

Mishima Yukio and/vs the Students' Movements of the Late 1960s: Bridging the Gap between Left and Right

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This paper revisits the exchange between writer Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) and the members of the Tōdai-Zenkyōtō (東京大学全共闘), held on May 13, 1969 on the Komaba Campus of Tokyo University. After reviewing the historical background against which this encounter took place, namely, the students' movements of the 1960s, this paper will reveal the connections and discrepancies between these two unlikely interlocutors. Along with the contextualization of this dialogue, it will show how violence, the emperor, and a radical form of action are the three key elements that articulate their political and intellectual stances.

The political and the artistic

Tightly wrapped in the illusion of homogeneity, the Japan we inhabit dreams of its own recent past as a period of calm, equality and political rest. Particularly the mid-Showa period, represented by the seemingly naïve Tower of the Sun, the iconic statue designed by Okamoto Tarō to commemorate the World Expo in Osaka, is popularly looked back on with a sense of nostalgia for a seemingly simpler time. However, the post-war decades of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s constitute a period when social contestation and political turmoil, as well as aesthetic manifestations of

dissatisfaction with the increasingly wealthy “new Japan,” were the most important social features.

While perhaps not as troubled as in previous decades, Japanese society during the 1960s was marked by the controversial revision and renewal of the Security Treaty between the US and Japan (Anpo, for its abbreviation in Japanese, originally signed in 1954 after the San Francisco Treaty), which produced an outburst of social discontent and protests that shook Japanese society, particularly during the summer of 1960. Of course, political tensions had arisen since the end of the American occupation in 1952 and had worsened through the 1950s, but it is in the year 1960, with its riots and protests, when landmark change took place. That year marks not only the beginning of an era defined by the enforcement of state policies aimed at ensuring the nation's economic growth but also a period of revolutionary forms of artistic and cultural expression. Although the ultimate purpose of the protests of 1960 was to prevent the passage of the new security treaty, a purpose that was unsuccessful as the treaty not only passed but has remained effective to this day, “[protests] *did* succeed in bringing down reviled prime minister Kishi [...], as well as preventing a planned visit to Japan by the US president” (Kapur, 2020, emphasis is mine).

The Japanese government of the 1960s was carrying out an intense campaign to place the country as a central actor in the global economy and the international community, something that came along with the redefinition of the Japanese national image through the promotional aesthetics of mega events such as the Tokyo Olympics of 1964 and the 1970 World Expo in Osaka. But also during this era Japan witnessed the appearance of students' and workers' unions, troupes of artists, performers and writers who

contested the political and economic developments of the time. It is possible to say that two cultural phenomena were taking place at the same time in Japan during the decade of the 1960s: one that moved towards the creation of a globally approved image of a modern Japan, and the counter-cultural, avant-garde movement, that nurtured the social movement.

Artistic and cultural productions are particularly important for a deep understanding of the complexities of this era, as they relocate state politics to the level of everyday life. Marotti (2013) argues, for example, that the avant-garde movement of the 1960s, with its attempt to return art to the quotidian locus, challenged the new, sanitized and depoliticized national mythology of the time, and gave new life to political protest. *Angura*, the countercultural theater movement, brought to the cultural foreground the idea that avant-garde artistic movements had to be, in their essence, pregnant with political sensibility aiming not only to think about the political but to actually transform society (see Eckersall, 2006). However, besides the dynamic groups of *angura* and the official images of the nation, the decade of the 1960s saw the flourishing of one of the most prominent cultural and literary figures of this time, perhaps even more important than the 1968 Nobel laureate, Kawabata Yasunari. That figure is none other than Mishima Yukio.

Mishima was the most well-known Japanese writer of the postwar era across the world, and both a pop culture superstar and an erudite of vast knowledge. He “wrote on nearly every topic imaginable: from modern European philosophy to classical Chinese ethics, from the underground gay scene of Tokyo to a rethinking of samurai culture as a mode of life, from short pieces in mainstream women’s magazines to vast, philosophically driven novels” (Walker, 2020). He wrote multiple pieces of *shingeki* modern

theater (the theatrical form that was criticized by the *angura* movement, although Mishima himself remained friends with some of its most notorious members), rewrote classical Noh drama, and even penned screenplays for action films, some of which he participated in as an amateur performer. This impulse towards exhibitionism was obvious, too, in his posing for highly sexualized photographs, and his commitment to bodybuilding. He was also an active commentator who engaged in literary discussions, political debates, and public dialogues with major figures from both artistic and political arenas. Mishima was a firsthand witness of the international mega events of his time: He was an enthusiast reporter for the Tokyo Olympics (see Hong, 2015, especially chapter 6), and died a few months after the Osaka World Expo. Mishima was known for his endless literary talent as much as for his right-wing antics: from writing essays about fascism, to creating a self-funded private army aimed at defending the emperor, to staging a theatre play with the controversial title “My friend Hitler,” to committing suicide by disembowelment in a dramatic performance at the offices of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

An invitation from the “left” to the “right”

Mishima, this performer of right-wing acts, was surprisingly invited in May 1969 to join a public discussion at Tokyo University. This invitation was extended by his future discussants, members of Zenkyōtō (All Campus Joint Struggle Committee), a radical leftist student movement which emerged from the larger Zengakuren (All-Japan Federation of Students), in one of the many fractures that the students' movements of the 1950s and 1960s suffered. Mishima was not unaware of the violent protests carried out by the students' movements, and had been attentive to the equally

violent and disproportioned response by the *Kidōtai*, the anti-riot forces; he had witnessed first-hand the aftermath of the anti-war protests of 1968, and was said to be concerned with the fall of the Yasuda hall (see Toyoshima, 2020, 1: 43, and Andrews, 2016, p. 88). But it was not a simple interest in current matters nor his job as a news correspondent what drew Mishima towards the protests (according to Flannagan, 2014, p. 212, Mishima *had* been appointed by the *Sunday Mainichi* as a special correspondent on the day of the International Anti-War riots); rather, he went to the field of action motivated by the wish to be as close as possible to these mobilizations and perhaps to have his wish of dying a beautiful, heroic death, fulfilled (ibid, 206). Mishima anxiously awaited the moment when his private army was called in to take part in some sort of violent action.

When Mishima arrived at the Komaba campus (why he was not invited to the main campus of Tokyo University remains unclear) he must have been well aware that he was putting himself at risk, entering such a hostile arena. Indeed, not only was he received in the tense atmosphere of a campus besieged by students, but also by a giant poster that depicted him as a “Modernist Gorilla” (see Figure 1). The poster parodied the built-up body that Mishima so often put on display and the anachronism of his ultranationalist, right-wing stance, and also perhaps contained a reference to an essay that Mishima had penned only a few months before the encounter. In January 1969, startled by the Kakukyōdō’s hostage incident, when the Japan Revolutionary Communist League took nine professors as hostages and put them through a grueling few days of verbal abuse, Mishima wrote the essay “Turn Tokyo University into a Zoo!” In a sarcastic tone, reflected in the fact that the essay was written in colloquial language (something rather unusual for Mishima), the essay criticized the imbalance



Fig 1: Mishima depicted as a muscular, hypermasculine, anachronistic and fascist gorilla

between action and intellect that Mishima seemed to perceive both in the stance of the students (who failed to seize power) and the official one (which lacked the power to put an end to the social unrest). The poster sarcastically announced an invitation to the “Tokyo University Zoo’s special display of its Modern Gorilla.”

Mishima received the joke in a remarkably cheerful manner, laughed at it and commented in jest how he should receive half of the day’s earnings to which he was contributing with his presence in this unlikely “special display”. But he also made a statement in relation to the poster clarifying his attitude towards the students. Mishima made it clear that he was no primitive man, but rather a *radical* one: “I do not enjoy this kind of political

agreement [...] I want the LDP to be more reactionary, I want the socialist party to be more violent. But both are just slacking... (*motamota shiteiru*)” (Mishima, 1969, p. 444. All translations are mine).

One might guess that the radically opposing political stances of the two parties involved would have been enough to produce an uncomfortable encounter. Yet, the discussion was rather a respectful one, filled with wit and mordant humor, which even ended with the following exchange:

-Mishima: I believe in your passion. In this one thing, I believe. I may not believe in anything else, but I would like you to know that I do believe in your passion.

-Student: So, shall we become a united front or not?

-Mishima: Well, this is a very sophisticated invitation and it sounds very attractive, but I refuse to fight alongside you (Mishima, 1969, p. 459).

Mishima praised students not only for their passion but also for smashing “the nose of self-conceit at Tokyo University” (Flanagan, 2014, p. 213), agreeing with the students that their anti-intellectualism was born from the most elevated form of intellectuality.

The opposition between Mishima and the students who took part in the protests was a product of the radicalization of politics throughout the decade of 1960. While the motivations that gave birth to the protests at the beginning of the decade differed vastly from those at its end (the agenda of ulterior protests did not only refer to the US-Japan treaty, but also included a clear anti-war focus and rejection towards large-scale projects like the new airport in Tokyo, among many others), it is undeniable

that there is a connection between both movements, possibly animated by a long-standing anti-American sentiment. In order to better understand the particular effects that these two moments of social unrest had, and to contextualize Mishima and his work within this background, let us take a look at two concrete years: 1960 and 1968.

1960

As mentioned above, in May and June of 1960, Japan saw some of the largest protests in its history. These occurred as a reaction against the ratification of the security treaty between Japan and the US (Anpo). Thousands of people came to the street day after day, and millions signed petitions against the treaty, but their voices were not heard and, after suffering from the repressive tactics of the police and the anti-mutiny police forces, the treaty was ratified on June 19. On June 15, 1960, one of the most important demonstrations took place in front of the building of the Diet, attracting an unprecedented number of protestors. As a result of state violence, thousands were hurt and one student, Kanba Michiko, was killed, becoming a symbol of fight against a government which was unwilling to listen.

In 1960, with the surge of political manifestation, a shift of consciousness starts to take place regarding Japan's identity as a victim of the war. In the fifteen years since the end of the war, Japan had "tied its national identity ever more tightly to its own victimization in the war. Stories of savagery by imperial forces, both against colonial victims and against fellow soldiers, ran counter to the prevailing postwar narratives of victimhood — stories of Japanese suffering, stories focusing on images such as [...] general privations [or] hunger on the home front" (Suttmeier, 2010, 31). But it was

not only the nation that had become a victim: the figure of the emperor, in the aftermath of the war, was also given an aura of sanctity, his possible crimes removed from sight, and his ambiguity transformed into trademark.

Although the image of the emperor as a victim rather than a perpetrator of the abuses of the war became only stronger since the end of the war (what Igarashi, 2000, calls the “foundational narrative of postwar Japan”), interestingly, in 1960, at least three literary works that deal with the figure of the emperor appear: first, Fukazawa Shichirō’s *Fūryū Mutan* (*Dream of Courtly Elegance*, the story of a dream about the decapitation of the crown prince and his wife by leftists who invade the palace); second, Ōe Kenzaburō’s *Seventeen*, and third, Ōe’s *Death of a Political Youth* (actually published at the beginning of 1961), both works based on the true story of right-wing assassin Yamaguchi Otoyō who killed the chairman of the Socialist Party, Asanuma Inejirō, in 1960, and later hung himself in prison.

Interestingly, precisely in 1960 Mishima wrote *Patriotism*, his first “political” novella, based on the failed *coup d’état* in February of 1936 (*Ni-ni-roku jiken*). Although the novella is more erotic and grotesque than political (he does not really deal with the incident itself but rather with the suicide of a young, newlywed lieutenant, whose participation in the incident was rejected, and his wife), it is worth noting that, while Ōe and Fukazawa symbolically kill the emperor in their works, Mishima chose to portray the military men who died in the name of the emperor, as if this sort of “surrogate death” was the true way to protect the emperor.

1968

Like elsewhere in the world, 1968 witnessed the peak of students’ movements in Japan. These had dwindled from around the middle of the decade

(see Oguma, 2015), when the promise of modernization had become a reality through the organization of the Tokyo Olympics, which literally and figuratively concealed the excrement of the nation, with the construction of an underground sewage system. But by 1967, with another Anpo renewal in sight, with the Vietnam war taking place not too far from Japan and with its cooperation, with American military bases spread across occupied Okinawa, the agonizing student movement saw a faction of the old Zengakuren revive under the name of Zenkyōtō and gain strength (Oguma, 2015).

In the early days of Zenkyōtō there were concrete demands for the reduction of students' fees, but "from the 1968 University of Tokyo uprising onward, students seemed far less interested in specific demands than in fighting for vaguely-defined goals such as "socialist revolution" or "university dissolution" that were convenient stand-ins for a barely-articulated process of self-formation" (Oguma, 2015). Some even argued: "All we want is the battle itself" (ibid).

At least three of the many protests around this period are considered to have changed the course of history in Japan:

- 1) In October 1967, a group of activists clashed with police near Haneda Airport in an effort to prevent the Prime Minister from traveling to South Vietnam. The violent confrontations, during which one student from Kyoto University was killed, were broadcast on national television news programs, and viewed on increasingly widespread color TVs, a key symbol of affluence in this period.
- 2) In October 1968, the International Anti-war Day was celebrated: "Students not only swarmed the campuses but undertook simultaneous guerrilla actions in Shinjuku, around the Diet and the Defense Agency,

in Ochanomizu and Ginza. A police vehicle was overturned and burned, prompting a strong response from the security forces, with shields, batons, tear gas and around 700 people being arrested" (Flannagan, 2014, 211).

- 3) On April 1969, there was another major disturbance on the so-called Okinawa Anti-war day, where demands for the immediate return to Japan of Okinawa, where the US had its largest military base, were presented. Around a thousand people were arrested, protestors were beaten, attacked with tear gas, and hosed with colored water for identification in the event of escape.

While Mishima was seen as apolitical until 1960, his dabbling in right-wing aesthetics and ideology was already clear by the latter half of the decade. When the protests of 1968 erupted, Mishima not only went out onto the streets to witness the actions of the rioters, and took on the task of reporting them to national press, but also decided to create the "Shield Society," a small right-wing paramilitary association whose members would eventually serve him as both witnesses and co-participants in the spectacular staging of his suicide. By founding this small army, Mishima also created a scenario that would be fitting for a hero's death: the moment when it became necessary to *act* in order to protect the emperor from a possible attack from the leftist mobs (of course, this never happened).

It is clear, I believe, that the two aforementioned historic moments of protests in Japan coincide with two turning points in Mishima's "political" stance: 1960, embracing the "right-wing" persona that hailed the emperor as a symbolic entity worth dying for, and 1968, taking an even clearer turn towards radical, violent action by forming his own militia.

With the understanding that Mishima and the Zenkyōtō members had

entirely opposing political positions, let us now go back to their encounter. In his opening remarks at Tokyo University, Mishima makes a reference to an event which had happened just a month before their meeting. Mishima says:

The other day I happened to meet someone. I wouldn't call this person outstanding, but a rather prominent person from the system side, and he said 'Well, this is troublesome. All the noise being made by such a bunch of crazy people. It is sheer stupidity!' Now, I was bothered by this. I am not trying to win you over. If they are troubled by crazy people disturbing their peace, then *they* are the ridiculous ones. Crazy people should be kindly taken care of, given medicine (these days psychiatric medicines are developing quite fast), they should be put away to be taken care of... Harming or killing crazy people has got to be one of the most inhuman, despicable actions, I believe. But *I do not think you are crazy*. That is why I am here today. (Mishima, 1969, pp. 442-443. Emphasis is mine)

This paragraph reveals a Mishima that, in spite of his clear right-wing stance and interest in militarism, begins his address to the radical-left at Tokyo University by acknowledging his interlocutors as *valid* ones (something that the establishment, as represented by the "prominent person" that Mishima referred to, refused to do). This declaration set the tone for the encounter between Mishima and the students, as a cordial, time-marking event, where the content of the discussion outweighed by far the political differences of the discussants.

Mishima AND the students: Violence and language

In his initial address, Mishima mentions François Mauriac's novel *Thérèse Desqueyroux* in reference to what animates the student's movement. This novel is an enquiry into the attempted murder of a man who has been poisoned with arsenic, with all evidence suggesting that his wife, Thérèse, is the perpetrator. And while the evidence condemns her, the motivation for the crime remains unclear: it is unknown *what* triggered her action. Mishima paraphrases the protagonist, who says she wanted to see "a hint of anxiety in the eyes" of her husband: much like Thérèse, the students' violent protests had a similar desire, he says. "It is obvious that you want somehow to see a hint of anxiety in the eyes of the system, of the Japanese power structure. Actually, *so do I*" (Mishima, 1969, p. 441). What this "desire to see a hint of worry in the eyes of the establishment" means in the case of Mishima is something that we will attempt to reveal. For a common right-wing sympathizer, such an affirmation would be unlikely, but for Mishima, the exhibitionist who in 1963 had published a scandalous collection of half-naked pictures, a different nuance can surely be expected.

This "anxiety" cannot be brought about without an element of disturbance, which is why Mishima acknowledges and praises the violence present in the students' protest. Mishima goes on to say: "Somebody told me: There is a common point between you (Mishima) and them (Tōdai Zengakuren): The people of Zengakuren elaborate logically from the ideology, onto the body (the physical), and from there to violence. I couldn't agree more" (Mishima, 1969, p. 445). For both these actors, it is not the maintenance of the *status quo*, or the preservation of order as it has been

established what matters: "I loathe tranquility. I am actually uncomfortable at being so at ease here and now [in reference to how it was supposed to be a dangerous event]. I do not like this political situation" (p. 443). He also refers to how this tranquility could eventually lead to the coexistence of opposing political ideas in hope for "peace": [... if] "that immediate order is maintained, there might even be a moment when the LDP and the Socialist Party will clasp their hands together!" (p. 444) For both Mishima and the students, violence is the only possibility to shake the establishment out of its state.

Due to his political stance, Mishima was often asked to condemn the "barbaric" actions of the students' protests, which included the occupation and fall of Tokyo University's Yasuda hall. "Mishima, however, who might have been expected to agree [with the condemnation of students' violence], did not, and instead appeared in the debate to endorse the students' commitment to action, even to violence, emphasizing that he shared with them the total rejection of postwar democracy, and that such commitment from the movement was "thrilling" (Walker, 2020).

But Mishima's drive for violence is not the product of anti-intellectualism, unless, as he paradoxically states, one sees anti-intellectualism as the most elevated form of intellectuality. Of course, the students' movements success in disturbing the academic hierarchy of Tokyo University can be seen as the enactment of anti-intellectualism, but it is not a denial of knowledge as much as a revolt against the class system it produces. Indeed, Mishima's approach to violence only occurs *via* the value of language, the main vehicle of knowledge. As Hirano Keiichirō comments, from the very beginning of the encounter with the students at Komaba, Mishima wanted to see if language was still valid, if words really worked, if they

fulfilled an actual function or not (Toyoshima, 2020, 1: 34).

Along with violence, there is another element common to Mishima and the students: eroticism. According to Mishima, eroticism and violence are related in the sense that they are both aimed towards the *other* as an object (Mishima, 1969, pp. 450–451). However, distancing himself from Sartre, Mishima emphasized that when the object of eroticism (or violence) is a conscious subject (a conscious *other*), both eroticism and violence are hampered. By referring to eroticism and violence, Mishima placed the focus of his discourse on the precondition of alterity and subjectivity for violent action. Although this paper does not further elaborate on this topic, the connection between eroticism and violence might be a capital element to understand Mishima's performative suicide.

Mishima VERSUS the students: The emperor

We have seen how the two seemingly opposing parties, Mishima and the students, actually agreed on the commitment to language as a tool that remained effective, and to violence as both the only true form of action and the necessary complement to awareness and intellectualism. However, there is an element that clearly separates Mishima from the young activists: the emperor.

When asked about the connections that could be established between the concept of the emperor and that of the nation, Mishima intervened with a comment that solidified his parallel with the *Zenkyōtō*: “I speak in earnest: If, when you were barricading the Yasuda hall, you had as much as *said* the emperor's name, I would have happily joined you in the barricade [laughter]” (Toyoshima, 2020, 1: 08). The burst of laughter that roared in the room was not one of scorn, but perhaps of surprise. It was impossible

that the leftist movement would have embraced the image of the emperor and yet Mishima was offering complete solidarity to them in exchange for their acceptance of it. Mishima's obvious imperialistic views might be seen as the core of the ideological difference between him and the students; however, Mishima was *not* proposing an ideological confrontation to the students, for he had seen through the reality of the ideological debates of his time. As Akuta—the famous baby-holding member of the debate, and artist of the *angura* movement—expressed in the 2020 documentary *Mishima: The last debate*, “Mishima himself was angry at the fact that all of those well-established right-wingers were hailing America... This was also what we—the Zenkyōtō—were aiming for: true independence. That's why we thought we could work together... [It was not a left/right conflict]. We had a common enemy: The vague and obscene Japanese nation (あやふやな猥褻な日本国)” (Toyoshima, 2020, 1: 27). In that sense, for Mishima, the emperor was the complete opposite of that passive, inactive, grotesque, over-comfortable Japan.

Certainly, the figure of the emperor is an ambiguous one for Mishima. While clearly an imperialist in ideology, Mishima did not necessarily admire the Shōwa emperor, nor agreed with the pragmatic purpose that the American occupation had given to his authority. On the contrary, Mishima proclaimed the need for an absolute emperor that would embody the spirit of the whole nation. That symbol was not contained within the limits of a single human being, nor of a tradition, but was rather a myth that would sustain the people and their destiny. Mishima states:

What I call the emperor and the human emperor in power are not one and the same. Because the human emperor is the political emperor,

he is often tied to Confucian principles or, to a certain extent, following the Meiji Restoration, even Christian principles. [...] To me, the emperor of the *Man'yōshū*, when free sex was natural, is more attractive than the emperor's current nature. I don't know if the modern imperial institution will persist as it does now, but when I speak of the human emperor, the emperor in power, I am speaking plainly of the form of the political power of the emperor. When I speak of *the emperor*, I speak of the emperors of the mythical past and how I would like to recreate their position in the present (Mishima, 1969, 490).

If Mishima insisted on the importance of the emperor as a symbol, it is because he believed that the Japanese national system collapsed when the emperor made his "human declaration" (*ningen sengen*), opening the way for the derailment of the Japanese spirit. According to Mishima, all the moral confusion of the postwar period stemmed from that. "Why should the emperor be a human being? Why mustn't he be a God? If I explain this matter, it all boils down to a question of "love" in the end. In modern times, nations have moved forward from the physiocratic to the capitalist system. This is unavoidable. Feudalism collapses, the nation industrializes and then cannot but become a modern welfare state—the most desperate of conditions. In the meantime, the more a nation modernizes, the less meaningful, the cooler, become personal relationships. For people who live in such a modern society, love is impossible" (Stokes, 1974, p. 201). More than the declaration of an ultranationalist, these words seem closer to those of a mystic: Mishima believed in the intrinsic supernatural condition of the myth of the emperor, and refused to see the modern, de-eroticized Japanese society as the place where such myth could be realized. What is

the element that would make love/eroticism possible with its sole existence? “The image of a third man whom the two lovers have in common—the apex of the triangle” (ibid); in a word, the emperor.

To elaborate on the notion of the emperor, the Zenkyōtō students question Mishima: if they agree that the country is run by corrupt politicians, if they can see eye to eye when it comes to violence against the structures of power, if they believe in intellectualism only if it is accompanied by action, why should they use the term “emperor” and not call it something else (or forgo any naming whatsoever)? Would a different name to the same ideology finally bring them together? Mishima was not averse to the suggestion, but refused to embrace the students' simplistic acceptance of the emperor as a mere nationalistic ideal: Mishima's emperor was more sacred than concrete.

By positing the emperor (in terms of an absolute symbol) as the element that could connect the fight between the left (at least the leftist faction he was addressing) and the right, Mishima was actually pinpointing the crux of the failure of postwar Japan. Walker (2020) notes how Mishima's articulation of “the importance of the emperor completely baffled the students, who did not really understand that in the aftermath of World War II, the emperor, under American hegemony, had become a crucial emblem of the postwar democratic compromise.” The students ignored the fact, according to Walker, that the emperor had remained in place as an uncomfortable remnant of the past and had not realized that “to overturn the real roots of the established order,” it was necessary to seriously take the emperor into consideration. This point, from which the complexity of the Japanese state derives, still bears significance in contemporary Japanese society.

Mishima WITHOUT the students: Radical action

Only a year and a half after this vivid encounter took place, in November of 1970, Mishima visited the office of the commander of the Japan Self-Defense Forces and carried out an equally spectacular, if more gruesome, act: *seppuku*. This event seemed to signal the end of the postwar period in Japan, marking indelibly the memory of those who followed the incident in the news.

During his encounter with the students, Mishima had repeatedly affirmed that he did not believe in legal assassination (hence his criticism of the death penalty and state violence), but that he agreed with a violent confrontation; true to his word, Mishima did not hurt the commander, who had been taken as a hostage, and instead turned the weapon against himself after delivering a rather unsuccessful call for action to the soldiers gathered in the courtyard. Unlike the students, the members of the Self-Defense Forces were not in the least attracted by Mishima's call. They did not respond to the value of his words (mostly heckling and noise came in response to Mishima's intended agitational speech, followed by indifference and disregard). Mishima had set himself in the middle of an audience that would not listen, for whom language did *not* have functional value. This situation could not have been more different from the encounter with the left, his "natural" enemy, and yet it was probably because of this failure that Mishima could stage the death of a misunderstood hero.

How, after the debate with the leftist students, should Mishima's suicide be interpreted? Was this the radical act that he invited the students to carry out? Was he aiming at causing the aforementioned "hint of anxiety" in the eyes of the Japanese society? Several interpretations, some more

political than others, have been made, but it is rather tempting to side with Akuta, the *angura* artist, when he views Mishima's act as a spectacle:

Akuta: When I saw Mishima giving his speech with a *hachimaki* on his head, I thought "ah, there he is, playing the fool again". But then I heard that he'd died, and I thought "ah, that's good, that's great".

Interviewer: Good? Great?

Akuta: Of course! It was his biggest dream come true! He gave the best performance of his whole life. (Toyoshima, 2020, 1: 37)

Mishima's *seppuku* was preceded by a stark demand, in front of the soldiers, for the restoration of the full powers of the emperor and the military, which had been taken away by the postwar constitution. Mishima's claim could only fall on deaf ears because, although he was no political strategist, he had purposefully chosen as witnesses of his death a public that would not follow him in his call for action. It is hard to believe that Mishima's suicide was a spur-of-the-moment decision triggered by the failure to communicate his harangue to the soldiers. Instead, it happened in a calculated manner, after publicly confirming that the army was inactive, the emperor was powerless, and language was inoperative: the mystic had been forsaken.

A few months before his death, Mishima mentioned his dislike for the state for the political situation of Japan at the time in a conversation with his friend Henry Scott-Stokes, who kept record of this meeting in his diary as follows: "[Mishima] said that Japan was under a curse, all Japanese ran after money, materialism; no spiritual values. Yukio used an odd image: said that Japan was under the curse of a 'green snake'. There was a 'green

snake in the bosom of Japan” (Scott-Stokes, 1975 (2003), p. 23). Mishima's suicide did not contribute to the revolution, nor did it produce any change in the course of the growing Japanese economy, but it did offer a reflection that still to this day continues being valid for our understanding of Japan: Is this the society that was desired for the postwar? Is this how the memory of the defeat should be reconstructed?

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