

Paradigms of Education in the Art of Acting

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Abstract: Embedded in interculturality and transculturality, this paper focuses on the actor's training, on facing, understanding and assimilating the theater lessons of the Far East, especially those of the Nō theater, based on the constructive encounters with them by practicing the Tadashi Suzuki (b. 1939) method, Japanese martial arts, researching Zen philosophy and the writings of Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443). This article points out the similarity between certain paradigms of the Western theatricality with those of the Far Eastern one (holism, body-mind, *here and now*, flow, imaginary) as well as their fusion with other paradigms due to the interdisciplinary transfer existing between martial arts (aikidō and iaidō), Japanese culture, and the art of acting (*shin-waza-tai*, *shoshin*, *ichigo ichie*). The way in which fixed forms relate to imagination (*kata*), specific to both Far Eastern theater and martial arts (aikidō and iaidō), is also very important. This research highlights the essential nature of the fixed form for the impulses of imagination and creative freedom.

Keywords: interculturality, art of acting, Zen, Nō theater, martial arts, holism, body-mind, imagination.

Holism and the harmony of shin – waza – tai

At the beginning of the 21st century, the actor attempts self-definition by facing the issue of diversity and cultural difference, of different syntheses: between tradition and modernity, between old and new, the impure and

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eclectic style of postmodernist or postdramatic forms which still persists up to this date. In the 20th century, Western theatre was interested in the traditional theatrical forms of the Far East as well as in the actor model proposed by them. Mastering the vocabulary of signs, the syncretism of expressive means, dance, body plasticity, and singing, having a perfectly-trained, out-of-the-ordinary body, the oriental actor is, as George Banu points out, a superior model for western actors. The current training of actors has been enriched by some techniques of the Far Eastern theatrical forms.

We will briefly analyze the holistic approach which characterizes Japanese thought and was observed among others by Solomon Marcus and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In a semiotic approach, Solomon Marcus, the Romanian philosopher and mathematician (1925-2016), observes that postmodernity was a moment of connection between the Western and Far Eastern way of thinking. Solomon Marcus starts his analysis by observing the influence of Chinese ideograms on Japanese and Korean culture. An ideogram is first and foremost a pictogram, depicting an object found in nature. The ideogram is a graphic symbol through which “one can obtain a direct intuitive access to a holistic representation²”, says Solomon Marcus, while also highlighting the opposition with the fragmentarism and analytical approach of the western thinking. The East Asian mentality has a tendency to view an event as a whole, as opposed to Cartesian dualism or Kant’s sharp distinction between subject and object. There is a difference between the dualism of the European philosophy and “the monistic vision unifying mind and body, a fundamental aspect of Buddhist thinking³.” Western postmodernism indulges in holistic and monistic visions, tending to blur the distinction between subject and object. Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) observes the first difference between Western and Eastern thinking in how the subject is conceived. In Eastern thought, in Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, there is a refusal of the subject – says Lévi-Strauss, these doctrines demonstrating the illusory nature of the self, which is only “a provisional arrangement of

2. Solomon Marcus, “Monism japonez și postmodernism occidental” [“Japanese Monism and Western Postmodernism”], *Secolul XX*, nr. 11-12 /404-405 (1998): 38.

3. Solomon Marcus, 39.

biological and psychological phenomena, with no lasting element such as a 'self': it is vain appearance, destined ineluctably to dissolve.⁴ Lévi-Strauss believes that Japanese thinking has a peculiarity, it does not completely annihilate the subject, but, instead of being the cause, the subject becomes a result: "Japanese thought places the subject at the end of the line."⁵ Thus, there is a difference between Western philosophy, which seems to be centrifugal (everything starts with the subject) and the Japanese, centripetal way of thinking. Like Solomon Marcus, Lévi-Strauss's analysis also takes into account the Japanese language and syntax, where the subject is placed at the end of the sentence. These observations are combined with those about the ethics and behavior of Japanese individuals within the community. For Japanese people, the sense of belonging to a community, to a collective work of art, respecting the hierarchies entailed therein, those moral obligations imposed by the *giri*, is extremely important. There is a tendency to define the individual from the outside, based on his/her place in the family and society.

The annihilation of dualistic distinctions is specific to Buddhist Zen thought. The sense of relativity developed by such a way of thinking is part of the histrionic character that celebrates change, being a fundamental part of the art of acting. Relativism, holism, the integrative approach rooted in the concept of body-mind, are all of paramount importance today in the art of an actor.

Japanese martial arts are deeply connected to Zen philosophy. To practitioners of martial arts, the mental training provided by Zen is of the utmost importance. Relevant in this regard in martial arts is the principle of *shin – waza – tai*, which expresses the connection between *mind*, *technique* and *body*. Practitioners of martial arts seek the unity and harmony between these three components. Even if one starts with the physical component, he has to move on to the mental one. In this trinity, the techniques are the path itself. Karate master Kenei Mabuni (1918-2015) emphasizes the connection between physical and mental training, warning practitioners that Zen training is done

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon. Writings about Japan*, Foreword by Junzo Kawada, Translated by Jane Mary Todd (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 36.

5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Other Face of the Moon*, 37.

with “our flesh and bones” and that “the spirit must be forged through the physical.”⁶ As a reply, Eugenio Barba notes that “the physical exercises are always spiritual exercises.”⁷

This unity and harmony between *mind – technique – body* is fervently sought by actors. This harmony grants the actor’s performance an organic nature and credibility. The techniques used by an actor through the unity of body and mind are, of course, adapted to the aesthetics that he embraces as an artist. But, apart from the aesthetics addressed, an actor’s psychophysical training must also take into account the three concepts above. An eternal problem one faces, as an actor, is the outside-in/inside-out approach. In his book entitled *Take Up the Bodies* (1982), director and theoretician of performance Herbert Blau (1926-2013) observes this insolvable dilemma an actor has to deal with: action or motive, being or becoming, inner or outer? In his opinion, the actor embodies both.⁸

In the 1960s and 1970s, as Zen gained popularity in the West thanks to the works of Alan Watts, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Taisen Deshimaru, the martial arts of the Far East also spread, and the art of acting did not miss this opportunity to revitalize psychophysical training. From Grotowski, Barba and Brook to Anne Bogart, Phillip Zarrilli, theater practitioners have used martial art techniques to train actors. Anne Bogart was an *aikidō* practitioner, Phillip Zarrilli experimented with *kalarippayattu*, *yoga* and *taiqiquan*, Herbert Blau used *taiqiquan* when training actors. Master Taisen Deshimaru’s book, *Zen et arts martiaux [The Zen Way to the Martial Arts]* is like a reply to Herbert Blau’s book *Take Up the Bodies*, being even published in the same year, in 1982. In this book, the author states something of utmost relevance regarding the holism of Far Eastern thinking and the outside-inside relation:

6. Jose M. Fraguas, *Karate Masters*, vol. II, *Deschizătorii de drumuri [Karate Masters 2, The Pathfinders]*, translated from English by Monica Hriscu, Documentation: Eva Ion (Cluj-Napoca, Curs Publishing House, 2020), 103.

7. Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe. A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, Translated by Richard Fowler (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 87.

8. Quoted by Phillip Zarrilli, *(Toward) A Phenomenology of Acting*, Foreword Evan Thompson (London & New York: Routledge, 2020), 9.

Mind and body, interior and exterior, substance and phenomena: these pairs are neither opposed nor in duality, but form a unity without separation.⁹

This is the vision that shaped my pedagogical thinking and allowed me to open up more to new explorations in the art of acting. The perspective I appropriated combines this holistic view of Zen Buddhist origins with Zeami's poetics and poetry on Nō theater, with the Tadashi Suzuki method and martial arts, which allowed me to establish the theoretical frameworks of an actor's training. Personal contributions are inspired from the exercises of the Suzuki method, which I teach rigorously in the exact way they had been transmitted to me by director and professor Izumi Ashizawa. I use personal ideas in the preparation and warm-up process and other adjacent studies that emphasize, support and harmonize with the Suzuki method.

In the student's training plan that I developed for the academic curriculum, I introduced elements of *aikidō* and *iaidō*. The interdisciplinary transfer that I operated between martial arts and the art of acting proved its usefulness, efficiency and pedagogical value. The elements taken over were productive and they paid off, proving their benefic effects in several ways, including: body awareness, breathing while moving, *hara* – the source of vital energy and the work center of an actor, posture, the relationship between relaxation and concentration, the equilibrium between balance – imbalance, the qualities of energy, intelligent effort distribution, body dynamics and flexibility, spatial relationships, proxemics. All these explorations are permanently supported by the imagination. In this integrative approach aiming to embodied consciousness, breathing, *hara*, movement and imagination are all connected one with another. Breathing can progressively turn into expressive breathing, vocal expression, word, text. The first step, however, is to link breathing to body movement. All Far Eastern martial arts achieve this goal. In the art of acting, this integrative approach is about how the invisible is seen. The Tadashi Suzuki method is one of these integrative

⁹. Taisen Deshimaru, *Zen et arts martiaux* (Paris, Albin Michel : 1983), 18. Our translation of the French original: "L'esprit et le corps, l'extérieur et l'intérieur, la substance et les phénomènes : ces couples ne sont ni dualistes ni opposés, mais forment une unité sans séparation."

methods and fully harmonizes with my interdisciplinary explorations. In Phillip Zarrilli's excellent study entitled (*Towards*) *A Phenomenology of Acting*, the author points out:

Whether *taiqiquan* or another process of structured psychophysical training such as Suzuki training, what is important is engaging and exploring embodied consciousness, attending to, perception, imagining, in detail as one learns what it is like to listen, and to touch 'the untouchable.'¹⁰

Performing arts and Far Eastern martial arts highlight the holism as well as the harmonious unity between *mind, technique and body*. This is an important foundation stone in the creation of the modern body-mind concept that actors are currently working with.

***Shoshin* –the beginner's mind**

The Sōtō Zen school developed the concept of *shoshin*, which means *beginner's mind*. Practitioners of Sōtō Zen are taught to adopt this attitude of a pure, fresh mind seeing beyond dualism, apprehending everything with curiosity. Based on the paradoxes specific to Zen thinking, Master Shunryu Suzuki (1904-1971) points out that "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."¹¹

Implementing this concept in the art of acting helps actors keep their mind fresh, leave behind their preconceptions, "empty their cup", as the famous Zen koan says. This eternal resumption of the actor is also emphasized by Ariane Mnouchkine, who believes that artistic development lies in one's power to be in a continuous apprenticeship.¹² Routine, stereotypical thinking,

¹⁰. Phillip Zarrilli, (*Toward*) *A Phenomenology of Acting*, 9.

¹¹. Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Edited by Trudy Dixon, foreword by Huston Smith, introduction by Richard Baker (New York & Tokio: Weatherhill, 1995), 21.

¹². *Ariane Mnouchkine*, Introduction, selection and presentation by Béatrice Picon-Vallin, translated from French by Andreea Dumitru (Bucharest: "Camil Petrescu" Cultural Foundation, Cheiron Publishing House, 2010), 25.

fatigue, impasse, blockages of all kind, can be eliminated by accessing the *beginner's mind*. After observing certain physiological disorders with unpleasant artistic consequences in an actor's life, Grotowski makes the following observation:

Every actor – even one who is technically skilled – undergoes some form of vocal crisis after a period of several years. This is due to age which changes the physical structure of the body, demanding a new adaptation of the technique. The actor who wants to avoid stagnation must periodically begin all over again, learning breathing, pronunciation and the use of his resonators. He must rediscover his voice.¹³

Aikidō, and Japanese martial arts in general, have the gift of training the intuition, of taking the other's energy and transforming it, carrying it forward, sometimes with a different sense, in different direction. Martial arts constantly train one's sense of anticipation, which becomes useful in case of accidents or unforeseen events onstage. One can deal with the situation without breaking the convention, without giving away that little syncope. The fluidity of the mind, in harmony with the prompt, firm, adaptable kinesthetic response, makes such trained performer an ideal partner. By thinking and acting with the *beginner's mind*, one will know not to stop, to carry on playing, to adopt one of the possible scenarios based on the situation played. Ordering of the mind is achieved by ordering of the body, by adopting the correct posture. This is a necessary practice not only for actors but also for people in general.

The man on the stage should not be concerned with "to be or not to be", because the moment he asks himself this question, he already knows very well that "he is". The actor is first and foremost *the doer*, the one who acts, so "doing" is his permanent intention and he should be aware of the fact that he can change our logical perception of time (in the general sense). We can travel from the past to the present and then to the future, but the course can change from the present back into the past or from the future back to the present. The

¹³. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Edited by Eugenio Barba, Preface by Peter Brook (New York: Routledge, 2002), 172-173.

beginner's mind can make this journey possible. When the mind no longer perceives space and time as different entities but rather as a continuous whole, the duality disappears or rather harmonizes with the actions that are taken.

The attitude implied by the *beginner's mind* protects actors from the vices of the job: getting stuck in clichés and manners, the immeasurable pride, the egocentrism, the complacency of victors. It can help actors to stay fresh, alive, *now and here*. Communication and empathy are enhanced in the open mind of a beginner. This mind knows how to listen to its partner and accompanies the actor when observing the relativity of the phenomena. *The beginner's mind* is boundless and curious, always eager to learn new things.

Ichigo ichie and here and now

In Japanese culture, there is a concept called *ichigo ichie* whose literal meaning according to neurologist Ken Mogi (b. 1962) is "one time, one encounter."¹⁴ The concept is associated with Sen no Rikyū, who seems to have developed it during tea ceremonies, based on Zen philosophy, which is shaped by the ephemerality of the world and its phenomena. According to this concept, a meeting between two people, a meeting between a person and things, places or events, is transitory, and, as such, should be appreciated, cherished, honored. Therefore, each meeting is ephemeral, unique, unreproducible, but, above all, it is a chance, an opportunity. *Ichigo ichie* urges us to fully enjoy the moment of a meeting. It is like being brought back to life. The concept appears in Zen meditation, martial arts and Nō theater. In martial arts, *being present in the moment* is a matter of life and death. Martial arts require the practitioner to engage with effort, energy and full concentration each time.

The art of acting is fundamentally related to the present, to *here and now*. The actor sanctifies and amplifies the moment, he gives himself completely in. Theater is the art of the present, says Ariane Mnouchkine.¹⁵

¹⁴. Ken Mogi, *The Little Book of Ikigai. The Essential Japanese Way to Finding Your Purpose in Life* (London: Quercus Editions, 2017).

¹⁵. Ariane Mnouchkine. *Arta prezentului. Convorbiri cu Fabienne Pascaud* [*The Art of the Present. Conversations with Fabienne Pascaud*], translated from French by Daria Dimiu (Bucharest: "Camil Petrescu" Cultural Foundation, Cheiron Publishing House, 2010), 17.

When describing actors, director Mihai Măniuțiu finds that the actor's joy "seems to derive from everything that remains ambiguous and only has its confirmation in the moment."¹⁶ Theater director and educator Radu Penciulescu (b. 1930) designed a series of exercises entitled *Ici et maintenant* (*Here and Now*) that were published by Patrick Pezin in *Le livre des exercices* (1999). The actor, says Radu Penciulescu, is required to have a higher level of presence than other people, he must not imitate yesterday but the color of the existence resulting from the *here* and *now*. In his plea for the actor who amplifies the theatrical moment, Radu Penciulescu shows that:

There is some kind of mysterious computer in us, which can receive all the signs, all the vibrations of a situation, organize them in a fraction of a second without opposing them, and which can find the right, instinctive solution to something involving the whole human being, exceeding all its intellectual, physical, sensory abilities. [...] It is the gathering of certain stimuli that causes the human being to react to what is going on in his environment).¹⁷

In our everyday life, as Radu Penciulescu observes, "we are half asleep," and moments of genuine awakening are rare. The actor is obliged to create such work situations on his own. The actor's extraordinary situation demands a state of permanent hyper-awakening.

The concept of *ichigo ichie* (*one time, one encounter*) and the actor's presence *now and here* are closely related to the concept of *flow*, described by psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1934-2021) in his book *Finding Flow*:

¹⁶. Mihai Măniuțiu, *Despre mască și iluzie* [*On Mask and Illusion*], (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2007), 9. Our translation.

¹⁷. Radu Penciulescu, "Ici et maintenant" from "Les « Dits » de Radu Penciulescu," in Patrick Pezin, *Le livre des exercices à l'usage des comédiens, suivi de Une amulette faite de mémoire, La signification des exercices dans la dramaturgie de l'acteur par Eugenio Barba* (Saussan: Éditions L'Entretemps, 1999), 334. Our translation of the French original: "Il y a en nous une sorte d'ordinateur mystérieux, qui peut recevoir tous les signes, toutes les vibrations d'une situation, les organiser en une fraction de seconde sans s'opposer à eux et trouver la solution juste, instinctive, et qui implique tout l'être humain, dilaté dans toutes ses capacités intellectuelles, physiques, sensorielles. [...] C'est le rassemblement de certaines circonstances qui fait que l'être humain réagit à son milieu."

The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life (1997). For the American psychologist, the state of flow means complete mental engagement in a given situation, on all levels, when, immersed in an activity, our will, mind and heart resonate in unison with each other. When “what we feel, what we wish, and what we think are in harmony”, we have what Csíkszentmihályi calls a *flow experience*.¹⁸ Characteristics of the *flow* state are the complete immersion in an activity, absolute and harmonious focusing of psychic energy, the loss of the sense of time. *Flow* is an intrinsically autotelic experience (it is *per se*, a goal in itself), for which no reward is expected. The state of *flow* is associated with joy, satisfaction, fulfillment. The state of flow is characteristic to artists that are passionate about their art. In fact, the concept was discovered by the American psychologist while observing his painter friend as he was working. Csíkszentmihályi noticed how immersed he was in his activity, a state of incessant devotion and pleasure which persisted for hours. Actors are used to working long hours when training or rehearsing. The *flow* state generates those rare moments that will be remembered and, perhaps, will be part of the performance. Immersion does not have to be a goal in itself, it is free, success being only a consequence. It is the joy of *being in the present*, of doing what you like *now and here*:

When experience is intrinsically rewarding life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain.¹⁹

Being fully in the present theatrical moment, in a good *flow* state, grants actors the possibility of a valuable performance. An actor’s performance and excellence are closely related to his/her ability to focus their attention on the object of the attention, personal or common, in a given moment during his training or performance. According to American psychologist Daniel Goleman (b. 1946), the state of flow is achieved by focusing your attention. Pleasure, says Goleman, “is the emotional marker for flow.”²⁰

¹⁸. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow. The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (New York: Harper Collins/ Basic Books, 1997), 29.

¹⁹. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 69.

²⁰. Daniel Goleman, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence* (New York: Harper, 2013).

The concept of *mindfulness* is also closely related to *ichigo ichie*, *here and now* and *flow*, as it also involves a complete anchoring in the present. *Mindful awareness* means to fully participate in what you experience *here and now*. The concept has Buddhist origins, with roots in the practices of meditation, yoga, tai chi, qi gong. For American psychiatrist Daniel Siegel (b. 1957), *mindful awareness (conscious attention)* is “a form of attentional skill that focuses one’s mind on the present,”²¹ as he points out in his book *The Mindful Brain. Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being* (2007).

The imperatives of the *present*, together with the *beginner’s mind*, always curious and empathetic, demand from the actor to always be able to start all over again. According to Mihai Măniuțiu “the actor always starts himself: in this lies his glory.”²² Immersion in the *here and now*, awareness of the theatrical moment amplify the quality of acting, improve adaptability and creativity.

Creativity and reinventing tradition

In *Fūshikaden*, Zeami recommends to actors to “improve” the techniques learned from their ancestors using “their own talent”, letting us understand that the “*Transmission of the Flower of Acting Style*” from generation to generation takes place with the special contribution of each actor.²³ In this process, in which the teachings are passed down, there is a clear, firm, rigorous component, but also a subtle invitation to make your own creative contribution, to innovation. There is an objective part of the teachings passed on which allows for refreshment through subjective contribution. In his book *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, Eugenio Barba comments on the dialectics between the “field of objectivity” containing the technical procedures condensed into clear principles and the “opposite extreme”, the one

²¹. Daniel Siegel, *The Mindful Brain. Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

²². Mihai Măniuțiu, *Despre mască și iluzie [On Mask and Illusion]*, 27. Our translation.

²³. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nō Drama. The Major Treatises of Zeami*, translated by J. Thomas Rimer Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), XIX and *passim*.

of subjectivity, namely personal “heat”, the “temperature” of an individual. The opposite extreme, i.e. that of subjectivity, of the artist’s *temperature*, is the field of imagination, of creativity, of the invisible.

Eugenio Barba observes that, in the 20th century, there was a *revolution of the invisible*, which disclosed the importance of hidden structures in fields such as physics, sociology, psychology, art and myth. A similar revolution took place in theater too, except that here the invisible structures were not meant to be discovered in order to understand how reality functioned, but were re-created onstage so as to give greater vitality to scenic fiction.²⁴ As a result of his research, Eugenio Barba developed the concept of *subscore*, the invisible element of a theatrical score, part of the “actor’s dramaturgy.”²⁵ The subscore is built up from associations, memories, photographic images, the lyrics of a song, a melody, a line, etc., anything deemed by the actor’s imagination as appropriate for the situation or the texts he is working with. What matters is not the intellectual value of these elements but rather their effectiveness: once found, these elements provided for Barba’s actors materials to be used in their improvisations. The actions resulting from these suggestions were first performed in their natural dimension and then miniaturized, becoming part of the subscore, made “invisible”. While directors, actors, playwrights and the other performers onstage are all working on the same score, the subscore is each actor’s individual task, where he can bring his/her own contribution based on their creativity and imagination.

A quasi-divine faculty, as regarded by poets like Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, imagination is the creative force of the artist. Thanks to the imagination, the actor can experience the new, the original, he/she is able to invent new forms. In the case of the Far Eastern theatrical forms, which are codified, and which also include the Nō theater, tradition has enshrined body expression in fixed forms of play, in *kata*, which are passed on from master to disciple. *Kata* means rigor, the discipline of the form, the accuracy of techniques. On the other hand, it is also the freedom and the ardor of the

²⁴. Eugenio Barba, Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology. The Secret Art of the Performer* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991).

²⁵. Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, translated by Judy Barba (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), 29-33.

imagination. Thus arises the issue of the relationship between the fixed form – *kata* – and the creative freedom of the imagination. It is known that stable things last for a long time but they hurt with their rigidity, immobility, stiffness, sometimes even becoming synonymous with death. Of course, in case of the traditional theatrical forms of the Far East (Nō, Kabuki, Kathakali, Peking Opera, Balinese dance), the virtuosity of the artists is what lends the form its shine. Virtue arises from maintaining the form. The question one might ask is how can you respect *kata* but also revive the form? To what extent and how can tradition be recreated? To what extent does *kata* accept novelty?

In her work entitled *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare /The Creative Tradition of Nō Theatre*, researcher Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno dedicates a few pages to actors Kanze Hisao and Umewada Rokurō, who, in her opinion, managed to recreate the Nō tradition when approaching Zeami's play, *Izutsu* in two different ways. In *Izutsu*, both actors played *shite*.²⁶ Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno describes us the different visions and interpretations of these two actors: Kanze Hisao chose to be closer to imagism, metaphor and symbol, while Umewada Rokurō focused on the psychological state of a “woman waiting for a man,” to her madness, approaching a more realistic territory. Well versed in the Japanese language (her paper is bilingual), Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno's research provides us with valuable materials, such as excerpts from Kanze Hisao's writings and essays, as well as excerpts from her interview with actor Umewaka Rokurō.

From the writings of Kanze Hisao²⁷ (1925-1978), we learn that he rejected the idea that tradition is only a faithful observance and rendering of the form. He thought that tradition should be recreated with each new interpretation. To respect the form learned and inherited is only the first step in art, its foundation, says Kanze Hisao. The great actor of the Nō theater states:

²⁶. *Shite* (“the doer”) is the main character of the Nō Theatre. Most researchers of the Nō theatre consider that this theatrical genre has, in fact, only one character, the *shite*, the other – the *waki*, being only a surrogate of the audience or a mediator between the worlds. *Shite*, the spirit of a man or a woman, represents the “unquenchable suffering of the dead” in search of knowledge, understanding, peace and enlightenment.

²⁷. In gratitude, Kanze Hisao received the honorable distinction of Important Intangible Cultural Asset.

Kata-zuke – the book of directing, or the director’s notes on the play – should never be turned into supreme rules. It may seem as an exaggerated statement, but Nō is only alive onstage if the actor, on the foundation we talked about, superimposes his reading of the book of directing so that on each of these lines he imprints his thoughts and feelings on Nō, his theatrical vision, his vision on life and the world.²⁸

In his essay “Kokoro yori kokoro ni tsutawaru hana – nō no genshōgaku” (“The flower passed from one heart to another – the phenomenology of the Nō theater”), Kanze Hisao states that he would eliminate the *monomane*²⁹ from each character, because all “speculations on realistic acting” seem to him incompatible with *mugen nō*-type (*illusion-dream*)³⁰ plays. Kanze Hisao has valuable remark on playing “the woman waiting for a man.” For him, the male actor who plays a woman dressed in her husband’s clothes is a moment signifying “a world of androgynous, sensual beauty”, for which “both the actor and the audience should embark from the real world and journey to an inner time”. The scene of the reflection of the “woman waiting for a man”, dressed in her lover’s clothes, in the water of the well, is a “sexual ecstasy,”³¹ says Kanze Hisao. For researcher Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, the vision and performance of master Kanze Hisao contributed to the recreation of the tradition and to the firm outlining of “the eternity of love” in Zeami’s play *Izutsu*.

Our research focuses on Master Kanze Hisao’s preference for metaphors and images, his preference to work on the connection between the images

²⁸. Quoted by Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare* [The Creative Tradition of Nō Theatre] (Craiova: Scrisul Românesc Foundation, 2009), 168.

²⁹. *Monomane*, spelled and *mono-mane*, a concept of Zeami’s poetics, means “imitation of work”, a concept somewhat similar to Aristotelian mimesis. *Monomane* is only a seemingly realistic imitation, as the Nō theater means essentialization, stylization and a specific semantic code. The strictness of the rules, the norms, as well as the particular canon, protect the Nō theatre from the dangers of naturalism. However, in order to meet the requirements imposed by monomanes, Zeami recommends to the actors to study and carefully document the human behaviour.

³⁰. Quoted by Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare*, 166.

³¹. Quoted by Ruxandra Mărginean Kohno, *Teatrul Nō. Tradiția creatoare*, 168-169.

taken from the text and body language, the attention paid to the colors of energy. The *jo-no-mai* dance, a very slow dance from the second part of the paly *Izutsu*, demands from actor Kanze Hisao both his imagination and his entire vital energy. The dance lasts about ten minutes, but for Kanze Hisao time is elastic, it expands and contracts, the dance seems to last for a moment or a year. Kanze Hisao refers to his own dance using metaphors, and, as noted by Baudelaire and many others, metaphor is the language of imagination.

In the performer's style of acting, one might observe the *tameru* technique, characteristic of both the Nō and the Kabuki theater. The expression *tameru*, whose Chinese ideogram means "to accumulate" and whose Japanese ideogram has the meaning of "to bend something which is both flexible and resistant", indicates retention, holding back. Hence the notion of *tame* which means the ability to retain energy, to concentrate into an action which is limited in space the energies necessary for a much larger action, to compress the same amount of energy into restricted movements.³² Eugenio Barba admires Kanze Hisao's dance, especially when the shite sits motionless in the center of the stage, when the actor "is dancing inside himself", a moment called "the action of silence" or "to dance with the heart."³³ There is a principle in the Peking Opera which also exists in the schools of the Nō Theater: it stipulates that the movement should stop outside and continue inside. In a workshop conducted by Eugenio Barba, he told us: "the movement stops in space and continues in time." Such moments require the extensive, strong support of our imagination. We would like to mention that such moments resemble *Radiating* on the scale of the four Qualities of the Movement (*Molding, Flowing/Floating, Flying and Radiating*) according to Michael Chekhov's (1891-1955) method. There are also similarities with the exercise of the seventh level of energy in the Viewpoints method, as developed by Anne Bogart, where the actor suddenly stops the unleashed movement of energy and "freezes", does not move any longer, but inside him/her the energy reaches its maximum.

The actor-poet Hideo Kanze reveals:

³². Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 28.

³³. Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 29.

I want to exist on the stage as a flower might, one which by chance has just happened to blossom there. Each member of the audience too sits brooding over various images of his own. Like a single flower. The flower is alive. The flower must breathe. The stage tells the story of the flower.³⁴

The reference to Zeami's *hana*³⁵ is obvious but, beyond that, the actor reveals fragments from his subscore and the way he/she makes the invisible visible. It is his particular way to infuse novelty into an old *kata*, to sustain the ancient form through a color of the energy that belongs to him. In his work, *The Invisible Actor* (1998), Master Yoshi Oida (b. 1933) uses the concepts of *tai* and *yū*,³⁶ by which Zeami attempted to divide learning into "fundamental structure" and "phenomenon". In Zeami's poems, *tai* is the flower and *yū* is its scent. Yoshi Oida's comment extends the explanation by adding another example: if *tai* is the moon, *yū* is the moonlight. We can say that the actor Kanze Hisao did not work on the structure but rather on the light of the *yū*, and those who saw him perform – including Tadashi Suzuki, Yoshi Oida and Eugenio Barba – shared the same scent of the flower blooming in the moonlight.

The contribution of invention and novelty offered by Master Kanze Hisao is an example from a stage performance. We will now highlight the part played by imagination which manifests during training. A principle by Yoshi Oida says: "Ideally, any physical exercise that you do should also become an exercise of imagination, not just working your body."³⁷

³⁴. Quoted by Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 29.

³⁵. Hana (Flower) is the main and particular concept of Zeami's poetics, it is the concept he always returns to, developing it and presenting its details or connections, demonstrating its practical use for the benefit of the actors. It is both an ethical and an aesthetic concept, it is metaphorical and ambiguous. *Hana* follows the *monomane* principle, but it is the original, the unusual, the element of surprise that removes the rigid conventionalism of imitation. *Hana* contributes to the quality of a performance. *Hana*, says Zeami, is in the depths of our art, it is its secret and essence.

³⁶. In Japanese, *tai* means body, and *yū* can be translated as *mystery*, *darkening*, *something that is hiding*. In Zeami's poetics, *yūgen* is an essential concept that signifies the grace, the charm, the secret spell of the actor's creation.

³⁷. Yoshi Oida and Lorna Marshall, *The Invisible Actor*, Foreword by Peter Brook (New York & London: Routledge, 1998), 18.

Working with Yoshi Oida, I had the opportunity to experience the imaginary in a certain exercise called *Fune kogi undo* (the rowing exercise), taken over from *aikidō*. This exercise was taken over from *Shinto* purification rituals and brought into *aikidō* by Morihei Ueshiba.³⁸ The *Fune kogi undo* exercise is also called *ame no torifume no gyo* (the rowing of celestial birds) and aims to connect voice with movement and to exercise the balance of Yin-Yang energies. The movements of the body are physical metaphors. Standing with one foot in front of you, the torso and arms move back-and-forth, as if rowing, while uttering *ei-hou, ei-hou* and *ei-sa, ei-sa*. In the *Shinto* ritual, these sounds form a kind of *mantra* called *kotodama* (word spirit). According to *Shinto* religion, sounds affect our mental state, thus, the vowels have certain aims: E for mind, I for spirit, O for power, U for emotions, A for birth and creativity. Working on this exercise with my students, I recommended them to make an *imaginary journey*, to build their inner images, to see with their own eyes the places they “cross” while rowing. In the exercises of the Tadashi Suzuki method, there are moments of free composition by the expressions of the arms, where imagination can intervene. The second part of the exercise, *stamping*, when the actors stand up and move forward, is such a moment. Moving forward with the same pace – *suriashi*, the actors are free to use their arms to create expressions that convey their emotions and thoughts. This complementarity between the body segments, established by Zeami, appears in many exercises of the Suzuki method, an opportunity to individualize the common requirements through expressive gestures. Such is the *statue* exercise, where the movement of the lower body is the same for everyone, while the arms move freely, according to everyone’s imagination. In fan and umbrella studies, in the actors’ dialogue of gestures with these objects, imagination also has a supportive role. Based on the *tame* technique, by compressing the action and retaining energy, one can generate suggestive body metaphors.

In conclusion, there is a living controversy between the fixed form – *kata*, and the fresh, renewing impulses brought by the restless imagination in accordance with the ideas of the current times. *Kata* is not the final destination but rather a solid base for creativity. *Kata* is not a *stazione termini*,

³⁸. Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) is the founder of the Japanese martial art of aikidō.

but rather the *starting point*. The purpose of the training is to prepare actors for the labor that follows, the roles they have to take up, to teach them how to create useful tools for their profession, to install in them patterns of theatrical thinking which, with the contribution of imagination, will be able to lead to theatrical creation. “For no matter how skillful an actor may be, if he does not perform his own plays, he will be no better than a great warrior on the battlefield without his weapons,” said Zeami.³⁹ Entering the uncertain realm of creation, a trained actor will be armed with the necessary “weapons” to face and create theatrical fiction.

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³⁹. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nō Drama. The Major Treatises of Zeami*, 21-22.

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