



## *unfolding essence—energetic sensibilities and aesthetics*

During a visit to New York City in 2005 Iemoto explained to several beginner students why a fan is placed at arm's length on the floor when bowing to a teacher. She said something to the effect, "It is a kind of metaphor. The fan creates a line between the student and teacher, and draws attention to that space. The line symbolizes the spiritual boundary (*kekrai*) located between the two individuals, honored as a kind of devotional space. *When you are bowing you are demarcating and acknowledging the distinction between your teacher and yourself, but your bow respectfully honors both of you.*" In the following days a fellow dancer and I corresponded via e-mail about this lesson, and she pointed out the importance of Iemoto's use of the word *kekrai*, a word with spiritual overtones that carries the meaning of boundary or barrier.

*Nihon buyo* lessons often seem spiritual in nature, extending beyond the rudiments of dance steps or music. It is not uncommon for Soke and Iemoto to speak about learning dance as *a process for understanding self and spirit*. They often stress the value of *learning through the body* and speak of *kokoro* (literally—heart, soul, spirit), an expressive essence projecting from one's inner self within the body. After a lesson one fall day Iemoto spoke informally to me about learning dance and *kokoro*:

IEMOTO: Dance should be here [she put her hand to her breast]. First comes the body. The most important thing is *kokoro* . . . without this there is nothing. When I teach students they think it's strict some-

times and they cry and cry. But this [correction] must happen for change to take place. You will really remember clearly, fully, if I make corrections—and then the dance will be performed in the proper manner, not just any way of dancing.

TH: [nodding] Yes, I have cried here too . . . seeing other dancers and wanting to learn to dance like them, I cried in frustration because I can not do it yet.

IEMOTO: [nodding] I understand.

TH: But this makes me practice harder, although I am tense . . .

IEMOTO: The head [mind] and body are imbalanced sometimes . . .

[she held her cupped hands up as if holding a large ball before her—one hand, palm down, at her brow and the other, palm up, at her breast] . . . but after practicing for a time you will feel more and more balanced [as she said this, her hands gradually came together until they gently touched]. The best is to be equally balanced—then you can dance from *kokoro* . . . without experiencing life, without personality, you have no dance, no *kokoro*, and you are invisible. But if you have a sense of self, then you can become any character on stage—a woman, a young boy, an old man.

Iemoto's words and actions revealed the “mindful” practice of dance and its ability to enable personal growth through a disciplining of the body. Her words and gestures unfolded concepts regarding the transcendence of the physical through dance to enact something beyond the limits of the individual self—a transformation of the body for artistic expression. This transformation resides beyond a fundamental recall of individual dance steps and artistic techniques (*kata*) to become the essence of *kokoro* in the art, perhaps similar to what Dorinne Kondo found in her research on tea ceremony: “it is by becoming one with the rules that the possibility of transcendence lies” (Kondo 1985: 302). Iemoto's words unmistakably stated the value of correct practice—“You will really remember clearly, fully, if I make corrections—and then the dance will be performed in the proper manner”—and that “not just any [arbitrary] way of dancing will balance the body/mind.” My interpretation of Iemoto's words is that artistic discipline fosters a flow of *kokoro*, or the ability for one's inner physical/spiritual energy to flow freely in creative expression.<sup>1</sup>

In most cases, traditional artistic training is prescribed—from individual steps to choreography, or the process of transmission. These prescribed artistic techniques (*kata*) are an important part of a per-

former's technical, expressive vocabulary. Although one school may have a system for teaching that is very different from the system of another school, cultivation and training is taken seriously as a significant process of developing character and spiritual strength (*seishin*). It is believed that the body's actual form and actions embody the inner nature (or spirit) of the person. Consequently, the transmission process is crucial because training the body to conform to set patterns (*kata*) "shapes," develops, or "cultivates" the character of individuals as well as that of the school.

Concerning the idea of artistic training and the body's form, Yuasa Yasuo proposes that "the theory of artistry derives from cultivation theory, the idea that **one's bodily form directly expresses the mind.**" In his chapter "Theories of Artistry," Yuasa posits that artistic cultivation practices stem from Zen meditation:

In Zen cultivation, whether one is engaged in seated meditation or in everyday chores, one is instructed to assume a certain "form" (*katachi*) or posture for meditation, eating, worship, or working in compliance with the monastic regulations. At any rate, **Zen corrects the mode of one's mind by putting one's body into the correct postures.** (Yuasa 1987: 105)

It is believed that **regular practice of prescribed dance poses and movements reinforces artistic skills in the habitual body, and as movements become embodied, an experience of freedom and realization may occur.** From a highly disciplined and structured pedagogical foundation it is thought that **the skills of an artist can flow "naturally" or effortlessly from the well-trained body.** This fundamental concept of training can be found in artistic practices throughout Japanese history, from theater to calligraphy to woodworking (see Coardrake 1990). Perhaps the most well-known treatises on training in Japanese performing arts are the writings of Zeami (the professional name of Kanze Saburo Motokiyo, 1363–1443). His texts offer an abundance of information on *noh* and its transmission during the early fifteenth century:

A real master is one who imitates his teacher well, shows discernment, assimilates his art, absorbs his art into his mind and his body, and so arrives at a level of Perfect Fluency through a mastery of his art. A performance by such an actor will show real life. (Rimer and Yamazaki 1984: 66)

Though centuries apart, there is a strong similarity between Zeami's statement and what Iemoto conveyed to me in our conversation. Both reveal that the spirit (or life) of art can exist only through disciplined practice of the mind/body with a teacher. Also, both connect the "balance" of mind/body and "fluency" of artistic practice.

**Learning dance is a lifelong endeavor of embodying the tradition**—a concept of practice that is strongly rooted in the *iemoto* social structure as well as Buddhist approaches to practice. I hesitate to place too much emphasis on Buddhism and Japanese philosophy as the foundation of transmission processes. *Nihon buyo* itself is certainly not explicitly a religious practice. However, the roots of nearly every traditional art in Japan are in some way indebted to the overwhelming influence of Buddhism during its formative eras. Japanese philosophers themselves directly draw a deep correspondence between the traditional arts and Buddhism (see Yuasa 1987, chapter 5).

Because *nihon buyo* repertory often depicts life in Japan, Buddhist overtones in pieces range from strongly thematic to subtle metaphors. Some dances, such as *goshugimono* (a formal, congratulatory dance genre), are derived from religious ceremonies and embody spiritual practices.

The pedagogical practices of many Japanese traditional arts, coming from a society where the disciplined irrationality of Zen Buddhism formed the dominant religion, incorporate **a reverence for what is inexpressible through words**. Learning through practice is vital. Transmission processes place value on the experiential and the heightening of awareness. Through repetition and practice it is believed that one may experience a different level of understanding. In this manner the body itself is seen to locate the deeper meaning of the practice, the transmission process, one's relationship to the practice, and the form itself. Because of this basic pragmatic approach to life as process and practice, it is easy to comprehend why such a straightforward approach to life and practice could pervade Japanese sensibility.

**Buddhism, particularly Zen philosophy, stresses the value of direct transmission (teaching without words)** that manifests itself through the active body. A moment's thought and further intellectualization are seen to interrupt the direct process, creating (unnecessary) mediation and a loss of clear transmission. Countless stories within the literature reflect this emphasis, such as Takashina Rosen's "Sermon without Words":

There is an ancient saying: "Better an inch of practice than a foot of preaching." It refers to the sermon preached by the body itself, through action and without speaking.

The sermon of words and phrases is the finger pointing to the moon, the fist knocking at the door. The object is to see the moon not the finger, to get the door open and not the knocking itself; so far as these things do achieve their objects they are well. (Takashina 1988: 177)

Another saying, “To know for himself what is cold to be cold, what is hot to be hot,” is explained by Yuasa Yasuo: “[This] is a common Zen expression meaning that cultivation can be understood only by personally experiencing with the whole mind-body; it cannot be grasped by the intellectual understanding of books” (Yuasa 1987: 103). This last statement echoes what some dancers have questioned about my research, including such comments as, “Why are you studying *how* to learn? Just dance.” For me, the idea of knowing the essence of cold or hot directly relates to questions raised in the “drinking water” orientation—reality is in the physical engagement and sensational knowledge of experience, a reality embodied in Iemoto’s fleeting gesture while she said, “first comes the body. The most important thing is *kokoro*.” Theory lies in the practice of embodiment.

Buddhist concepts concerning the body reveal a great deal about Japanese praxis. Thomas Kasulis’ interpretation of the writings of Kukai (774–835 C.E., the founder of Shingon Buddhism), concisely imparts how enlightenment is embodied through practice. Kukai stated:

The reality-embodiment preaches the Dharma (*hosshin seppo*). (1993: 308)

One becomes a buddha in and through this very body (*sokushin jobutsu*). (310)

Kasulis’ reading of Kukai’s words are:

Our bodies, just as they are, are already expressions of the cosmic buddha’s enlightenment . . . We only need to realize it. (310)

The purpose of practice is to take us from belief to realization. If we have disciplined ourselves so that we enact buddhahood in thought, word, deed, we are indeed buddhas, right here and right now. The truth *hosshin seppo* [the reality-embodiment preaches the Dharma] is no longer a metaphysical theory, but a practical reality. We embody buddhahood. (311)

This approach to cultivating the self unifies practice and enlightenment in a pragmatic and very real, even tangible, process of embodiment. The body and its actions focus and become aware through discipline. I believe Soke's direction to "know with your body" conveys the essence of this concept concisely—embodiment and realization arise through experience and practice.

In his book *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, Yuasa points out the locus of the body within this experiential transmission process:

To put it simply, true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through "bodily recognition or realization" (tainin or taitoku), that is through the utilization of one's total mind and body. Simply stated this is to "learn with the body," not the brain. Cultivation is a practice that attempts, so to speak, to achieve true knowledge by means of one's total mind and body. (1987: 25–26)

Revealed in this passage is the notion that the mind and body are conceived of as inseparable and that it is the process or development of the mind-body complex that Japanese philosophy stresses. In other words, the body is not considered to be a separate entity from the mind. There is not a dilemma, as in Western philosophy, of what the existential or physical relationship is between the mind and body. This does not mean there does not exist a duality, or tension, between the mind and body, however. It is through disciplined personal cultivation (*shugyo*, "enhancement of the personality" or "character building") that one can achieve *shinjin ichinyo* (the oneness of body-mind) and *satori* (spiritual awakening or enlightenment). I believe this coming together of the mind and body is what Iemoto conveyed with her hands drawing together while saying, "The head [mind] and body are imbalanced sometimes but after practicing for a time you will feel more and more balanced."

### sensing folds

In *nihon buyo* we tell stories with the body. As in many of Japan's performing arts, the repertory consists of compositions based on a narrative and an emphasis on narrative vocal genres. Though dance movements vary according to which genre they stem from, choreogra-

phy is generally tied to the narrative, however abstract. Depending on the particular piece, the narrative thread embodied in movement expression can range from realistic mimetic gestures, such as a scene from a babysitter's day, to a movement style that is only abstractly representational. In lessons at Hatchobori these mimetic actions enfold dance and our daily lives outside the studio through our physical memories and sensational knowledge.

For example, during a lesson I heard Iemoto call out from the front of the dance studio, ". . . there [in the dance passage], where the icy breeze hits your face. Next time you experience wind like this [outside], remember it in your body memory." Iemoto's direction provided an impetus for the expression of the narrative, a motivation that drew on a dancer's experience, or sensational knowledge. On other occasions Iemoto provided insights to dancers, such as, "If you live your life fully outside the dance studio, then your dancing will grow and come to life." Here dance and daily action inform each other and interconnect. The lines distinguishing them can blur and become liminal; as the movements of dance are informed by daily life, movements in life draw us to recall dance.

Performing gestures with clarity to convey a narrative is vital. For example, there is a passage in the dance "Seigaiha" where the character admires a serene seaside landscape. No scenery surrounds the performer; with just a paper fan and her body she must convey the context. In one passage a wave rushes onto the sand. In my lesson Iemoto undulated the open fan to embody the rippling water and took quick steps back, as if to keep from getting wet. In my mind the image of the beach and vast seascape came to life when Iemoto danced. In reality we stood inside the bare Hatchobori studio. How did her body evoke this dramatic atmosphere? How can Iemoto's embodiment of the character project beyond her body to stir up this seaside illusion, a corporeal impression unfolding the *mise-en-scène*? I admit, I was mesmerized by the vision and drawn to embody such energy.

In the dance the character of the young woman discovers an object in the sand. Iemoto's gaze and stance piqued my curiosity. What did she find? Her following gestures revealed the answer. A small seashell. *Delighted, she picked up the shell and held it to the light before returning it to the sand. The vision played tricks on my mind. Fully engrossed in the scene, I found it believable, yet also knew it to be beyond the "reality" of my senses. There was no shell. No sand. No water.*



PHOTO 2. Holding up a seashell in “Seigaiha.” PHOTO: WALTER HAHN

When I learned “Seigaiha” Iemoto directed my focus to the seashell: “If you see the shell yourself, *really* see and feel it, the audience will believe it.” I wondered, is dance an art of illusion, an artifice of staged images? If so, **how is the illusion conjured by the moving body?** We convey the narrative with **bodies that “know,” or embody, characters and emotions within dances.** Again, Soke’s direction to “know with your body” comes to mind, advice that privileges embodied knowledge.

**I practiced “seeing and feeling” the shell, over and over again.** This very point of the practice presented a fascinating yet bewildering enigma of embodiment and physical memory. How does transformation arise from the strictures of prescribed movement and choreography? There is a stylized way of tying a knot, for example, in which the movements are mimetically based on actual tying movements. However, the dance movements are not at all realistic; rather, the dancer’s job is to project the “feeling,” or heart, of tying. The informed body—aware of the lived experience of tying as well as the prescribed dance gestures for tying a knot—can transform the mundane to art. I wondered how (stage) presence could be taught, in an embodied sense.

I noticed that **Iemoto and Soke frequently ask students, “What are**

you doing? Do you know? If you do not know, then how will the audience know or feel it?" Their many variations on these questions emphasize the importance of performing gestures with clarity from an informed body, imbued with a lively spirit.

During my lesson on "Komori" (The Babysitter), Iemoto burst out laughing after asking me, "What are you doing?" She continued, "Oh! Maybe you *really* don't know what you are doing!" Still smiling, she began to sing the lyrics and explain the dance movements to me. I was learning a passage where the babysitter is playing while the baby sleeps. The babysitter rhymes fish names in a song, and at one point she wriggles her entire body. In my lesson Iemoto leaned forward and asked, "Do you know what *namako* is?" I shook my head no. "It's a fish with no bones, like a jellyfish or squid, so you move like this . . .," and she undulated as a boneless *namako*. I went home that night and looked up *namako* in the dictionary: a trepang or sea slug.

The following day I returned to my dance lesson and practiced a double-folded embodiment—enacting a babysitter playfully imitating a sea slug. We repeated the passage several times. Since the dance steps are prescribed, practice involved repetition until I could transcend the rudiments of "correct" movements while grasping for a glimmer of transformation.

During experiences of transformation like the babysitter and seashell scenes mentioned above, dance cuts to the corporeal to unfurl and disclose the phenomenal. I pondered: *Considering that transmission in nihon buyo is based on following a teacher through prescribed movements—where is one's self, relative to transfiguration and the informed body?* Where is presence in the body-character-spirit continuum? In my sea slug lesson I was imitating Iemoto imitating *komori* imitating a sea slug. Iemoto said to me, "do not just imitate me. That's boring. Learn the dance and then dance it with Samie's heart." So there is a struggle in learning. *The transmission process is through physical imitation and sensory information, yet at a certain point we must embody the dance and instill our personal self* through the strictures of the choreography and style. I believe this is where the body sensually situates movement to orient "self."

Rather than a masking of one's self to become a character on-stage, *Iemoto and Soke stress the seishin (spiritual strength) needed by a dancer* in order for transfiguration to arise. Their concerns about training the body point to the source of transformative abilities, while also revealing Japanese concepts of embodiment. Again, Iemoto's words to

me—"Without experiencing life, without personality, you have no dance, no *kokoro*, 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." In a sense, the training of the body can be viewed as an enabling process, one that transforms the individual through a transcendence of rudimentary movements to a level of artistry. The leap from an embodiment of fundamental dance abilities to extraordinary artistic expression perhaps lies beyond words. It is manifest within the daily practice of dance. In chapter 5, I will return to the concepts of orientation and the artistry of transformation and presence.

### moving art

The aesthetics of a genre and the process in which the art form is passed down are tightly interwoven, inseparable even. This is particularly true for the performing arts in Japan that highly value the process of learning and have a concern for the tradition's continuity. Accurately describing *nihon buyo* is nearly impossible, since the genre comprises countless subgenres and has been influenced by a wide variety of theatrical and dance styles. With this in mind, the last two sections of this chapter outline the fundamental aesthetic and physical qualities of Japanese dance in relationship to transmission.

First, let us ponder a few broad questions. What makes something beautiful, or aesthetically pleasing? What cultural insights can be revealed through observing a culture's aesthetic values? How do trends of beauty influence the arts through time? How are aesthetic values passed down from generation to generation? And finally, how does the transmission process foster aesthetic ideals? A closer look at a culture's transmission process reveals the deep connections that exist between a genre's practice, aesthetic priorities, and cultural values.

Buddhist concepts and beliefs have had a powerful influence on Japanese culture, since the arrival of Buddhism in Japan in the sixth century via contact with China and Korea. The religion spread throughout Japan, developing diverse sects and establishing a strong foundation of spiritual and philosophical principles that permeated nearly every aspect of Japanese culture, particularly transmission practices.

Enlightenment, one pursuit of Buddhism, is believed to be attained via a variety of paths, such as meditation or the diligent practice of particular art forms. In his well-known treatise *Kakyo*, Zeami (1363–1443,

the creator of *noh*) wrote: “both dancing and gesture are external skills. The essentials of our art lie in the spirit. They represent a true enlightenment established through art” (Rimer and Yamazaki 1984: 90). In the journey to enlightenment, the contemplative insights gained through the struggle and suffering of attainment provide a central focus of Buddhist tradition. This fundamental emphasis on diligent practice as a process for insight is one of Buddhism’s most influential contributions to the arts and is crucial to the study of *nihon buyo* transmission.

Aspects of Buddhism’s spirit may be observed in four aesthetic approaches in the arts—simplicity, irregularity, suggestion, and impermanence. These four general characteristics are often used for studying the visual and literary classical arts of Japan (to name a few, Kishibe 1984; Komparu 1983; Keene 1981; Suzuki 1973; and see Addiss, Groemer, and Rimer 2006 for a valuable interdisciplinary approach to understanding Japanese arts within culture). I present these four concepts as a means of introducing the aesthetics and practice of *nihon buyo*, and to offer parallel creative trends between the arts. An overview of each aesthetic approach is followed by a mini-case study. I must admit that I myself cringe at the problematic nature of introducing such a generalized approach to aesthetics. I find it objectionable (even offensive) to reduce a culture’s aesthetic approaches to only a few concepts, since not all the performing arts of Japan incorporate such an aesthetic formula. For example, some Japanese aesthetic values derive from Buddhist concepts propagated by the aristocratic nobility as early as the first century, and so these values more appropriately apply to the Japanese classical arts than to folk genres. I ask readers to please keep in mind that my purpose in the next section is to introduce general aesthetic principles at play in *nihon buyo* in order to provide a setting for transmission. My earlier question—How are aesthetic values passed down?—is a difficult one to observe. Students are not sat down and taught the aesthetics of *nihon buyo*, but rather gain an understanding of such a sensibility through practice and embodiment of the tradition—through observing dance in the studio and at performances, and through discussions during lessons. Let’s take a closer look.

### simplicity

The word *simplicity* encompasses several Japanese words that convey this aesthetic sense, such as *sabi* (quiet, rustic, unadorned beauty),

*wabi* (poverty, simplicity), and *kotan* (refined simplicity). Simplicity is an aesthetic approach that values the use of economy in art, the shedding of superficial elements. Formal, or compositional, approaches aim to evoke the profound with minimal detail—a bird sitting on a dead branch portrayed by a few quick brushstrokes, for example. *Haiku* clearly embodies the idea of simplicity in its form, based on the verse form of 5, 7, 5 syllables. Here is a poem by Issa (1762–1826) I have grown fond of:

Singing as it goes,  
an insect floats down the stream  
on a broken bough  
—Issa<sup>2</sup>

The compact *haiku* structure reveals the simplicity of the form. Subtlety is key. Removing all extraneous detail allows the simplicity, or the bare essentials, to be appreciated. Examples of simplicity may be observed in a variety of Japanese arts, such as the simple silhouette of a woman or man wearing a *kimono*, the austere linearity of traditional Japanese architecture, gardens, or the design of *sensu* (fans).

### irregularity

As a creative approach, irregularity emphasizes proportions that avoid regularity and symmetry within an artistic composition. It also embraces the beauty of imperfection. An example of irregularity can be found in the art of *bonsai*, or miniature potted trees. A tree is usually not planted symmetrically in the center of the pot, but positioned off to one side or even cascading below the rim of the pot in order to emphasize the negative space within the container. This compositional structure draws attention to the tree's location in its world. *Bonsai* are encouraged to grow in gnarled and twisted forms to display their maturity as well as to draw attention to the beauty of irregularity or imperfection found in nature.

The avoidance of regularity and symmetry is thought to be rooted in nature, as well as the tendency for humans to take notice of things that are slightly unusual or uneven (as our eyes are drawn to the slightest crack in the surface of an egg, or an irregular inflection in a person's voice). For example, an artisan might select a portion of bamboo that

exhibits wormhole patterns to craft a tea ceremony utensil. Irregularity may be found in poetic verse forms that employ odd numbers of lines, such as *haiku* (lines of 5, 7, 5 syllables) or *tanka* poetry (a classic verse form dating back to the first century consisting of thirty-one syllables, divided into five lines with a syllabic distribution 5, 7, 5, 7, 7).

A formal aesthetic technique called *jo-ha-kyu* (corresponding to “introduction, scattering, and rushing”) is used in many compositions of music and dance. This is a tripartite structure not founded on the symmetry of musical or dance material (Western A-B-A compositional schemes, for instance) but on organizing material in an A-B-C form, emphasizing the flow of time. Dances are often composed of three sections, which in turn may be divided into tripartite subsections of *jo-ha-kyu* (or a different odd-numbered structure, to avoid symmetry). The *jo*, introductory section, opens a piece and sets the mood and artistic vocabulary. The *ha*, or scattering section, follows and gradually builds the material and momentum to a climactic point. *Kyu* (rushing) brings this climax to a rapid close, settling the intensity. The sections are not proportionally symmetrical—the *ha* section is normally the longest, and *kyu* is relatively brief. What is fascinating to me is how the *jo-ha-kyu* formal structure becomes embodied by performers. During lessons there is little discussion of compositional devices. It is thought that dancers gradually embody these structures so that phrasing is a practice that becomes physically ingrained, or flows effortlessly through the dancing body. Discussion is considered an obstacle in that it can impose a self-conscious aspect to the flow of dance or music, resulting in an apparently academic, stiff execution of the form. Inevitably such performance lacks the embodied spark, or energy, needed to enact the flow of *jo-ha-kyu*.

Tied to *jo-ha-kyu* is the concept of *ma*, “negative” or “open” space-time—a vital aspect pertaining to compositional proportions found in many Japanese art forms. It is interesting to observe how different art forms use this concept for their practice. *Ma* is a particularly Japanese aesthetic where aspects of “negative” space and time are not believed to be empty, but are considered to be expansive and full of energy. Artists employ *ma* as a vehicle to arouse a contemplative state, an awareness of expansive space and time. In *nihon buyo* irregularity and the concept of *ma* are embodied in the series of poses within a dance. Most often the body is not symmetrically “balanced” in a pose. Instead, the naturally symmetrical body is positioned so that one leg is forward or bent, each arm is held in a different position, and the torso is often

turned in opposition to the direction that the feet are aligned. Not only is the body's position asymmetrical in composition; the "negative space" around the body forms interesting asymmetrical contours, such as the open area under an outstretched arm and torso. During such dance poses time freezes momentarily—a temporal *ma* that highlights a moment outside the "natural" flow of time. This expanded temporal quality is often mirrored in the music by a noticeably free tempo, implying a suspension of time through abstract punctuations of silence. Here the negative space, or *ma*, arises in the lack of sound, or silence, between notes.

### suggestion

Suggestion, reflected in the word *yugen* (profound sublimity), is an art of implication and mystery. The etymology of the two *kanji* characters evokes their inner nuances: *yu* (hazy, dim, dark, quiet, otherworldly) and *gen* (subtle, profound, or dark). The Japanese love of mystery, concealing, wrapping, folding, and tying—all reflect this aesthetic in the arts. A direct presentation of a theme or artistic motif is not considered to be as engaging as that which carries a degree of mystery through implying parts of the whole. For example, the aesthetic of suggestion is embodied in the art of wearing the *kimono*. In this traditional apparel the body is completely obscured, except the neck, head, and hands. Heavy makeup and a wig normally conceal even these exposed areas of the body. The contours of the actual female form are merely suggested, leaving details of the body's form to the imagination. Compare this concealing of the body to contrasting clothing trends that enhance the voluptuous female contour, such as Victorian corsets, the sari in South Indian *bharatnatyam* dance, or even overtly stylized bras worn by American pop stars such as Madonna.

The Japanese preference for nuance and subtlety over direct communication is revealed in the aesthetic of suggestion and the ambiguity of artistic forms. Interpretation is often left for the observer to examine for herself. The structure of Japanese language is famous for demanding interpretation—the lack of subjects or plural forms, for example, oblige listeners to focus and contextually interpret the speaker's intended meaning. Again, *haiku* are a marvelous example of implying a scene, mood, and philosophy through only seventeen syllables.

Suggestion in *nihon buyo* is embodied in a variety of ways. The Jap-

anese love of narrative, paired with indirect communication, provides a rich setting for theatrical works. Few props populate the *nihon buyo* stage—a simple arrangement of flowers or a screen placed to one side of the stage, perhaps. Dancers often perform whole narratives with only a *sensu* (fan) to abstractly pantomime the entire narrative. In such a case the *sensu* must transform before the audience to convey the essence of a story—the fan transforms to a rippling brook, a flower blossoming, or a mirror. The art of implication, indirectly imparting the mood and alluding to a deeper meaning, is part of the commitment of *nihon buyo* dancers.

### impermanence

The notion of impermanence as an aesthetic technique is a fascinating, yet puzzling, consideration. The concept stems from Buddhist belief—the contemplation on the passing of time; the frailty of (human) existence; and the karmic wheel of life, death, and rebirth cycle. These spiritual and philosophical elements are illuminated in the arts in a variety of ways. For example, in the art of *bonsai* it is common to retain a dead branch long after it has withered. This practice is not only to suggest the age of the tree but to convey and even celebrate the frailty of the tree's existence. Japanese love of seasonal change imparts an essence of impermanence found thematically in many arts such as poetry, screen painting, objects for tea ceremony, or dance. The *haiku* composer's ability to conjure a context of time and place through merely alluding to a seasonal setting is a challenge of the poetic form. Images and sounds of summer permeate Issa's *haiku* (above), such as the singing insect and flow of water in the stream.

The evanescent quality of life is represented within dance in numerous ways. Time-based arts are naturally linked to their ephemeral existence in the present, bow to the lived experience of the moment, and revere a connection with the past in embodied memory. The transmission of dance relies on learning through doing and an active engagement of embodiment through experience with a teacher. Dance and dance training are ephemeral and necessitate regular practice to maintain embodiment, as well as social ties.

As I mentioned earlier, not all dances neatly fit into the four aesthetic categories. Consider the “wild” and busy aesthetics of many *kyogen* dances, for instance! However, despite this conflict in style, these

very pieces often exhibit some aspect of these aesthetics (*ma* or impermanence, for example). I close this section on aesthetics with a case study of a dance that clearly illustrates the essence of the four aesthetics discussed above. The dance is called “*Kurokami*” (Jet-black Hair). The poem of the same title, written in the seventeenth century, is not attributed to a particular author. The narrative portrays a woman’s longing for her lover, who has departed. In the lyrics her solitude is conveyed deeply through the stillness of images.

*Kurokami* (Jet-black Hair)<sup>3</sup>

<i>Kurokami no</i>	It is the pillow
<i>musuboretaru</i>	We shared that night,
<i>omoi wo ba</i>	When I let down
<i>tokete neta yo no</i>	My jet-black hair.
<i>Makura koso</i>	That is the cause of my lament
<i>hitori nuru yo no</i>	When I sleep alone
<i>ada-makura</i>	With my single robe
<i>sode wa katashiku</i>	To cover me.
<i>Tsuma ja to iute</i>	“You are mine,” he said.
 (ainote)	
(musical interlude)	
<i>Guchi na onago no</i>	Not knowing the heart
<i>kokoro to shirade</i>	Of a simple girl,
<i>shin to fuketaru</i>	The voice of a temple bell,
<i>kane no koe</i>	Sounds into the quiet night.
<i>Yube no yume no</i>	Awakening from an empty dream
<i>kesa samete</i>	In the morning,
<i>yujashi natsukashi</i>	How lovely, sweet,
<i>yarusenaya</i>	And helpless is my longing.
<i>tsumorou to shirade</i>	Before I know it
<i>tsumorou shirayuki</i>	The silver snow has piled up.

“*Kurokami*” is for a solo dancer using a *sensu*. The minimum stage space necessary for the piece is only a ten-foot-square area. “*Kurokami*” embodies simplicity in its concise choreography, yet the lack of extraneous embellishment requires the dancer to maintain her focused presence and develop the depth of subtle nuances in gesture.

Each phrase consists of several movements, framed by held poses that add to the feeling of stillness (*ma*) and the melancholy mood. In this deceptively simple dance structure, every breath is apparent and, to a degree, choreographed. An inhale opens a dancer's chest above the *obi* (sash) and sends barely noticeable movement across the shoulders, neck, and torso. Her inhale is timed within the phrase, held momentarily (*ma*), and with her exhale the energy of release instigates the vitality of the next movement. This cycle of breath—from inhale, suspension of breath, and exhale—imparts a stunning flow of tension and release. Notice that the breath cycle is also an asymmetrical (tripartite) form.

In the opening of the Tachibana choreography the dancer enters slowly, yet her face is concealed by her open fan. The character's identity and emotion is a mystery, only suggested. She gracefully turns and poses holding the *sensu* before her and it transforms into a mirror. The woman adjusts her *kimono* collar and hair. Her momentary focus on her appearance early in the dance summons the viewer to observe her beauty, foreshadowing the nature of fleeting beauty with the passage of time.

Although actually sung by a vocalist, the poem text is hauntingly written from the character's point of view. Hearing the woman's internal thoughts intensifies the emotional impact for an observer—we hear her compelling lament and mournful longing in the first person, and it seems as if we are listening to her subconscious, since “her” voice emanates from the singer. Every line is heavy with double meaning and metaphor. Her first utterance (and first line of the poem), “*Kurokami no musuboretaru*” (When I let down my jet-black hair), seems unimpassioned, yet it powerfully projects a depth of emotions in metaphor. *Musuboreru* refers to knotting and, in this case, letting her hair down. In Japanese culture images of tying, wrapping, and securing something (or someone) are common, revealing metaphors of social or spiritual connectedness and bonds of love. An alternate meaning of *musuboreru* is “gloomy” or “depressed” in mood. Since the verb is linked to hair in the narrative, the emotional weight is perhaps not apparent at first. Women's hair is a potent symbol in Japan and is often used as a metaphor. There is composure and restraint in the poetic images. Letting her hair down in her lover's company implies that she also let down her emotional guard. Traditionally women arrange their hair high on the head. This contributes to the sleek, elegant outline of a woman's contour in a *kimono* but also reveals the sensuous nape of her neck. Here the *kimono* collar (*eri*) is drawn back slightly—her exposed nape line

suggestive of the contours concealed below several layers of her *kimono*, *obi*, and ties.

I will not analyze the entire poem or dance, but will point out a few significant elements that embody the aesthetic techniques discussed above. The concept of impermanence unfolds in the line “*kane no koe*” (the voice of the bell) followed by “*samete*” (*sameru*, wake up, awake). This passage alludes to the Buddhist belief that spiritual awakening is possible in an instant of realization. The word *sameru*, written with a different *kanji* character, also means “fade away” or to become “discolored”—a play on words to impart the passage of time. The starkness reflected in the sparse choreography and single dancer on stage, balanced with the lush images and sounds in this passage of the poetry, also frame the temporal and spatial concept of *ma*. The music reflects this aesthetic, using a heterophonic texture of the ensemble, performed with a small chamber *nagauta* group (ensemble for the *kabuki*) of *koto*, *shamisen*, voice, and drum. The vocal and *shamisen* lines are particularly interesting. The two parts melodically mirror each other, yet each playfully stretches or compresses time in different phrases, producing integrally interwoven melodies that are similar, not identical. The lines weave together beautifully, exploiting subtle nuances of melody and timing. The most active section of the musical piece occurs in the “*ainote*,” or interlude. In this section the voice rests, and the instrumental ensemble has an opportunity to play a bit more elaborately. In contrast, there are moments where the ensemble plays so sparsely that the silence, the *ma*, becomes intense, emphasizing the sorrowful, introspective mood of the dance. There is elegance in the restraint embodied in “*Kurokami*.” The simplicity of the choreography, music, and poetry is dramatic and heightens the feelings of sadness and nostalgia.

The final poetic image of snow introduces the motif of nature but carries a low-spirited double meaning in metaphor. Snow signals the arrival of winter and the woman’s awareness of time passing. Snow also embodies a metaphor of her physical changes over time. Waiting for her lover, she has endured unbearable longing, and she did not notice that “the silver snow has piled up”—that her once black hair has now turned white. In the closing passage the dancer creates a *shoji* (paper and wood) door with her fan. She slides it open to see snow falling in the garden. As she gently reaches out her right hand to catch a snowflake, she feels the chill of winter, metaphorically exposing her desolate mood. Taking the open fan with her right hand, she holds it flat and above her head to portray the eaves above the veranda. Her left

hand slips into her *sode* (*kimono* sleeve) and brings it to her mouth with her fingertips. This last pose is classically asymmetrical in physical contour, from the positioning of her arms and legs, to the slight twist in her torso. Despite this asymmetrical stance, her body appears firmly grounded and compositionally balanced, as if her limbs individually create a counterbalance to ground her figure. Her final pose is punctuated with a subtle, three-part head movement that emanates from her neck—from the audience perspective: left, right, center—as she gazes longingly into the distance.

Transmission, the physical internalization of aesthetic practices, is the central focus of this book. I believe the path to comprehending cultural aesthetics, social structures, and interactions lies in the process of embodiment, or the methods of transmission. It is a cycle, however, as cultural aesthetics and interactions are also the key to understanding transmission.

As I mentioned earlier, the study of this ephemeral process challenges a participant-observer, for as the practice unfolds a myriad of cultural patterns, these very patterns become physically internalized and often seem less accessible on a conscious level. Sensational knowledge moves the dancer. It is the art, indistinguishable from the practice. The following section offers insights into how the body is composed and practices dance.

### grounding the body

The way the body is presented in dance varies widely in different cultures around the world. **The dancer's body in performance differs from the body in everyday life because of the intention of its display.** How is the body “organized” to dance, including stance, gaze, breath, energy, weight distribution, and movement? What aesthetic cultural values might be revealed by an observation of these characteristics? . . . or by an observation of the transmission process? Although *nihon buyo* encompasses a wide variety of dance postures and movements, it is possible to outline a general character of the body.

Japanese concepts of energy flow through and around the body illuminate a great deal about *nihon buyo* and movement transmission. At the core of Japanese philosophies of the body is a concept of energy, or power, known as *ki* (in Chinese, *chi* or *qi*). In his writings, philosopher Yuasa Yasuo takes a cross-cultural approach to Japanese practices

of the body—comparing Eastern and Western philosophical and spiritual paradigms—and offers key concepts, to reveal differences in cultural practices. Yuasa's writings include references to specific practices such as martial and performing arts, making his work particularly valuable for Western theorists studying Eastern performing arts. Nagatomo Shigenori, introducing Yuasa's research on *ki*-energy in *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki-Energy*, writes, "According to acupuncture medicine, an invisible psychophysical *ki*-energy circulates within the interior of the body, while at the same time intermingling with the *ki*-energy pervasively present in the environment including that of other persons" (Nagatomo 1993a: xii). *Ki* remains a somewhat elusive concept, however:

The scope which this concept covers is very comprehensive; it can include, for example, a climatic condition, an arising social condition, a psychological and pathological condition. It also extends to cover a power expressed in fine arts, martial arts, and literature . . . Yuasa, while confining his use of the term "ki" to human beings and their living environment, defines *ki*-energy as a third term with a *psychophysical* character that cannot be properly accommodated within the dualistic paradigm of thinking . . . it is not arrived at merely through intellectual abstraction, but is derived also from observation of empirical phenomena detectable both experientially and experimentally in and around the human body. (Nagatomo 1993a: xi–xii)

**Awareness and control of *ki* through the body fosters the flow of movement, enabling dancers to move with a spirited energy that radiates from the body through dance.** As stated by Nagatomo above, **awareness of *ki* is developed through experience, rather than intellectual pursuits.** I believe that this is one reason why active (dance) practice is privileged over discussion during lessons—*ki* is considered to lie beyond what words can supply. Only through the gradual process of practice and observation can the development of *ki* awareness and embodiment be gained. Yuasa proposes the idea of training the body via self-cultivation, or *shugyo*, as a path for developing *ki* awareness:

I have developed a special interest in the problem of self-cultivation [*shugyo*] as found in various Eastern religious traditions. In Japan self-cultivation methods have been established and transmitted to later generations ever since Buddhism's acceptance in ancient times . . . a

connotation of the term “*shugyo*” or simply “*gyo*” (self-cultivation) is that of training the body, but it also implies training, as a human being, the spirit or mind by training the body. In other words, “*shugyo*” carries the meaning of perfecting the human spirit or enhancing one’s personality. Therefore, it seems to imply that mind and body are inseparable. (Yuasa 1993: 7–8)

Yuasa’s work imparts the profound significance embodied in self-cultivation and *ki* energy. Embodying practices are a deeply personal and spiritual engagement, a challenge of the body and mind. However, the path to understanding is through the body and experience, a concept Soke stated so clearly in my lesson—“Know with your body.”

Training of the body is key for *ki* to flourish and develop. Specifically, a disciplined routine of specific movement and sound patterns must be practiced in order for the body to move freely with the spirit of *ki* energy. Yuasa wrote:

when there is repeated training in the practice of performing techniques, the body-mind is disciplined, then the state of conscious movement changes into one which the hands, legs, and body unconsciously move of themselves. This is the state of “no mind.” (Yuasa 1993: 31)

The performing techniques Yuasa refers to are *kata*. *Nihon buyo* dances consist of *kata*, formalized body movements that greatly aid the memorization and embodiment of pieces. *Kata*, or “precise exercise forms” (Singleton 1998), are a distinctly Japanese formal device found in nearly every artistic practice, such as tea ceremony, archery, theater, *enka* (popular song, see Yano 2002), and martial arts. Because most of the traditional artistic practices in Japan are taught through active engagement, *kata* are vital as the foundation for training. In *nihon buyo*, *kata* function as the fundamental building blocks for the foundation of dance expression. Rather than learning the discrete forms individually first, as is the case in ballet training, *kata* are learned gradually and contextually within dance pieces, but also from observing *kata* during other students’ lessons. In a sense, this is similar to children’s acquisition of language vocabulary; new words are heard and incorporated as they are needed.

*Kata* operate as artistic motifs that are standard and repeatable. They are also flexible. Structurally similar *kata* may appear in a variety of pieces, yet for each dance, and even within each phrase, a *kata*

is performed with the nuance, or flavor, of that particular context. For example, a seated bow is a *kata* performed in many dances. However, the specific character the dancer portrays in a dance will modify the basic bow, depending on the character's gender, social status, age, mood, or the social context of the bow (who s/he is bowing to). Formal bows in a classic dance will differ from a bow in a dance based on a folk dance. It is important to keep in mind that there are *kata* for each movement unit. *Kata* are named and so have a pragmatic purpose in lessons, as teachers can call out a *kata* during a lesson. In this section I will be describing only the general manner in which the body is organized to move. For a wonderfully clear and organized description of the specifics of dance movement see Hanayagi Chiyo's *Jitsu nihon buyo no kiso* (The Practical Skills of Basic *Nihon Buyo* Movement).

The concept of a dancer's form, or posture, is expressed in the word *katachi*. This word does not simply translate into "posture"; it represents a structural system for cultivating the body, and, as Komparu Kunio points out, there is a connection between *kata* and *katachi*:

Two Japanese words, *kata* and *katachi*, are closely related. *Kata* corresponds to pattern, model, or mold; it refers to set movements in the martial arts and to dance patterns in Noh. The word *katachi* means shape, form, or condition, as perceived by the senses. We can generally translate *kata* as pattern and *katachi* as shape or form, but the terms may be very close in meaning. According to etymological dictionaries the word *kata* derives from *kami* (god) and *ta* (paddy or hand). Thus *ka-ta* involves god, agriculture, and the hand of man, and indeed the basic movement patterns of Noh are related to agricultural activities and sacred rituals . . . The *chi* of *katachi* apparently is an indication of mystical powers and often appears written with the character for soul or spirit. (Komparu 1983: 221)

*Katachi* is the form that the body assumes while dancing—the structural source for the flow of energy and movement. For dance, the notion of flow is apparent in a physical sense as well as in the sense of an inner, contemplative energy. *Nihon buyo* movements derive from a strong core centered in the abdomen, or *hara*, where the body's energy and spiritual center resides. The body moves with a firmly grounded stance derived from a lowered center of gravity rooted in the *hara*. The basic stance reinforces this foundation—feet are firmly planted on the ground; the tailbone is tucked under so that the hips appear level with

the floor; and the knees are always bent. Movements emanate from the *hara* region and radiate outward through the torso and limbs. The connection of the feet to the smooth wooden floor plays a vital role in a dancer's carriage, balance, and movement vocabulary. More importantly, the connection of the body's *ki* energy to the earth is via tactile contact with the soles of the feet. This is an energetic transmission flow between the dancer and ground.

Apart from a few exceptions, *nihon buyo* dancers perform in traditional socks, or *tabi*, when dancing. *Tabi* enable dancers to glide smoothly along the wood floors in a commonly performed style called *suriashi* (a "sliding feet" walking style). They are made of finely woven cotton with metal tab findings sewn vertically on the inner side of the ankle to secure them on the feet. In a mittenlike fashion, the large toe is enclosed separately from the others, enabling *zori* (a thong sandal) to be easily put on or taken off. Also, the isolation of the big toe allows it to spread out slightly from the other toes to grip the floor, greatly aiding stability by creating a stronger base. *Tabi* fit tightly around the foot like a second skin, sculpting the foot into a single sleek shape. I detail *tabi* here because dancers rely on firm contact with the ground, and *tabi* are the only thing that comes between feet and floor.

Foot and leg positions vary according to the character role a dancer is portraying in a piece. In general, legs and feet are discreetly turned inward for female roles, which keeps the *kimono* composed during walking. Thighs and knees are held together with knees bent. The dancer walks with small, controlled steps, not strides. The leg and foot positions of male characters, on the other hand, vary from a straight, forward position to one that is turned out from the hip, somewhat like a shallow ballet plié. Of course there are countless variations depending on the character's age, social status, gender, or the genre of the dance. In fact there are many pieces in which a dancer assumes several roles to convey the narrative. In such dances she must shift, or codeswitch, between the variety of characters in such a convincing manner that the audience can fluidly follow the story (see chapters 4 and 5). For dances that involve codeswitching between contrasting characters, the physical portrayal of the personae is vital.

For all character roles, the slight bending of knees grounds the body and also supports a manner of shifting weight often incorporated into dances. Because *tabi* allow feet to slide on the floor, the body can easily change directions by shifting weight while rotating the feet. The firmly grounded nature of the lower body secures a flexible foundation

from which to move. Above the navel a dancer's carriage is upright—neck and head erect, chest and shoulders held back and broad. When teaching posture, Iemoto often tells us to imagine a thread emanating from the crown of the head that is pulled upward as the tailbone is simultaneously pointed down, creating a sense of rootedness to the floor. The basic carriage is interesting because it polarizes the body so that from the navel to the floor a dancer is grounded, and from the navel up she extends upward. The key here is the midpoint, the *hara*—safe-guarded below layers of costume. The strength and life of movements radiates from this central core.

I recall that during one lesson Iemoto began to swing her arms like a propeller while commenting to a new student how easy but senseless it is to just swing the arms into place. “That’s not dance. The movement must come from here,” she instructed as she embraced her *obi* with her hands, then fluidly slid them up along her torso and shoulders, until her arms were outstretched high in the air. Again and again I have seen her “dance” this basic lesson of the body—each time with animated vigor and enthusiasm, revealing **how essential the flow of energy is in *nihon buyo* movement**. This brings our focus to the shoulders, arms, wrists, and hands.

Shoulders perform an interesting role in *nihon buyo*. They are quite active, as they provide a crucial link between the dancer’s strong torso, head, and her highly expressive hand and arm movements. In this capacity they physically support the arms, but, more importantly, they convey the energy outward from the torso through the arms, wrists, fingertips, and fan or other prop. Iemoto often reminds students that shoulders need to be drawn down and back. A slight tap between the shoulder blades during a lesson signals that the muscles here must firmly support and control the shoulders.

On the surface, *nihon buyo* can appear as if the hands and arms take on the majority of activity. As Iemoto implied with her “propeller” arm lesson, this perspective is misguided. Movements of the arms alone will seem lifeless and disembodied. When an experienced dancer moves, the flow of *ki* energy from her body’s core outward is apparent in a fully embodied sense, and the animated energy only heightens the articulation of the hands and fingers. The entire body radiates with energy, whether moving or still.

Shoulders carry an emotive role as well. Considered to be a sensuous area of the body, the shoulders press downward with every step a dancer takes. Each (vertical) half of the body is coordinated such that,

for example, when the left foot moves forward, the left shoulder simultaneously moves downward. For female characters, depending on the particular dance and role, the undulation of the shoulders can range from subtle to overtly sensual. Shoulder movements for male roles are also varied but generally reveal the degree of strength, or virility, of the role—from a swaggering, domineering character to a more light, or humorous, role. Of course the expressivity of the shoulders is connected to that of the entire body. As a link between torso and arms, their role is significant.

As mentioned above, on first glance *nihon buyo* appears to prioritize hand and arm movements. Because gesture plays a vital part in the narrative, the hands often appear to function as the primary communicators of movement articulation. Compared with female characters, the arms for male roles are generally held away from the body with the elbows turned outward (again, depending on the character's social status and age). In contrast, female characters keep their elbows close to the body, turned downward. This is culturally considered to be more composed and reserved but also ensures that the underarm and breast area are discreetly hidden from view. However, keeping the elbows in this reserved position does not mean that a woman's arms do not stretch out, away from the body. They do, but elbows remain pointing downward.

The flow of energy from the *hara* rises up the erect torso, across the shoulders, down the arms and wrists, through the hands, and extends out through the fingers. If there is a prop in the dancer's hand, then the energy must then be conducted across the fingertips and out through the prop, as the prop is employed as an extension of the body.

Because there are countless ways of positioning the hands, I will provide only a general description here. Female characters' hands move almost as if they are one complete, simple unit. Fingers are held together, with the thumb tucked slightly into the gently cupped palm. Individual fingers do move separately, however. There are many gestures that require an extended index finger or pinkie; it depends on the context of the movement and the specific movements choreographed into the narrative. Hands for male roles range from a cupped hand, similar to the hand for a female role, to a boldly extended hand with fingers splayed. In the case of both male and female hands, movements of wrists, hands, and fingers are interconnected and maintain the flow of energy from the body. The use of the hands in this way also maintains the simple, clean-line aesthetic form valued in Japanese arts.

Returning to the shoulders, let's move up the spine to the neck and head. With the torso and shoulder area providing a strong yet supple foundation, the head and neck are able to move freely. Like the shoulders, the female neck is considered to be highly sensual. Though generally concealed under makeup, the neck, face, and hands are the only areas of the body that are exposed to view. The collar of the *kimono*, or *eri*, is drawn down the back to reveal more of the female contour for more provocative characters, such as *geisha*. In general, the neck is held erect and long—extending the crown of the head upward. The neck moves the head in a variety of ways, from straight back to forward and side to side. A characteristic movement in *nihon buyo* occurs at the end of a phrase, where the head, shoulders, and neck punctuate a three-movement closing unit. For example, the head remains relatively upright and turns to face right-left-center, as the shoulders and neck undulate in the same direction to emphasize the movement. Supported by the back, the neck does the majority of the work to support the head in a level position while the shoulders are moving. For female roles this action necessitates the ability to execute the sequence in a graceful, smooth manner. To complicate matters, if a wig is needed for a particular role, then the neck must take on the added challenge of the weight while maintaining an outwardly elegant appearance. Shoulders do not move as gracefully for male roles. As male characters walk their shoulders move, but instead of undulating softly they remain broad to open up the chest cavity. The upper torso and shoulders can emphasize a strong male character's swagger, for instance, by shifting the corresponding shoulder forward and down as the leg steps ahead.

A dancer's gaze and facial expression convey considerable information about the character being portrayed. Facial movements in *nihon buyo* tend to be reserved relative to other Asian dance styles, such as Peking opera, South Indian *bharatnatyam*, or *kabuki*. Although gaze and facial expression in *nihon buyo* may appear subtle, this is a very powerful aspect of the dance. Generally a dancer's gaze moves in sync with her head, or slightly leading her head movement. For example, if a character looks across the horizon slowly from left to right, her eyes continue scanning the horizon with a straight gaze as her head moves, or just prior to her head in anticipation. If there is a fan pointing to the horizon, then her eyes must be drawn to the same location. The gaze is focused and directs the body to the following gesture.

While facial movements vary from dance to dance, by and large facial demeanor is relaxed and calm in an introspective sense, often

letting the body, rather than overt facial expressions, convey the emotional impact. Of course there are dances in which a character's emotions are distinctly portrayed—such as a mother smiling as she holds her baby, an evil villain showing contempt, or a comic character bumbling along a country road.

Taking a step back, we can observe how Japanese aesthetics and concepts of the body are integrally linked. Learning dance by following a master allows for a gradual acquisition and enculturation of aesthetics via the body. Embodying a wide variety of ideals and philosophical concerns, the animated body acts as the living art form, narrator, individual, and social metaphor representing the “house.” The *ki* (core energy) located within the *hara* (abdomen) empowers the individual to flexibly perform as these various markers of identity. In the *keikoba* (practice hall or place of practice) we take part in *keiko* (practice), a word that carries associations with *shugyo* (self-cultivation) and training of the mind-body complex. In English the word *training* has strong connotations with a regimented program of activity devoid of emotion or compassion. While many of the arts in Japan are strictly overseen, *keiko* is considered to be a process in which the body endeavors to reach a level of technical mastery so that the mind does not hamper the expressive body, which can then move fluidly—without thought.

Soke and Iemoto's intense focus and awareness attracted me to research the pedagogical system of *keiko* at Hatchobori. As I unraveled their teaching methods I realized that a large part of what they teach through dance is focused apperception—*haragei*, or the art of using the energy and strength of one's personality. The very word *haragei* incorporates *hara*, the area of the abdomen where *ki* energy resides. The kanji for *haragei* provides insight into its embodied meaning: *hara* is the common word for abdomen with alternate meanings of mind, intention, courage, spirit; *gei* means art. Francis Hsu directly relates *haragei* to transmission: “The central core of teaching is *haragei* (literally, abdomen technique) through which the disciple learns not by receiving explicit instructions but by unconscious imitation of the master” (Hsu 1975: 63).

The various interpretations of the word *haragei* supply plenty of insightful metaphors inspired by the body. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 25–32) and Fernandez (1974: 124–125) posit that temporal and spatial orientation are partly constructed for us culturally, via metaphor. Specifically, structural metaphors within rituals and other shared cultural experiences assist individuals in constructing ideas of structural

spaces. I believe that such metaphors and orientations structure not only the spaces for the body to inhabit but also interior physical space *as the body*. As a philosophy of the body, *haragei* points to the *hara* as the source of energy—the *hara* is an area within the body but also interacts with exterior space and the individuals located outside the body. The *keikoba* is a private space inhabited by students and teachers, a place that stages the narrative of transmission. It is a narrative comprising similar episodes of the articulate body, repeatedly displaying the practice of aesthetic cultural values and social bonds through fragments of dance. The bodies in this narrative are in transition, gradually embodying knowledge through practice. The metaphors connecting the practice with the physical and spiritual not only surround the dancer as she learns to move—she appropriates these metaphors until they become embodied,

*outspread*

*Stretching your fingers out as wide as possible, your hand transforms to a paperless sensu. This corporeal fan embodies stories raised in gesture and sound.*

*An open palm, fingers cupped, can beckon for food, catch a raindrop, or make a connection with another hand.*

*. . . and how did you learn to use this fan?*

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