

ANKOKU BUTOH

Lecture delivered at Fu Jen University decade conference, Taipei:
“Feminine Spirituality in Theatre, Opera, and Dance.”

By Natsu Nakajima, October 1997

The title of this conference is “Feminine Spirituality in Theatre, Opera and Dance”. In the three years since Prof. Lynda Scott contacted me, inviting me to speak here today, we have been corresponding via fax, trying to agree on a title for my paper. That was even before we decided that this session would take the form of a lecture-workshop. After these three years of communication, I thought Prof. Lynda Scott would already have a deep understanding of what I am about to say. In an effort to ensure that what I am going to talk about will be of close relevance to the theme of this conference, Prof. Lynda Scott suggested titles such as “Shamanism”, “Spirituality and Transformation”, and even “Dance Therapy”, which is related to my current work back home, in dance education with handicapped people. So for three years, we corresponded via fax, trying to decide on a title. Every time Prof. Lynda Scott suggested something, I would say “NO”. I believe she must have been very frustrated. Anyway, we finally settled on “Ankoku Butoh and Transformation”. In fact I still felt like saying “NO”, but I also felt that I should not waste any more fax paper. So it was settled and here I am. Contrary to Prof. Lynda Scott who was always trying to come up with new titles, I have, right from the very beginning, felt that “Ankoku Butoh” alone would be a good enough title. While I feel the need to clarify our differences, I also feel that this could either be a blind spot, or a very important topic in itself.

I wonder how many of you here have heard of, or actually seen “Ankoku Butoh”, which is a revolutionary movement in performing arts in Japan. I believe a fair number of you have seen a performance of one of my teachers, Ohno Kazuo, when he performed in Taiwan several years ago. Now in Europe, and some other countries, the term “Ankoku” has been dropped from “Ankoku Butoh”, and the term “Butoh” has become more closely associated with these countries.

I would like to begin by talking about the historical background to the birth of Ankoku Butoh, as well as the *idée*, worldview, and aspirations behind this artistic movement. By working with the dancers and actors who have come especially for this workshop, I will also try to explain the basic concepts and techniques of Ankoku Butoh using a practical approach, and also to show you what our working process is like. As I have mentioned just now, Ankoku Butoh has a history of over thirty years. The originator of Ankoku Butoh, Hijikata Tatsumi has passed away, and there are many misunderstandings, misinterpretations, as well as misrepresentations concerning Ankoku Butoh. We have very little time today and as a workshop process, this is problematic. It takes a long time to acquire a certain craft, let alone a craft from a foreign culture. We will not achieve much today, but no matter how little, I will try my best so that you will come to understand something.

1. The Birth of Ankoku Butoh: It’s history and cultural background.

To approach Ankoku Butoh’s history, I will talk very generally about the times when the Ankoku Butoh movement occurred. Ankoku Butoh came onto the scene in post-war Japan, and developed very rapidly in the 1960’s. So, as I said earlier, Ankoku Butoh has a history of over thirty years. The founding members, at the beginnings of the Ankoku Butoh movement, including myself are considered the first generation. Today, we have the third and even fourth generation. Hijikata Tatsumi, who passed away 12 years ago, is the originator of Ankoku Butoh; and Ohno Kazuo, who is 92 years old, but still active in international dance and arts festivals, was his great, extra-ordinary collaborator. From the beginnings of the movement, for founding members including myself, both Hijikata and Ohno were our teachers. We

were influenced as well as cultivated by them. Hijikata was a genius choreographer, director, strategist, thinker and a kind of shaman. Ohno was an extraordinary and rare dancer. They are both unique and distinctive. Hijikata was like Picasso; every season, he would change the style of his works like a chameleon. This partly explains why each of his disciples developed very different working styles.

In the early 1960's a very small, close circle of members was involved in the Ankoku Butoh movement, with Hijikata and Ohno as teachers at the core of the movement. We were the beginnings of their lineage of disciples. Hijikata and Ohno, as well as myself and other early members, were trained in modern dance and classical ballet. So in a certain sense, Butoh can be seen as a rebellion against American modern dance.

I would like to talk a little more about the social background. Since the openings of Japan in the Meiji period (1868 – 1912), Japan had been learning and importing all sorts of things from the West. In dance, there were a number of pioneers who had brought German Expressionism back to Japan even before World War II. Dancers saw Europe as the main learning centre at that time. After Japan lost the war to America, American modern dance became popular. On the other hand, the great traditional arts, such as Noh, Kabuki, and Nihon Buyo, were lethargic, stagnant, and were alienated from the masses. The founding members of Ankoku Butoh were all trained in western modern dance, but as Japanese, the idea of merely imitating the Occidentals was not acceptable, and it was this sentiment that brought us together. The blood that flows in our bodies does not allow us to be mere Western imitations. We had to look for the body expression of the Japanese.

Critics in the West talk about Butoh successfully playing the role of two bridges between theatre and dance, and between tradition and modern. To a certain extent, these are fair judgments, though very journalistic in approach. In Japanese traditional performing arts such as Noh and Kabuki, there was no distinction between theatre and dance. They are performed as 'total theatre' and Butoh has this same kind of integration. In Japan, Butoh is classified as dance but I believe that Hijikata conceived Butoh as total theatre.

It was an interesting time in the 1960's both in the West and in Japan. Waves of revolution were rising. In Japan, the Underground Theatre Movement was developing. Where previously there were only commercial or mainstream/major performing arts, for the first time the seed of counter-culture found a season good for sprouting. Ankoku Butoh was a movement in the performing arts that was born riding on this wave of counter-culture.

When I look back and ask myself what does this past 30 years mean, the history of Ankoku Butoh appears as if it is my personal history. If Ankoku Butoh was just a dance, I believe I would have given up on it long ago. So what has brought me here? To talk about this, is to talk about the important ideological background to Ankoku Butoh, as well as the differences between Prof. Lynda Scott and myself. As one of the founding members of Ankoku Butoh, I am obliged to use the ideas of Hijikata as the centre of reference. Ankoku Butoh came onto the scene with Hijikata as the foundation. As I mentioned before, he was a genius artist and a strong character, like an ancient shaman.

As I have mentioned earlier, be it in Europe, America, or Japan, "Ankoku Butoh" has somehow developed on its own with the title "Butoh". Losing "ankoku" has resulted in losing sight of the original ideology from when Ankoku Butoh was created and has given rise to many misunderstandings and misinterpretations. To talk about the "*ankoku*" that has been dropped by much of the current Butoh communities and performers is to somehow touch on the theme of this conference: "Feminine Spirituality in Theatre".

2. What is "Ankoku"?

So what is “ankoku”? This is a very difficult topic to tackle. It is like trying to explain and understand the black-hole in the universe. I am neither a scholar nor a researcher. I am simply a living dancer. But I will have to struggle on with this... ..I can only try to share with you my deep personal experience of Ankoku Butoh through my clumsy use of language. In some sense, I feel that we can replace the word “ankoku” with “spirituality”. When I examine in retrospect, my path over the past thirty years, I feel that I did not take up dance in particular, but rather, I have borrowed the “field of the body” to go on a spiritual journey. Usually when we talk about spiritual inquiry, we think of the topics of Psychology, Philosophy, Literature, Anthropology, or even Theology. All of these investigate “spirituality” in a linguistic and sociological domain. But where is the inquiry into individual spirituality? If we move along the line of dualism in Occidental culture, we see that in order to look into spirituality, we examine the mind. Occidental dualism does not allow us to explore spirituality in the field of the body. For myself, my inquiry into spirituality did not happen in academia, it happened in the field of the body. This is full of contradictions if we approach it from the point of view of Occidental dualism, but this is precisely the unique feature of Ankoku Butoh. I am bewitched, not by the spiritual quest in the field of language, but rather, by learning in the field of the body. But what is this field of the body? Learning and seeking into that constitutes my Ankoku Butoh journey.

When Japanese people are asked where the position of the mind is, most of them will point not to the brain, but to the heart. I wonder if mind is equivalent to brain for Occidentals.

There was an interesting incident that happened in Ohno Kazuo’s rehearsal studio. Many foreigners come to his studio, and he would begin by giving them a phrase to dance on. For example, “Dance in the heavens. Dance in hell. Dance in the heart.” He would ask them to dance in different “fields”. Most of the foreigners could cope with this and they would feel that it had been a wonderful rehearsal. But when Ohno said, dance in the “*konpaku*”, all of a sudden they would not know how to move. “*Konpaku*” is a word that even the Japanese have forgotten and would be startled by. Where is the field of “*konpaku*”? If there is a field of “*konpaku*” it would neither be in the “*heavens*” nor in “*hell*”. It is a term that describes the riverbanks where the dead and the living come and go, very much at peace with themselves. I have the impression that the essential difference, between “*konpaku*” and western concepts of “soul” and “spirit” is that these words have connotations of heaven but not hell. In Japan, we use Buddhist terms like “*higan*” –the far side of the riverbank, the world of the dead, and “*shigan*” –the near side of the riverbank, the world of the living. “*Konpaku*” belongs to the world of the dead. The dead come and go several times a year crossing the river to their ancestral homes. It is not about being called up to the heavens. “Heaven” and “hell” have a rigid vertical relationship in Occidental society. “*Higan*” and “*shigan*” have a horizontal relationship. In other words, the heavens and “*shigan*” are not places but “nowhere out there”.

Whatever you may call it, darkness, spirituality, or even something formless, something that cannot be put into words, or simply, the unconscious, the inexplicable, the destroyed and disappeared... ..we are actually talking about something that cannot be seen. Something that Hijikata called “*ankoku*”. Hijikata liked to use the word “*yami*” (shadowy darkness). It gives the feeling of something that is full of contradiction and irrationality, somewhere like the “*chaos of eternal beginning*”.

When Butoh is talked about as a kind of shamanism or a form of therapy, it’s like dissecting ones own body into pieces. To deconstruct Ankoku Butoh

with “language” is moving further and further away from the joy of early Ankoku Butoh’s integral quest for “the body as the scene of fulfilled life”.

In some sense, Hijikata hated the word “spirituality”. He preferred to talk about “*yami*”, (shadowy darkness). When seen from the point of view of Occidental dualism, spirituality appears to be superior to the flesh. Ankoku Butoh is fundamentally in conflict with this because it is based on the eastern belief of body-mind/body-heart unity. We hold the belief of the total body, and the view of “body as the scene of a full life”.

ii. Living and dying.

Examining the area of life, living and dying, I recall Hijikata’s famous aphorism: “Butoh is a corpse standing straight up in a desperate bid for life.” Artistic expression can move in two directions, either towards beauty and living life, or towards death, “*yami*”. Butoh is an *ecole* that deals with a great deal of death and “*yami*”. When I looked through the notes I took when I was young, the word “corpse” was all through them, for example, “the field where corpses are placed”. You can say that we were a group that preferred “*yami*” to “light”. In our works, we also had no qualms about dealing with social taboos such as death and sex. Hijikata’s debut work, “*Kinjiki*”, (Forbidden Colours) took its title from the work of Mishima Yukio, was inspired by the work of Jean Genet, and dealt with the theme of male sexuality. In the area of sexual taboos, Hijikata’s work was scandalous.

ii. The anti-establishment and Vanishing History of culture.

If we look at things from a cultural perspective, we can see Ankoku Butoh as counter-culture and anti-establishment. Without much thought, I have actually ventured into cultural history. If “Official History” is that which has been put into print, “vanishing history” is that which has not been written down, has nothing to say, or has disappeared without leaving a trace.

Hijikata often told us to “shed the skin of our body that has been tamed and domesticated”. He was like a spy who tracked down all the details to see where domestication began, and to what extent the body has been domesticated. This is actually essential to Ankoku Butoh technique. I will touch on this again when I talk about “the body that becomes nothing”. Hijikata investigated the phenomena of “modern people who live with domesticated time”. In the article that he wrote for one of my performance program booklets, he said:

“We modern people are not living as the skin we have shed; we modern people are not pursued by the “time of that cast-off skin” - we can extend and reduce this time, because it is full of much diverting and chatting dance. We are living surrounded by a mass of tricky symbols and systems, and we are using predetermined movements as our alibi.”

Hijikata’s writings are well known to be difficult to understand. This “extending and reducing of time” does not refer to the 60 minutes/hour digital time, but time that is elastic, or a “dream time” when art was born from the mother’s womb. He was a strange genius that applied the standards of effectiveness and efficiency to examine even the notion of time, and showed us that such standards are not necessarily the only way to view the world. If we see standard 60 minutes/hour digital time as written “official history”, we can see that Hijikata was going against it. Hijikata preferred the ignominious “Vanishing History”. He preferred darkness to light.

3. Ankoku Butoh: Pre-modernity and Shamanism

Next, we look at Ankoku Butoh as an art or art movement. Usually a revolutionary art movement tends to be one that will catalyze the development of “future time”. But the uniqueness of Ankoku Butoh, according to a critic is that, “if post-modern is after modern, Butoh is unique in that it resulted in a return flow to pre-modern.”

What did this Japanese critic mean by “a return flow to pre-modern”? He saw that Butoh manifested the “body and hand movements of the agrarian Japanese”, a hint of the uniqueness of the Japanese people dating back to mediaeval Japan. I do not agree with this view, but I do see some similarity between Ankoku Butoh and shamanism, in that it is pan-racial, and has a certain primitive air. I have learned shamanistic dance from Kim So Cha from Korea. The first time I saw her dance, I intuitively identified with it, “Ah, this is Ankoku Butoh!” There is a similarity to shamanism in the sense that both utilize “transformation” as a key technique.

i. Man and Nature.

When we look at the body, in ancient or primitive times, we do not see man as being made up of contrasting artificial and natural elements. The body is seen as a gift of nature –an entity that is in union with the universe. Such a view does not exist in the Christian belief system, which believes in the superiority of man over nature. The body is an embodiment of “consciousness”, “unconsciousness”, “rationality”, and “irrationality”.

In anthropology there is a concept of “centre” and “fringe”. You may want to classify Ankoku Butoh as tending towards the fringe, but you also need to see that such classification is, in itself, problematic. Joseph Campbell in his book, “The Power of Myth”, mentioned that the Navaho Indians in America do not refer to plants, trees, birds and animals as “it”, but rather as “you”. It is the same with Ankoku Butoh. If it were not so, there would be no way to enter into transformation, to become “wind”, “flower”, “water”, “chicken”, “smoke”,

ii. High-art, Low-art

It appears that I am bringing out too many dark images, by talking about “anti-establishment”, “negativity”, “yami” and such, but Butoh also loves irony, humor, nonsense and “the trickster”. Ankoku Butoh excavates the dimension of the grotesque, in contrast to the bright world that brews beauty.

Just as the earth can be separated into southern and northern hemispheres, perhaps artistic expression can be discussed in these terms. In other words, we can place professionalism and “beauty in completeness” into the northern hemisphere, where standards like “efficiency” and “effectiveness” are imposed and “High Art” reigns. But it does not mean that it is only possible for us to live in the northern hemisphere. In the expression of the southern hemisphere, there is a lot of excessiveness, extending and reducing of time, playing, free floating things, mess, matters of unknown meanings, things that are highly fragilethe tendency to move towards Cheap Art, Low Art, which is something like the overturned toy box of a child.

iii. Language and the body.

I would like to talk about language and the body. The body is something that cannot be totally captured in words. In the depth of our body, there is something mysterious, something hidden, something that we want to discard... ..To give these “formless matters” a “form” is what Ankoku Butoh is about.

One of the key elements of Ankoku Butoh, especially Hijikata’s Ankoku Butoh, is summed up in this irony: to put into words that which cannot be put into words, to give a form to that which is formless. Perhaps it can also be called “the activities of words of

the body”. The conflict between language and the body forms the backbone of Ankoku Butoh. When we say language, we do not mean words like “What day is today?” or “How much is this?” -words which convey concrete daily meanings; rather, we are talking about metaphorical language. As in the words of Joseph Campbell, “Poetry is a language that has to be penetrated. Poetry involves a precise choice of words that will have implications and suggestions that go past the words themselves. Then you experience the radiance, the epiphany.” In trying to say that which cannot be said, we came to the realization that we can only say it through metaphor. Like Antonin Artaud, Hijikata left behind many literary metaphors. For example:

“Bacterium is god, god is bacterium.” (It may not be so appropriate to introduce such a metaphorical saying in a Christian university.)

“The disappearing history of the flesh trails behind the metropolis of the flesh.”

“In our body, there is something that sometimes goes astray, and sometimes surfaces.”

“Butoh is the walk of smoke. Because Butoh is about disappearing, that is why a form is left behind.”

The last one I will share with you today is:

“Isn’t being born into this world itself a matter of improvisation?”

Lee Chee Keng, a young theatre person from Singapore is currently researching Butoh, and up until recently was studying in Kagoshima University. Lee has been trying very hard to research the Ankoku Butoh that is disappearing in Japan. On the linguistic side, he is an outstanding theatre person. He tries to understand everything by working his brain very hard. But he stumbled when he met with the nebulous language of Hijikata. Hijikata said, “The apparent history of language trails behind the metropolis of the flesh and in the end, lost its way.”

To explain “life” in words is like catching a fish that has been swimming in the water. At the very moment it leaves the water it begins to dry up and die. “A fish that has become a corpse” and can no longer be a proof of “life”.

In the final stage of his work, Hijikata did not intend to leave butoh just as an “avant-garde movement”. He was working hard to create a system that is comparable to the codified theatre (codified dance/dance-theatre/theatre) such as classical ballet, Beijing Opera and Kabuki. It is unfortunate that he passed away before he was able to achieve his objective. “Codified form” and “the body’s activities of words” were the primary concern of Hijikata’s work. In his later years, he passed this on only to those disciples who were taught directly by him. This is in part what has given rise to all the misunderstandings and misinterpretations that we are faced with today. I feel that what is called “Butoh” in Japan now is very far from how Hijikata conceived it.

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I have tried my best to put into words my ideology of Ankoku Butoh. These are “background thoughts”, not things that were learned and proven academically. They can be seen as seeds of fire that spread across the fields of Cultural Anthropology, Psychology, Philosophy, Literature, Religion, etc.

Prof. Lynda Scott thought of titles for my lecture like “Shamanism”, “Therapy”, “Spirituality”, and I have said, “No” to one title after another. In a sense, I did not want to fix or cage the fluid life of the body that is in the “integral field of fulfillment”. For me, the body is the field where I learn all that we have touched on: “Spirituality”, “yami”, “formless form”, “unnamable something”, “hidden something”, “something to be discarded”, “nature”, “something to destroy”, what we may call “everything that cannot be seen”. It is like a journey. Using the body as the axis, we can move into human being, into life, into nature, into words, into the universe, into spirituality, into love This is a field where we learn something integral, something beyond dance. In India, a teacher

or a master is often called a “guru”. The word means “someone who disperses the shadowy darkness (yami)”. Hijikata was the greatest guru to me, and a shaman as well. However, in the end, Ankoku Butoh still has to come under the umbrella of some “art movement” or “dance theatre”.

3. Ankoku Butoh Technique: Body and Language.

In some sense, the concept behind the basic technique of Ankoku Butoh is simple when put into words. The first step is to shed the things that are daily and social, “to return to the original body”. This is the direct opposite to the techniques of Western Expressionism. The *idée* of Ankoku Butoh is based on such body ideologies as “the extra-daily body”, or “the body shed of social domestication”, or “to strip off the individual or social identity, and return to the body as a natural entity”. In Hijikata’s words, to become “a body as a corpse”. These are not exclusively patented to Butoh. They run across all traditional Japanese performing arts. Take the example of “to return to the original body”. It is said that Noh performers take ten years to achieve such an objective. Western dance techniques in contrast, emphasize “Visible techniques” such as the “ability to do something”, “how many times can I turn”, “the height the leg can reach”. Ankoku Butoh technique “to return to the original body” is an “invisible technique”. This is essential so that dance may surge out from the deep depths of the body.

To “return to the original body”, “to become nothing”, “to become not anything”, as I have just said, means to shed the daily and social character that we have put on and “to return to the body as a natural entity”. In western dance, “someone dances”. In Ankoku Butoh, “something moves, something dances”; it is not the individual human being who moves or dances. Western dance technique is “Visible”, while our technique is “Invisible”.

“To return to the original”, “to become not anything”, “to become nothing”; all these seem to be pointing towards a condition of emptiness, but it is actually a “filled emptiness”, or in other words, “an emptiness that is filled within, that is ready to take a leap into the next dimension”. For example, when I dance, it is not the body that was socially given the name Natsu Nakajima dancing, but the movements germinate in the deep centre of my body, and my body is moved.

* * *

The questions of “When is the dance born?” and “What is dance?” are very important to me. (You see, professional dancers don’t only dance.) These questions are also related to the question of “passivity” in the special condition of “returning to the original body” and “the state of nothingness”. The moments when I truly experience the ecstasy, or zest in dance, are also the moments when I feel “a certain special passivity”. When my arms move, it is not my arms that are moving. It is a moment when my arms, commanded by the unconscious, are moved by a greater force that is beyond me. “The moment of birth of dance” refers to the moment when one enters into a zone of unconsciousness that is beyond oneself. Some people call this propitious moment “dance”, others call it “harmony”, “freedom”, “centre”, “unity”, “ecstasy”, “love”, “truth”, etc...

The pre-expressive of Ankoku Butoh should be such that, through the invisible technique of “first becoming nothing, becoming not anything, becoming empty”, the performer’s ego is cut off. In words, one says, “to become not anything”, but in the body, one is actually “fully filled”.

* * *

From here, one moves a step further “to become something”, that is “to carry out transformation”. “To become something” in Ankoku Butoh is different from the technique of becoming something in German Expressionism or western techniques. For

example when we say, “to become a flower”, in terms of western techniques, all the efforts are put into creating an image on the exterior. So the dancer tries his best “to look like a flower”. In Ankoku Butoh, however, the dancer works only from within to begin “to become a flower”, “to become a stone”, just like a child who believes in what he is doing, or the shaman who is a medium. Instead of trying to manifest the external image, the performer must feel with the inner depth of his body. Paradoxically, this is easier put into words than carried out with the body.

We have just talked very briefly about the basic Ankoku Butoh technique: from the state of “becoming not anything”, to “becoming something to depend on”. To touch on the relationship between language and the body, I will talk about the challenge that Hijikata took up at the final stages of his life, which is characterized by the irony of “trying to give form to that which is formless, trying to put into words that which cannot be put into words”. He took up this challenge by creating a dance notation. Usually dance notation such as Laban Notation, representative of western dance notations, records the positions of the parts of the body. It is a very mechanical way of recording the external images. In the case of Hijikata, however, while he uses words for recording, his words are images. Let me give an example here:

(hand movements)

long pipe
combing
resting chin on the table
tying a knot in the string
stretching the string
carrying a cup
weaving cherry blossom branches
hair ornament
lipstick
stop!
cutting the string with teeth
stretching the string
outline of your face
loose hair
big nose
three streams of rain crossing in front of your face three times
TOKIWA
ogress

This notation system has a vertical axis and a horizontal axis. It is a rare “double notation system”. For example, if we only say, “sit”, “stand”, the dancer or the actor will only understand it as “sit” and “stand”, but when we say “stand, invited by the moonlight”, “sit with a stone pressing down from the top of the head”, the nuances are totally different. With a ladder, we climb down into the well of the body, drawing up the inexplicable, the unnamable from the depths. On top of this “inner exploration” of “giving a form”, “putting into words”, we super-impose another layer of activities of words, which is an “external exploration”, so that we will radiate various qualities and quantities of energy into space.

* * *

Let’s try some exampleswith movements, (working with dancers and actors) ...
...in the “light space”, in the “stone space”. You can see that they are totally different.

You see that if a dancer only understands the movement as “sitting”, “standing”, or just moving “fast” or “slow”, it will be a lifeless and inorganic understanding of dance, and language will simply be understood as signs. It will not be a manifestation, translation, and rendering of form to the meaning of words. Hijikata’s dance notation is not to be understood with the head, but rather to be felt and sensed in the field of the body.

The words have to be picked up by very sensitive antennae in the body. The words need to be physically felt and read, otherwise, there is a danger that the notation will degenerate into plain signification of some external form, and dance will become some kind of “lifeless form”. Words do not exist for the purpose of tracing a form or a figure, neither is it for the purpose of translating and conveying the meanings of “language”. Usually we “read a book” with our eyes. Here we “read the book” with our ear, hair, nose, legs, stomach, as well as other organs. The poet Uno Kuniichi, an expert on Antonin Artaud, said this about Hijikata’s use of language:

“In order to turn the body into a sign, the Butoh dancers used a tremendous amount of words to fill themselves. I was awed by that. The flesh of the butoh dancer appears to be made from countless particles of words. I have never met anyone like Hijikata, who goes to the extent of filling the bone marrow of a dancer with words. The flesh does not depend on any form. The more one tries to make the invisible phenomena visible, the more one needs to propagate the material and drive hard at the waves that link the interior and the exterior of language.”

* * *

After we unveil the mystery of Hijikata’s dance notation, it turns out to be something rather simple, straightforward and non-mysterious. However, we need to see the fact that words are filled with nuances, and can express in great depth what one wishes to express. In that sense, this is an important asset that mankind invented.

When we speak the “words” with our mouth, they act mainly as meaning. Dance is definitely not a media to express concrete daily meaning such as “Good morning” or “How much is this?” When the performer “reads the book” with deep physical sensations, there will be some invention or magic that is conveyed to the audience. In other words, metaphorical “high-potency” language transmits more power than “concrete meanings”.

If we look deeper into the relationship between language and the body, we will see that there are two types of language. On the one hand, there is practical language that is used to transmit concrete meaning, and on the other hand, there is metaphorical language. In ancient Japan, we believed that spirits lived in the words in language. These spirits we call “*kotodama*”. The leaves of our words –“*kotoba*”, are moved by “*kotodama*”. “*Kotodama*” and words are one unified entity. If we use words without “*kotodama*”, these words will only be meanings and signs, and will lose their unseen power.

Modern rationalism has no qualms about breaking down language, turning it into signs or digitizing it. This competition for effectiveness and efficiency has only resulted in a bankruptcy of the modern rational spirit, giving rise to chaos. With the value system in such a mess, man should not break up language any further, but should return to this grand encompassing natural entity called the body and the unifying centre deep down in the depths of the body. I have said earlier that the moment of the birth of dance is sometimes called “harmony”, “freedom”, “centre”, “unity”, “ecstasy”, “love”, “truth”, etc. The moment when the body is in union, one will go beyond oneself and meet with another someone.

For me, Ankoku Butoh is not a school but a journey and a place where I learn about the invisible. At the moment of the birth of dance I experience the union of mind and body and transcend my tiny self to feel a great power, great love.

It appears that I have not touched on the feminine aspect of the theme of this conference. For a very long time, the history of art has appeared to be the product of masculine spirituality. Ankoku Butoh was totally ignored by Japanese society, hidden as an artistic activity tending towards total “shadowy darkness”. I feel that this is very much a type of female spirituality.

Art is the fruit of higher spiritual activities of human beings. Art is not a kind of stable social occupation, neither is it a kind of business dealing. As we enter the 21st century, let us with fresh energy, stand up for the fruit of rich spiritual activities.

What is seen is supported by what is unseen.

As Hijikata said, “We living people are holding hands with the dead.”

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