
SUMMARY

THE MIRACLE OF EMBODIED METAMORPHOSES TAIWANESE DANCE THEATRE AND THE THEATRE OF MOVEMENT

This monograph presents the works of the most important Taiwanese dance theatres and theatres of movement of our times and their artistic directors: Liu Jingmin (Liu Ruoyu) and U-Theatre (You Juchang / Youren Shengu) and Lin Lizhen and her Legend Lin Dance Theatre (Wugou Wudao Juchang). It presents the activities and changes in the aesthetics of these groups since the 1980s and 1990s until now.

My aim is to show the interplay between Western theatre reformers and Taiwanese choreographers and performers who favour a broad understanding of cultural heritage. They transgress the boundaries between cultures and epochs, and strive to bring together the Far Eastern and Euro-American dance conventions of the past and the present: techniques derived from the local Taiwanese performing arts, Far Eastern classical forms of dance, folk forms of Chinese ritual theatre, meditation techniques, Japanese *butō*, *taijiquan*, Asian traditions of martial arts, calligraphy etc., with techniques typical of 20th-century European and American modern and contemporary dance, inspired by such choreographers and dancers as Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham and Pina Bausch. As a result, they create a new concept of a transcultural body, which is both local and global and oppose the hierarchical vision of cultural tradition. Contemporary Taiwanese choreographers are not only placed on a map of international experimental performing arts but are also presented in the local context. Their preferences often focus on the peripheral, the forgotten and the marginalized. In this way, they undermine the official discourse on issues related to culture and art. My project is interdisciplinary in its nature, and I therefore make use of the methodology typical of comparative intercultural research, which combines the viewpoints of the art historian, culture critic, anthropologist and sociologist of performing arts.

The monograph consists of several chapters. In Chapter I and II I focus on defining the terminology, and understanding the notion of body / corporality in Chinese traditional philosophy, medicine, martial arts, painting, sculpture and theatre. The philosophical and aesthetic aspects of the Chinese body are discussed in great detail. I deal with such issues as the unity of body and mind in Chinese culture, the relational character of the human body, and meditation / breathing techniques as useful tools in the process of self-cultivation. One of my aims is to show how the traditional idea of the body changes in the 20th and 21st century under the impact of such contemporary forms of art as body art, installation art, video art and dance theatre. I describe how Chinese body art calls into question the official discourse on body which dominated during Martial Law in Taiwan (until 1987)

and in communist China. I am also interested in women's art and the feminist understanding and representation of corporality / the body in the works of Taiwanese female artists. Finally, I try to explain why the ideas of the Eastern body aesthetics (*dongfang shentiguan*) became so popular in some circles of modern dance choreographers and dancers at the end of the 20th century and how this phenomenon shaped the discourse on the theatrical body at that time.

The next chapter of my monograph is devoted to one of Jerzy Grotowski's most creative disciples, Liu Jingmin. The theatrical activities of Liu Jingmin, who created U-Theatre, are also presented in a broad multicultural context. First, I try to show how Jerzy Grotowski – himself influenced by the Far Eastern traditional theatre and philosophy – inspired Liu's idea of actors' physical and vocal training. Then, I focus on Liu's Plan of Tracing Back, announced by Liu in 1989, which consisted of two complimentary programs. The former intended to overcome the dichotomy that divided modern people from their forefathers, the body from the mind, man from nature, man from God, and the actor from the spectator. The latter had a more practical aim – to determine the essence of the "Taiwanese body" and the meaning of "Taiwanese form of performance". The members of the group became interested in Chinese exorcist theatre (*nuoxi, nuotangxi, Anshun dixi*), Japanese and Chinese traditions of theatrical mask, local puppet theatre (*budaixi*), and traditional costumes. In 1992 the leader of the group initiated the Plan of Finding Ones' Heart and turned it into a formation of holy drummers (*shengu*). Their performances departed from the dramatic form (plot and character in the traditional sense) and approached a form of contemplation through movement and sound. The actors turned to meditation and breathing techniques, *taijiquan*, Sufi dances and pilgrimages / long distance walking as a source of their new understanding of body and human perfection. Their point of departure was rigorous physical training, exploration of the possibilities of one's own body, careful observation of one's surroundings, and a deeper understanding of one's own cultural tradition. The goal was internal / spiritual and external / physical transformation. By reaching the highest level of the acting craft, Liu sought to influence the spirituality of modern man. Just like her great master, Jerzy Grotowski, Liu dared to pose questions which reached far beyond the theatrical sphere and touched the very essence of human existence.

The last chapter of my monograph is devoted to Lin Lizhen, the outstanding Taiwanese choreographer, dancer and director of the world-known Legend Lin Dance Theatre (Wugou Wudao Juchang). In the course of painstaking work, Lin managed to create an individual, inimitable style for her theatre, which derived signs of its exceptional language from many sources, including Daoist and Buddhist beliefs, traditions of Taiwanese aboriginal people, shamanistic and exorcist culture of South-Western China, Asian meditation techniques, Chinese martial arts and gymnastics. In this chapter, I describe the metamorphoses of Lin Lizhen's artistic path and try to expose the specificity of her dancers' body language, the structure of their performances, their connections with religious rituals and local traditions, and the meaning of such symbols as water, fire etc. My aims are to show the role of meditation and respiration techniques in actors' training, the impact of *taijiquan* movement techniques on the slow motion aesthetics of Wugou, and inspirations coming from *butō* and Japanese culture. I also point to the similarities between Lin Lizhen's philosophy of art and the American transcendentalists' ideas concerning Nature and human beings as a part of it.

Lin Lizhen and Liu Ruoyu are charismatic figures for whom dance / movement becomes a vehicle for self-improvement as an artist and human being. Their dancers become a sort of practitioners, who not only change themselves but the world which surrounds them as well.