If the essential quality of classical art can be described as the whole space calling upon a kind of holiness and singing with it to the maximum, then my art possesses all the ingredients of that (Koike 1993–94).

‘Japan is soft and safe – it seems to be wrapped up in a warm surface. On the other hand I cannot shake off the feeling that today’s Japan is saturated by deep fear and darkness’, Japanese director Koike Hiroshi observed in his programme notes to *Spring Day* (1997). Koike interrogated this hidden anxiety in this production by his dance-theatre company Pappa TARAHUMARA. (This is Koike’s preferred presentation of the company’s name when represented in English.) Koike founded Pappa TARAHUMARA in 1982, then calling it Tarahumara Theatre. In 1987, he changed the name to its current form. In that time Koike has produced over thirty productions and has performed on tour or in festivals in the United States, Canada, Europe and throughout east Asia.

This same sense of anxiety has been linked by John Clammer to Japan being a ‘very self-conscious culture’: ‘concern amounting often to anxiety with the “correct” appearance of one’s individual self’ (1992, 197). In the context of Japan’s culture of shopping, Clammer posits that the acquisition of goods is one strategy Japanese adopt to reassure them of this anxiety. Strained, anxious leisure is one of the motifs of *Spring Day*, as will be explained below.
Koike’s concern for Japanese culture as expressed in the quotes above manifest in a style of international humanism in which he searches for texts, images and styles of performances to create eclectic forms of archetypes of the human experience. Their name is highly suggestive of this project. Koike’s choice is two-fold, one relating to the indigenous people of Mexico and the other relating to Antonin Artaud’s writings about these people. Koike and other members of his troupe have an expressed interest in the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico. When explaining their choice of name, they write in one publicity package available in English that the name refers to ‘an area in Mexico that is called the Land of Tarahumara... What we have aimed for is to try somehow to capture and present the special wonder of Tarahumara culture, inexpressible and interpretable in modern rationalistic terms... we aspire to an overall image of wonder and joy.’ In the same public relations statement they caution, however, ‘we have not directly incorporated Tarahumara culture as such into our pieces’ (Pappa TARAHUMARA 1992).

Pappa TARAHUMARA is known for its precise choreography and abstract performance tactics. Koike is a charismatic visionary bringing his own quest for wisdom to his productions. Koike sees performance as restorative and as a space for rebirth. In his programme notes to the German performances of Pappa TARAHUMARA’s Parade, he described his ‘task’ as ‘to discover the centre of world, to give a form to it and present it as a work of time-art within a medium in space’. This centre he understands as ‘something which lies at the bottom of a profound, unconscious structure. Something we might be able to call an unstoppable impulse goes backward to an ancient and pre-modern times. I would like to restore this impulse to the present.’ In 1998’s Spring Day, such inspiration takes the form of a performance whose world is one not quite of the living or dead, or of the memory, or of the now, but of liminal figures that do not seem directly aware of their hazy, marginal status. Yet, that marginal status manifests in the forlorn ferocity that characterizes much of the performance. I will describe and analyse the group’s aesthetics with reference to two particular productions, Spring Day (1998) and Stone Age (1991).

By utilizing Uchino’s (2006) mapping of contemporary Japanese avant-garde theatre practices, a context is created for understanding Koike’s aesthetics in exploring notions of contemporary Japanese identity through performance. In ‘Mapping/Zapping “J” Theatre at the Moment,’ Uchino presents a ‘cognitive map of what is happening in Japan’s theatre culture at present’ (2006, 132). He logs forty theatre companies upon two axes: Literary/Text versus Performance/Body in one direction and Gadget (Relativist=Postmodernist) versus Real (Essentialist=Modernist) in the