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## From Street Show to Stage Show : The Human Pump and the Modern Age

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## From Street Show to Stage Show: The Human Pump and the Modern Age

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### 1. THE ART OF THE HUMAN PUMP

There is a form of entertainment called the human pump. In it various objects are swallowed and then regurgitated, either in the state in which they were swallowed or with some trick performed on them. It ordinarily involves a routine—for example swallowing a number of black and white chequer stones which are then brought back up in any combination requested, swallowing a watch and chain and producing the watch with the chain threaded through it, swallowing a light bulb which is then lit up inside the stomach, or swallowing a goldfish and producing it again still alive—finishing off by drinking some petrol (or paraffin or benzene) and breathing fire out of the mouth.

Of these, the art of firebreathing is considered to be one that has been around in Japan for a very long time. For instance there is an illustration of a man blowing fire out of his mouth in the *Shinzeikogakuzu*, a work said to date from the Heian period. Some doubt whether what is depicted was actually performed, but the art of firebreathing is believed to have been one of the art forms, referred to as *sangaku*, which originated west of China, in India, crossed China and was brought to Japan in the Nara period. It would appear not to be as difficult as it looks—it was performed in *kabuki* productions during the Edo period, nowadays rock groups do it on stage and it is even performed on occasion by amateurs as a party trick.

Shows involving eating strange things have also existed in Japan for a long time. According to Asakura Musei's *Misemono Kenkyū* (*Research into Shows*) there was a show called "Pan-Eating Man," performed in Dōtonbori in Osaka in the spring of 1758, in which a man used his teeth to crunch up things like rice bowls, pans and even sand; he then swallowed these and drank some tea before finally putting some burning embers in his mouth and casually munching these down too. (In-

deed, at a subsequent performance at Ryōgoku in Edo he was billed as the "Fire-Eating Monk.")

There is still a considerable difference, however, between this practice of simply eating strange things and the human pump, who eats an object but then regurgitates it. The form of entertainment which can be considered the original human pump first appears in records during the last years of the shogunate and the start of the Meiji period.

Then, to gather people round for the *hariki* (strength of tooth) display, he puts some water into a small bowl, takes a bit of earth from the ground next to him and adds it to the water in the bowl, thereby making the water muddy. He then puts his mouth to the lip of the bowl and takes a long drink. After the spectators have been given a few jokes to amuse them and they have been asked for some money, he then spews back up the water he has just drunk. Now he spews up clean water, now muddy. There is no one that is not astonished by what he brings back up. This was his *Sanbasō*, his curtain-raiser... [KIKUCHI 1965 (1905): 262-263]

He puts some water in a small bowl and drinks it. He then scoops up some earth from the road, adds it to the water, saying it is just like sugar, and drinks the muddy mixture. Then he gobbles down some needles, fifteen or sixteen of them that he puts in his mouth, saying as he does so that they are just like the cakes you have with tea. This done he then says he will winnow out the muddy and the clean water and produce all three elements in turn for the audience to see. He knocks on his head first of all, and spits out clean water; then, saying that next will be muddy, he pinches his cheeks and spits out muddy water; having done this he then pinches his throat and produces half a dozen needles. He then repeats the process and produces them again and again—clean water, needles, dirty water. He performs very skilfully and, even though trickery may be involved, one cannot fail to be impressed. [KASHIMA 1977 (1922): 90-91]

The first of these two was performed to gather a crowd, as a minor attraction before a *hariki* street show (in which a man uses only his teeth to lift two twenty-gallon barrels and a wooden bucket laid on a wooden door); the second was one of the tricks of *Nekohachi*, who did a mimicry act (mimicking animals was a speciality of these street performers) and an escapology turn. One can basically assume that the two accounts are of different individuals although it may just be that they were one and the same.

The West also had this sort of show, where various items were regurgitated separately one after the other.

In the middle of the seventeenth century there was a Frenchman, born in Malta, called Blaise Manfre who was doing tricks with water two or three times a day, even after he had reached the age of sixty. Manfre had his pupils bring about twenty cups and containers full of warm water. First opening his mouth

wide to show that he did not have anything inside, he then proceeded to drink, in such a way that the audience could hardly bear to watch, all the water in the cups lined up in front of him. Then he spouted out one after the other into cups that he held in his hand, wine, *eau de vie*, rosewater, lemonwater, liqueurs and white wine. The spectators were given the cups to examine—the colours and smells showed that each was indeed the real thing. [MAEKAWA 1991: 48]

Apparently this form of entertainment involved a trick which is somewhat hard to believe.

He had apparently had surgery to make a hole in his lower jaw—he then threaded a tube through below his tongue. The tube made its way behind his neckscarf, under his jacket and down his trousers to be connected to leather bags in both his boots. The large volume of water he drank was thus all contained in these leather bags. The wine and the various other drinks were put in small bags and worn about the body: thus when he pressed his hand against his clothing the liquid would travel along the tube and into his mouth. [MAEKAWA 1991: 49]

## 2. THE “FOUNDER” OF THE HUMAN PUMP

When was it, therefore, that the name “human pump” became attached to this sort of entertainment?

Fortunately the man who professes to be the “founder” of the human pump is still alive and well. His name is Arimitsu Nobuo and he was born in 1917. Originally a clock repairer in Kōchi Prefecture, his stomach was diagnosed in 1937 as abnormal (an over-sensitive stomach) when he was examined for military service. He was told that he had one year to live. He was admitted to military hospital and, as a result of that experience, he then went around various parts of the country making sympathy calls to military hospitals. Around 1939 he appeared as the “Human Pump” first at Osaka’s Ashibe Theater where he caused a sensation. Moving eastwards he continued to Nagoya and Tokyo and apparently appeared in Tokyo at the Kin’ryūkan in Asakusa and the Yūraku-za in Yūraku-chō. Here too he caused a sensation, drawing record audiences, and during the next fifteen years or so he toured theaters all over the country performing his human pump. After the war he gave public performances in America, even, and Brazil until about 1955 when he performed the human pump for the last time and retired from the entertainment world. One is, according to what I have found, not much mistaken in considering Arimitsu as the originator of the human pump. This would put the first use of the name “human pump” at around 1939.

If we use newspaper advertisements for his foreign performances and postwar posters to look at Arimitsu’s human pump show, we find the following:

- 1) When he swallows a light bulb and lights it up in his stomach, his stomach clearly lets out a strong red glow.

- 2) After swallowing three different colors of goldfish—red, white and black—he can produce whichever color is requested.
- 3) After swallowing several dozen glass balls (lemonade-bottle stoppers, or pin-ball balls) he produces as many as are requested.
- 4) He swallows several safety razor blades and breaks light bulbs and then eats them. As he clenches his stomach one can hear the crunching of the broken glass; he then brings out all the razor blades he has eaten.
- 5) He swallows an egg yolk, then rubs and strikes his stomach, but produces it unbroken.
- 6) He mixes up white and black chequer stones and swallows them; he then produces the color and number of stones requested.
- 7) Swallowing a whole tangerine he takes it apart in his stomach and produces it segment by segment.
- 8) He drinks a bucket of water (according to different sources, this is 3.5 litres, 9 litres or 8 litres) then blows it out of his mouth in one go to extinguish a blazing fire five metres (other sources say four metres) in front of him.

On top of this he would swallow several dozen glass bottle-stoppers and make a noise with them in his stomach, then he would get them up to the region of his head and make a noise with them round about his forehead; he would apparently also do a trick whereby he swallowed petrol (or benzine), then set fire to it and breathed out fire. In other words Arimitsu's human pump was basically the same as the human pump of today.

Of these turns there is just one that is not performed by today's human pump. This is the final part where he drank a bucketful of water, got up onto a platform some two metres high and then blew the water out to extinguish a fire blazing about five metres from him. Some photographs of this survive and it is exactly like a fire hydrant—an act entirely appropriate for the name "human pump."

Arimitsu relates how, ever since he was a child, he made use of his unusual stomach, often discharging water from his mouth at the same time as he was urinating. Because of this ability to produce water from up above as well as down below, he earned himself a nickname which translates as "wee-wee pump." The "human pump" label would seem to be an extension of this. One can also gather its origins from sources such as a newspaper announcement that "I drink between five and nine litres of water then blow it all out in one go—hence the 'pump' name" and explanations on posters which impart that "it is because of this (the water-spouting) that Kyushu University Medical Department's Dr. Ishigami has named him the "human pump"."

### 3. THE HUMAN PUMP AS A STAGE SHOW

There is almost no difference between the human pump art form and the art forms of its predecessors, the *hariki* and *Nekohachi*. This is to say that in each "a spectacle is performed in which the digestive organs regurgitate things which have

been eaten, dividing them up into elements which are better separated than they were when they were eaten," thus turning on its head the idea that "the digestive organs take goods which are originally separate elements, mix them up and change them into something which has no separate elements." [NAKAZAWA 1984: 335]

There may, however, be no genealogical link between the art forms of the *hariki* and *Nekohachi*, active at the end of the shogunate, and that of the human pump. We are probably right if we assume that the human pump shows appeared independently after the *hariki* and *Nekohachi* shows had petered out. This is probably because these other art forms, no matter how hard they tried to employ novel approaches to familiar acts, were not successful in drawing record crowds to the theaters.

Let us at this point make a comparison between the *hariki* and the *Nekohachi* shows and that of the human pump.

Firstly, the regurgitation skills of the *hariki* and *Nekohachi* shows bear no name. This is because this was not the only skill in their repertoire. Or rather, to be more exact, the regurgitation tricks were a display they put on before their main act, as in the statement "This was his *sanbasō*, his curtain raiser." In the case of the *hariki* show it formed the prelude to the display of the literally superhuman strength of the entertainer's teeth; in the case of *Nekohachi*, to the escapology. The human pump, on the other hand, can be said to be an entertainment form which isolated part of their art and increased the variety of articles regurgitated. The name that was given to the act, meanwhile, was the human pump. The pump, needless to say, did not really reach Japan until after Meiji. It was first introduced as a means of firefighting but soon became widespread, used at normal domestic wells where it did away with the well bucket. This process was taking place during the end of the Meiji era and the Taishō era. There is a poem by Ishikawa Takuboku, composed in 1909: "Water gushing from a pump—a lovely feeling; I watched awhile, my heart young." This corresponds precisely with the period in which pumps spread into the typical household. Perhaps even in the later 1930s when the human pump appeared on stage the word "pump" still had some tinge of modernity about it.

Next, they were performed in different places. The *hariki* and *Nekohachi* showmen were street performers who "performed to passers-by on days when the weather was good, summer and winter, in squares at Okuramae in Asakusa, at Yamashita in Ueno, at Sujitagai, Yatsujigahara, and Kubo-chō." The human pump, on the other hand, appeared from the outset in theaters as a stageshow.

There is a tremendous difference in performance style between street shows and stage shows, even if they both employ similar techniques and are both regarded as ephemeral in nature.

As far as street shows are concerned, they are for one thing subject to the weather as well as needing natural daylight, whilst they must succeed in making passers-by stop, passers-by who had no real intention of going to watch anything. When enough people have stopped and gathered round to form a crowd, the perfor-

mance begins. Performer and audience are at the same eye-level and the distance between them is extremely short. Communication between the performer and the audience is naturally intimate; what is called for from the performer is acting that will make the audience hold its breath—he must talk to them, dodge out of showing them how it is done, tease them, make mistakes when appropriate and then pick his moment to carry his act out with beautiful style. Frequently there are also unexpected occurrences. The superior street show performer will incorporate these into his personal act. In the street an act conspicuous for mistakes and inexperience for some reason succeeds over a flawless, perfect one. The superior performer therefore skilfully introduces mistakes and clumsiness into his routine deliberately. In other words, with mistakes and occurrences where at first glance things do not seem to have gone according to plan, they are actually carrying out a meticulously planned act. After all, the money the performer is paid for his act comes, of course, in the form of loose change thrown to him and it goes straight into his pocket.

Stage shows, on the other hand, are performed indoors. Whilst the number of spectators does to some extent depend on the weather, it is still possible to perform whatever the weather is like outside. On top of this, by making use of lighting and sound effects, scenery, costumes and so on the performer or director can have the performance done through to the end in perfect fashion exactly as he wishes.

Furthermore, since stage show audiences pay an entrance fee in advance, they can be seen as a select group of people: they have an established desire to see something performed on stage. Whilst it is not true to say that there is no need to make this audience hold its breath, the need is far smaller than it is in street shows. In a few cases the entrance fee goes direct to the performer, but in most his takings are guaranteed in the form of a fixed minimum payment. Thus the stage showman, under these safer, more secure conditions, can focus more closely on his act than the street showman can.

The elaborate props and gadgets found in Arimitsu's human pump only became feasible once his act had become a stage show (these included introduction by a compère, a two-metre platform, apparatus for lighting light bulbs, and the effects achieved by blacking out the stage during the light bulb trick and the trick where he blew out water to extinguish the fire). Or it may in fact, on the other hand, be the other way around: that the *hariki* and *Nekohachi* shows developed, through their use of elaborate props and gadgets, into a show that would bear the scrutiny of an audience that payed to watch, and that this show developed into the human pump stage show.

When we look at the *hariki* and *Nekohachi* shows and then at the human pump, we also find that different things were swallowed. The *hariki* and *Nekohachi* performers swallowed mud, earth and needles. The earth came "from the ground next to him"—in other words scooped up right where the performance was put on. The human pump, on the other hand, swallowed light bulbs, goldfish, glass bottle-stoppers, safety razors, chequer stones, tangerines, water, petrol and so

on. Whereas the *hariki* and *Nekohachi* performers swallowed things that were readily to hand, the objects that the human pump swallowed were ones which needed special preparation. Also, with objects such as light bulbs, safety razors and petrol he was swallowing modern manufactured goods.

Worthy of particular note amongst them is the light bulb. As he swallows a light bulb and switches it on in his stomach, one can check that it is alight from outside. This is a trick which proves beyond doubt that other objects have also been swallowed down into the stomach. It is an idea which allows one to see what is inside the body from outside. It is the same idea as one finds in X-ray photography. In fact X-ray photographs taken of the human pump with a coin (one with a hole in the middle) in his stomach were exhibited in theater foyers.

One can point out in this regard the medical explanations and certificates that accompany the human pump. In Arimitsu's case advertisements, posters and descriptive accounts posted inside theaters accompanied such medical and biological expositions as "verified by experiments carried out by Kyushu Medical University," "This man's abnormal physical constitution occurs in one case in 1.6 billion; I consider it to be due to nervous oversensitivity in his stomach movements." (Kyushu University, Dr. Ishigami). "The development of his stomach rictus, several times greater than an average man's is truly remarkable; the strength of the muscles is again several times greater." (Dr. Soga). Much in this vein was circulated in the newspapers of the time. "On 8 November last year (1940) and also on 20 November, he was examined at Kyushu Imperial University; a large number of doctors were apparently astonished to see with the help of X-ray film that objects which he swallowed did indeed lodge in his stomach. He could live into his ...ties, and apparently a settlement has been made to buy his body for ¥10,000 after he dies for medical research purposes at the Imperial University" [*Nagoya Nichinichi Shinbun* 18 January 1941].

Let us summarise our conclusions thus far. Semiotically the human pump is the same form of entertainment as latter-day Edo period street shows. However, in order for it to become a show performed on stage and known as the human pump it needed modern facilities and equipment. It was not simply that the lighting and props were modernised, but modern equipment and its explanatory systems were introduced both into the act itself and into its environs. The human pump waited for the introduction of modern equipment; once it arrived, the act began and the human pump was able to become a stage show. The human pump is truly a product of the modern age.

#### 4. ORIGIN OF THE NAME "HUMAN PUMP"

We have thus seen what lies behind the name "human pump." From where, however, did the inspiration come to combine "human" with "pump"?

When one considers it, the combination of human and pump produces a strange name. Of course similar names do exist in traditional entertainment. Thus



there have been Horse Man, Cat Girl, Bear Boy, Crab Man, Bird Woman, Dog Man, Fox Woman and so on—according to Asakura Musei these are all examples of people who were freakish curiosities of nature. However, names such as Horse Man and Cat Girl differ fundamentally from human pump on two points. The combination here is between a human being and not an animal, such as a horse or a cat, but a machine, in this case a pump; also the word order in the combination is reversed (i.e. not “pumpman” but “human pump”). What we find therefore is that the metaphor employed to denote a remarkable person changes, from something from the world of nature to something from the world of the machine.

Perhaps, however, the practice of combining a human being with the name of a machine to form a nickname was a vogue of the 1920s. The twenties, for example, were when the “Human Locomotive” Paavo Nurmi was in action. Nurmi was a Finnish long-distance runner who won a total of nine gold medals at the 1920 Antwerp, 1924 Paris and 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games, and who set twenty-eight world records during his career. Carrying a stopwatch and always setting a precise pace, he earned nicknames such as the “Human Running Machine,” the “Man of Steel” and the “Flying Finn,” as well as that of the Human Locomotive.

It would appear that this period saw “Human-“ nicknames applied to other sportsmen demonstrating superhuman powers as well as Nurmi. It was the twenties that saw the American boxer Harry Greb who dominated the light heavyweight and middleweight levels dubbed the “Human Windmill,” whilst the 1930s saw the “Human Buzzsaw,” American boxer Henry Armstrong who dominated the three levels of featherweight, welterweight and lightweight. Although it has yet to be established how these men were put across in Japan, it may be that some influence came to bear from here on the naming of the human pump.

Discussing human beings in machine terms is a practice that did of course exist before this. One example is the metaphorical description of the heart as a pump for the distribution of blood. This no doubt also ties in with twentieth-century ideas of cybernetics. Metaphorical comparisons to machines such as this are, however, limited to single parts of the body. There is still some way to go from these to metaphorical descriptions in which an individual displaying superhuman abilities is compared as a whole entity to a machine, which is what we find with the human pump, where it is the man himself that is the pump.

Leaving aside detailed research for some future occasion, let us for the time being see what it is that lies behind names such as the “human pump.”

One factor is the *avant-garde* movement in art between the 1910s and 1930s. As one of the directions that was taken in this movement amongst artists of this period one can see a move to assimilate the human body and the life of humans into a type of machine. One can say of the *avant-garde* movement in art at the time, which spans various different genres, that it was “an extremely radical movement to strip man of his nineteenth-century body and adapt to the new environment.” For instance, if we look at Giacomo Balla, an exponent of Italian futurism, we find in his 1914 “Machine Tipografica” a performance of a printing press, with six actors

lined up horizontally, imitating the movements of a piston and another six waving their arms to denote the turning of the machine [Itō 1991: 27].

Another factor lies in the way that the introduction of machines to Japan during the rapid development that followed the Meiji Restoration, coupled with the people's powers of imagination, gave birth to strange stories and strange individuals. Folk stories in which badgers and foxes, for example, turned themselves into trains to fool people ("fake train" tales) spread wide throughout the country. Let us take an example from Yanagita Kunio's *Tanuki to Demonorojī (The Badger and Demonology, 1918)*. To quote one example:

Badgers often imitate steam trains along the Tōkaidō railway line. First one thinks there are red lights off in the distance, then these lights are joined by a strange croaking sound. "What's this?" one thinks, "there shouldn't be any freight trains around ...." As the distance narrows, the lights and the sound of the wheels vanish without a trace, for this is the work of a badger. [YANAGITA 1970 (1918): 472]

Presumably this sort of folk story sprang up whenever the railway lines were extended. Also, before the war, as my grandmother (who was born in 1901) often told me, there were strange people, famous in these areas, who pretended to be trains and cars. These folk stories and the appearance of these eccentric individuals are interesting, revealing as they do a belief in a type of "possession" held by the common people regarding machines and machinery, which only began to appear in the modern period. Can we perhaps not see something in this which relates to the human pump?

Can we not say perhaps that the human pump used the imagination of the Japanese people as a springboard, as it came into being in the modern age where machines, pieces of equipment imbued with a powerful sense of life, were covering the world?

## 5. THE HUMAN PUMP LINE

As Arimitsu, the founder of the human pump, leapt into the spotlight, similar human pump-style acts followed his lead, appearing on stages all over the country and starting to tour the provinces. By my own reckoning alone there have been ten (see APPENDIX). Acts appeared with such easily confusable names as the "Human Tank," "Human Whale" and the "Human Godzilla."

Yasuda Satomi, who is even now still performing as a human pump, relates as follows:

Then, while I was busy doing that [performing comic dialogue], long ago, I was on tour playing in Nagoya—there was this "Human Tank" at the Kannon Theater at Ōsu. So, anyway, I went off to see it—I can't remember now though [who it was]. It was packed out, a full house, and he was swallowing all these

things and regurgitating them. "Well that's funny," I thought, "I didn't know you could do that sort of thing." If you're putting on a show and it's a two-man act, if one of them drops out then that's it, but this, this is something you just do on your own—I must learn how to do it. So I started performing it, with an announcement that I had put in the *Nagoya Mainichi Shinbun* under the name "Human Pump," (because I couldn't really call myself the Human Tank). I'd only just begun, but I could swallow chequer stones and bring them up without any problem. I swallowed a goldfish and up that came too. "Right—this is it, this is it," I thought to myself . . . Excuse me for saying so, but it was me that started the "Human Pump." [KATSURA 1991: 240]

Judging from what Yasuda says, therefore, the art itself was something which he picked up from studying someone else's act, but he said he was the first person to come up with the "Human Pump" name. Let us for the time being leave aside the problem of who first thought of the name. Yasuda, who was born in 1923, says that he started doing the human pump at the age of sixteen—this is only shortly after Arimitsu began.

In the case of Sonobe Shirō, born in 1923 and also still performing the human pump today, it would appear that he was drawn to it when he saw it as a sideshow in a nearby festival when still young, but that he did not actually perform it himself until after the war. He hunted up some connections at the Tokyo branch of Yoshimoto Kōgyō (Yoshimoto Entertainments) which had an office in Asakusa; through them he apparently began touring the Occupation army camps. He is, indeed, entered in the January 1950 "Public Relations' List of Entertainers" recorded in Akune Iwao's *Kyoku-nori Tosei Shimatsu-chō* (*Trick Riders' Trade Accounts Book*), where he is listed as the "Human Snake."

Suffice it to say that several people have, at one time or another, burst onto the scene as the human pump, performing the show and spreading its reputation. It would appear that it has not only been professionals either, with amateurs also introducing it as side entertainment. Within a short space of time the human pump became a show of no mean proportions.

The golden age of these human pump stars was between 1940/41 and 1955. There are quite a few people now in their fifties who witnessed the human pump live, even if they cannot specify which performer they saw.

Amazingly, despite so many of these performers arriving in show business at the same time, they rarely crossed paths. This was both because the various entertainment networks in the Japan of the day were separated off into different strata and because geographically they were spread out too. In the theater for example, from the large venues to the humble provincial playhouses, different show business networks were involved, whilst these differed in turn from ones for the transitory shows found at fairs. It was thanks to the variety of showmen and the variety of stages dispersed around the country that so many could operate at the same time. Thus each of them could come on stage and introduce themselves as the real McCoy, the genuine article, as the one and only Human Pump.

The fact that television, as a visual mass medium transmitting simultaneously over the national network, was still underdeveloped was also a contributory factor. For if one heard about the human pump, be it show or showman, there was no way of seeing what sort of man he was. As a result when someone performing the human pump came along, naturally as far as one was concerned he was the human pump. In fact, what almost always happened with the human pump was that when people mentioned it, they mentioned only the show and the performer's nickname, "the human pump." It thus becomes practically impossible to determine a specific performer's name and nobody remembers it.

Both the act itself and the "human pump" name are responsible for this. The act is called the human pump; because of the overwhelming appeal of this the personal name is swept off into the background. Even when one looks through film and theater advertisements in the newspapers, nowhere does one find the name Arimitsu Nobuo, even though catchphrases such as the following abound (each from newspaper advertisements announcing Arimitsu's arrival): "Man or devil? The genuine human pump is here. The world's one and only. The man with the world's toughest stomach appearing here," "The world's best; a stomach of steel; a death-defying demonstration. Six cities round the country, one after the other—packed out everywhere. A world-wide wonderman; examined and guaranteed by Kyushu Medical University." In cases where the name Arimitsu Nobuo does appear in advertisements, the name "Human Pump" is in far larger print. Thus with the human pump, the human pump nickname extends to become the name of the act even as it denotes the actual form of entertainment.

## 6. THE FATE OF THE HUMAN PUMP

However, the human pump's heyday did not last very long.

Presently a medium appeared which was decidedly unfortunate for the professional showmen—television. Television drained both show and showman of funds at a furious speed. In no time at all people tired of an art form which had taken many years to build up. One need only see an ephemeral show such as the human pump once on television—that once is enough. It is not the sort of show one watches again and again. The human pump may have appeared several times on shows like "Bankoku Bikkuri Shō" ("Shock around the World Show"), "Bikkuri Daishokku" ("Big Shock Surprise") and "Kijin Henjin" ("Funny Man, Weird Man") but the "visual consternation," to which Nakazawa Shin'ichi refers and which he originally had the power to cause, was crucially tamed and contained within the TV set.

This, however, was not the end of the misfortunes that TV brought to the human pump. It turned out that the human pumps that appeared on TV came to be regarded as genuine, while those that did not were seen as fakes. TV appearances guaranteed that a human pump was legitimate: "The Human Pump, as seen on television." Yasuda was introduced like this in his show tent perfor-

mances, while it was stills of his TV appearances that were put up in the foyer.

The medium of television was basically an unfortunate one for the human pumps and their art, whether they appeared on it or not.

What was more, performance stages rapidly began disappearing. Playhouses, cinemas, music halls, strip clubs, squares—after this they all quickly vanished from towns.

People started having some vague idea about the human pump dying. “Nowadays the cause of death would be quoted as an occupational illness, meaning that his stomach—his capital—had been damaged, the upshot of which was that his source of income had dried up and he had died all alone in some slum somewhere near Amagasaki, or perhaps Nishinomiya in the Kansai area—that’s what I heard [FUJII 1978: 144].” Rumors were whispered about that he had gone mad from the petrol fumes going round his chest or that he had died from a major haemorrhage after he had injured his stomach with the needles and razors.

There is surely no need to ask whether these stories are true. What is important is the fact that people believed that the human pump had died because of his craft. They wanted to see revenge on the human pump by that extraordinary stomach of his.

In Japan nowadays there are a mere two people performing under the human pump name—Yasuda Satomi and Sonobe Shirō. Both of them are now in their seventies. They have no heirs; their craft was a one-generation craft. The boast that “the human pump’s stomach is different from other people’s” turned out to be their downfall and they cannot pass their skills on to successors. Presumably it will not be long before the human pump’s art meets its fate and disappears from our shores. The human pump thus emerges as an art form that blossomed in the Shōwa period, an abortive flower that lasted one generation.

One might indeed say that the human pump’s extraordinary stomach is taking its revenge after all.

## APPENDIX

### HUMAN PUMPS

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| ARIMITSU Nobuo         | Founder of the human pump. Born 1917. Performing 1939-c.1958. Toured America, Brazil and Argentina from 1951 for over two years.                    |
| YASUDA Satomi          | Born 1923. Performing 1939 (?)—present day. Mainly performs in show booths.   |
| SONOBE Shirō           | Born 1923. Performing from after the end of the war to the present day. Started by playing Occupation Army camps; mainly performs in variety clubs. |
| SASA Hiroshi           | Unclear. Recorded on Hokkaido Broadcasting news video (entertaining inmates of a prison) shot around 1960. Arimitsu is aware of his name.           |
| AOKI (The Human Whale) | Prewar. Unclear. Made Arimitsu angry.   |

- KAGAWA Until the 1970s. Used to appear at the Yokkaichi Health Center.
- TOKIKUNI (Female Human Pump)  
Female. Taught by Yasuda. From after the end of the war-1960(?). Mainly performed in show booths.
- The Dumb Man of Matsuzaka  
Yasuda's teacher(?).
- NAKAYAMA (?) Mainly toured strip clubs. Drowned in a Hokuriku hot spring about 1967. Korean(?). Listed as "Special Appearance by the Human Pump" in a piece on the Sennaka Music (strip theater) in the theater and cinema guide pages of the *Kyōto Shinbun* in 1960. Perhaps this is the same person?
- Human Godzilla (name unknown)  
There is a listing "The Human Godzilla performs—man breathes fire" (at the Tōji Theater) in May 1955 in the theater and cinema guide pages of the *Kyōto Shinbun*. Also appeared in 1957 to acclaim. The film "Godzilla" was released in 1954. Perhaps the same person as one of the people above.
- TAKEDA Kōichi Born 1938(?). Part-time for side income. Arrested for stealing temple offerings in 1958. Aged twenty at this time. Ube city. (Okuda 1991: 155)
- MUTO Reiji Born 1911(?). Boss of a steelworks. Amateur. Made Yasuda angry. Ichinomiya City. Recorded in *Josei Jishin*, 9 August 1979 edition.
- SAKURAI Tomoaki Born 1962(?). Appeared on television show *Kijin Henjin (Funny Man, Weird Man)*, performing the human pump—swallowing a goldfish, regurgitating it alive and so on. Ueda City. Amateur. Recorded in *Josei Jishin*, 9 August 1979 edition.
- Uncle Sakuda(?) Sold tickets for the Kinoshita circus. Also did the human pump.

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