



transforming sensu—presence and orientation

November 21, 1993

Today I witnessed Iemoto transform from a modern Tokyo woman to the character of a child, to perform the piece “Komori” (Babysitter).¹ Although I videotaped her making up and changing costume backstage, these were only surface features—the embodied transfiguration would not be captured through my lens. But the transformation occurred. A small fifty-two-year-old woman, once clothed in layers of undergarments, *kimono*, and makeup, emerged onstage as a tough nine-year-old babysitter. Not so simply.

Transfiguration came gradually. Arriving at Mitsukoshi Theater, Iemoto could have been anyone. As she approached the dressing room, however, there were clues that this was no ordinary individual, nor ordinary day. People within the theater abruptly halted their conversations and bowed deeply as Iemoto passed by; others, upon seeing her, immediately knelt on the floor in a formal bow. In her dressing room, a parade of visitors arrived every few minutes to greet her—the wig dresser, costume man, musicians, dance acquaintances, and Mitsukoshi Theater directors. Beautiful flower arrangements also poured in, filling the already small room with color and the scent of freesias and roses. At one point a television camera crew from NHK even entered, set up bright lights, and interviewed Iemoto. I had no idea her dressing room would be so lively.

The room calmed after the visitors left. Iemoto and her assistant

turned their attention to costume and makeup preparations. She changed from a colorful pantsuit to stark white cotton and red silk *kimono* undergarments. Next she laid out the makeup carefully in front of the mirror, and I noticed that *there was a logic to the placement of each object according to its order in the makeup process*—*bin* (beeswax), a bowl of water, *oshiroi* (white makeup), small containers of pigment in red and black, several shapes of brushes, sponges, powder, towels, and countless other accessories. *The color, smell, and textures of these objects were familiar to me.* I moved so that I had a direct view of Iemoto's face reflected in the mirror. As I watched her put on a *habutai* (a purple silk fabric to cover the hair under a wig) and begin to apply layers of makeup, *an empathetic sensation came over me, as if I could feel the makeup on my face too.* The makeup has a certain feel, and smell, and particular motions that are used for applying it—sticky beeswax to seal pores and create a smooth canvas for the layers of pigment to follow, red pigment applied with quick strokes with the middle fingertip in a triangular region from eyebrow to nose, the sound of makeup boxes opening and closing. These familiar sensations streamed from my memory. The room was warm. The assistant drew a fan from her *obi* and pulsed a constant stream of air toward Iemoto to keep her face cool and dry.

Iemoto mixed the *oshiroi* with water to a thick consistency, dipped a wide, flat brush in the mixture, and whitewashed her face, ears, upper chest, arms, and the front of her neck. Again, although I was standing three feet away, I vicariously felt the sensation of the wooden brush in my hand, dipping it in the bowl filled with white liquid and then feeling its soft hair, damp and heavy with *oshiroi*, sweeping cool pigment across my face. Iemoto patted her painted skin evenly with a dry brush, then repeated with a second coat of *oshiroi*—white on white—softening all lineaments of her face. Iemoto's ghostly white appearance seemed neutral in character. As the *oshiroi* dried, the undercoat of brilliant red makeup around her eyes and nose emerged as a faint pink hue, adding depth to her now stark-white flesh. She dusted red above her eyes, deepening the contours. Iemoto seemed to disappear beneath the whitewash.

The assistant painted the back of Iemoto's neck and repeated the patting. Then, with steady hands, Iemoto painted the outer edges of her eyes with red using the middle fingertip of her left hand while holding a handled mirror close to her face with her other hand. With a small brush she painted small eyebrows—her own long vanished beneath



PHOTO 6. Tachibana Yoshie applying makeup. PHOTO: YONEZU TAKASHI

layers of *oshoiroi*. Then, tapping the pigment with her fingertip, the sharp edge of the black line became diffused, and two gently curved eyebrows emerged. Iemoto turned her attention to shaping a babysitter's pouty lips in a brilliant red color with a small brush.

Her precise movements contoured her new features like jet-black calligraphy ink on white rice paper. The clarity of each brushstroke was no different from the decisive movement qualities I knew in her dance. Distinct. Unwavering. Unlike dance, however, tangible marks remained after each of these movements to compose the semblance of a babysitter. Iemoto edged back from her makeup area and, after wiping her shins and feet, painted them with *oshoiroi* as well. The babysitter wears *geta* (wooden clogs) without *tabi* (socks)—and Iemoto's exposed feet and lower legs had to be painted to match the white skin tone of her face and hands. Iemoto paused before standing up to dress, and for a moment I caught a glimpse of the babysitter character reflected in her mirror, but Iemoto's own voice and movement quality betrayed this illusion.

The wig dresser arrived. Putting on a *katsura* (wig) requires a great amount of skill. Dance wigs, rigid and helmetlike, fit snug against the

head. Iemoto held a sheet of plastic film to her forehead as the wig dresser slid the wig onto her head from back to front. The plastic sheet kept her makeup intact but also drew the wig forward to her forehead as she slid it out. Two cotton cords attached to the interior of the wig were pulled back, around Iemoto's ears to the nape of her neck, tied firmly, and tucked under the back of the wig. A delicately shaped long-handled wood comb appeared in the hand of the wig dresser, and she combed the unruly locks into place. The wig for the babysitter is cute—flaunting a big red bow puffed up at the crown, several round ornaments, a red lacquer comb at the front, and short tassels of hair hanging at each temple. Iemoto noticed me teetering nearby with my video camera and shot me a playful grin and laughed.

Next, a professional dresser and two assistants wrapped layers of costume onto Iemoto's body fastened with *himo* (ties) and an *obi*. The dresser was a jovial, elderly gentleman who arrived while Iemoto was applying makeup. I noticed that his slight frame was not much larger than Iemoto's as he stepped forward to dress her. He first bound cotton padding around her torso, then scarlet silk undergarments with white abstract designs, followed by a yellow and black plaid *kimono* with a black collar. Over this colorful costume he wound a red, white, and purple *obi* around her and tied it securely in a bow on her back. After Iemoto was in costume, the wig dresser stepped forward and tied a white *hachimaki* (cotton headband) around Iemoto's head with the knot atop her forehead so that the ends stood up.

Finally, the “baby” (a doll prop) was bundled onto her back under a green and yellow silk jacket. The eyes of the baby seemed to peer over Iemoto's shoulder. The babysitter was still not present, though all the surface features of the *komori* character stood before me. When Iemoto went backstage for her entrance, I left to take a seat in the audience. As we walked in opposite directions down the corridor, I looked back at her one more time. In this fleeting glance I witnessed a profound instance of transformation—Iemoto was scurrying down the corridor as the child babysitter. Her embodied expression was a dramatic metamorphosis. It was as if Iemoto had vanished in that instant, leaving *komori* to take the stage. Elegant codeswitching.

From my seat in the audience the vivid nature of the babysitter appeared. Each step of the choreography was impeccable and seemed effortless. But beyond her physical execution of movement, the babysitter's presence shined through—penetrating layers of makeup and costume. I had to remind myself that this doll-like figure was the same

woman who, moments ago, had been joking backstage with the NHK interviewer.

orienting culture

Extraordinary experiences are situated somewhere between reality and the constructs of our beliefs. We experience these unusual moments in part because they extend the realm of our orientation in “ordinary” life and are enculturated possibilities. With this remark I am not denying the existence of such experiences, but proposing that beliefs and desires frame them. Because they are *extraordinary* experiences, we depart from the ordinary and find ourselves transformed. Concerning the relationship of ordinary and extraordinary experiences, Roger Abrahams notes:

The very flow of the everyday assures the continuity between routine activities and the more extraordinary ones. We have become aware of the continuities between the ordinary and the “deeper” or “higher” events through performed mimetic experiences, which openly imitate (and stylize) everyday acts and interactions. Far from exhausting the relationship between the ordinary and the otherwise, such imitational play only begins the discussion. Indeed, *how* the disruption of the patterns of expectation in ordinary interactions are remedied, even transformed and used in play events, may prove to be the most important point of connection between the different states of apprehension and understanding. (Abrahams 1986: 68, italics in original)

I find performance, as well as fieldwork, to be an encounter that heightens awareness and draws our attention to the “continuity between routine activities and the more extraordinary ones.” In particular, performance can construct an extraordinary experience to affectively precipitate a sense of shared experience in a community. Though performance itself is an extraordinary experience for many people to witness, for performers it is their craft, or medium of expression. I intimated my jarring and quite physical experience of Iemoto’s transformation backstage because it offers insights on dance transmission, culture, and ethnography. Transmission trains us to learn the craft of setting the stage for expectation and, perhaps, moving the audience.

Consider an occasion that tested your sense of reality, perception, or orientation. It can be an everyday event that transformed to an extraordinary or unusual moment. Have you seen a performance that caused you to focus differently? What made this an extraordinary experience? I imagine that the experience had an impact on you, since you recognized it as extraordinary and set it apart from what you deem to be “ordinary.” When you were experiencing this event, do you recall if it caused you to stop and consider the situation in depth? To figure it out sensibly? logically? Were there sensations that were unknown to you? Did the extraordinary and ordinary overlap? How? Did you need to resolve the experience before turning your attention to something else? Did you question or deny the experience?

Extraordinary encounters are disorienting, particularly if they summon sensations we previously have not physically experienced. I am purposely vague in my use of “extraordinary experience” because I believe that everyone and every culture defines what sits outside their realm of “ordinary” experience. Of course, each person has a different set of life experiences. Extraordinary events occur because they test our perception and sense of reality within our frame of cultural beliefs. Our senses are triggered, yet during such an experience we might question the reality of what we sense. What qualities of sensation would be necessary for you to deem an event extraordinary? A visual apparition? A sound or smell? Touch? Taste? Returning to the experience you considered above, can you detail the experiential elements of sense that marked that event as out of the ordinary for you? Does an examination of the experience reveal why the encounter disoriented you? Transformations, on any level, are informative in that they provide us with opportunities to recognize boundaries that define our patterns of orientation, patterns of reality.

It seems to me that ethnographers are in the business of (cultural) disorientation by consciously situating themselves within particular contexts and searching for ways to comprehend these experiences from a variety of perspectives. These contexts may be disorienting because they are completely unfamiliar. But extraordinary experiences in familiar settings can be twice as disorienting because they are unexpected and cause us to experience sensory displacement (as in my “backstage” experience). Some of these disorientations can be resolved as cultural differences, while other episodes are perhaps truly out of the ordinary. But, as ethnographers, what do we make of these unusual events in the field? Do we hide them and only analyze and present hard

data? How might we integrate these experiences into our academic work and attempt to convey their transformative effects on us? (See Hahn 2006b.)

A collection of articles in *Being Changed by Cross-cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experiences* describes extraordinary experiences that ethnographers have had in the field and discusses the issues that arose from them. The editors, David Young and Jean-Guy Goulet, assert that these experiences need to be included in ethnographic texts:

Good ethnographic reports, whatever their subject matter, jolt us into new awareness, for they are derived from lived experiences that challenge our own conventions and assumptions in life. Good ethnographic reports evoke a realm of human experience and in the process lay the groundwork for its explanation within anthropology. (1994: 20–21)

Ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong observed spirit possession in Thailand while conducting fieldwork on the *wai kruu* (a ritual to honor teachers). In particular, she witnessed the “Old Father” spirit enter the body of ritual participants. In *Sounding the Center: History and Aesthetics in Thai Buddhist Performance*, Wong writes, “**My time in Thailand fundamentally changed my own beliefs. I didn’t plan on that**” (2001: 254). Acknowledging encounters with the Old Father’s presence, she writes:

Having encountered him so many times and in so many places, I can’t not believe, as my mask maker acquaintance said to me . . . The fields of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and cultural studies (to name a few) have so thoroughly problematized ethnographic authority that one necessarily addresses the construction of cultural reality through the lens of particular subjectivities, and the fact is, my subjectivity changed in the course of my research . . . I can not tell you at what point, precisely, I felt that the Old Father was touching me—at what point I felt his blessing as something tangible. I can say that there is no retreat from the moment when subjectivity shifts, no going back . . . (2001: 255)

Wong’s subjectivity shift interests me. **Although my experience of Iemoto’s transformation backstage was not spirit possession or trance, I identify with Wong’s encounter with a different sense of reality and her experience of a subjectivity shift.** My own experience transmitted a sensibility of presence that changed my perspective, my orientation.

Disorienting encounters during fieldwork can be challenging, leaving us vulnerable. Writing about such encounters and changes in our beliefs poses further challenges, as Wong offers—“If experience is accessible only through a certain loss of control, then the moment of threshold-crossing, when experience folds into belief, is even more difficult to write.” In a provocative book, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*, Judith Becker discusses how legitimacy is a factor in the experience and reception of trance. She proposes that believability, or faith, plays a large role in a community’s practice of trance (2004: 30–34). Believability teeters on an edge that Western research is uncomfortable to embrace. And that edge is where the extraordinary resides.

In *Between Theater and Anthropology*, performance studies scholar and theater director Richard Schechner included a section titled “Transformation of Being and/or Consciousness,” and proposed:

Either permanently as in initiation rites or temporarily as in aesthetic theater and trance dancing, performers—and sometimes spectators too—are changed by the activity of performing . . . While watching the deer dance of the Arizona Yaqui in November 1981, I wondered if the figure I saw was a man and a deer simultaneously; or, to say it in a way a performer might understand, whether putting on the deer mask made the man “not a man” and “not a deer” but somewhere in between. (1985: 4)

Disorienting encounters pose challenges to our experiential knowledge. Believability is called into question, and through the process of sorting out the experience there is a possibility for growth.

I realize that the ease of Iemoto’s transfiguration in that spellbinding moment backstage was the result of decades of practice in the studio. Still, I was left with an extremely moving experience that I could not immediately “make sense” of logically. The extraordinary can easily be explained away. For example, one could say that the nature of performance itself is an art of illusion and that Japanese performers are trained to transfigure on cue. Since I have been enculturated through dance training to believe in artistic transfiguration, one might conclude that my cultural expectations created my experience backstage. To a degree this is true, because dance training includes transformation as part of the movement vocabulary, and transformation is also part of the folklore narratives.

For example, I grew up listening to Japanese bedtime stories with

shape-shifter protagonists. Japanese folklore is filled with stories of *henge* “transformation,” such as an animal transfiguring to an object or another living being. The most well-known *henge* tales star a shape-shifting fox, or *kitsune*, who has supernatural powers to transfigure, most often into a woman such as a nun or a mother. Badgers, or *tanuki*, are also masters of transfiguration. The most famous tale is of a *tanuki* transforming into a teapot to escape the wrath of taunting children. My elaboration of *henge* in folklore here is meant to provide examples of how the notion of transformation is not unusual in Japan. Transformation itself is considered to be extraordinary, but it is not an unusual concept.

How are dancers enculturated to the notion of transformation through dance? And how does transmission play a role in the process? In the following section I offer a glimpse into how transmission practices provide an essence of performance that reaches beyond the rudiments of codified dance. Believability remains at the core.

transfiguring on cue

Orientation through disorientation occurs as a disruption of normalcy, followed by a clarity that signals a reorientation and comprehension of one’s sense of place, literal or otherwise. Let’s examine a *nihon buyo* performance practice in which transfiguration—the narrative shifting between characters—is choreographed into dance.

As mentioned earlier, *nihon buyo* pieces most often follow a narrative form. Depending on the piece, dancers either portray a single character or shift between several characters within a single dance. In both structures, the embodied shift from one’s self (identity) to a performed character can be a disorienting experience. Recall the footage of Hideo’s first dance lesson, where his movements continue to project his own character rather than the performer in “Matsu no Midori.” Performers must learn to articulate each persona with expressive clarity so that the characters appear distinct for the audience.

Iemoto’s direction to me, “without experiencing life, without personality, you have no dance, no *kokoro* [heart, spirit, or soul], and you are invisible . . . but **if you have a sense of self, then you can become any character onstage**—a woman, a young boy, an old man,” conceptually links performance and the formation of a dancer’s identity (see the opening to chapter 3 for the full conversation). Her comment reveals the notion that strength in one’s self (identity) provides a

freedom and ability to be flexible in dance. I believe there is a correspondence between Iemoto's idea of a stable yet flexible self; the metaphoric, shifting self in dance; and the Japanese philosophical/spiritual conception of self being capable of change. One gestures to the other through practice, revealing the notion that one might comprehend the essence of life's ephemeral nature in an actively embodied way (Yuasa 1987, 1993; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991). In the following paragraphs I provide an example of how this concept of shifting identity (or codeswitching), choreographed in dance, provides dancers with an opportunity to playfully embody multiple identities in dance.

The piece "Ame no shiki" ("Rain in the Four Seasons," choreographed by Tachibana Hoshū) provides a clear example of character-shifting techniques. It poetically depicts a traveler encountering seasonal rains in picturesque Edo. The performer must make an embodied shift between numerous contrasting roles throughout the dance. With only a simple paper fan in hand, a dancer must also convincingly animate and transform the prop into a variety of objects to tell the narrative. The following is a description of the opening six-minute passage of "Ame no Shiki" to illustrate the use of character shifting.

First emerges the male traveler, the main character. The dancer holds a male carriage, feet shoulder-width apart; toes pointed slightly out; legs in an open (vs. turned inward) position; elbows away from the body; and a broad, erect torso. The traveler shields his face from the rain with a straw hat, conveyed by an upturned fan. Facing away from the audience, he peeks out from under his hat to see rain still falling. He walks along a path, sidestepping puddles. Facing the audience, he peers out again and sees that the rain has stopped. Removing his hat with a shake (the fan closes), the traveler continues along his way. Several sights along the road amuse him, such as birds soaring in the sky. The traveler's *kimono* sleeves transform to wings as he flutters his arms as a bird. The character shifting becomes more complex as the dancer portrays a traveler who then mimes a bird within the dance.

Several minutes into the passage the dancer transforms into a contrasting character—a mother with her child in tow. Now the dancer's movements are feminine in nature, elbows close to the body; knees bent and legs together; and feet pointed slightly inward (keeping the line of the *kimono* trim and composed). The open fan, held by the paper tip in her right hand, represents the woman's child at her side. She stands for a moment holding the child's hand and looks off in the distance. The mother adjusts her hair with gentle movements and then



PHOTO 7. Tachibana Yoshie (*in black*) teaching a student the role of the male traveler in "Ame no shiki." Tachibana School, Tokyo, Japan.

gestures to attract her child's attention. She points ahead, showing the child where they will visit. After walking forward the mother notices that the moon has appeared and points it out to the child. They continue to walk together and come to a series of vendors along the street. The child sees *miso dango* (a sweet dumpling served on a stick, dipped in a fermented bean paste) being sold by a peddler and wants one. The mother purchases the *dango*, dips it in *miso*, and feeds it to the child. Immediately following this vignette the dancer turns and shifts into the character of a candy peddler.

The vendor appears balancing his wares on his head (the dancer mimics this by balancing an open fan atop her head) and makes his presence known by hitting a gong, mimed by the dancer with her left hand held above her head. The candy man finds a customer, takes the money with his right hand, and puts it into his left *kimono* sleeve. He takes down a stick of candy and passes it to the customer. Smoothly, the dancer now shifts to portraying a series of four fruit peddlers in rapid succession. First the dancer mimics the peach seller with her gestures—holding the luscious large peach cupped in the left palm while



PHOTO 8. A student following Tachibana Yoshie during a quick change of character. "Ame no shiki" lesson, Tachibana School, Tokyo, Japan.

her right hand polishes it with a circular movement. The vendor displays to customers how juicy the fruit is by wiping his mouth with one swift sweep followed by a second shake of the hand to fling the peach juice off his fingers. The dancer then places her hands inside her sleeves. This movement abstractly represents the mandarin orange and apple vendors. Finally the dancer tosses the fan from her head to her hand and, by closing it, transforms the fan into a banana that the vendor holds high in the air as he circles the area.

The closed *sensu* (fan) transforms from banana to a pestle as a sesame seed peddler appears. The dancer kneels facing the audience and rapidly grinds the sesame seeds in a mortar. The dancer points to the distance at more vendors. Out comes the watermelon hawker. The *sensu* becomes a watermelon slice as the dancer swings the fan open. She mimes holding a knife and cuts the melon in two, then picks up half (the fan) and takes a bite, roughly spitting the seeds off to the ground. The dance continues, and many more characters appear. With these codeswitching examples in mind, let us continue the examination of how codeswitching techniques foster orientation.

shifting selves

Research on codeswitching in linguistics and social anthropology has been helpful to my understanding of the character-shifting process in dance. The research reveals that **verbal codeswitching patterns enable individuals access to a number of social identities**. In cultures where codeswitching is prevalent, individuals negotiate multiple frames of reference, with multiple roles and role relationships within the society.² Carol Myers Scotton, in her analysis of verbal codeswitching in East Africa, noted: “It is as if the switch is made to remind other participants that the speaker is a multi-faceted personality, as if the speaker were saying ‘not only am I X, but I am also Y.’ This ploy, in and of itself, is a powerful strategy because the speaker ‘enlarges’ himself/herself through marked choices in a mainly unmarked discourse, asserting a range of identities” (Scotton 1988: 170).³

Borrowing concepts from linguistic theories on codeswitching, I applied codeswitching analysis to the choreographic language of dance. I acknowledge that the practice of switching between identities in dance is not impromptu as in the everyday speech analyzed by Scotton and others. However, the linguistic framework provides a useful starting point for analysis of codeswitching. As seen in the brief description of “Ame no Shiki,” **codeswitching is consciously employed and honed as a codified formula to convey a narrative, and so it is a practice that is trained into the body**. I find that the embodied “shifting,” or codeswitching, between characters in dance metaphorically mirrors a social coordination of self that is present and respected in daily life in Japan, where clear delineations between social circles, between men and women, between young and old are reflected in impromptu behavior and speech. **In the past two decades, research on “self” in Japanese culture has received a great amount of attention.**⁴ Social anthropologists propose that the conceptual flexibility of self enables individuals to orient themselves and interact in a wide variety of social levels. Identity is relational—contextually based. Concerning the nature of Japanese social interactions, Jane Bachnick wrote, “Japanese choose appropriate behavior situationally, from among a range of possibilities, resulting in depictions of the Japanese self as ‘shifting’ or ‘relational’” (Bachnick 1992: 152).

The practice of codeswitching in daily life in Japan can easily be observed—levels of speech from familiar to honorific are chosen situa-

tionally, as is the pitch of speech, manner of dress, body language (such as bowing and other social coordinations within a space), and the different names individuals acquire in their artistic practices. In dance, as in daily life, the patterns of codeswitching are transmitted through embodied practices—lessons of orientation and agency enabled by the practice of dance.

I find that the continuous codeswitching exemplified in the dance “Ame no shiki” is conceptually similar to the codeswitching one may experience outside the dance studio. By this statement, I am not saying that Japanese dance is drawn directly from everyday life, but that codeswitching is a common practice in everyday life and in that respect it is within Japanese dancers’ daily vocabulary, inside and outside the dance studio, to enact identity shifts. This does not make the practice of training the body to codeswitch on cue any less disorienting, however. Like codeswitching in everyday life, the codeswitching in dance is founded on a common vocabulary of communication. Shared physical, expressive vocabulary is vital in any narrative artistry in order for the audience to comprehend the story line and the development of a plot. It can be argued that the codeswitching experienced in daily life is founded on social, ethical, and moral situations an individual must spontaneously interact within, whereas dance is a choreographed artistic practice. What I find fascinating is that in both settings codeswitching reveals social structures through metaphor. I believe that the complex sensitivities needed in contrasting social relationships in everyday life form the foundation of choreographic structures in many *nihon buyo* dances. Dance serves as a valuable model of embodied metaphors that inform how techniques of the body in motion are culturally and historically situated.⁵

I have noticed that switching between characters can have a disorienting effect on students. The switch requires a dancer not only to embody the proper carriage and movement for each role but to portray the essence of each character so that each persona is distinct. In my experience of learning “Ame no shiki” and observing other students learning the dance, I find that focusing one’s attention on the subtleties of character portrayal and shifting is crucial.

Iemoto calls our attention to the details of each character portrayal, including carriage, gesture, eye gaze, sound, facial expression, costume, and prop use. She often takes time to clearly describe the character and the context of his/her appearance. Iemoto is particularly attentive to the moment of transformation between characters. The

clarity of the shift is vital. She teased me one day and made her point clear: “You can’t be the [male] vendor but still have feminine feet [from the previous character]!” When I learned the sesame seed vendor passage, Iemoto commented: “Do you know what you’re doing? Have you ever ground sesame seeds?” Although the portrayal of grinding the seeds is performed in a stylized manner, the mimetic act must convey the process of grinding to the audience; otherwise, “How will they know what you are doing?” **Not until the character being portrayed is fully understood, in both intellectual and physical ways, can a deeper transformation occur.** Believability must be rooted in the body.

I am often asked if learning to embody stylized stereotypes in dance constricts dancers’ sense of individual identity. From personal experience as a dancer and researcher, I actually find the opposite to be true—that physical expression in dance and everyday life provides an abundant palette of performed selves to express the diversity of one’s inner sense of self. I believe that Iemoto’s illustration, “without experiencing life, without personality, you have no dance, no *kokoro* (heart, spirit, or soul), and you are invisible . . . but if you have a sense of self, then you can become any character onstage—a woman, a young boy, an old man,” resonates the profound relationship between a dancer’s sense of self and character both inside and outside dance. Only from a solid core of realized identity can flexibility arise. As the headmaster of the Tachibana School, it is Iemoto’s obligation to transmit the school’s way of dance to her students. Her guidance reaches far beyond dance to a deeper level of comprehending one’s self relative to others and the world.

There are contrasting perspectives on the topic of multiplicity and self. Some view multiplicity as a fragmentation, or distortion, of a person’s sense of self (and self-image), while others see multiplicity as a vibrant marker of plural identity.⁶ Philosophers Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar state, “Diversity critiques parallel postmodern critiques in challenging the assumption that agents are cohesive and unified. Such critiques claim that each individual has a ‘multiple identity,’ which reflects the multiple groups to which the individual belongs” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000: 11). In the case of codeswitching in Japanese dance, it may be argued that the highly stylized portrayal of characters in many Japanese dances restricts the repertoire of identity representations to a narrow vocabulary of stereotypes that reinforce male-dominated hierarchical social systems. I find, however, that dance lessons, where women are encouraged to physically enact

roles beyond their daily repertory of identities, provide a rare setting to “imagine oneself otherwise,” to borrow Catriona Mackenzie’s phrase:

I contend that our ability to imagine ourselves otherwise—that is, our ability to imaginatively distance ourselves from our habitual modes of self-understanding and to envisage, in imaginative representations, alternative possibilities for ourselves—plays an important role in practical reflection and deliberation about the self, and hence in self-definition.

(Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000: 139)

Building on her idea, I propose that *physical activity through role-playing* significantly reinforces an expanded image of self through the vocabulary of embodied memories in dance. The *process* of cultural embodiment, the enactment of a wide variety of characters, has a powerful effect on dancers’ identities. Extreme role-playing—such as playing a witch, a demon, or a rude, spoiled child—*can provide an emotional outlet as well* as an expanded vocabulary of identity. Further, dance lesson contexts are a socially acceptable and “safe” haven to playact expressive modes not deemed appropriate outside the dance studio in Japanese public life.

There is, however, a complex set of traditional social obligations attached to *nihon buyo* life. The strict *iemoto* (headmaster) system, which enforces the continuity of the oral tradition and dance family heritage, for example, overlies yet another complex web of multiplicity. I am sure that added obligation and *perceived confinement of behavior* *must dissuade many women from entering into the nihon buyo world*. I acknowledge that these pressures exist, though I personally find them outweighed by the deep bonds I experience in the Tachibana dance family. The commitment of these women to the art inspires me to move and write.

Performance provides a vehicle for expressing complex identities, and even for broadening personal expressive vocabularies. Richard Bauman sees performance as a means “for the encoding and presentation of information about oneself in order to construct a personal and social image” (Bauman 1984: 21). I see performance as a process where *cultural boundaries of identity are negotiated metaphorically*. Through the structures of choreographed codeswitching, I believe it is possible to transgress the boundaries of our everyday identities and to reorient self through practice. The potential of enacting multiplicity through performance is so clearly stated by Tachibana Sahomi: “When you’re

dancing you can be anyone.” In such play enactments, dancers perform codified identities—cultural sensibilities of learned, embodied agency. Is this a part of “believability”?

The direct physical transmission of multiple characters in the dance studio teaches stylized roles, yet *it also imparts a way of knowing self and character through the body, which reaches beyond superficial mimicking*. *Nihon buyo* offers all dancers, but women in particular, powerful expressive means to transcend the boundaries that might confine them in daily life in Japan.⁷ Strict social rules and expectations within the society restraining women’s behavior can create a high level of pressure. Dance provides an opportunity to act out a variety of roles. This can be a liberating and even playful activity—consider a daily practice of embodiment that includes transforming into a warrior, monkey, lower-class character, ghost, drunkard, or bold, demonic witch. Dancers learn from a very early age how to express a diversity of character portrayals, and as a result a wide vocabulary of embodied cultural ideologies is transmitted.⁸

The tradition of metaphoric shifting provides students with abilities to negotiate and comprehend multiple identities on the dance floor. I believe that the metaphoric shifting present in *nihon buyo* choreography empowers women through the transformative, shared, embodied experience of multiple identities as well as flexible notions of self, within a society that has historically restricted their expression. As one might imagine, codeswitching between a complex series of characters can be disorienting at first. In a sense, codeswitching is a practice of orientation through disorientation—the transformation into “other” necessitates a clear knowing and establishing of self.

performing passion

When I told dancers at Hatchobori that I was studying how dance is taught they nodded, but smiled with blank faces. On one occasion someone exclaimed, “Oh you’re here to learn to dance!” I replied, “Yes, but I’m also here to learn *how* we learn.” More puzzled faces. “We watch and listen,” someone else chimed in. At this point even I began to question myself. After all, the gist of my study was exactly what this dancer said—to show how we see, hear, feel touch, and put it all together. But “putting it all together” seemed too simplistic. I have seen many dancers proficiently execute the codified steps of a dance,

yet something was lacking. All the steps were there, timing great, costuming impeccable, but the passion and heightened awareness in the performance nonexistent. On the other hand, I have watched dancers miss a few steps yet embody a wonderful essence of artistry. *Putting it all together* is not enough, I thought . . . I must have missed something in the transmission process.

I believe it is presence.

Presence, as ephemeral as the body, remains an elusive quality of dance. Ineffable. Presence is vital to a dancer's artistry. I wondered how presence could be transferred from teacher to student—is it in the steps? In the relationship between teacher and student? In the eyes of the observer? Is it active believability? Early on, presence eluded my scorecard of observable transmission modes, yet I found it integrated into every lesson. I am not certain it is possible to definitively provide a formula for the transmission of presence. Presence is transmitted in the folds of lessons, when dancers learn to orient themselves via the senses during lessons; when they learn to expand their awareness; learn to transfigure on cue; and understand the flow of embodied *ki* energy available to them. Heightened awareness and sensibilities are not only absorbed through practice; dancers embodying such a depth of awareness and orientation can project this *ki* energy out to the audience.

My disorienting moment backstage as Iemoto transfigured into the babysitter drew me to the idea of presence as a trained sensibility. The practical features of learning dance movement through the senses pre-occupied me at the time—how we learn to heighten our visual, tactile, and aural/oral awareness in order to absorb dance. This had been my primary focus in fieldwork. A flash of insight on presence grabbed my attention when I witnessed Iemoto backstage. As dance students we absorb the tradition through honed awareness, but as performers we project awareness outward. Iemoto's back was turned to me as she scampered down the hallway, so I saw no gaze, no emotive facial expression; her projection of the babysitter's presence was an embodied one. This is difficult to describe, but permit me to try.

Throughout this book I have detailed an inward motion, a taking in of sensory information to train the body. But once apperception occurs, assimilation and realized embodiment, the very sensory paths that were the vehicles of transmission now enhance presence. We become present through visual awareness, through our tactile and kinesthetic awareness, through our listening awareness, through our life force, or *ki* energy. What was absorbed can be projected if the dancer draws on

her embodied sensibilities and *ki* energy. The audience can observe the dancer's heightened awareness as the performing body projects presence. This is what Zeami, the fourteenth-century originator of *noh*, termed "*hana*" (flower)—the essence of dramatic artistry.

Iemoto described a flow of awareness between dancer and audience: "In Japanese performance the house lights are left on. This way performers can see the audience—I mean really see them—and [the dancer can] draw on their energy to intensify [her] performance." I admit that at the time her instruction seemed logical and interesting, but it would soon change the way I understood presence and *ki* energy flow onstage. The energy that performers can tap from seeing, feeling, and hearing the audience cannot be quantitatively measured; however, comparing the opposite setting—when the stage lights are on and the audience is in the dark—reveals a very different perspective. With the house lights turned off, the flow of communication is muted; the anonymous audience gazes on the performer, and the performer looks out at darkness. When a performer has the opportunity observe the audience, she can draw on their energy and subtly craft nuances of her performance to the unfolding context, or mood. In other words, a dancer can read the audience and work with its emotions on the spot.

Awareness of the audience is not a simple task. It demands much more than just looking in the correct location when dancing. It demands confidence in one's dancing abilities, self, and the role one is portraying. Performers must project their energy stemming from the *hara* area, the abdominal region considered to be the center of energetic and spiritual strength. The *hara* is where *ki* energy, or power, resides. The flow of *ki* energy is practiced repeatedly in dance class via *haragei* (the art of visceral communication, introduced in chapter 3) and is used to connect with an audience. Ben Befu points out the connection between *haragei*, the body, and transmission: "*haragei* (visceral communication) which lies very near the end of the spectrum of non-verbal communication" is connected to the Japanese aesthetic of suggestion as a form of communication using empathetic readings of others' facial expressions and other nonverbal forms of communication (Befu 1991: 110). In *nihon buyo*, movement must originate from the *hara* center and ripple up the torso, out the arms, legs, head, and even the gaze of the eyes. In fact, the choreography demands that movement must flow from the *hara* and project outward. Transmission practices reinforce the *hara* as the central source of energy, an area that is trained repeatedly to project movement, character, awareness, and resilience.

flowing transmission

When a dancer effortlessly executes the many requirements of a dance while projecting a keen awareness of multiple sensory modes, a vibrance of energy, or presence, arises. I believe that this state is what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi refers to as “flow,” an optimal experience of consciousness and focused awareness. He states that, “to pursue mental operations to any depth, a person has to learn to concentrate attention. Without focus, consciousness is in a state of chaos” (1997: 26). He provides an example of a flow experience:

Imagine, for instance, that you are skiing down a slope and your full attention is focused on the movements of the body, the position of the skis, the air whistling past your face, and the snow-shrouded trees running by. There is no room in your awareness for conflicts or contradictions; you know that a distracting thought or emotion might get you buried facedown in the snow. And who wants to get distracted? The run is so perfect that all you want is for it to last forever, to immerse yourself completely in the experience. (1997: 29)

Dancers can easily identify with this state of flow, where the intensity of dancing before an audience under stage lights parallels the dramatic in-the-moment flight on the slope. Onstage, when mental and physical coordinations effortlessly “flow,” a dancer can use the heightened state of focused energy to project that awareness. I believe that this is the ultimate embodiment of dance. Every dance lesson is about gaining flow. Csikszentmihalyi provides insights on flow and learning: “Flow tends to occur when a person’s skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable” (1997: 30)—and several pages later, “the flow experience acts as a magnet for learning—that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills” (33). In a sense, Iemoto teaches students to focus and heighten their awareness. She is conscious of the edge where introducing too much material will overwhelm a student and too little will lead to boredom. But there is much beyond the basic memorization of movements and choreography. Once rudimentary dance material is learned, the next stage is to rehearse the dance so that movements and energy are fluid. This “putting it all together” is perhaps the most difficult stage of learning dance.

Throughout this book I have detailed the stages of learning and

students' struggles with new information. We can observe different stages of students' embodied fluidity with the learning process—a continuum of potential flow experiences for the beginner, intermediate, and experienced dancers. If you were to visit a dance studio and watch lessons over a period of time you would see how the process of gaining embodied knowledge is very gradual. In some cases, painfully slow. While a dancer may intellectually comprehend how to move, the body is generally slower to realize the essence of the dance. Repetition encourages flow.

Dance transmission actively invites flow experiences. The physical and mental multitasking required of a dancer during lessons (as well as during performances) is challenging—a setting where flow experiences can potentially occur. These multitasking events have been detailed in this book, but to review a few—coordinating the steps; listening to the music and orienting the body in time; orienting within space; facial expression; character shifting; costume management; choreography; and energy flow. During a lesson these tasks expand to other sensory negotiations—visual awareness (following the teacher), tactile awareness, and oral/aural awareness (listening to the teacher and the music).

For each individual the ability to focus attention and awareness is different. I believe that experiences of flow and the projection of presence can arise during the early stages of a dancer's development, although they may not be as apparent as they are when an advanced dancer beams energy and confidence while fluidly performing in class.

One of the most fascinating aspects of flow that Csikszentmihalyi introduces is the relationship of flow and self: "Following a flow experience, the organization of the self is more *complex* than it had been before. It is by becoming increasingly complex that the self might be said to grow" (1991: 41). I do not believe that dancers' sense of personal growth is something observable, or even a sensibility that can be measured in any way. Yuasa clarifies some of these intangible aspects of self and embodiment in Japanese training: "the tradition of Eastern self-cultivation places importance on entering the mind from the body or form. That is, the mind is not simply consciousness nor is it constant and unchangeable, but rather it is that which is *transformed* through training the body" (Yuasa 1993: 26), and a page later, "a characteristic of Japanese artistry is that its fundamental emphasis is placed more on the *standpoint* of the performer than in that of the audience . . .

The artist requires the catharsis and enhancement of his or her mind in pursuit of beauty, just as does the cultivator in pursuit of satori [enlightenment]" (27).

At Hatchobori there is a passion for dance and there is a passion for teaching. Iemoto and Soke teach with an enthusiasm that is compelling. Transmission of presence exists through the intimate sharing of *kokoro* (heart, spirit) and *ki*. Sensational knowledge. The experience is transformative.

orienting folds

An uneasy question: where does emotion fit into the transmission process? Deidre Sklar, in her essay "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance," inspired me to grapple with this problematic question: "beneath concepts, movement inevitably involves feeling. Simply to move is to feel something as the body changes. More important, habitual patterns of movement are colored with associated emotions" (2002: 31). Dance literally transforms our bodies. We rehearse movements linked with sounds, linked with emotions, and these physical and emotional associations become enculturated—embodied. Presence rides this energetic path of associations and offers a way to connect with others. If dance is a "way of knowing," it is also a way of expressing what we know, what we embody, and who we are.

Splayed open, one can see that a fan's outermost bamboo "bones" differ from the rest. These two bones bear the pressure of opening and closing the fan, so they are slightly heavier. Here, in the closing bone of this book, I return to a more personal reflection of the type that appeared most strongly only in the opening chapter. Dance classes have been personally transformative for me, filled with lessons of the social and performing body, energy, and presence.

Sensory "sensational" knowledge orients. Clearly, embodied identities rise from the wealth of sensory information we encounter in our daily lives. It is disturbing that in such a sensory-rich world, visible surface qualities of the body—such as skin pigmentation, hair color, eye shape, cranial contour, height and weight—establish the yardstick of embodied sameness/difference with which to essentialize racial/gender boundaries.⁹ Absent in this prioritized fixation on mere surface is the essence of deeply embodied experience and sensory knowledge sustained through transmission practices. As a multiracial individual I

find this notion particularly charged, and I ask, What stories are told by bodies that differ? . . . bodies that rupture the lineage of reproduction/transmission in their very presence and perhaps alter the course of the stories through misread reception of such a (different) moving body? It is not possible to definitively answer these two questions, since each multiracial person has a different orientation due to his/her upbringing, appearance, and social life. Below I provide my own orientation to offer one experience in this complex negotiation.

Throughout my life Japanese and Americans from a variety of backgrounds have boldly questioned me: "Why are you studying *Japanese* dance? Why not ballet? You could easily pass [as white]." Within the Tachibana group my Eurasian appearance has never been an issue, and I have always felt a strong sense of belonging and acceptance. This attitude may be particular to my school, however. Unfortunately there are many cases of rejection of foreigners practicing Japanese traditional arts. A genre termed "Japanese dance," while it embraces and embodies Japanese culture, can simultaneously reject outsiders. It is an art expressed by the human form, but must one be Japanese to perform it? The aesthetic components of the style reinforce this to some degree: the attire, the mimetic movements drawn from Japanese culture, the aesthetic of the physical movements, and the physique itself. Of course, these aspects of performance were well established specifically for the Japanese physique hundreds of years prior to contact with the outside world. *Kimono* and other traditional costumes are constructed to comfortably fit the compact, petite Japanese body.

The movement qualities are (logically) tailored to complement the Japanese stature as well. This is not unusual; many if not all dance communities across the globe base their movement aesthetics on ideal concepts of their native physique. So, what reactions come about when outsiders attempt to perform these world traditions? If the aesthetics and concepts of the body within a performance genre are intrinsically flexible so that a variety of body types can be included, then the issue of outsiders performing the tradition may not create a conflict. A culture's philosophies of the body and how philosophical/spiritual practices inform the aesthetic style embodied by the performer are also important factors to consider. Outsiders remain outsiders when such differences are found crucial to a performing tradition.¹⁰

These considerations can be quite painful for performers involved in traditions outside their (physical) heritage. This brings me to the question, What are "natural" bodies? If a culture deems bodies as (biolog-

ically) natural or naturally talented, then essential ethnic or national body traits can be defined and idealized. In turn, "authentic" performances can be constructed from these, and only these, bodies. But if dance is seen as a system of representations that are culturally coded, then "outsiders" practicing the tradition can be included on some level. If an "authentic" performance consists only of insiders to the tradition, then when outsiders perform, is it considered to be blurring or destroying the art? A colleague related a tale of a Japanese teacher commenting that an American dancer's style was "*bata kusai*" (reeking or stinking of butter). As butter is associated with Western cuisine, and with the distinct odor of those who eat meat and dairy, this was not meant as a compliment. Distasteful. Clearly the essence of the art was altered by the very presence projected by the foreign dancer in this teacher's eyes. Several non-Japanese colleagues practicing traditional Japanese arts have confided to me that they receive strong reactions from Japanese audiences, particularly to aspects of their physical appearance, which they believe reflect Japanese nationalism. I find it interesting that many *gaijin* visual artists, tea ceremony practitioners, and monks have been more readily accepted within Japanese communities yet performers, whose bodies are displayed in public as instruments of their art, are often discouraged, ignored, or merely included as a novelty.

During my fieldwork Soke and Iemoto stated very strongly to me that "this is *nihon buyo*, and *kokoro* is the most important thing . . . it is about a *human* feeling, a *human* experience. It does not matter if you are Japanese or not." I remember how they emphasized the word *human* (*ningen*) to make this point. However, outside the Tachibana group I often experienced rude awakenings to my *gaijin* identity. Once, three Japanese women came up after seeing me dance and, as if I was invisible, carried on a conversation before me: "Oh she dances so well . . . and she's not even Japanese! Most Americans just don't look right." On the other hand, both Japanese and Americans have asked if I believe that my dance abilities are due to Japanese blood. I commonly reply that, while my petite physique and Asian features have not hindered my training, I do not believe that Japanese art practices naturally flow through my veins but, rather, exist because of my upbringing. The explanation of my identity can be a daily performance—embodiment of biracial performativity is full-time.

Multiracial individuals complicate and confuse the constructs of race. We do not easily fit into statistic census categories in an orderly manner. Marginalized by the mainstream and by the marginalized

themselves, living double enforces a continual critical perspective of the “politics of difference” (West 1993) and a lived flexible (flexed?) sensibility of agency. This “double consciousness” (Du Bois 1993) has been enacted through the body—ironically, the notion of shifting identities has been not only a metaphor within the dance style I have been trained in, but also an embodied practice I negotiate in my daily life as a biracial individual. Through experience I have come to understand that the notion of a flexible sense of agency and the enactment of shifting identities can be a positive aspect of an individual’s well-being.¹¹ I found that the codeswitching that I finessed and deployed defensively between diverse communities as I grew up was fortified by the practice of dance, nurturing strength in fluid plurality. As a child I played at becoming different characters onstage. This continues to offer me pleasure, yet I currently also see the process of embodied transfiguration/transformation as a powerful way of *dis*-orienting myself and experiencing different cultural orientations, physical sensibilities, and perspectives.

Curiously, learning to enact multiple identities in dance has leveled the polarity of my biracial “halves” and redeployed “doubleness” as a viable presence to project. By orienting within plurality I understand that embodiment allows for a cohabitation and enactment of multiple identities. I have a strong sense that biraciality is in itself a haunting performance that disrupts discrete racial boundaries for others.¹² Mixed-race individuals, by their very presence, display and broadcast the sexual “act” of race mixing. The taboos of racial boundary crossing are embodied, so that our daily lives, our very presence, can become confrontational performative enactments. The (not so noble) savage/ethnologist stares back, and what does she see? A postmodern embodiment quandary that messes with well-established notions of an ethnographic order of whole and bounded communities. Mixed-race, mulatto, mestizo, hapa, criollo, biracial, multiracial—these are all designations of mixture, not a “one drop” either/or racial classification. Like panels on a fan, each identity exists relative to the whole scene.

The experience of shifting between identities is something many people negotiate in everyday life. While not the same as the identity shifting of one who is multiracial, the subtle dance between anyone’s various personae—student, teacher, daughter, wife, friend, coworker—draws on knowledge of relational social experiences. Each of us is socially enculturated to orient in various situations with certain people, whether it is through dance training or other cultural practices.

closing fans

I would like to expand John Berger's insight, "The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe" (Berger 1972: 8), replacing "see" with "sense." The way we sense and experience the outside world is surely affected by constructs of our culture. For me, the key word in Berger's sentence is "way," for it is not so much the biological capacity to sense that draws my attention, but the cultural construction of the *way* we are trained to sense. "Way" also denotes a manner, path, or practice that imparts activity. Learning through the body is the practice of active *attendance* to particular sensory inputs. Embodiment of "sensational knowledge" is "the way" we consume experience to grow as individuals and as members of a community.

The flow of transmission is the flow of energy between dancers.

I find that the very shaping of our bodies through dance transmission is an ongoing process of sensual orientation that reveals the constructs of our individual realities. Bodies, situated by sense, are transformed by the very stories we live and dance. Soke's straightforward direction, "Know with your body," speaks to the simplicity of transmission yet simultaneously gestures toward a complexity of what is embodied within.



enfolded

Sensu close with the defined percussive snapping of bamboo and paper. Appressed together, the bones become one solid unit. When not in use we store the compact, quiescent fan close to our body—enfolded between layers of obi, under the left breast and below the heart.

Swordlike, they are ready to be drawn and enact a story.

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