



MASAKI IWANA - THE INTENSITY OF NOTHINGNESS

Butoh Dance Workshop

Brussels 1-5 April 2017

Content of the workshop

Open for performers, researchers, dancers, visual artists, architects and all other artists, the workshop provides body training in contemporary Japanese Butoh dance.

The workshop allows the participants to:

- 1) Study of the basic principles of movement analyzing the composition and function of body;
- 2) Discover body itself not simply as forms and movements, but having general possible status of inner landscape as model and sources;
- 3) Use poems and words as sources to transform imagination (ideal product) into image (visible product) not depending on standards (signs, symbols);
- 4) Train through improvisational dance how to select instantly the most exact elements to be danced among several (or more) possibilities which are present right before action and behavior ; that means generally to train improvisation.

The workshop suggests a system of training exercises in 4 directions: body training; defined dance; inspiration dance; improvisational dance.

With five kanji characters, '*han – gi – tai – to – kan*' (grilling, sacrifice, great nature, dance, mirror), butoh's founder Tatsumi Hijikata encapsulated the importance to dancing of sacrificing our own body

and soul, and treating nature as our mirror or teacher. Through these words, he urged that we dance a material entity hidden within our body, transcending society, institutions and norms. Once we perceive our body as a material entity; morals, dark intentions, desires, concepts of beauty, life and death, violence and eros become like tiny leaves are swept along by a torrent into a vortex of the immensely truthful nothingness existing within all the blameless origins of the universe. For dancers this nothingness must have intensity.

Butoh Blanc (White Butoh)

My White Butoh is not intended as an antithesis to 'ankoku butoh' (black butoh or the dance of darkness) of Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of butoh. Rather, by using the word 'white' I stress the philosophical advocacy of ankoku butoh: a butoh dancer must completely expose the 'darkness of his own existence.' In this interpretation, I amplify it and assert that such exposure should be so complete that it comes under the 'white sun,' meaning a perfectly clear and cloudless light.

Almost all modern dances in Western countries, or worldwide, are 'created' with the basic method of first clarifying a concept and then collecting and arranging dancers' external movements and forms to realize that concept. In contrast, one of butoh's largest characteristics is to produce --- or more accurately, 'give birth to' --- dances by guiding and drawing out the 'dance' already immanent in the dancer's body (this 'dance' may be referred to as 'original experience'; the word 'inner landscape' is often used in the butoh world). As a result, some butoh dances do not involve specific or phenomenological forms and movements as their basic element.

Butoh dancers have always referred to the body with that immanent 'original landscape' ('dance') as 'nikutai,' to be distinguished from the physical body, or flesh, as a biological entity. To realize 'nikutai,' a butoh dancer must recognize and amass personal experiences, memories and bodily habits; and since butoh is an art of expression, he must also have the ability to 'montage' those personal elements.

Difficulties butoh dancers are often faced with are related to the difficulties of realizing 'nikutai.' Difficulties, or sometimes misunderstandings, on the part of butoh audiences, on the other hand, lie in their common sense, with which they seek to see 'nikutai' with the immanent 'inner landscape' only as a visible object, or as specific and phenomenological forms and movements. White Butoh's thrust, however, is to go to the very bottom of the essence of butoh which is prior to forms and movements; namely, to pursue the realities of life. It goes without saying that it is not an easy task.

About Our Dance

First I would like to speak about what kind of training one should pursue. Because dance is "a realization of one's dream through the body", one must first know one's body very well. When I say 'the body', I mean a total body that includes all levels -- the bio-skeletal body, spirit, and intuition.

Dance is not movement in itself, but it is greatly related with movement. Therefore, one must know the functions of movements. I often compare the body with a building. The function of the body, like the ones of the building, has 1) 'strength' 2) 'flexibility' and on top of them rests 3) 'balance'. If the three works well together, it becomes movement, and the movement can have relationship with dance. Before entering the dance training, we train the body which is the valuable instrument of dance. This training is for flexibility and core strength --using stretching--, and power and balance training. these exercises have a single aim -- by training the lower-body (the base of our body), we prepare the body so that the upper body can relax. Now about the dance training. In order to let the body function entirely, I made about five fundamental dances. These are truly fundamental movements that one can encounter in daily life. For example, to walk, to rise up (to stand), to crouch,

to roll on the floor, and to turn. These are the first lessons. If one cannot perform well these fundamentals, the shortcomings show during the dance.

Next, let us think of requirements for the movement to become dance. Movement alone does not become dance -- the requirement for the dance is that one feeds such things as one's own dreams, memories, and desires into the movement. For this reason, sometimes, not to move (to be in stillness) becomes also dance. I am speaking ahead of myself, but let us say that dance is "a work of making the mental imagination into a concrete picture through the body". We must be able to draw various pictures with our bodies. The lessons in order to achieve this might be, for example, to dance a story-like subject (for instance, to dance an old pregnant salmon climbing against the rapid), or to dance a sensory subject (to dance the 'sensation of peeling off'), or to dance a material (texture) not limited by movement or form (to dance 'fragrance', to dance 'stagnation'), or to dance an intuition that is impossible to dance to (to dance 'a prostitute named ruin' or 'to fish silence' etc.) Lastly, it is necessary to do a training of improvisation. In order to free one's mind and body, improvisation is an absolutely necessary training. However, improvisation is not about doing whatever you want to do, like it is generally understood. Improvisation is a work of precisely choosing actions from moment to moment by preparing as many sensory and perceptive antennae as possible. In a sense, if our antennae grows more numerous as a result of training, an action that might happen by chance comes nearer to necessity (nature). Now, finally, I would like to speak about two very important points. Firstly, unlike dancers of traditional or classical dance, we are in a sense amateurs.

By 'in a sense' means, if we judge from the view point of defined aesthetic models and technical levels. A "professional" dancer will immediately drop out of the framework of these models and levels if he/she misses one day of training -- so they cannot dare to miss the training. Of course, for us also, lessons are valuable -- however, because there are no defined measures and levels, in this sense we can stay amateurs. However, if one thinks that one can then dance very easily, it is the contrary. It is incredibly difficult. The reason why it is difficult is because the reason to dance does not exist in technique and levels, but it exists within one's self. It may be difficult to understand, but I would like to replace the word "self" by the word "concreteness." For example, even if one follows the procedure that we learned somewhere, if it is not something extremely high level, it is not one's own, and one will not win against a high level professional. Also, it is possible to dance to music, but if the rhythm of the dance is not properly good enough, it cannot pass as a performance. As I just gave the examples, if the learned dance procedure or dancing to music is not crystallised technically, it is only a borrowed dance -- it is to say that it is not concrete. Then, what could one do? One is to find within oneself something concrete, something that will not be questioned in terms of technique (victory, defeat, or merits by competition do not exist in our dance) and dance it richly or desperately. This is the meaning to dance or, in other words, to dance one's body. If you are not convinced with this, please verify it by dancing. Now, secondly, there are some people who say that they dance to heal themselves. At the beginning, this is allowable, but if one does it to the end, it is a problem. The reason is, our dance cannot be done alone. It always requires someone looking on, a witness. To put it simply, it is a performance (exchange with audience), and if I may use my favourite words, one needs a resolution to be on show. It means that half is for healing oneself, and the other half for healing and giving joy -- and if fortunate, to touch the hearts of -- others. If one forgets this, the dance becomes a selfish act that is only to satisfy oneself. A dance of the content as I described above is not easy to appeal socially to become famous or to make a lot of money. This is because society likes to create frameworks and models, and to create superiority within that framework. Society puts a price on the dance as a commodity. Therefore, ones who aspire to our kind of dance must have a great resolution and courage to not care at all about not being famous or to be outside of the assessments and competitions. If still you would like to try our kind of dance, please visit me one day.



Masaki Iwana's Profile

Photo By Fumio Takashima

One of the most acclaimed Butoh performers in Japan today, one of the rare Butoh performers in the world who maintain the original Butoh spirit.

Masaki Iwana began his dance career outside the "Butoh genealogy" in 1975. Until 1982 he presented 150 experimental performances in which he stood straight, completely naked and perfectly still. Since then, in Europe as well as Japan, Iwana has presented his performances and workshops continuously and has created works which are built on his sharpened aesthetic in 100 cities - 40 countries. Iwana represents the institute for the research of Butoh *La Maison du Butoh Blanc*. Moreover in 2006 he produced and created a theatrical film 'Vermilion Souls' which got Best film award at Portobero IFF in UK in 2009, followed by the 2nd film 'A Summer Family' 2010.

www.iwanabutoh.com

Masaki Iwana (dancer, choreographer, dance teacher, film director)

<Personal Career>

- 1945 Born in Tokyo, Japan.
- 1967 Graduate Keio university Tokyo-Japan, entered to TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System)
- 1968 Retired TBS and started the activities as an actor.
- 1975 Started dancing independently as fringe.
- 1985 Established the Research Institute of Butoh dance *Hakutoh-Kan* in Tokyo.
- 1988 Moved to France and started the activities in Europe.
- 1995 Established the Research Institute of Butoh dance *La Maison du Butoh Blanc* in south Normandy-France.
- 2005 Started film making.

<Artistic career>

- 1975 Jumped into the body work which could not be named 'theater' nor 'dance'.
- 1979-84 Developed more than 150 performances with standing up-right, stillness with naked.
- 1983 Official invitation by Avignon Chartreuse International Theater-Dance Festival and acclaimed.
- 1989 Invited by May Fest in Glasgow. Solo dance piece 'Half Demon' was acclaimed.
- 1990 2 weeks continual solo performances at Communita theater in Rome.
- 1991 One of the best five in the Festival 'Mimos' (International Mime Fes. In Perigueux – France)
- 1992 Cultural Emission to Russia and Romania organized by Japan Fondation.
- 1994 Fabrication of the first butoh essay 'Dressed in Water'.
- 1995 Lecture 'Butoh has never existed' in the frame of Butoh Festival'East Wind'at Chisenhall in London.
- 1996 Started International butoh workshop "Spanning the centuries" culminating with spring 2006 in South Normandy – France.
- 1998 Started the Festival 'Danse Direct' in South Normandy.
- 1999 Butoh essay 'Human as Material Entity' was written.
- 2000 Joined to SAPA(the seminar for East Europe artists) in Sofia.
- 2001 Butoh piece 'Figure de Femme' was acclaimed at the same time this piece was filmed as digital video film. .
- 2002 Fabrication of the second butoh essay 'The Intensity of Nothingness' in English-Japanese.
- 2004~08 Realization of theatrical film 'Vermilion Souls'.
- 2006 The Agency of Cultural Affairs of Japan has supported Iwana's film. In August he started the second international butoh workshop "Verda Utopio" culminating with spring 2011 in South Normandy – France
- 2005~09 Realization of second feature film 'The Summer Family'
- 2009 'Vermilion Souls' won "the best film" award at Portobello International Film Festival in London UK and has been selected officially by 8 international film festivals beginning with Rotterdam Film Festival.
- 2011 started the third international butoh workshop "re-BE" culminating with spring 2016 in South Normandy – France

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