

abstract (English summary of the doctoral dissertation)	
Thesis Subject	The Theater of Botho Strauss —Anthropology in the Media Age—
Author	Sunao Otsuka
<p>This is a study of the theater aesthetics of the modern German playwright, Botho Strauss (1944-), whose systematic interpretation has yet to be introduced to Japan in a diachronic and synchronic way. His dramatic method might be said to have started during his days as a dramatist and literary manager. This thesis analyzes mainly by focusing on his "remakes" of past masterpieces. The reason why my study focuses on "remakes" is because in these "remakes" Strauss was trying to find the deep structure of the present that was difficult to identify, and it could be achieved through his contemporary dramatization of the classical writings that mirrors a feature of the present time taken together with various periods of history. This means, we can also understand the deep structure of our age, that was observed by Botho Strauss, by studying his "remakes" and his intention to remake.</p> <p>At the same time, Strauss' essay <i>Anschwellender Bocksgesang</i>, "The rising Goat Song" (1993), caused quite a sensation. This was because the essay was viewed as his declaration of being a "right-winger" after the reunification of Germany. It has been translated and introduced as a manifest of his activities and its explication serves as a core for this study. In doing so, internal conflict of the political culture in the former West Germany, that had reputedly been led by the liberal left-wing faction until the 1990s, comes out. In addition, Strauss' radical reinterpretation of the traditions of Western culture that is really beginning to disappear in our Media Age is dealt with as is the critical duel between the "literary language" that is primary and concentrated and the "media language" that is secondary, plain and based on the advancement of information society that cannot be easily reflected in politics. Consequently at the end the following question is raised: What is the role played by literature and drama in our times?</p> <p>Moreover, this thesis presents a viewpoint of "Anthropology in the Media Age" as the basis for the comprehension of the works of Botho Strauss. He is our contemporary and plays as a kind of trickster an active part in the field of German theater. He expresses, for example, the original character in "remakes" with the reflection of daring modernity, though he seems to insist on restoring the traditions of the "literary language". Strauss also leans towards Christian</p>	

existentialism, but on the other hand, he takes the viewpoint of Understanding Media into account. That is, however, his method leads to a new emergent, performative recognition from the unexpected arrangement of signs by standing intentionally between the two conflicting extremes and taking concurrently a critical attitude toward this bipolarity. For example the two myths of our times, reality and illusion, absence and presence, etc. In the discourse on his major "remakes" from the early period to the present we try to discover such a bipolarity as the theater aesthetics of Botho Strauss—namely, "Anthropology in the Media Age".

The aim of this thesis is ultimately to consider the history of Media circumstances of modern or postmodern society. It has been nearly 40 years and by examining his theater aesthetics we see the various aspects of present-day Germany since May 1968 when Strauss his work.

Section 1 (1963—1976)

In the first section, the study reveals the history of how he appeared as a dramatist in the German theater world. Strauss who belonged to the so-called "1968 generation" started his literary career as a reviewer and a staff writer for the "Theater heute" at the time of the events of May 1968. This is one of the most popular journals in Germany, and these events became a turning point for him, bringing into focus contemporary history. Strauss was decisively influenced by Adorno, who was the greatest social philosopher of the time, and his socially critical theory of the Frankfurt School. But Strauss, during the same time, introduced from France the latest accomplishments of (post-) structuralism or text semiotics into Germany then. Thus he learned from the two conflicting extremes both the "negative dialectic" of Adorno and the "archaeology" or the "discourse analysis" of Foucault. The critical point of view against the media industry can also be clearly observed as the starting point of the literary activities of Botho Strauss. His critical essays about the new current in those revolutionary days were greatly valued and therefore Strauss was invited to join the "Berlin Schaubuehne", the famous theatrical company that dominated the world theater scene in the 1970s. During this time, Strauss worked as one of the brains of this group in the area of theatrical, "hands-on" activities. On the other hand, he gradually emerged as the new playwright who can express accurately the "new subjectivity", the delicate interior world of solitary people in such a social context called "Shift in the wind" in the mid-1970s.

This section revolves around Strauss' work of the "remake" of Gorky's *Sommergaeste*, "Summerfolk" (1974), and examines the process of the shift from the postwar period to that of present-day Germany. That is because his work was painted over by the process of changing of the social meaning that the "1968 generation" was once striving for.

Section 2 (1977—1988)

The second section focuses on Strauss' theatrical activities in the 1980s. The political

terrorism of the Red Army Faction took place in the autumn of 1977 and which led to a national crisis that became known as the "German Autumn". It was followed with the social tendency to make concentrated attacks on the people who showed understanding of leftist radicals which came about by the "public opinion" that was fomented through the media and information industries. Moreover, the social structure had obviously changed in the 1970s from collectivism to individualism or from universalism to the age of having respect to "variety and difference". During this time, his heyday, Botho Strauss dominated the German theatrical world as the playwright who had led the culture of Western society. He was ranked equally with the dramatist, Heiner Mueller, who represented East German society. Strauss, however, has slowly come to seek for a "spiritual home" in the tradition of the literary world in the postmodern era, in which, Strauss analyzes, that man can no longer have their home. He therefore started in searching the meaning of existence not in the present but in connection with the past. At the same time, he distant himself from the dialectical thought of the Frankfurt School that seemed to Strauss unproductive. It went on criticizing the social system in the hollow area of meaning, while he was learning from phenomenology—that discovers the poetics in the everyday lives—the viewpoint of Understanding Media or the "new science".

In this section, the study here examines his remake of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—*Der Park*, "The Park" (1983), and his long poem *Diese Erinnerung an einen, der nur einen Tag zu Gast war*, "This Remembrance of a Guest who tarries but a day" (1985), and goes into his stance that he tries to renew and succeed to the mythical tradition in European history, as he rediscovers it from today's viewpoint in the media age when the cultural memory or legacy gradually lost its substance.

Section 3 (1989—2000)

In the third section, this thesis obtains an overview of the vacuum state of the West Germany's "critical statement" in the 1990s, where history suddenly lost its meaning with the fall of the Berlin Wall, that had been an iconic symbol of the Cold War. With Strauss' two works entitled *Ithaka*, "Ithaca" (1996), and *Lotphantasie*, "The Fantasy of Lot" (1999), the new social situation in the history drastically replaced the so-called "postmodern" society supported by the economic boom of the 1980s.

After German reunification, the former poets and writers of East Germany were exposed as to their connection with the Stasi, the Ministry for State Security. During the Gulf War, the unified armed forces of Germany were formally dispatched overseas, and the increase of political refugees and asylum seekers in the country caused the Neo-Nazis to attack foreigners. That clearly meant a climate change in the public opinion.

Almost all of Strauss' published plays were once chosen as the best drama of the year, and

he was hailed by many critics as the most popular playwright in West Germany. However, amid this din and bustle of social situation after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification the essay *Anschwellender Bocksgesang*, "The rising Goat Song" (1993), Botho Strauss published in Germany's most influential magazine *Der Spiegel*. It created an unprecedented sensation. His ambiguous and obscurant attitude that could be taken as acceptance of fundamental violence to establish order or as the conversion to a "Rightist" was construed as his inclination toward the German aesthetic nationalism that was advocated by right-wing intellectuals after reunification.

Ithaka and *Lotphantasie* are respectively attempts to reread from today's point of view the two major classics of the European's literary world, Homer and the Old Testament. The former treats the problem of a basic violence the ancient tragedy shows toward our times and moreover deals with the End of History and the Return to the Origin in a state of Germany in the early 1990s, while *Ithaka* points out indicates the conflict or the difference between theoretical understanding and practical performativity in Strauss' works. The latter *Lotphantasie*, mirrors critically the view of German reunification in the famous tale of the Genesis.

Section 4 (2001 – present)

The topic of the fourth section is Botho Strauss at the present. After the so-called "declaration of being a rightist" in his notorious essay *Anschwellender Bocksgesang*, "The rising Goat Song" (1993), argued intensively in the mid-1990s, most of the reviewers gradually took no notice of his works. After the reunification, younger generation had already developed their new cultures and started shaping the New Germany. In the German theater world, that is to say, "Postdramatic Theater" (Hans-Thies Lehmann) became the mainstream. It places much emphasis on any other components, except the text, about the theater. Also the Austrian feminist dramatist and novelist Elfriede Jelinek, whose plays are regarded as the succession of Heiner Mueller's monologic condensed text, appeared in the limelight. Strauss who is still sticking to "dialogue" began to regard himself as a dramatist of the past.

Since the early 1980s, continuing to claim his "dialectic"-criticism, Strauss had declared the invalidity of the abstract thinking method. It would appear, now, that Strauss' methodology as a playwright had shifted to the "phenomenological" one that emphasizes the look or the "visual image". In addition, his intention to try to find out the constant and invariable mythical dimensionality behind the eroticism and the everyday lives, gives us big hints as to the interpretation of his theater aesthetics. Its baroque refracted aspects in this Media Age, however, prescribe the contemporary viewpoint of Botho Strauss.

Moreover, *Schändung*, "Violation" (2005), the remake of Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus", is analyzed in this section, because this play reflects deeply the "Clash of Civilizations" (Samuel

Huntington) between Western civilization and the Muslim world that became evident after the terrorist attacks by Islamic extremists on September 11 of 2001 in New York City.

We look at the refracted aspects or the transfiguration portrayed in Strauss' works that turn up between the anthropological models in the mythical world and the comprehension of Understanding Media in the modern period. Archaic ethics in his plays also emerges unexpectedly from the playful spirit of the age called "Postmodernism". It follows then that Strauss does neither insist on going back into the past, criticizing the modern world one-sidedly, nor urge the progress of literary activities by a bold deconstruction of the classics, completely affirming the present Media condition. The challenge of his works is, that is to say, the unexpected discovery of how the constant and invariable things now appear. It is the way of human beings, profiled in the old sources as theater texts, and their discrepant perspectives. The difference or the discord showed by transposing them to our modern Media society that eventually comes out as his theater aesthetics through the comprehension of the "remakes" in this thesis. From this standpoint, Strauss has criticized modern society in comparison to the great human beings of the past, but he has at the same time deconstructed the past tradition of literature from the viewpoint of our times. Strauss therefore has been writing his dramas for 30 years, with the methodological approaches that show an intentional ambivalence as the "Anthropology in the Media Age".

Thus, Botho Strauss has been at the top of the German modern theater world as a unique dramatist who presents radical problems on his plays and stimulates the reader and the audience to reflect on contemporaneous events from various perspectives. He always stands, views and asks between the two conflicting extremes, for example Critical theory and Media theory, even if he has not given model replies to the discrepancies of the age.