

Relation between Butoh Dancing and Noh Theater music in their spiritual dimension

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Abstract

The authors start by a reflection on the deepest meaning of the terms “dance” and “spirituality”. Then they study two fundamental questions concerning dance :

- The interior psychological nature of the inspiration of the artists
- The origin of movement and gesture in a spiritual context

Finally, the authors present their own original experience and philosophy on the combination of Butoh et Noh

Introduction

The Butoh Dance

Butoh, a movement of adaptation necessary for survival in extreme situations, was born in Japan at the end of the Second World War. Often carried in a spirit of revolt and a desire for renewal related to an awareness, dance Butoh comes from these bodies bruised in their souls and in their flesh.

The principal founders of this movement in Japan were the dancers : Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010) and Tatsumoni Hijikata (1928-1986).

Butoh has its origin in life itself, in the need to find the meaning of what is real, the authentic relationship to oneself, to one's body, to those around us.

The Noh Theater

Created at the end of the 13th century in Japan, Noh is a theatrical form uniting two traditions: the danced pantomimes and the versified chronicles recited by wandering monks.

The founder of Noh performed in our days is Zeami, a Japanese actor and play writer (1363-1443). He created the “fukushiki-mugenno”, Noh with double structure appearance which takes place in the real world as well as the unreal world beyond death.

In “fukushiki-mugenno”, human beings living in the real world can enter the unreal world after death and return to the real world. The important point in Noh is **emptiness**, that is the fact that **there is nothing**. This **void** is emphasized between two musical moments. It is there that we find the essence and thought of Noh.

1 - What is dance, what is spirituality? Why associate the two of them? do they represent a single and unique entity?

The dance

The word "dance" comes from dancing, stemming from a Romanesque root meaning "to pull in length" akin to the Latin *tendere* ("stretch"), *tensus* ("tense").

Etymologically dance means a chain, a line but also refers to "distance", "remoteness".

This evokes in our artistic practices the question of "**the outstretched hand**", hand which is also very present in the dance and the music of the Noh theater.

The hand represents the first movement of the fetus but also the part of the body which is most in contact with others in a gesture of welcome; it prolongs the body, it extends it.

Dance refers to what is visible, whereas spirituality refers to the invisible, yet if we associate them it is certainly because there is some "disappearance of the physical body", some dematerialization in favor of an intention going beyond the laws of the visible. This intention concerns our aspiration to a fundamental harmony with the environment, like the chameleon does.

In general, we are mostly attracted by feeling than by just seeing. So, dance and spirituality tend to become one and the same thing.

Now let us take a closer look at the definition of spirituality.

The spirituality:

The word "spirituality" etymologically means "breath", the movement of the air that is produced by blowing.

Spirituality refers to something which is spirit, soul or whose origin is not material; it concerns its life, its manifestations or its moral values.

Spirituality is also the quality of a being that does not have a body.

Breathing, respiration, fits with the natural or human environment; the soul, manifests itself only in situations often linked to a very strong emotion: love or a situation of extreme emergency.

Spirituality inhabits every one of us in our proper personality, even though there is a universal attempt of codification and visibility of the art certainly related to an attempt to transmit it but also sometimes just to appropriate it.

The issues of dematerialization and interiority concerning the artist are outlined in the **Duende theory** of Federico Garcia Lorca, a great Spanish poet (1898-1936):

"... So, the duende is a power and not an action, it's a fight and not a thought. I heard an old master guitarist assert: "the duende is not in the throat; the duende climbs in from the soles of the feet"

That is to say, it is not a question of means, but of a real lifestyle; that is, blood; that is, very old culture, active creation.

*Also, Nietzsche said that every step climbed by a man or an artist in his own way to perfection, is at the cost of the struggle he is waging against a duende and not against an angel, as has been said, nor against the muse. **Therefore is necessary to establish this fundamental distinction concerning the root of creation.***

.....

The angel and the muse come from outside; the angel brings the lights and the muse brings the forms (Hesiod had understood it). On the other hand, it is necessary to wake the duende, in the ultimate dwellings of the blood.

The real fight is with the duende.

We know the ways to seek God, from the rough attitude of the hermit to the subtle way of the mystic. And even if we have to proclaim, with the voice of Isaiah: "Truly, you are the hidden God", in the end, it is this hidden God who sends to whom seeks him his first thorns of fire ..."

2- Spiritual dance for whom?

Movement, life belongs to everyone (dancers and others) and it is life that sets all things in motion. Spiritual dance is an attitude towards life, a state of mind close to real life resulting from daily adaptation situations often related to the desire to act for others.

Spirituality is expressed in everyday life and links people in a sincere way. The first of spiritualities is to be truly in harmony with oneself, one's true nature and potential and thus adopt an attitude that brings the true breath of life.

Spiritual dance therefore belongs to everyone who, faced with unusual, if not extreme, situations of adaptation, reveals one's potential and opens a deep and sincere world. The experience of life is a necessary requisite for a spiritual dance: particularly concerning Noh dance with 650 years of age and history!

In this context, the gesture, the breath and the heart are perfectly tuned.

The breath, carrier of life, results from the authentic gesture and not the opposite way. It is not a carefully studied breathing that gives rise to the essential movement. This is true for the dancer and the musician as well as the spectator.

Dance / spirituality is to be in a real, beautiful and same breath.

A spiritual gesture cannot be repeated. It leaves a trace, in communion with its natural and human environment. The spiritual dance is ephemeral and dematerialized. We should not seek to codify and understand it.

Dance means getting out of one's physical body through the expression of the most sincere and sensible self, bringing an inner peace. Even a "technically codified" gesture may be transcended depending on the dancer. Instrumentalize a body makes it lose its life because that is not the way one can express his goodness.

The person who can be authentically him or herself is thus approaching God. This is the essential spiritual communication with God or the Gods.

Dance is a universal language calling for one's empathy and humanity. Dance is close to life, to the earth from which life springs.

"How man would be great if he knew how to cultivate his soul, if he knew how to adapt it, associate it to natural forces. If we only could listen to what the moving soil, that we are plodding, wants, any one of the days in our life could become a fertile source for living in harmony with beauty "

Antoine Bourdelle architect-sculptor (1861-1929)

It is not a question of dancing the soul but of being the soul. **Dance is a pray.**

*"My dance consists to reach out to the sky, to feel the radiant sun and give thanks to the gods for being here. What I danced so far was only a pray for this. "***Isadora Duncan (1877-1927)**

*"When the great Isadora danced before me, thirty years of my life contemplated all the great human masterpieces suddenly coming alive "***Antoine Bourdelle**

3 - Relation between the music and the chant in Noh/ The dance Butoh and Noh

Both of these arts have the same intention, the same foundation which essentially resides in **the non-technical** . It is necessary to approach life first and then to act.

It is a question of going beyond the technique or rather returning to the sources, the authentic foundations, the deepest emotions of the human being, to what has sometimes evolved to a technique.

In Noh , bringing spirituality requires practicing an instrument (tsuzumi), and fully experiencing the gesture whether in dance or in music.

***"We don't invent movements , we discover them, as we discovered harmonies in music , we did not invent them. "*Isadora Duncan**

A fundamental element in Noh theater and Butoh dance is the question of the **VOID**: the silence between two sounds, an immobility between two gestures.

Art is life, the breath of life, spirituality:

The sound is "exhaling" and the silence is "inhaling"

The gesture is "exhaling" and immobility is " inhaling "

There is "appearance / disappearance" of the body.

It is in silence and immobility, that is in the void that the public can feel profoundly what has been expressed and so appropriate it.

The void is very distinct from the occidental notion of "break" which takes the form of a disconnexion with the public.

The void, in this sense, brings more humanity. It becomes a very important moment. There is communication with others, we breathe together. We discover what is familiar to everyone.

Another aspect emphasizing the humanity of the artist is described in the following example :

The player of the Tsuzumi, a small shoulder drum that intimately accompanies the dance Noh , feels the necessity of touching the horse skin that covers the instrument as more important than the sound itself.

There is a sensible perception of two beings.

The question of empathy is fundamental in art.

4 - Conclusion

The objective of the workshops combining Butoh and Noh is to rediscover meaning in the movement and consider the sense of movement as the fundamental basis of art.

In our workshops we are approaching the origin from which springs a just and sincere movement in the art as well as in any transmission or communication

The research for an authentic relationship / perception of oneself and of the others are the basis of this movement called "Butoh".

Let's go back to the artistic and human approach of the architect-sculptor Antoine Bourdelle who created more than 75 sculptures as "bas reliefs" for the front of the Champs Elysees theater. He wanted the sculptures perfectly integrated into the architecture so that it is "***the wall itself which in places designated, in good order, seems to be moved in human figures***"

We learn therefore that Antoine Bourdelle did not sculpt according to the inspiration of the moment but respected the fundamental structure of the wall and the necessities it imposed.

The need for the right, authentic and essential gesture comes from the awareness of the importance of life, every life.

Our experience as well as the "transcription" of this state of mind in our respective arts naturally leads us to feel as our duty to transmit them.

Finally, let us meditate the following excerpt concerning Bourdelle's sketches drawn when Isadora Duncan was dancing, ***In his sketches he uncovers her inner stream that animated her, this stream that translated the richest treasure of myths and symbols to the attitudes of dance, hectic, disheveled, rippling like the sea or leaves in the wind.*** "

(E. Faure philosopher - Solid Shadows 1924)

"Art is love", Antoine Bourdelle