*, *Rad Hourani*, the Belgian and Japanese designers. *Alexander McQueen* of course, and many more, not to mention all the awesome small and underground labels. By overforming, underforming, (re-)segmenting, extending, restricting, de- and re-contextualizing the body, they enable their wearers to create »lines of flight« in the *Deleuzeian* sense. By following these lines, the »subject« deterritorializes itself from the attributions that society, religion, even biology has put upon them, providing the means to re-territorialize themselves inside infinite »planes of consistency« or *Haeccetities* / intensities beyond all metaphysics of the »subject«.

»The plane of consistency would be the totality of all BwO's [= Bodies without Organs], a pure multiplicity of immanence, one piece of which may be Chinese, another American, another medieval, another petty perverse, but all in a movement of generalized deterritorialization in which each person takes and makes what she or he can, according to tastes she or he will have succeeded in abstracting from a Self [*Moi*], according to a politics or strategy successfully abstracted from its origin.« [y]

Aren't these thoughts on the BwO a wonderful definition of fashion? – a fashion not understood as an economy-driven industry, but as a social technique.

Clothing works – similar to language – through a combination of single »tokens«, and just like language it can generate three formations: enforcing ones (the *Peircean argument*: law – uniform), constative / plain ones (*dicent*: practical language – functional



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Stephen Delattre**
styling | **Lorand Lajos**
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Stephen Delattre**
styling | **Lorand Lajos**
Courtesy of the artist

/ everyday clothing), and poetic ones (*rhema*: poetry / literature – fashion).

The poetic forms are the most interesting ones because they are open to interpretation, they are self-reflexive and they work with a coded sign-system which is constantly altered and extended through its use (*rhematic-indexical legi-signs* according to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, later perceived as the aesthetic sign-function by Max Bense and identified as the »open self-reflexive logics of signs« by Hans-Vilmar Geppert) [x].

Furthermore, these are the only forms that create something »new« by katachrestically combining single pieces in an innovative way and thus closing a »gap« in their respective system. But then, they do not petrify in their meaning, they go on, and with the next dress / line they add new layers (planes) of articulation that can question or even contradict the earlier ones. They never let you distill an unquestionable meaning or »truth«. Thus, fashion, like poetry, in its highest forms can never be totalitarian.

According to Deleuze & Guattari, we are bound by »three great strata [...]: the organism, significance, and subjectification« [w]. What they then say about the BwO is absolutely true for poetry as for fashion like I understand it: »To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or *n* articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification)« [v]

:: *You have worked with big magazines like Vogue. How was that experience?*

That wasn't commissioned work, they just printed my pictures. *Vogue Italia* in the context of their *New Talents* scouting, *Vogue Deutsch* for an advertorial of a jewelry client. So I can't really tell you much about it, but I was happy to see my images printed in some »A-list« magazines.

»A TRULY NOMADIC SUB-CULTURE WILL ALWAYS WITHDRAW ITS CORE FROM CON- SUMPTION.«

:: *Fashion these days seems to have switched its focus more and more on niche visual and music artists, probably trying to re-define itself. Do you think it has always been the case of incorporating*

and even swallowing these more underground segments? Is it just a passing thing?

I think this is a common cultural dynamics nowadays. A century ago, fashion was a social »trickle-down« phenomenon, getting its inspirations from the upper classes. During the second half of the 20th century, it opened more and more up to influences from subcultures until the point you're speaking about where you get the impression fashion(s) absorbed them completely. I don't see this procedure as a big problem though. If a sub-culture is soaked up by an established system, it probably wasn't strong enough. A truly nomadic sub-culture will always withdraw its core from consumption. The »system« can't even conceive it because it's beyond the system's terminological restrictions.

Punk e.g. is not dead even though almost all of its elements have been grabbed by high fashion. And the fetish / BDSM scene will not die out because *Topshop* is selling latex leggings.

On the contrary, fashion can even have an educational value by recollecting bygone eras and decades. Right now we see the 90ies everywhere in fashion, today's teens didn't experience them, but learn about them through contemporary fashion. It's what Walter Benjamin describes as fashion's »tiger's leap into the past« [u].

:: *Most of your works are completely desaturated and angular. How does monochrome help convey the mood of your photographs? Is it just an aesthetic choice?*

When I started this project, I decided to take anything out of the pictures that wouldn't be necessary to create the dream-logic

that I wanted to depict, so I kept the images as minimalistic as I could. They should be surrealist, but also clear and sharp as a knife. I couldn't find any reason for colour to be part of them, so I went for black&white. It makes them more decisive, just like the graphic, sometimes almost geometric lines and shapes. I'm totally conform to B&W myself by the way, a lot of the clothes used in those pictures are my own, and they're all black or grey...

:: *Some of your photos also play with motion and blurs, almost creating an »aesthetics of disappearance«, as Paul Virilio phrases it. Does digital photography generate a sort of visual epilepsy, or on the contrary, leads to a visual awareness in precisely those overlapping blurred pixels?*

I think both phenomena that you describe are equally true in the sense of a *coincidentia oppositorum*: if you push two opposite movements on a line far enough, they coincide at a certain point. The effects of motion and blurring in my pictures aren't added in the post-production. I love to shoot with special lighting techniques and long exposures, so you could shoot these images with these effects also in analogue. A photograph tends to suggest that it has an essence or »substance«, I think that's because of its predominant iconic quality. But as I said before, I find the metonymical vectors inside (and beyond) a work of art far more interesting than its iconic assertions. By putting movements into the picture, I can underline its temporal dimension, *Deleuze & Guattari's* »becoming«:

»For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the

human being does not *really* become an animal any more than the animal *really* becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say

»SOCIETY'S ASSEMBLAGES OF POWER USUALLY OVERCODE THE FACE BY ACTIVATING A SEMIOTIC OF THE SIGNIFIER«

that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.« [t]

:: *You also model in some of your photos, but the facial features are not your main focus most of the time. Is that intentional?*

For the pictures featured here it was fully intentional. Society's *assemblages of power* usually

overcode the face by activating a »semiotic of the signifier« [s] which is disciplining the bodies by »overwriting« them with specific meanings. »The face is a politics« [s]. By covering or alienating the face I wanted to set the body free to get rid of its overcoding and to become something else: »becoming-woman, becoming-child; becoming-animal, -vegetable, or -mineral; becomings-molecular of all kinds, becoming-particles« [r]. One of the most wonderful truths of the *Thousand Plateaus*: »Yes, the face has a great future, but only if it is destroyed, dismantled« [q].

:: *And last, but not least: how would you describe your »personal sphere«? What are you interested these days in terms of music, literature, visuals?*

I love *Soap&Skin*, I was listening to her album *Lovetune for Vacuum* on maximum volume while I was shooting my self-portraits. Another outstanding musical discovery is *Thomas Feiner & Anywhen: The Opiates - Revised* is probably the most ingenious album I know. Besides the writers and thinkers already mentioned in my answers, I love *Thomas Pynchon* a lot. *Gravity's Rainbow* is one of my favourite books. I should also mention Foucault here, I've just shot a fashion editorial inspired by his thoughts on the *Panopticon*. But I also read lots of less sophisticated books, e.g. I collect antiquarian curiosities, especially erotica. The only things I spend lots of money for besides photography are clothes and books. And the clothes are worn off after a season or two, in the end only the books remain...



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
Self-Portrait.
Courtesy of the artist

[z] *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1970-1988: Gallimard, Vol. V, p. 266. Engl. translation taken from Amy M. Hollywood: *Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*. Chicago / London 2002: Univ. of Chicago Press, p. 300.

[y] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translation by Brian Massumi. London / New York 2004: continuum, p.174.

[x] Bense, Max: *Die Unwahrscheinlichkeit des Ästhetischen und die semiotische Konzeption der Kunst*. Baden-Baden 1979: agis. Geppert, Hans-Vilmar: 'Welchen der Steine du hebst.' Charles S. Peirces Semiotik und ihre literatur- und medienwissenschaftlichen Perspektiven, in: Geppert, Hans-Vilmar: *Literatur im Mediendialog. Semiotik, Rhetorik, Narrativik: Roman, Film, Hörspiel, Lyrik und Werbung*. München 2006: Ernst Vögel, pp. 9-36, p. 27 [Thomas Sing's Translation].

[w] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translation by Brian Massumi. London / New York 2004: continuum, p.176

[v] *ibid.* p. 177

[u] Walter Benjamin: *Theses on the Philosophy of History, Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, London 1973: Fontana/Collins, p. 263. For a comprehensive understanding of fashion's underlying mechanisms I can strongly recommend Caroline Evans: *Fashion at the Edge. Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness*. New Haven / London 2003: Yale University Press.

[t] *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 262

[s] *ibid.* p. 201

[r] *ibid.* p. 300

[q] *ibid.* p. 190

Thomas Sing.

model | **Stephen Delattre**

styling | **Lorand Lajos**

Courtesy of the artist





photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Kate Welsh @ Major Models**
styling | **Lorand Lajos & Chiara Padovan**
make-up & hair | **Maren Endrass**
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Kate Welsh @ Major Models**
styling | **Lorand Lajos & Chiara Padovan**
make-up & hair | **Maren Endrass**
Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Thomas Sing.**
Self-Portrait. Courtesy of the artist



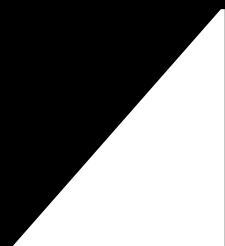
photo | **Thomas Sing.**
model | **Stephen Delattre**
styling | **Lorand Lajos**
Courtesy of the artist

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ICK LORÉA

A HYBRID OF LOVE AND DEATH



VEL THORA

:: Hello and welcome to the Spheres. To introduce Patrick Loréa to our readers, tell us a little bit about your work and background. When did you step into the artworld?

Since I was very young, I have been strongly fascinated by the human body and its representation. My youth has been squeezed between a very strict education and my own fascination for the post punk movement and the sur-

realist art. This inspiration led me to drawing, painting, playing music... With these tools I was able to express some creative energy, but I felt too often frustrated about not creating a relieved feeling, until I went over to sculpture, which made me feel comfortable.

::What is your main field of activity?

I'm not working full-time in my art studio. I also work as a plastic and reconstructive surgeon spe-



photo | **Patrick Loréa.**
Vanity Cases. Courtesy of the artist



photo | **Patrick Loré.**

Vanity Cases. Courtesy of the artist

cialized in hand surgery. If these two occupations may seem to be antagonist, these are two different expressions of the same soul. On the one hand, there is the artistic creativity, loneliness and complete freedom, no rules at all - the introspective part. On the other hand, there is the more social part of *creativity*, with many rules, constraints and schedules.

:: How do you get your work to the public?

To be honest, I am not a very good trader at all! I am using social networks and my own website to show my work and to meet people. These media environments are have very high accessibility for the entire world, if you do not fall into the potential trap. A few people I met that way became really interesting relationships and those led to events, exhibi-

tions, collectors interested in buying my work and even close friends. On the other hand, I am represented by a gallery in Paris (*Espace Saint-Germain*) which offers me the opportunity to reach another kind of public.

:: How do you come by the themes you use in your projects? Are they a spur-of-the-moment thing, or are they the result of extensive documentation? In general, where do you find your inspiration?

It's rather a spur of the moment thing, afterwards enriched by a variable amount of documentation. Usually, I start with what I call an *image*. This image can be inspired by anything I may encounter in my daily life: people, concerts, performances, magazines, dance shows, books or even simple feelings. That image starts to obsess me until the con-

crete part of the process begins. Unfortunately, as sculpture is a process which takes a long time, only few of these images I have become sculptures, so I am accumulating many unsatisfied obsessions. For sure, this first part of my creative process doesn't need to happen necessarily in my art studio. It is never premeditated and it may occur at anytime, anywhere. For me, sculpture doesn't begin or end at the door of my art studio. Sometimes, for the technical aspect of the realization, I need more documentation, so I take pictures of a model or I am looking at some books or searching the internet for images linked to my *vision*. Concerning the *Vanity Cases* project, I have studied a number of books about the idea of death in different cultures and times. The documentation for this project was quite more detailed.



photo | **Patrick Loréa.**

Vanity Cases. Courtesy of the artist

:: What does your usual work process involve?

Most of the time, the first step is the sculpting in clay (around an iron framework). Once my model is made, the sculpture in clay is then cast (with silicone, latex, resins). Then, I remove the clay from the mold and, in this mold, I make the final sculpture with various materials (resin, wood fiber, charcoal, iron wood, soil - this is my secret recipe). All of these stages of the process are interesting and important for me to do on myself and sometimes I prefer the mold rather than the final sculpture! This molding, casting process inspired me for my soft sculpture projects. For the *Freeboxes* project I recycled the model in clay and immersed it in clear polyester resin. For me, it has an important symbolic meaning when a part of the process becomes a sculpture in itself.

:: How long does development usually take?

Everything depends on the work required to materialize my idea and on my motivation (which often is very compulsive). It can take several days to several weeks for the modeling in clay, a few days more for making the mold and some other days to finish the final sculpture. I am creating about a 15 sculptures a year. The materialization of an idea may begin from the first evening (I love nightscapes) sometimes it can be suspended for several months, or it may never occur.

:: *Vanity is a recurring theme throughout the ages, especially in literature. Where did the idea for the Vanity Cases project emerge?*

At first, I have been inspired by the image of the *natural* mummies of Guanajuato. What I like

in those mummies (opposite to skeletons) is the *living* aspect as a result of the variable skin and soft tissue preservation which leads to their various expressions. In the mummies of Guanajuato, in contrast with the Egyptian mummies for instance, the scenery is very impressive and some of them really seem to have been surprised by death in their daily life (some historians believe one of these was buried alive) and have only been preserved because of the climatic conditions. When the first of those sculptures had been realized, I was unable to present it *nude*, I felt it too hard, too crude and left it in a corner of my art studio for later. Then, haphazardly the words »Vanity Case« came up into my mind and I thought about its double meaning. I began to look (in secondhand markets) for old cases and objects linked to



photo | **Patrick Loréa. 2011-2012**
Untitled. Courtesy of the artist

the scenes I wanted to represent. All of those cases and objects belonged once to someone who is now dead. During the whole project, I was fascinated by confronting the parts of somebody's death on the one hand, with the parts of somebody's supposed life on the other hand.

:: Your work has been described as «Notre besoin de consolation est impossible à rassasier». Do you believe that comfort is unattainable because we project ourselves in a different manner than what we actually are? Or is it that understanding of oneself is impossible, thus making comfort hard to achieve from the outside?

This sentence was written by Stig Dagerman, an utopian anarchist

who unfortunately committed suicide two years afterwards. For sure, most of us are projecting ourselves more or less in a different way than what we actually are. But that's not the essential thing, it's just the human comedy. The understanding of ourselves is maybe not possible to really achieve, but we can tend to that, at least we have to and we need to. We are sometimes able to reach the knowledge of what we really need. The problem is, if we do have this knowledge, that we do not always have the resources to satisfy our needs. Sometimes our actions are contradicting our needs. For instance, we need to experience dependence to understand and enjoy freedom. Comfort is hard (if not impossible) to achieve from

the outside. Comfort and freedom have to be found inside of us, but as we live *within* this outside, we are often in an antagonistic (or in best cases diplomatic) relationship with nature and society.

As Stig Dagerman would say: »If I want to live free, I have at the moment to do it inside these forms. The world is thus stronger than me. To its power I have nothing to oppose but myself - but, from a certain view, it is considerable. Because as long as I do not allow myself to be crushed by the numbers, I am also a power. (...) Such is my only consolation. I know that relapses into despair will be numerous and deep, but the memory of the miracle of the liberation carries me as a wing towards a



photo | **Patrick Loréa. 2011-2012.**
Untitled. Courtesy of the artist

purpose which makes me dizzy: a consolation which is more than a consolation and bigger than a philosophy, that is a reason for living».

:: *Photography, painting and the related arts are mostly bi-dimensional pieces. In opposition, sculpture and installation art is mostly three-dimensional. Is it difficult to imagine a piece of work in 3D? Or does it come naturally?*

To imagine a piece in 3D is go-

ing very smoothly, but, for sure, for its realization on a technical level, there are more technical constraints. On the contrary, it was difficult for me as a painter to restrict the things to only two dimensions. We live in a 3D world as we have the dimensions of time and motion. The real challenge in sculpture is to press the button on hold in order to stop the movement and to catch an emotion or expression.

:: *Going back to the Vanity Cases project: how does the love-death dichotomy apply to it?*

Let's talk about the *Thanatos* and *Eros* drives. I'm not a disciple of Freud but I think that those concepts are fundamental to understand our human beings, and it is maybe the best way to resume most of my work, *Vanity Cases* included. *Thanatos* (*Todestrieb*) is our drive towards death, self-destruction and the return to the



photo | **Patrick Loréa. 2011-2012**
Untitled. Courtesy of the artist

inorganic state. That death drive opposes *Eros*, our tendency towards survival, procreation, life, sex, pleasure.

Most people only see the pain in my work, but *Eros* is a blend of pleasure and pain (such as a delivery which gives birth to new life or such as a painful or anxious expression on the face during an orgasm), as *Thanatos* is a mixture of pain and relief. All our behaviors are either an opposition or a combination of those drives. For instance, the excess of love may lead to a murder. In the *Vanity Cases* I reduced the classical gap that people use to put between life and love on the one hand, and death on the other hand.

:: *Is degradation of the human psyche visible from the outside? Or does it become apparent only through the passage of time?*

First, it depends on who is looking. I think I look more easily inside the psyche of many of my contemporaries than I'm able to understand them. Then, the passage of time is rather helping each of us understand better the degradation of our own psyche and to hide it better, for those who want or who believe they have to.

:: *You have a collaboration project with Oceane Gil, involving soft latex and mixed media. Have you also considered collaborations with audio artists, for example, or any other inter-medium mixes for you work?*

Collaborations and inter-medium mixes are important to me. For my project *Beautiful Agony*, I made an installation where the music (a mix of *Erik Satie* and *Melek-Tha*) was quite as important as the sculptures. I often collaborate with a photographer named



photo | **Patrick Loréa.**
Vanity Cases. Courtesy of the artist

Olivier Lelong, by working on a set and sometimes making some *Shibari* (living sculptures) as it is needed for the photograph. I also collaborated with him for the scenery of a video clip he realized for the band *Treponem Pal*. We also worked together for other performances on scene where we adapted the use of materials mostly used in sculpture (*Latex*, *Alginate*). I am quite interested to cross the border between static (dead) sculpture and living body

expression. I also have a project with a music band (*Mistreated Soul*) and a *Butô*-related performer (*Yannick Unfricht*). For this project, I am working on semi-soft sculptures and masks to go with the performers on stage.

:: *What are you working on at the moment?*

At this very moment, I am trying to answer your interesting questions!

Most of the time, I am working on



photo | **Patrick Loréa.**

Freeboxes. Courtesy of the artist

different projects together. I am looking for new materials, new textures. I am working on new *Vanity Cases* and other *Freeboxes*. At the same time, I am developing the project with *Yannick Unfricht*.

:: *What future projects are in store for you?*

I have so many of them. I cannot talk about them in detail because, if I speak too much about a project, I lose some desire for it and, consequently, I lose the energy needed for its realization. But let's say that I want to explore new materials, human expressions, I want to find the best way and moment to freeze the image and motion and to work on body-casting. All I want is to have fun whilst finding some relief for myself

:: *What are you reading at the moment?*

Dans les forêts de Sibérie by Sylvain Tesson. This is the story of a writer who is going to live for 6 months in a hut in Siberian Taiga, escaping thus from Parisian life in order to experience how to find and how to manage loneliness and liberty.

:: *How is life in France? Is it a fertile medium for creation?*

I do not have the impression that the country where I live is important for the fertility of my work or my inspiration. On the contrary, I was born and passed my youth in Belgium, a little country and a fertile place for famous artists (*Delvaux, Magritte, Wim Delvoye,*

Jan Fabre, Somville). Concerning France, there are a lot of great artists, but the market is maybe too feeble.

:: *If you were to describe your work in 4 words, what would you say?*

Human, Pleasure, Pain, Life.



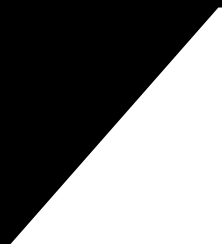
photo | **Patrick Loréa.**
Freeboxes. Courtesy of the artist

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IO MISHIMA

DEATH AS SOMETHING TO BE SEEN.



**BERTRAND
MARILIER**

»What distinguishes the heroic from the decadent death? (...) What difference there might be resolves itself into the presence or absence of the idea of honour, which regards death as »something to be seen«, and the presence or absence of the formal aesthetic of death that goes with it, in other words the tragic nature of the approach to death and the beauty of the body going to its doom.« [z]

In 1949, then in his early twenties, *Yukio Mishima* publishes *Confessions of a Mask*, his first novel

which also brought him to international attention: it portrays the largely autobiographical character of a young Japanese man who, throughout his childhood and his youth, come to build a complex but painfully ill-fitting persona in order to satisfy the pressing demands of the post-war Japanese society, most notably in terms of his sexuality. A decade later, we find *Yukio Mishima*, his own homosexuality a relatively open secret, somehow continuing where his character was left in the story: now married he is expecting his first daughter, Noriko.

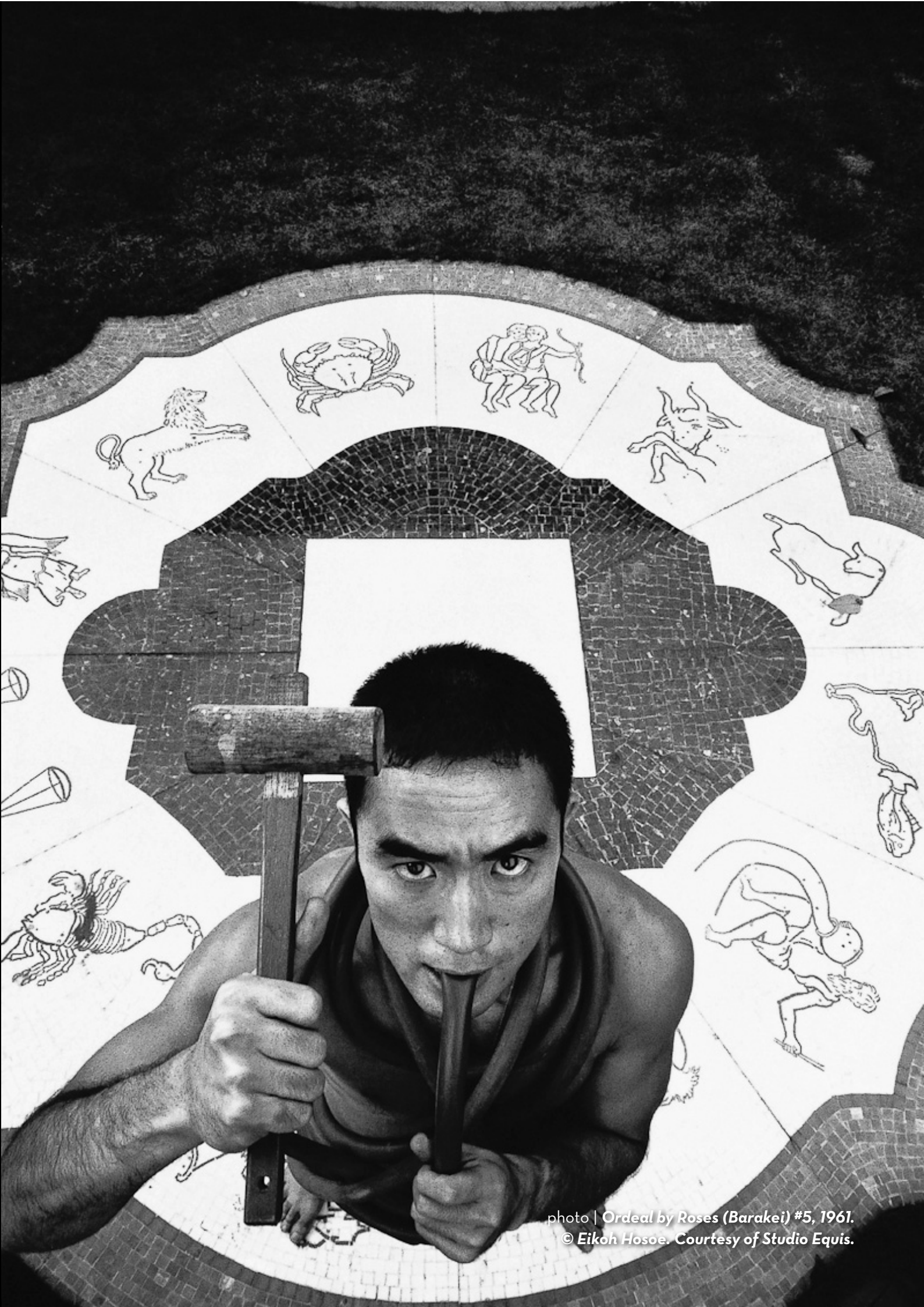


photo | Ordeal by Roses (Barakei) #5, 1961.
© Eikoh Hosoe. Courtesy of Studio Equis.

In the meantime, on the other side of the pacific, merely three years older than *Mishima*, sociologist *Erving Goffman* publishes a book that will change radically both the material and the method of his discipline: *The Presentation of the Self in Every Day Life* argues that human interactions are best interpreted as those of characters acted out by actors, and that places and objects can, or must be, perceived as sets and props. *Goffman's* work and it's powerful latent aesthetic participated, with *Borges*, *Burke* and I in setting the foundations for the *mise en abyme* narratives championed by *Charlie Kaufmann*, but also certainly planted the seeds that would grow into what *Mathew Wilson Smith* coined *Total Performance*, that is life in its entirety, as a performance and a work of art.

The metaphor of theatre for social life is by no mean an invention of *Mishima* or of *Goffman*: the Latin root *persona* means a mask and the analogies of theatricality were long used to discuss a variety of *diegesis* and *mimesis*: the ins and out of characters and social roles, the Socratic dialogue of *Ion of Ephesus* or even the *Platonician* duality between the real the staged stand amongst many others in a variety of cultures (»At first tragedies were brought on the stage as means of reminding men of the things which happen to them, and that it is according to nature for things to happen so, and that, if you are delighted with what is shown on the stage, you should not be troubled with that which takes place on the larger stage.« [y]. But *Goffman* seems the first to have interpreted social life, as a whole, as a form of theatre. The ensuing approach

that developed we call social dramaturgy and this was to take part in some major shifts in the arts in general and in performance in particular.

»THE TRAGIC NATURE OF THE APPROACH TO DEATH AND THE BEAUTY OF THE BODY GOING TO ITS DOOM«

»All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women
merely players:
They have their exits and their
entrances;
And one man in his time plays
many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first
the infant«

Whereas *Goffman* sees the theatrics and the dramaturgy in every day life and the most common interactions, *Mishima* will dedicate his life to re-writing and hijacking not only his harshly shortened take on *Shakespeare's* seven acts, but also of the entire performance of modern political history. His very failure on the political stage, will be the necessary condition for his spectacular achievement in the drama of his own life.

»Politicians are concerned with the effect of an act, and effectiveness is not my motivation. My responsibility is to the act itself.« [v]

Yukio Mishima, born *Kimitake Hiroaka* had a very sheltered childhood, due to a feeble disposition and an overprotective grandmother, and was of his own confession, left out of the social life of boys until he reached adulthood – some biographies expand on hints present in *Confession of a Mask*, asserting he was attributing his own homosexuality to those circumstances, while others of his works most notably *Forbidden Colours* or *Sun and Steel* could suggest different interpretations; However he developed early a very bookish disposition and immersed himself, in this isolation, in Eastern and Japanese traditional culture which were to take under his pen, a distinctly eroticized aspect:

In his most famous story *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1956) he develops in many ways the aching urge for the sublime that lead him throughout his life: whereas he himself and critics occasionally regard others of his works as superior in their maturity and insight (After *The Banquet* or *The Sea of Fertility*) the short story seems to capture both the



photo | *Ordeal by Roses (Barakei) #29, 1961.*
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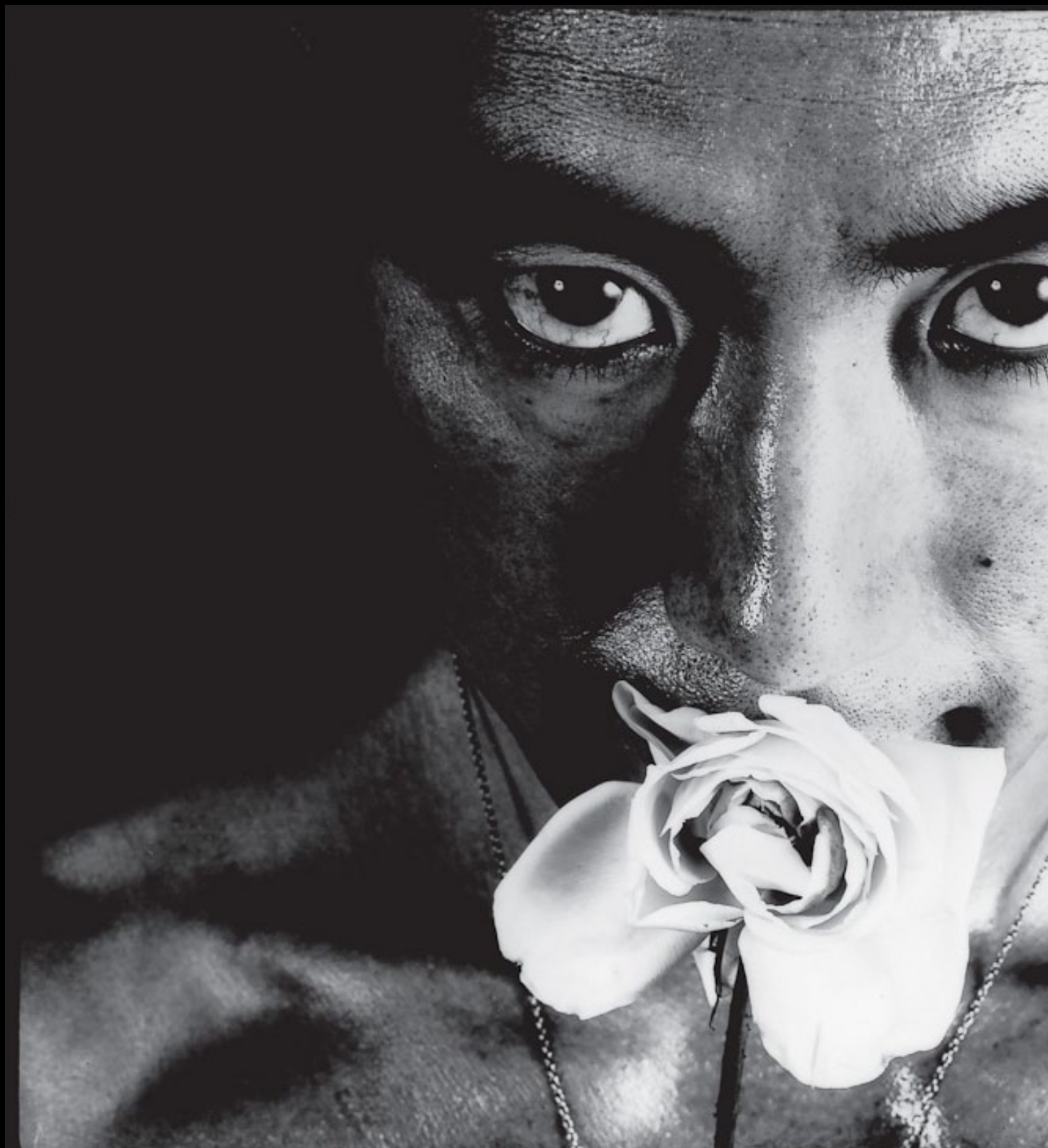


photo | ***Ordeal by Roses (Barakei) #32, 1961.*** © Eikoh Hosoe. Courtesy of Studio Equis.

romanticism and youthful boldness of his earlier work, and the more articulated expression of his world view as fulfilled in his death. In the next 15 years or so he will perfect his style and write many

novels, short stories, plays and films, defining a literary style that meshes the refined and traditional aesthetics of Japanese poetry with a modern, angular, sometimes brutal narration, contrasting pain-

fully human characters with their otherworldly aspirations. The label of nihilist that was apposed to him (and which he co-opted) came lately under increasing questioning and is in my eye misleading



given the transcendental quality of his ideas of nothingness – yet, if the looming sense of the futility of all action is not present in all of his work there was certainly a deep misanthropy that took part in lead-

ing him to the radical idealism he lived and died for.

»I was there alone and the Golden Temple – the absolute, positive Golden Temple – had enveloped

me. Did I possess the temple, or was I possessed by it? Or would it not be more correct to say that a strange balance had come into being at that moment, a balance which would allow me to be the Golden Temple and the Golden Temple to be me?» [u]

His books often tell the us of an encounter with the sublime, either in the form of the sacred or in the form of transgression: it seems that for him the two remain inexorably bound together, whether it is the sacred that free one of the absurd and degenerate conditions of the norm, or the transgression that reveal a world of beauty and absolute behind the heavy curtain of the quotidian. His stories, unlike those of his celebrated contemporaries *Tanizaki* and *Kawabata*, are in terms of structure closer to the occidental traditional model, and despite their exotic aesthetics, provide the reader with a rewarding dramatic development, which probably part-took in his western popularity. And this is one of the many reproaches the Japanese (and some of the Occidental) medias have been wielding against his ghost, and one that can hardly be denied: for all of his heroic, intransigent nationalism, *Mishima* was aware, and fond, of his occidental recognition. For a celebrated high-brow writer he was indulging in a variety of unexpected incursions in the domain of pop-culture, as many »publicity stunts« would say his detractors, from acting in popular action gangster-flicks to posing nude or commenting on an astonishing number of sometimes odd cultural phenomena.

»Dress my body in a Shield Society uniform, give me white gloves and a soldier's sword in my hand, and then do me the favour of taking a

photograph. My family may object, but I want evidence that I died not as a literary man but as a warrior.« [t]

This enthusiasm for gaudy popular forms is reminiscent, in its wide sweeps across high and low culture, of another of his American contemporaries, *Andy Warhol*. Although *Mishima's* dedication to ideal beauty and sacrifice seems worlds apart from *Warhol's* endorsement of ruthless, individualistic capitalism, and his disturbing fascination for its paradoxical shortcomings, there are beyond political differences, striking similarities. *Warhol's* practice made an extensive use of self-portrait and can be regarded as an attempt to enforce absolute control over his public persona: »Business Art. Art Business. The business Art business«. As he writes in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1975), involves his taking self-marketing to radical new heights. From his screen prints to the 1967 Utah impersonated lecture, in flooding mass culture with products and representation in every form and at every level, he discredits alien accounts or interpretations that could potentially hi-jack his image (as exemplified in his famous ad »I'll endorse with my name any of the following...« in *Village Voice*).

Mishima's media conscious character was never perfected to the level of *Warhol's* one, nor included the in-built intricacies that made the American so difficult to use or to tarnish. The Japanese writer did share his want for total control over his life, both from within and from without: One of his biographers, *Henry Scott Stokes*, quotes him confiding »I want to make a poem of my life«, and to achieve his grand project *Mishima* needed

complete control. This pursuit is apparent in his interests in body building and martial arts (*The Sun and the Steel*) and I find his much derided outings in the realms of the mass media to be attempts at

»DRESS MY BODY IN A SHIELD SOCIETY UNIFORM, GIVE ME WHITE GLOVES AND A SOLDIER'S SWORD«

devising an equivalent discipline to master his »public body«.

But unlike *Warhol*, his dabbling in mass media never made him the two-dimensional, inhumane signifier that *Warhol* was: his life and his work still appears to us as contradictory, imperfect, flawed and deeply human: in *Sun*

and *Steel* (1968), defining tragedy he writes »when a perfectly average sensibility momentarily takes on to itself a privileged nobility that keeps others at a distance and not when a special type of sensibility vaunts its own special claims«. One can be tempted to see in his acting for *Black Lizard* or *Afraid to Die*, a portrayal of that »perfectly average sensibility«.

In interviews *Mishima* was reportedly keen to compare himself to *Don Quixote*, certainly echoing his fondness for the Spanish golden age – but obviously the analogy does not stop here. *Cervantes'* character peculiar form of madness springs from having read too many chivalric novels and transposing, inadequately but with great perseverance, those ideals into the real world. This attempt at re-uniting the original duality of the real and the ideal is clearly present in *Mishima's* glorification of the man of action, but he also wants to be both *Don Quixote* and *Sancho Panza*, both the idealist and the witness. The very comparison he draws between himself and the Spanish knight evidence his awareness of that fact, as he probably lacks the necessary, tragic madness to truly believe in his political windmills. His heroic quest, void of the necessary madness, becomes a performance.

»17. Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the author pleases to make it. If short, of a short one; if long, of a long one. If it is his pleasure you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, to act well



photo | **Ordeal by Roses (Barakei) #16, 1961.**
© Eikoh Hosoe. Courtesy of Studio Equis.

the character assigned you; to choose it is another's.« [s]

Mishima's hubris left him no place to act out any »plan for life« but the one would write. According to his biographers, Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde left him the biggest impression after his teenage readings. If Nietzsche's pervasive influence can be felt throughout the influence of Wilde certainly part-took in the building of his total performance: in his short dialogue *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde dispenses his provocative theory: it is not, as established since ancient philosophy, art that imitates life, but life that imitates art.

»If it drew some of its strength from using life as rough material,

it drew all its weakness from using life as an artistic method.« [r]

Wilde attacks realism for being dull and, ultimately for being wrong; art, in the words of his main character originated in abstract forms, that were later imitated by life (»Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder«) – for Mishima art begin with the idealized, heroic Japan of the *Hagakure*, that is on the brink of fading away for ever from modern Japan, which fails to perpetuate the tradition of beauty. For Wilde, lying will restore art in its proper position that realism has pretty much extinguished.

The idea of decay, and decay of lying, is very present in Mishima's work: a Spenglerian sense of imminent doom permeates most of his work. Societal, individual and possibly metaphysical decline is nowhere as central as in the tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility*, and, as for other traditionalists, attempts at interrupting the process corruption appear to the author futile but none the less necessary: in Wilde's text, at the very end of the dialogue, the main interlocutor, betraying half of his previous argumentation against nature and fresh air, command his friend to take a stroll outside, proving that the argumentation, in its entirety is ultimately a lie and therefore an artwork.

»The Nihilist, that strange martyr

who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm, and dies for what he does not believe in, is a purely literary product.« [q]

Throughout the sixties, while *Mishima* and *Warhol* are at the top of their career, from the fallouts of *Action Painting* and the rising political awareness, performance art is blossoming all around the world with movements such as *Fluxus* or *Gutai*.

From Austria rose one the most virulent expressions of this new form: in the space of approximately ten years, the Viennese Actionists staged a variety of *Aktionen* in an orgy of blood, bowels, scat and sex giving rise to a wave of indignation that would lead them to regularly experience legal pursuits and sometimes jail. »Performance art«, in the eyes of the Actionists, was aimed at creating an artistic manifestation that could not be commodified by the state or the system. We find here a clear echo of *Mishima's* own political concerns, and it is interesting to note that the *Mühl/Brus* Actionist manifesto share its title *Art and Revolution* with one of *Wagner's* first texts on the relationship between politics and aesthetics: *Mishima* was to pick *Wagner* (predictably) for the music of his short movie *Patriotism* prefiguring his own suicide.

Of the four core members of the Vienna Actionists, three adopted a relative unconcerned but similar approach, celebrating chaos and transgression on the backdrop of a pagan cathartic ritual, while the fourth character remain a lot more enigmatic: *Rudolf Schwarzkogler* produced few performances and they were often little documented, he died in tragic and relatively mysterious circumstances in 1969.

The case of *Rudolf Schwarzkogler* shed a particular light on *Mishima's* death a bit more than a year later:

»TO PLACE ONESELF IN THE POSITION OF GOD IS PAINFUL: BEING GOD IS EQUIVALENT TO BEING TORTURED«

the actionist's death was reported by *Newsweek* as having resulted from one too many an extreme performance, when, attempting to chop his penis into slices he would have lost too much blood and died on the spot. Years later it is now widely accepted that this version of the death of *Schwarzkogler* was constructed either for sensa-

tionalist purpose or to cover the real circumstances of his death following a fall from a window – whether the fall was intentional or not has not been certified yet but the more glamorous option of a suicide remain the dominant narrative.

»To place oneself in the position of God is painful: being God is equivalent to being tortured. For being God means that one is in harmony with all that is, including the worst. The existence of the worst evils is unimaginable unless God willed them.« [p]

Schwarzkogler's pursuit is more difficult to define, because of the scarcity of theoretical documentation, and because of the form and mood of the one that reached us – ascetic dietary suggestions, disjunct and esoteric instructions for future performances, and a number of lists whose purpose could not be identified. At the very opposite of *Warhol's* permanent media awareness, the Austrian performer seemed a very private individual, who performed most of his rare *Aktionen* in front of an extremely limited audience, if any audience at all. Those performances generally took place in his own flat and involved a highly controlled environment and a restrained aesthetic, miles away from the *Dionysiac* celebrations of the rest of his fellow actionists. For example, from his notes one can gather that his performances incorporated important colour symbolism, yet most are documented in black and white: This lack of suitable documentation and the total disregard he showed for either press or audience in his work led many commentators to see his practice as being eminently personal and sometimes therapeutic, cathartic,

imbued with an urgency that keep them on the verge of outsider art.

»Lord Naoshige said, *The Way of the Samurai is in desperateness. Ten men or more cannot kill such a man. Commonsense will not accomplish great things. Simply become insane and desperate.*« [o] *Hagakure* is an XVIIIth century book describing in detail the prescriptions of the author concerning the ways and beliefs of the proper samurai – the book enjoy a unique status in Japanese culture for crystallizing the chivalric ideals considered as the height of the tradition, while also being deeply tangled with Japanese nationalist thought, *kamikaze* and militarism in general – if a comparison had to be drawn, *Wagner* springs to mind again: although presented by the nationalists as the epitome of vitalism and martial value, *Hagakure* was actually written in a time of peace where *samurai*s were more rarely drawn to fight than to administrative duties. A fascinating read it is also ridden with nostalgia for a lost era of valour and dignity, values it presses the young to adopt less as a tool towards achieving anything than as a method to live a life one can die proud of.

In 1967, Mishima published *On Hagakure* in which he develops on the central role that the text played in philosophy. One core concept in his interpretations is centrality of death in the proper existence of the samurai. The *Hagakure* ceaselessly invite the *samurai* to think about his own death to the point of becoming so familiar with the idea that it would arouse no fear. One should, *Mishima* adds, not only welcome death but even actively pursue it: as the

most absolute embodiment of the beautiful ideals leading the warrior's life.

»A real man does not think of victory or defeat. He plunges reck-

»A REAL MAN DOES NOT THINK OF VICTORY OR DEFEAT. HE PLUNGES RECKLESSLY TOWARDS AN IRRATIONAL DEATH«

lessly towards an irrational death. By doing this, you will awaken from your dreams.« [n] Less emphasized by *Mishima* but certainly determinant for his future thought was the importance of the *daimyo*, the master, for whom the *samurai* total and unconditional dedication has a mystique (or erotic for some

commentators) appeal – for a XXth century civilian like *Mishima*, the direct, individual relationship with a *daimyo* is impossible and his blind faith is therefore deported onto the last remnant of the transcendental hierarchy, but also its most axial figure, the emperor. *Mishima's* relationship to the emperor is a complex one – the national catastrophe that put an end to WWII and initiated the American occupation striped the emperor of any political function but did not abolish the imperial hierarchy, and *Mishima* held this bastardized condition in awe, sometimes even more than he did for the fully westernized post-war economy.

But that criticism, obviously, was not enough to distract from him the ire of the radical student left which was, in Japan as everywhere in the western world, arising to criticize American hegemony which in *Mishima's* country was all the more literal. *Red Army* groups flourished around the country ultra-left student groups were regularly confronting the authority – their political program, as opposed to Japan's forced Americanisation as *Mishima's* own diatribes were, was also internationalist, communist and materialist in ways irreconcilable with the novelist's *Samurai* ethics. Although *Mishima* repeatedly expressed sympathy for the radical left he was occasionally insulted and mocked by figures of the left and students. Following fifteen years of American occupation and growth oriented politics, in the sixties, Japanese culture produced a large amount of books, films, theatre, music and comics, and the particular Japanese outlook started getting renewed interest in the west, spear-headed

by charismatic ambassadors like Yoko Ono, Nagasi Oshima or Kisho Kurokawa. Yukio Mishima himself, although supported and promoted by the older and very popular writer Kawabata, became increasingly alienated from the Japanese literary scene, who, predominantly left-wing, stomachached with difficulty his repeated vows of allegiance to the nationalist cause.

Mishima seemed to gather more popularity in the movie industry: maybe his professed preference for actions over words lent itself better, at the end of the day, to performance than to writing. A close friend of Donald Richie, the most prominent expert and promoter of Japanese cinema in the west he acted and directed a short film called *Yukoku*, based on his much celebrated short story *Patriotism* (1966). His incursion in popular movies is also pictured in Terayama's classic counter-culture movie *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, if in a certainly less ceremonious fashion...

Yukoku in many aspects refuses to submit to even the most fundamental contemporary conventions: the plot, following precisely the short story builds no momentum or suspense. The film itself is shot in black and white and uses scrolls to replace dialogues, while the set design and the acting, slow, calculated and ritual, is referencing Noh theatre. The story depicts the ritual suicide of an army lieutenant and his wife in support of an attempted coup to restore the glory of the Japanese empire: it is of course an other one of Mishima's oracles as to his future destiny. It is interesting to note that of all his text and plays Mishima picked this particular

**»BEFORE
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OF MY
MIND, HAD
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TOTALLY
REDUNDANT«**

short-story and went to stage it as filmed theatre, rather than one of his many theatre, *Noh* and *Kabuki* pieces.

He was also known for his disdain of *Bunraku*, the elaborate Japanese puppetry, which he dismissed as being devoid of the essence of performance: film seemed to have in his eyes lacked »the essence of performance« just as much. This tension between the classicist tradition and the new media, between his rigorous inner life and his need to perform it to an audience, is to be found throughout most of his non-literary output: *Ba Ra Kei*, his modelling shoot with celebrated Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe, captures, at times movingly a certain vulnerability and awkwardness in his public persona, possibly revealing of his fundamental inability to reconcile his heroic longings with lascivious abandon of mass-media.

»Before Hosoe's camera, I soon realized that my own spirit, the workings of my mind, had become totally redundant. It was an exhilarating experience, a state of affairs I had long dreamed of.« [m]

The German terminology of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, roughly originating in Wagner's project of fusing music, poetry, painting, theatre, dance and all other arts he could include, hints at a seamless artwork, a microcosm of sort under complete control of it's creator. In his book *The Total Work of Art*, Mathew Wilson Smith draw a daring parallel between the »spatial« *Gesamtkunstwerk* à la Wagner and the total performance of the self, as represented by Warhol, and, to me, by Mishima and maybe by Schwarzkogler. Indeed



photo | *Ordeal by Roses (Barakei) #38, 1961.*
© Eikoh Hosoe. Courtesy of Studio Equis.

the lives of those artists in the burgeoning age of the mass media involved many forms of arts, from their original practice in painting, writing or graphics, evolved to encompass music, film or happening – but what they strived to achieve, and *Bayreuth* couldn't ever dream to fulfill, was the fusion of those many artistic practices with the artist himself, with the art of living – and the art of dying.

»I just finished the novel on the very day of my action in order to realize my *Bunbu-Ryodo*. After thinking and thinking through four years, I came to wish to sacrifice myself for the old, beautiful tradition of Japan, which is disappearing very quickly day by day. I wish you the happiest and healthiest life.« [1]

The Japanese terminology *Bun* means *Culture Arts*, *Bu* means *Warrior Arts* and *Ryodo* stands for *Synthesis*. The *Bunbu Ryodo* is part of the traditional *samurai* ideal and involves an all around knowledge of traditional Japanese arts, from music to calligraphy, floral arrangements or poetry. It is traditionally complemented by the concept of *Bunbu Ichi*, the »Unity of the Culture and Warrior arts«.

Throughout his life and his writings, as his existence was coming to a close *Mishima's* interest in literature seemed to wane, or at least he liked to pretend so: as best exemplified in his commentary of the *Hagakure* and *Sun and Steel*, the influence of the *Yomei* philosophy lead him to a mystical glorification of action over words, as if, to realise his *Bunbu-Ryodo*, much action was needed to balance all the words of his literary career.

**»TOO FOND
OF BEAUTY
TO BE
WARHOL AND
TOO KEEN
ON PUBLIC
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SCHWARZKOGLER
MISHIMA WAS
HOVERING
SOMEWHERE
IN BETWEEN
ON THE SCALE
OF THE TOTAL
PERFORMANCE«**

Such an ambitious synthesis for *Mishima* like for *Wagner*, sits somewhere between romanticism and modernism. In a Japan where tradition and modernity or action and theory were becoming ever more polarised, this pursuit was bound to create conflicting aspirations, conflicting allegiances too, and death appeared throughout his work as the absolute solution for those situations as for all compromises. Too fond of beauty to be *Warhol* and too keen on public attention to be *Schwarzkogler*, *Mishima* was hovering somewhere in between on the scale of the total performance.

Mishima, *Warhol* or *Schwarzkogler*, each in exercising such unrelenting control over their public persona, had the intent of transcending the dramaturgic paradigm, the separation between the genuine and the pretence. *Warhol's* approach to the »total performance of the self« differs radically from the one of *Mishima*: *Warhol* wanted to extinguish the actor, to leave only a mask, and to make the void behind the mask all the more conspicuous whereas *Mishima* attempted to fusion the mask and its wearer, for the actor to become his character. At any rate both wished to dissolve the fundamental diegesis as outlined by *Goffman* – for *Warhol* this was death of the conscious, the dissolution of the individual in the image and the product, but for *Mishima*, to achieve this death was the only solution.

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Photos |

Eikoh Hosoe. Courtesy of Studio Equis

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