

Tokyo Fugueⁱ

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Johann Sebastian Bach is turning in his grave. His *Prelude and Fugue in D minor* has been completely deconstructed and its structure reapplied, becoming the backbone of an enthralling production with just three bodies and three chairs. Directors Kentaro Suyama and Tania Coke are joined by Toshihiko Nishimura on stage, as they present a philosophical exploration of the repetitive, dehumanising and overwhelming nature of the commute. Through this, *Tokyo Fugue* offers a Kraftwerk-esque exploration of transport in repetitive diction and choreography (see: Trans Europe Express, Autobahn), but it is uneasy, rather than enthusiastic, about pushing contemporary technology to its absolute limits.

The play starts with a solitary body performing ritualistic dances, as the projected outline of a screeching underground train towers above him. It's unpleasant and disorientating, akin to those first few seconds of complete disarray as you wake up at the end of the line post-hangover. Sleep is one of many motifs peppered throughout this production: lullabies interject the industrial clangs and the clickety-clack of the zooming underground train, while Bach's influence pervades the unpleasant cluster harmonies of piercing wind instruments as a ground bass accompanies bodies running around with chairs.

The choreography is as meticulous as it is constant, but are these rituals a liberating release from the constraints of the capitalist commute - Lord Of The Flies but make it management consultants - or are they three bodies trapped in a never-ending sequence? The latter is confirmed by the cyclical structure of the fugue, where the last section (recapitulation) essentially repeats the first (exposition).

There is a constant sense of the characters not being in control, but most striking about this performance is the extent to which they are dehumanised. Indeed, the biography describes them not as people, but as bodies. It feels sinister that they are most human when they become completely insane (there's one bit where Tania screams at the top of her voice, then jumps around the stage with her hands over her eyes, before applying a makeup routine).

Indeed, the bodies do not interact with each other but interact with themselves around each other. Chi Onwurah MP once [described](#) getting into an Uber as the driver selling you space in it, rather than sharing their car with you, and *Tokyo Fugue* explores the similar phenomenon of the underground train simultaneously embodying a means to different ends for different individuals while being an entirely communal experience.

Breaking down what the commute actually involves is pretty scary: 900 of us all locked in metal boxes on wheels, carting us along at 40 miles per hour, 40 metres underground. But is it really the train that deprives the bodies **of their sanity** in *Tokyo Fugue*? And is the mesmerising damage done to them by commuting enough to stop me from getting on the train tomorrow morning? Perhaps not, but maybe that's their point. I am merely a unit of capitalism, and I am too gripped by the routine it imposes to change a harmful way of life. How terrifying.

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