Sacred Abjection in Zen Shakuhachi

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In a manuscript from the 1820s, Japanese *shakuhachi* player Hisamatsu Fuyo proclaims it is “despicable, if someone loves to produce a splendid tone” on the instrument (an end-blown bamboo flute) (Gutzwiller 1984:61).[1] This strongly worded condemnation expresses an often overlooked aesthetic—and ethical—orientation within the shakuhachi tradition, one still active among certain practitioners: to play beautifully is something loathsome, expressive not just of poor musical judgment, but of bad character. “Splendid tone” is a mark, indeed, of the *abject*.[2]

As formulated by literary theorist Julia Kristeva (1982), abjection is a virulent species of exclusion and division, a strategy for demarcating the bounded self in relationship to the exterior, dangerous other. Kristeva puts it succinctly when she defines the abject as that which is “opposed to *I*” (1).[3] In this terse formulation, the abject is not simply a neutral counterpart to the subject; it is radically, unforgivably separate. By definition, then, abjection relies on a strictly policed binary logic founded on the fundamental duality between “I” and “not-I.” This basic division spawns still other dualities tinged with the dynamics of abjection, including good and bad, clean and dirty, and beautiful and ugly.

These conceptual distinctions, so key to the workings of culture, also play a major role in the creation, consumption, and evaluation of music. Because music is one of the most powerful means of symbolically ordering reality, this should come as no surprise: the binary essence of abjection maps onto music in diverse and fascinating ways, expressing itself in a range of culturally- and historically-specific manifestations. But if abjection is inherently dualistic, how does the category of the abject function in cultures and musical systems that reject binary logic? Susan Miller (2004) points out that disgust and abjection do not play a major role in Buddhist philosophy, which teaches that the bounded self is illusory. In Buddhism, she writes, “division does not order chaos; it simply disturbs wholeness and denies the natural transience of all things. In eschewing good-bad judgments, Buddhism moves the practitioner away from cravings and away from disgust” (166). This perspective toward duality informs the aesthetic systems of Buddhist societies in complex, subtle ways; indeed, the basic philosophy of drastic

non-distinction, a concept called *sunyata,* "emptiness," plays a dynamic, constitutive role in traditional Japanese musical aesthetics, particularly the primary instrument associated with Zen Buddhism, the shakuhachi.[4] Although Miller's observations regarding Buddhism's negation of duality hold in most regards, this tradition is not without its own native binarisms, its own complex relationship with the abject.

In this article, I examine a number of conceptual binarisms that play a role in the history, performance, and philosophy of the shakuhachi, including the dyads of music/noise, humans/nature, performance for an audience/solitary performance, and good/bad.[5] At the root of all these, however, lies a major definitional ambiguity around the question of whether the shakuhachi is a musical instrument at all (*gakki*), or a spiritual tool (*houki*), a conceptual division that, while largely a false dichotomy, still prefigures a fundamental split in practitioners' orientation towards the instrument, which, in turn, can be understood as a particular manifestation of abjection. Despite the eschewal of duality in many aspects of the tradition, the vast majority of players approach the shakuhachi as "music," while others approach it as "non-music," or spiritual practice. For some in the latter category, the spiritual use of the instrument is fundamentally opposed to the musical, and "music" falls on the negative side of the binary coin as an abject condition. I argue that abjection does not play a significant role *within* the musical language of the shakuhachi; rather, in certain factions of the shakuhachi tradition, *music itself is the abject state*. My analysis draws on ethnographic accounts, histories, theories of the abject, timbral analysis, and participant-observation fieldwork studying the shakuhachi with major American and Japanese players, including Bill Shozan Schultz and Kaoru Kakizakai.

Before going on, a few words regarding my treatment of duality in the shakuhachi are in order. For a binarism to be collapsed, it must first be perceived to exist as a feature of the phenomenal world. Once a binarism is established, its logic of division can be subverted to reveal, in Izutsu's words, the "ontological transparency of things" (see Lee 1993:212). In Zen, the *koan* (discussed later in this article) serves this function. However, if a particular binarism does not exist, or is perceived by a certain people not to exist, then the phenomenon simply *is*, undivided and undifferentiated, a unified totality. Ultimately, music/noise, art/nature, and instrument/spiritual tool are categories with utility limited by their retroactive application to the shakuhachi tradition, when Japanese (and foreign) musicians and scholars began attempting to explicate the inner dynamics of the system according to Western principles. This can make addressing this topic uniquely problematic. However, it is not to say that duality—in particular the concept of abjection, or radical otherness—plays absolutely no role in the Zen-infused tradition of the shakuhachi. The idea that dualism does not exist in so-called "Eastern" philosophy is a well-worn cliché with some basis in truth, but also a vast oversimplification. I draw upon binary logic in this article because categories are the creatures of discourse, not because I necessarily believe they reflect any ultimate truth about the music or the way it has been conceptualized historically in Japan. Indeed, scholarship itself is an intellectual pursuit that differentiates, orders, and compartmentalizes knowledge: I can reckon no other way to address the shakuhachi without employing the very binarisms that might be foreign to its native soil.

Historical Overview

The shakuhachi, like most things Japanese, has its provenance in China. It first enters the historical record in the eighth century but emerges in modern form only around the seventeenth, when the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism embraced the instrument as a spiritual tool.[6] At this time, the middle of the cultural renaissance of the Edo period (1603–1867), the shakuhachi was primarily associated with the *komuso,* "priests of nothingness," a group of mendicant monks who wandered the country playing shakuhachi for alms. Equipped with identity-concealing straw basket hats (*tengai*) and official passes from the government granting them unencumbered travel among feudal Japan's many provinces, the komuso represented a lifestyle of freedom and anonymity that appealed to many besides the original enlightenment-seekers. Numerous members of the samurai class (*ronin*) joined the Fuke sect, donned basket hats, and learned the shakuhachi to provide themselves the socially sanctioned cover necessary to travel, settle vendettas with rivals, and seduce women.[7] Their abuses grew such that the instrument came to be associated in the popular imagination as much with violence and sex as with its former Zen connotations.[8] To combat this, the main Fuke temples founded several shakuhachi instructional schools to musically differentiate "real" monks from rogue troublemakers. Playing technique and tune repertory became a sort of shibboleth used to distinguish between rival groups: If a komuso monk played a classical piece (*honkyoku*) in the wrong way, he could be executed on the spot.

At the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in the late 1860s, the new, Western-oriented imperial government decided to end such chaos by officially banning the Fuke sect of Zen Buddhism. With this edict came a corresponding, implied musical proscription against using the shakuhachi as a tool for meditation (*suizen*, "blowing meditation"): the flute would be used in secular contexts such as ensemble music (*sankyoku*) and folk song (*minyo*), but not

tolerated as a solitary implement of Zen self-cultivation, at least not within the Fuke context.[9] In other words, the Meiji government actively redefined the shakuhachi as a "musical instrument" (*gakki*) instead of a "spiritual tool" (*houki*).[10] The conceptual bifurcation between gakki and houki, music and non-music, is still an ambivalent yet active division today.

Noise, Nature, and Sawari

Classical shakuhachi honkyoku, the music of the komuso monks, has certain technical and stylistic features that predispose it to resist being heard as music. The first consists of an arsenal of playing techniques more closely resembling noise than musical sound.[11] Although the thin line between music and noise is culturally and situationally determined, and depends upon a wide range of variables that fall well outside the scope of this article, it is accurate to say that shakuhachi players inside and outside Japan consciously cultivate noise techniques and understand them as such. Kaoru Kakizakai, a renowned player based in Tokyo, explains: "when we want to express something deep, strong, and hard, we use noise" (personal conversation with Kakizakai, 15 November 2010). He goes on to say that there is a "big possibility of sound" in Japanese music, but not all sounds are, strictly speaking in the Western sense, "musical," a fact I will discuss shortly. Noise techniques vary widely and include this greatly abbreviated list: "bamboo grass blowing" (*sasane*), a breezy tone infused with breathy noise; "thrashing breath" (*muraiki*), an explosive rush of air; *koro-koro*, a bobbling rhythmic effect best understood by its onomatopoeic name; *tamane*, an avian-sounding tremolo effect akin to flutter-tonguing; "voice of the wind" (*fuusei*), a high, piercing wail; "rain drops" (*amadare*), a waterfall-like swoop, and so forth.[12] In addition to such specific techniques, shakuhachi playing involves a number of body–instrument interactions that lead to disruption of timbral purity, including *meri* notes, which produce an occluded, "gloomy" sound.[13]

Sasane

Muraiki

Koro-koro

Taken together, techniques like these are described as possessing a quality called *sawari*, translatable in this context as "roughness" or "noise." Musicologist Eishi Kikkawa, composer Toru Takemitsu, and many others have noted that sawari is an essential concept in Japanese musical aesthetics and plays a major role in the shakuhachi sound ideal, which values qualities of roughness, hissing, and "dirt."[14] However, the concept is more complex than simply a predilection for noisy timbres and effects. As Bill Shozan Schultz points out, these sonic qualities result from a dynamic process of material negotiation through which players overcome the "deliberate instrument-based inconvenience" of shakuhachi design; sawari, in this more nuanced definition, is both a corporeal process of engagement and an acoustic manifestation of this embodied interaction (personal conversations with Schultz, September 2010-January 2012). Moreover, as evidenced by the nature-derived names of many techniques listed above, the sawari principle expresses at its root a philosophical insight central to Zen, and to our discussion of (abjecting) binarisms: in shakuhachi music, no ontological distinction is made between the sound of humans and the sound of nature. The "noisy" sawari sound—the outcome of material encounter between the player's body and the bamboo—represents the sonic unification of music (the organized sound of people) and environmental sound. In fact, sawari literally means "touching," an apt description of the rubbing, overlapping closeness—indeed, non-distinction—of these two sound concepts.[15] This aesthetic predilection towards the sounds of nature is ubiquitous in all Japanese arts, examples of which abound in classical literature (including the eleventh century *Tale of Genji*), *noh* theater, and woodblock prints (*ukiyoe*) (Kikkawa 2004:87-88).[16] But nowhere is this ideal more apparent than in the shakuhachi. Many shakuhachi noise techniques are a form of nature mimesis, from the rush of the muraiki technique, which is supposed to sound like wind blowing through a bamboo grove, to tamane, which was developed to mimic the sound of nesting cranes.[17] These effects and others draw humans into an intimate dialogue with the environment; indeed, the concept presupposes the complete lack of distinction between the two. In contrast to Eduard Hanslick, who claimed, "there is nothing beautiful in nature as far as music is concerned" (quoted in Matsunobu 2009:8), the shakuhachi plays at the borders of music and noise, and human intentionality and environmental sound, ultimately collapsing these binarisms. Steven Feld puts it in a different context: "the music of nature is heard as the nature of music" (quoted in Matsunobu 2009:10).

Noise techniques and embodied sawari engagement between player and bamboo manifest the blurry line separating music from nature. They also reflect the recurring philosophical fuzziness over the very definition of the shakuhachi: is it gakki, a musical instrument, or houki, a spiritual tool that helps align us with nature? It is and always can be, of course, both at the same time, and most players treat it as such. Nevertheless, although most

players today and in the documented past recognize this false dichotomy (Zen forbids an unrepentant binarism), different players orient themselves in different ways along the spectrum of "music" and "non-music." The musically oriented perspective is far better documented in the ethnomusicological literature; it also reflects the majority view of the shakuhachi community. In this approach, the shakuhachi simply represents, in the context of Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu's writings, "the sound of the bamboo flute," which he identifies as *jinrai,* "sound of human affair," (or more colloquially, "music"). By contrast, players with a non-musical orientation think of the shakuhachi as "the sound of bamboo"; here, the "flute" part of the definition, a designation of musical intention, is missing. Chuang Tzu calls this approach *tenrai*, "sound of heaven."[18] It is toward this definition I now direct our discussion. To illustrate the non-musical orientation of certain shakuhachi players, I will focus on Kentaro Idemitsu, a modern player; Watazumi Doso, a mid–twentieth-century Zen monk and shakuhachi player; and, finally, Hisamatsu Fuyo, the early nineteenth-century teacher, player, and writer whose words opened the article.

The "Non-Musical" Shakuhachi: Two Cases

Tokyo-based Kentaro Idemitsu is a vocal proponent for reclaiming what he calls the "old-style of shakuhachi music regardless of how the public reacts." To this end, he plays only raw, unlacquered (*ji-nashi*) flutes that sound like "howling wind," not music (Matsunobo 2009:82). Next to his public performance venues, he displays a calligraphy sign reading: "this is closer to a piece of bamboo than a musical instrument, used as a religious tool for self-cultivation." Idemitsu states he does not want to make "human-made music," preferring instead to focus on breathing and sound production: "It's better to leave the expression up to the bamboo rather than myself trying to express music by manipulation. Many people appreciate bamboo's sound rather than my sound" (quoted in Matsunobo 2009:91). To Idemitsu, the word "music" is synonymous with being "crafted and contrived"; it is a mark of "manipulation" and artifice, pretension, "sexiness and seduction" (*iroke*). Addressing those who view the shakuhachi from a musical orientation, he remarks, "although people say that the shakuhachi expresses the sound of wind or Zen, many people still play it too beautifully as music." With students, Idemitsu practices a form of playing called *detanari,* "as it comes out," which emphasizes purely the act of blowing without regard for crafting the resulting sound. He calls this *kenkabuki*, "fighting blowing," and by this method deters students from *kireibuki*, "playing beautiful tones," which he believes spoils the breath.

It is somewhat ironic that Idemitsu is interested in sharing the non-music, "old-style" shakuhachi approach with the public, insofar as this particular orientation was in the "old days" never intended for audience consumption (see Gutzwiller 1974:140; Samuelson 1994:87). Although komuso monks played for each other and for alms, the primary purpose of the shakuhachi as a spiritual tool was solitary meditation. As shakuhachi scholar Tsuneko Tsukitani writes, "playing of the shakuhachi was a device of Zen, with performance not a goal. As a result, the process of producing the sound was more important than the production of that sound" (Tsukitani, et al. 1994:111). This closely relates to an important concept in the philosophy of the shakuhachi best summed up by the popular adage *ichion-joubutsu*, "with one sound, one attains Buddha consciousness."[19] The central aim of Zen shakuhachi is not the production of music, which entails tonal control, formal structures, pitch manipulation, and perhaps eventually, audiences. Instead, this approach focuses purely on the aesthetics of the "single sound" (*ichion*) divorced from any musical context. To this end, many players focus exclusively on tone itself in pursuit of what they refer to as "absolute sound" (*tettei-on*), the sound of enlightenment (*satori*). Indeed, sounds play a hugely important role in the Buddhist literature going all the way back to the *Surangama Sutra* of the eighth century, often serving as the trigger for enlightenment.[20] A few sounds that have served to "wake up" various Zen masters in the past include: a pebble hitting bamboo (*Kyogen Chikan*), a strike on a drum (*Mumon Ekai*), a temple bell (*Hakuin Ekaku*), the sound of bamboo splitting in the forest (*Dogen*), a crow's cry (*Ikkyu*) (see Lee 1993:214; Blasdel 1984:2). None were performed as music for an audience; they were solitary experiences.

The audience-less nature of this orientation raises important questions.[21] Without a listener, who is to judge whether a player is "good" or "bad"? Does this even matter? Indeed, because the non-music orientation privileges private contemplation of the "single sound" over musical performance for an audience, the question of "good/bad" is rendered moot. Nobuhisa Hanada, a contemporary player, puts it like this: "Just as a baby or a person sound asleep breathes naturally, in essence there is no good and bad in shakuhachi playing. A player who is said to be good is one who has abandoned all technique. A poor player is one who tries to play skillfully." Quoting Rinzai, the ninth-century founder of the eponymously titled Zen sect, Hanada continues: "In Buddha's law there is no place for skill and usefulness" (quoted in Lee 1993:202). This attitude—a reordering of the values of musical judgment—can be found in many players who adopt a non-musical orientation. Idemitsu, for instance, says that shakuhachi honkyoku is "not the world of whether you play well or badly." Although he has over fifty years' experience with the instrument, Idemitsu says, "I wish to remain a poor player. I don't want to develop anything and become a great player. I don't intend to astonish the audience" (quoted in Matsunobu 2009:87). Because the shakuhachi is

not a musical instrument, it does not matter whether a player is considered “good” or “bad” in the eyes of an audience. The *process* of producing sound is of primary import; the resulting sonic product, as well as its real or imaginary reception by others, is beside the point.

Eccentric mid-twentieth-century shakuhachi player and Zen monk Watazumi Doso (1910–1992) exemplifies this attitude as well.[22] In a 1981 workshop, Watazumi counseled participants: “You all have to give up the idea of wanting to become good or great at music” (Watazumi 1981). He also frequently told students, “if it sounds like music, you’re doing it wrong” (conversation with Schultz, 24 November 2010). This non-musical orientation is patently audible in his recordings. Watazumi’s style is defined chiefly by breath control and power. Smoothness, tuning, clarity of tone, and other “musical” attributes are not prioritized in his system (*watazumido*); in fact, they are openly stigmatized.[23] This lends many of his recordings a quality of chaotic immediacy, a patina of noise, and a disregard for conventional shakuhachi musicality that strikes many as defiantly anti-musical.

To briefly illustrate, Watazumi’s non-musical orientation is evident in his recording of “Hifumi no Shirabe,” and his preferred noisiness readily lends itself to visual capture in spectrographic form.[24] Figure 1 shows the opening three phases. Imperfections in the recording aside, a few salient features can be gleaned here: first, energy is concentrated in a very wide frequency band, indicating the fundamental pitch is obscured by non-harmonic partials. Note that it is difficult to discern prominent harmonic overtones in this excerpt (horizontal lines of spectral energy)—the whole range washes together. This indicates a sound structure clogged with inharmonic noise filling up a wide spectral range. In addition, the intense high-frequency energy (in the range above approximately 8 kHz, particularly at the 17-second mark) indicates the hissing, breath-like quality on display in the excerpt. The noise-saturated quality of Watazumi’s sound thus has certain identifiable acoustic parameters, features that differ considerably from the sound of more musically-oriented players.

By way of comparison, Figure 2 shows an excerpt of American shakuhachi player Richard Stagg’s recording of the Rando Fukuda (1906–1976) piece “Gekko Roteki.” Although a certain level of noise is inherent to the shakuhachi, Stagg—following Rando’s aesthetic preference for a smoother, cleaner playing style—minimizes inharmonicity where Watazumi emphasizes it.[25] The higher degree of timbral clarity is evident in strong fundamentals and clear harmonic overtones (*e.g.*, at 11 seconds, the fundamental and harmonic overtones are represented by bold red lines, showing strength in these frequencies). Additionally, Stagg employs vibrato (*yuri*), while Watazumi eschews such “musical” performance practices entirely. Watazumi’s was not a sound, after all, that was cultivated for the recording studio and the concert hall; he treated the shakuhachi not as a vessel for music but as a tool for spiritual and physical development.[26] Indeed, to Watazumi (and to Idemitsu), “good” music is “bad” spirituality, and it is to this spiritual dimension, particularly the notion of sacred abjection, that I now turn.

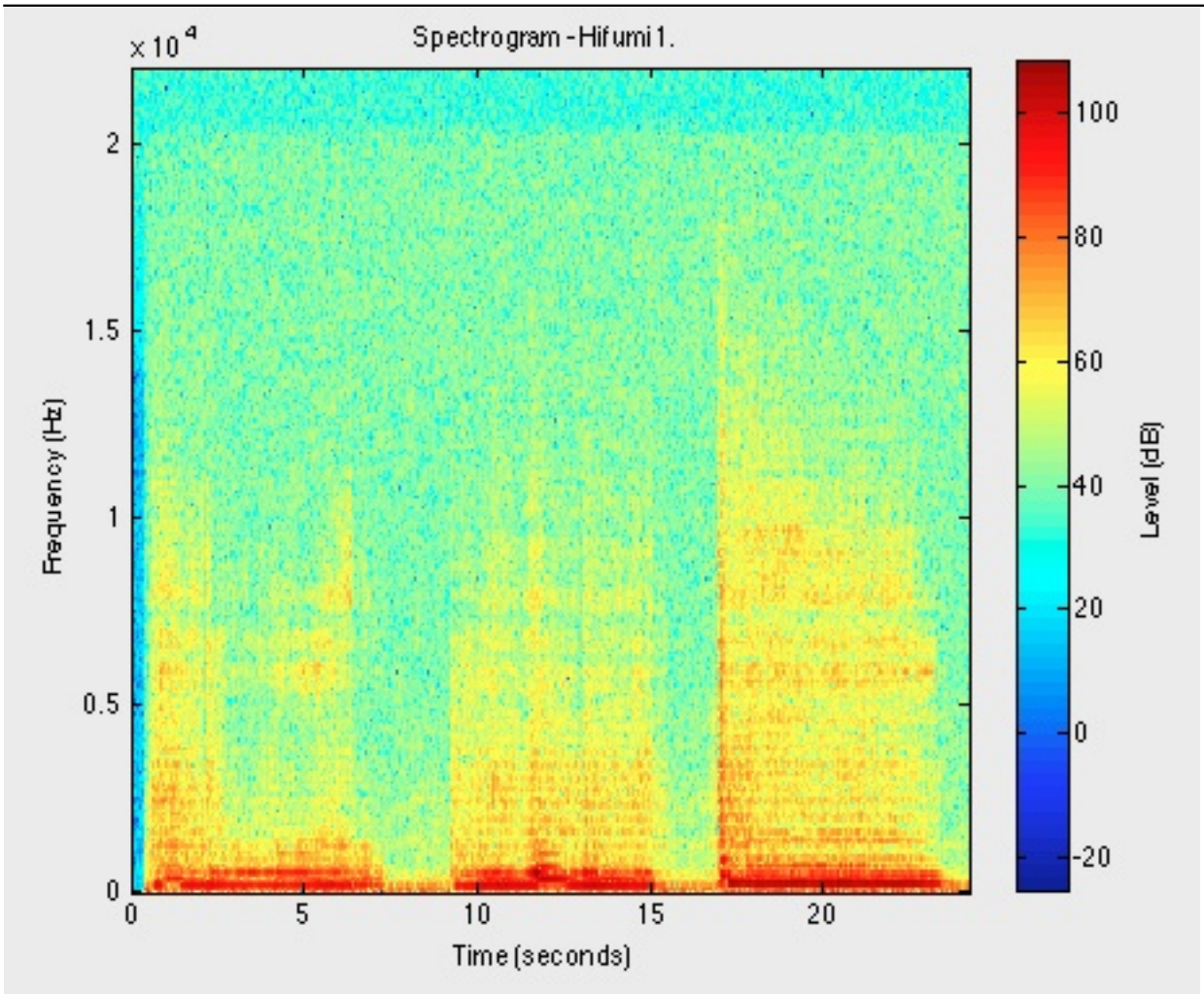


Figure 1: Watazumi, "Hifumi no Shirabe," first three phrases

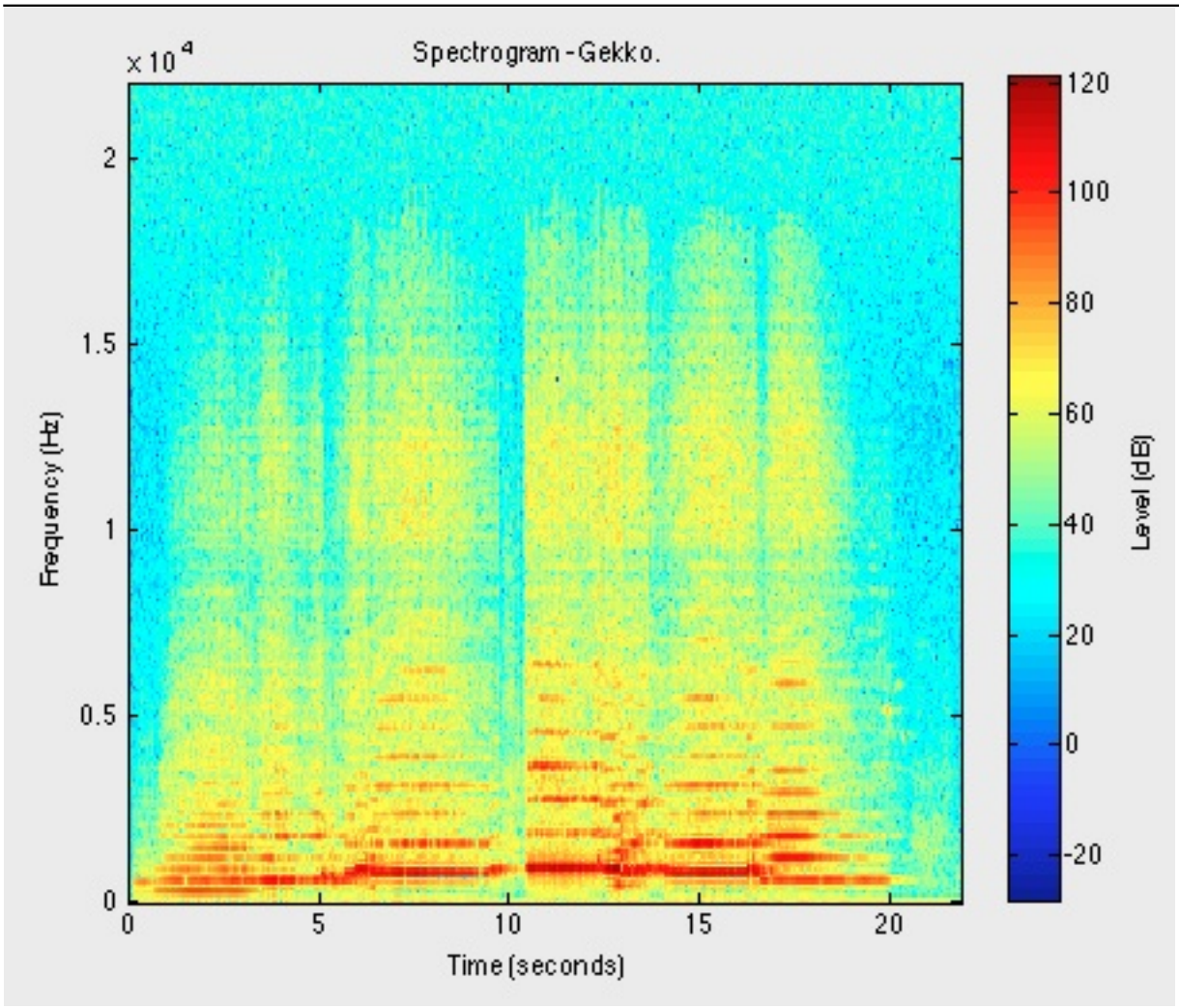


Figure 2: Richard Stagg performing Fukuda's "Gekko Roteki," first two phrases

The Spiritual Utility of the Abject

Categories of "musical" and "spiritual" so far appear to be mutually exclusive in the shakuhachi tradition. But why cannot the musical be spiritually enhancing? What assumptions are made about the character of the musical versus that of the non-musical shakuhachi, and what does this say about the underlying spiritual-philosophical system? Music is not excluded for aesthetic reasons (indeed, the non-musical approach is also the non-aesthetic approach), nor entirely as a matter of social distinction (although this plays a role).[27] What we see instead is the exclusion—the abjection—of the musical on grounds of *religious principle*. For a spiritual system commonly believed to be non-dualistic, what does this unexpected proscription against music signify?

French writer Georges Bataille (1985) postulates that the sacred impulse, in its most primitive form, is sublimely other and thus abject. It cannot be managed, contained, or appropriated; the sacred abject, such as a dead body, is thus rejected (as abject) and venerated (as sacred) at the same time. As Bataille, Kristeva (1982), and Mary Douglas (2002) point out, the psychology of religion is deeply bound up with the will to purify the abject.[28] Purification is an important form of spiritual work: it redeems alterity—in the case of the dead body, by providing it with a properly ritualized, thus purifying, burial—and in so doing admits the community or individual into a sacred space where the abject can do no harm. In order for the sacred to peek through, therefore, abjection on some level must be involved in order for it to then be ritually purified. Relating this theory to the matter at hand, the problem with music to shakuhachi players like Watazumi and Idemitsu is that it is *not abject enough* to have any spiritual utility.

The writings of Hisamatsu Fuyo (1790–1845) provide some of the most revealing documentation relating to this issue. In his 1820s manuscript, *Kaisei Hougo*, he writes:

> He who wishes the Spiritual Breath (kisoku) to rise must first rid himself of toxins. He who wishes to purge away the toxins may not fear the attacks of dizziness brought about by the antidote. Do not shrink back from the unclean sound which is caused when the Great Bamboo is blown! This sound is like a potent emetic which expels the poisonous mucus. […]
>
> […] Those who are irresolute, those who hear about the rigors of the treatment and are too afraid to take the medicine, are those who love the Small Bamboo. Such people treat the Spiritual Breath in a smug, complacent manner. They only trifle with the Path and produce a sound which resembles absurd babbling. Such people are without honor and see only blindness. Have nothing to do with such people![29]

This passage is rife with the language of abjection. Fuyo, who treated the shakuhachi as a spiritual tool, saw its primary function in terms of its capacity to help the player cultivate "Spiritual Breath" (*kisoku*). When played for this purpose, the shakuhachi will not sound pleasant; instead, the tone of the "Great Bamboo" will be "unclean." The manifestation of this sound, however, positively affects the player's bodily health by expelling "poisonous mucus."[30] In Fuyo's schema, people who do not follow the "Path"—those who treat the shakuhachi as just a musical instrument and strive for its most "musical" sound, which he compares to "absurd babbling"—are described in damning terms.

What we see here is not a flat *negation* of binarism, but an *inversion*. In this conception of the shakuhachi, "bad" music—as represented by noisy, rough timbre—is "good" spiritual practice. In fact, musical purposes diminish the shakuhachi's efficacy as a spiritual tool. "Unclean," bad sounds are desired, and it is the very dirt in the shakuhachi's timbre that ultimately, and paradoxically, purifies the player.[31] Following Bataille, then, the sacred sound *is* the ugly, abject sound. Once breathed into existence, this abject sonic utterance is incorporated into the body, which is purified as a result. Kristeva identifies this sort of phenomenon as "purifying the abject," arguing that it lies at the heart of "artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies" (1982:17). This process nullifies the abject presence, since that which is pure—clean, incorporated, identified with the self—ceases to be radically other. Conversely, that which is musical and beautiful is rendered *truly* abject, as "music," associated with all-too-human artifice, unnatural control, pretention, and "seductiveness," offers no possibility for purification.

But there are further complexities. This is not just an example of "purifying the abject"; it is also *its* inversion, *an abject that purifies*. It is ultimately at this level that the knotty duality of the shakuhachi (and the crux of this article) breaks open: to non-musically oriented players, the shakuhachi not only summons the abject in order to purify it, it embraces the abject as part of the totality of life, and this embrace is itself purifying. To Kristeva, the abject is "radically excluded and drives me toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). Similarly, through the opposition of binary forces in the shakuhachi, "meaning collapses" and the essential emptiness (*sunyata*) of reality is revealed. The abject sound is used to purify a false understanding of the duality of things. In this way, shakuhachi players treat the activity of blowing into a bamboo flute as a sonic *koan*: negation and ultimate unity are revealed when "meaning collapses" in the act of breaking apart.[32] Unity is the result first of duality.

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Notes

1 For a reproduction and German translation of the full text of Fuyo’s manuscript, *Hitori Kotoba*, see Gutzwiller (2005:162-198).

2 I would like to thank Mitchell Morris for introducing me to the rich analytical possibilities of thinking about the relationship between music and abjection. Additional thanks are due to Bill Shozan Schultz and Nina Eidsheim, who offered invaluable guidance at various stages of this project.

3 For more on the binary nature of abjection and disgust, see Nussbaum (2004:107) and Miller (2004:191).

4 Fuyo makes the shakuhachi’s relationship to sunyata explicit: “The Zen instrument shakuhachi is emptiness.” See his 1823 manuscript *Kaisei Hougo*.

5 This paper will refer only to the *honkyoku* genre, the classical solo music of Zen shakuhachi.

6 For perhaps the most comprehensive history of the instrument, see Yuko Kamisango’s essay in Blasdel and Kamisango (1988).

7 William Malm (2001) points out that the modern shakuhachi, with the heavy, blunt root end on the bottom, represents perhaps the only case in the world where a musical instrument serves a dual function as a weapon (169). For more on the shakuhachi’s Edo-period association with dandyism, see Sanford (1977).

8 Many kabuki and noh dramas were based on the mysterious, alluring lives of shakuhachi-playing komuso.

9 The komuso and their houki-oriented approach to the instrument migrated at this point from Fuke to Meian temples.

10 For more on the gakki/houki division, see Keister (2004).

11There are other factors as well, most notably its non-metrical, “free rhythm” approach, that play into this dynamic.

12 For discussions of these techniques and others, see Lee (1993:263-269); Weisgarber (1968); and Matsunobu (2009).

13 The *meri* technique requires the player to crane the chin downward to change blowing angle over the mouthpiece (*utaguchi*). Required to hit certain non-pentatonic pitches (the instrument has only five holes, thus five “natural” pitches), meri notes are timbrally distinct from the five regular notes. Acoustically, they are much more unstable and rich with noise components. The description “gloomy” comes from my L.A.-based teacher, Bill Shozan Schultz.

14 “Dirtiness” is Schultz’s preferred term. The sawari concept is discussed in great depth in Eishi Kikkawa’s three books in Japanese (see bibliography); for a concise explanation and discussion in English, see Kikkawa (1987:85-94). Toru Takemitsu (2004, and in his other writings) meditates more cursorily on the topic (see bibliography).

15 In its original context, the sawari is a small piece of wood on the *biwa* (lute played with a large plectrum) designed to create a buzzing noise.

16 A telling illustration of this predilection can be seen in Utagawa Hiroshige’s 1858 print *Dokanyama mushikiki no zu* (“Listening to insects on Mt. Dokan”), which depicts summer picnickers gathering to listen to sound of insects. Thank you to Bill Shozan Schultz for the high-resolution scan.

17 The honkyoku piece that first employed tamane, according to Kakizakai, was “Tsuru no Sugomori,” or “Nesting Cranes.”

18 For a summary of Chuang Tzu’s taxonomy, see Matsunobu (2009:93).

19 For a succinct description of this important adage, see Blasdel (1984).

20 An analysis of the role of sound in this particular influential sutra can be found in Howard (1991).

21 For instance, the question of elitism. Like the thorniest twentieth-century avant-garde compositions, the non-musical orientation can be audience-unfriendly in the extreme, and practitioners understand perfectly well that what they are doing is inaccessible to the majority. Fuyo freely admitted in 1823: “those who study shakuhachi as a Zen instrument are rare.” Idemitsu’s teacher assents, pointing out that few people have the capacity to appreciate this level of expression (see Hisamatsu 2005; Matsunobu 2009:93).

22 Watazumi’s eccentricity has perhaps eclipsed his renown as a player, with stories of his provocative behavior well circulated in the oral tradition. For instance, his main student, Katsuya Yokoyama, tells the possibly apocryphal story of an important state banquet that he attended with his teacher. Watazumi was served a cup of tea, but was not given a spoon with which to stir his drink. To the disgust of all, Watazumi stirred his tea with his penis then drank from the cup.

23 Exemplifying his disdain for “musical” shakuhachi playing, Watazumi was sworn enemies with Rando Fukuda, a player who advocated a more “musical” style of playing. (Fukuda was also the teacher of Katsuya Yokoyama, a fact that might have exacerbated their rivalry.)

24 High-frequency dirt in the Watazumi excerpt is the result of analog hiss, and should thus be disregarded. Nonetheless, spectrum photos make visible certain significant aspects of his tone. They were generated in Matlab using the PsySound toolbox. See bibliography for information on the source recordings.

25 For detailed acoustic analyses of shakuhachi timbre, see Gutzwiller and Bennett (1991); and Bolger and Griffith (2005).

26 Watazumi was the teacher of the famous Yokoyama, who debuted Takemitsu’s *November Steps*. Were it not for his encouragement, Watazumi probably would not have made any recordings at all.

27 The social element of this question is a fascinating one that deserves further research. In addition to the rarified, elite status of the non-musical orientation owing to the approach’s audience-unfriendly character (see note 21), it would be fruitful to interrogate what this anti-public-performance perspective says about the nature of power vis-à-vis the audience. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) writes: “The audience senses secret mysteries and powers behind the performance, and the performer senses that his chief secrets are petty ones. As countless folk tales and initiation rites show, often the real secret behind the mystery is that there really is no mystery; the real problem is to prevent the audience from learning this too” (70). One wonders if this dictum does not apply to this situation as well.

28 For the classic text on this particular question, see Douglas (2002), particularly chapters 1 and 2.

29 Fuyo, *Kaisei Hougo*, reproduced and translated into German in Gutzwiller (2005:162-198). For excerpts in English, see Gutzwiller (1984:57-62).

30 Watazumi amplifies this connection between sound and physical health, describing “unconscious breathing”—his term for the way we breathe when playing music—in the following terms: “Unconscious breathing is similar to a pool of water that has been stopped up and is sitting there and stagnating. Just like a river that has not been stopped up, the river that flows cleanly and purely, that is how the conscious breathing affects the inside of the body.” Watazumi’s “conscious breathing” is the equivalent of Fuyo’s “spiritual breath.” For more, see Watazumi’s 1981 lecture.

31 Mary Douglas (2002) asserts that control of dirt is essential to symbolic order. Inversely, in this line of the shakuhachi tradition, sonic “dirt” is necessary for purification.

32 Walter Ong writes that the perception of sound is, by uniting the hearing subject with a sonic field, “the unifying sense” (quoted in Lee 1993:208).

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