

**Opening the Actor's Spiritual Heart: The Zen Influence
on *Nô* Training and Performance
With Notes on Stanislavski and the Actor's Spirituality**

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The Tendai Buddhist priest Shunkan, exiled on Devil's island for conspiracy against the Heike ruler, Kiyomori, sits immobilized center stage holding the letter that reprieves his two companions from living hell, but which does not mention his own name. His mask, inclined slightly forwards, is carved with lines of age and intense suffering. As the chorus sings the first half of the *kuse*,¹ he sits, apparently doing nothing for an extended period of time while the other characters silently witness. This is the *i-guse* (seated *kuse*) section of the fifteenth century Japanese *nô* play *Shunkan*,² attributed to Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443), poet, playwright, theoretician, and creator of the *nô* drama.

The deep, silent concentration of the actor performing the *i-guse* bears a striking resemblance to the Buddhist monk engaged in seated meditation *zazen*. Indeed, the audience's fascination with moments of no-action results, according to Zeami, from the actor's "greatest, most secret skill," an ability to manifest "a concentration that transcends his own consciousness"³ or, in the Mark Nearman translation, "[. . . an awareness that goes beyond] the activities of the discriminating functions of the mind."⁴ Immobilized at the center of his body, the actor creates an "inner spiritual intensity" that connects "all the arts through one intensity of mind."⁵

The concentration of a master actor in the *i-guse* is one of the more striking manifestations in the *nô* of a fully integrated mind-body signifying the highest level of acting. Zeami calls such peak acting moments *myôka fu*, "The art of the flower of peerless charm," an aesthetic designation that Benito Ortolani and others equate with the experience of Zen *satori* (enlightenment).⁶ Mind-body unity in the *nô* is achieved when the actor transcends his temporal self to unite with the hidden aspects of his deepest self or "Buddha nature"—accomplished in the selfless act of "becoming" the character. At such moments, according to Zeami, the actor opens his spiritual heart to the spectators, creating exquisite feelings that cause them to gasp in momentary wonder—entering a state where their distinction-making minds

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are suspended in a vision of the shimmering such-ness of the world, or the Buddhist “One True Reality.”

The search for a methodology that enables the actor to attain peak moments of great emotional intensity in which he overcomes mind-body duality but does not lose control of his performance has been a central preoccupation in the history of acting. Answers have remained elusive in the West, which posits the body as separate and different from the mind,⁷ whereas, in the East, Buddhist spirituality holds that the mind and body are already a unity whose original ontological wholeness can only be experienced in and through spiritual cultivation (*shugyō*) involving an intensive body discipline which aims at extinguishing the ordinary, everyday mind constituting the ego.⁸ The term “*shugyō*” (or sometimes shortened to simply “*gyō*”) means to train the body, “but it also implies training, as a human being, the spirit or mind by training the body.”⁹ While the term “*shugyō*” is most closely associated with Buddhist cultivation, it also applies to the Buddhist-influenced arts of Japan known as the Way (*dō*) arts. The *nō*, along with poetry, calligraphy, painting, martial arts (among others), is considered a Way art in which training (*keiko*) is viewed as a form of ascetic discipline (*shugyō*)¹⁰ that, like Zen cultivation, leads by stages toward spiritual enlightenment.¹¹ Indeed, “the central tradition in Japanese aesthetics . . . is one in which aesthetic experience and religious experience are ultimately of the same kind.”¹²

While much has been written on Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian elements in *nō* plays, only recently has scholarship revealed that Zeami was closely involved with Sōtō Zen *shugyō* and that Zen aesthetics and cultivation practices may have deeply inspired his conception of actor training.¹³ This paper makes connections between Zeami’s evolving theories of actor training and Zen *shugyō* in seeking to answer the question of how a training methodology based in “disciplining the body” educates the *nō* actor to achieve moments of mind-body unity in performance. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the actor’s spirituality in Stanislavski’s method of actor training and suggests that, while Stanislavski eventually came to view disciplining the body as the key to the actor’s “organicity” (a translation of his term for mind-body unity), his approach to acting remained largely dualistic.

The paper draws upon translations of Zeami’s treatises and the scholarship available in English, which have become the primary source materials on the *nō* for Western acting and performance teachers, for evidence of Zen-inspired aspects of *nō* training. Statements by contemporary *nō* artists (primarily in Zeami’s lineage) regarding their acting processes, while not necessarily representative of the experience of medieval *nō* actors, nonetheless provide an important modern perspective that helps to collaborate and interpret Zeami’s theories for Westerners. Throughout, the author has drawn on her study of corporeal mime, *nō shimai*, Stanislavski-based acting, and her daily praxis of Zen meditation. While the effort to locate Zeami’s work in the tradition of Zen *shugyō* is scholarly, the interpretation

of Zeami's writings regarding *nô* training is intuitive—deriving primarily from the author's lived experience of her own body.

Historical Connections Between Zeami and Zen

Zeami Motokiyo continued the work begun by his father Kan'ami Kiyotsugu (1333-1384) to elevate the *nô* from a rustic and crude mimetic entertainment to a highly refined form of dance drama. In Zeami's twenty-three treatises, which serve as a guide for the actor's personal and artistic development, we glimpse his concern with transforming the popular but crude *sarugaku*¹⁴ mime into an art of exquisite beauty that would win the acclaim both of his aristocratic patrons and the common people.

The question for Zeami was how to create an enduring and beautiful art form with imperfect actors drawn from the lowest stratum of society. He understood that refinement of *sarugaku nô* demanded actors capable of overcoming personal limitations in order to attain artistic perfection—and that, in order to develop such actors, he needed to systematize training and to ground it in rigorous and challenging physical discipline. It would not be surprising, therefore, that he looked to the Zen cultivation practices, popular among all classes of the time, as models for *nô* training.¹⁵

Until recently, the primary evidence of Zeami's contact with Zen, outside the extensive use of Zen terminology and sayings in his treatises, had been the sporadic references in contemporary literature linking his name to Zen institutions and individuals.¹⁶ However, Ôtomo Taishi's revelation several years ago that Zeami became a lay Zen monk at age twenty one (much earlier than previously thought)¹⁷ has lent support to the scholarship that argues that *nô* theatre and the Buddhist-inspired language of Zeami's treatises reflect a deep experiential knowledge of Zen *shugyô*.¹⁸ Perhaps spurred by the untimely death of his fifty-two-year-old father in 1384, Zeami became a student that same year at Fuganji, a newly established Sôtô Zen monastery in Nara prefecture.¹⁹ That Zeami may have begun Zen *shugyô* on assuming the leadership and artistic direction of his father's troupe suggests that Zen philosophy and practice would have exerted a powerful formative influence on the development of all aspects of the *nô* and, in particular, *nô* training (*keiko*).

Preconditions for Attaining the Way

As a student at Fuganji temple, Zeami would have been familiar with Sôtô Zen precepts and cultivation practices, and, in all probability, would have come into contact with the major writings of Dôgen Kigen (1200-1253), the founder of the Sôtô Zen sect, whose *Shôbôgenzô* ("Treasury of the True Dharma Eye") was being translated from Chinese by a famous, resident monk-scholar.²⁰ In a section entitled "Guidelines for Studying the Way," Dôgen stipulates that those who wish to follow the Buddha way must have a strong desire, single minded devotion,

avoid thoughts of fame and profit, and must study under the guidance of a master. Similarly, Zeami writes that the actor must not only have the requisite talent, but also have a deep devotion to the art of *nô*, exclusiveness of commitment, and study with an acknowledged master.²¹

Disciplining the Body to Overcome the Mind

Overcoming the provisional duality between a mind that posits itself as distinct and separate from the body is a central aim of training in Zen and the *nô*. As Antonio Demasio has recently asserted, Descartes's ideas of a separate ego-self located in a rational mind is erroneous; Spinoza had actually been correct when he posited that the mind is only an aspect of the body. "Knowing" and being aware of the self as knowing that constitute what we call mind is closely bound up with emotion and feeling generated by the body's responses to internal and external phenomenon.²² Over time, these responses "habituate" the mind-body giving rise to an "ego-self" ("autobiographical self"—Demasio's term). Zen Buddhists believe that the ego must be overcome in order to restore the original ontological unity of mind-body and that this overcoming is accomplished by cultivation. Freed from the ego, the cultivator experiences the world from the perspective of non-differentiation or "no self"—an experience of "emptiness" (*ku/sunyata*), as the Buddhists term it, roughly analogous to the Western concept of *ek-stasis*.

Disciplining the Body in Zen Shugyô

"In the Buddha way, you should always enter enlightenment through practice."²³

Zen cultivation aims at eradicating the ego through the discipline of "just sitting" (*shikan taza*)—more generally (*zazen*)—established by Dôgen as the core practice of Zen *shugyô*. The "just" indicates both the method of sitting in a lotus position and the single mindedness of the devotion to and concentration on sitting.²⁴ In his detailed instructions for sitting *zazen*, Dôgen maintains that the *zazen* posture is the *a priori* root of "no-mind"—"the dropping off of mind and body" characterizing awakening.²⁵ *Zazen* replaces the individual's everyday posture and mode of being in the world by restricting behavior and focusing the mind inward. With time, this new attitude becomes inscribed in the preconscious level of the body—what Yuasa terms "the dark consciousness."²⁶

The essential meaning of Zen cultivation, according to Shiginori Nagatomo, consists of the conformation of an individual to a particular bodily "form," whether it pertains to seated meditation or to daily activities prescribed by monastic rules. The underlying assumption is that one learns to *correct* one's mode of consciousness first by assuming a certain bodily "form."²⁷

The *zazen* posture optimizes the shedding of the ego-self by bringing the cultivator's activity as close as possible to zero. Immobilized in an environment, cut off from the distractions of the outside world, the cultivator is as though dead—a living corpse. Sitting upright, yet relaxed, with attention to the breath and the proper inclination of the head and spine, the cultivator attempts to disengage from the constant stream of thoughts and emotions passing through the mind. In the early stages of cultivation, the mind intervenes to correct the posture, stop thought, and will the breath. However, with time, the mind gradually gives up control and begins to merely observe events occurring inside and outside the body. The cultivator is learning, according to Dôgen, to "think, not thinking" as awareness gradually moves from the head to the body's vital center located in the solar plexus. Eventually, the cultivator may experience the dawning of a deep calm or groundedness, which Dôgen terms "the *dharma* gate of great ease and joy,"²⁸ brought about by the gradual dissolution of the discriminating mind in the body.

Zazen has often been erroneously equated with Oriental quietism or a withdrawal from the world of action. However, the purpose of "just sitting" is the cultivation of "mindfulness"—a relaxed concentration and focus on the task at hand. Ideally, there should be little difference between the mind-body of *zazen* and that engaged in activity. As a means of strengthening the "mindfulness" cultivated in *zazen*, Dôgen prescribed proper forms (*katachi*) for daily activities such as eating, walking, and worship.²⁹

Similarly, Zeami did not see art and life as two distinct spheres of endeavor. In the *Kakyô* ("Mirror Held to the Flower"), he indicates that the "intensity of mind" that the actor exhibits in moments of non-action or "pauses" in the action should be carried over to everyday activity as a means of strengthening the actor's concentration and attention: "Such attitudes need not be limited to the moments involved in actual performance. Morning and night alike, and in all the activities of daily life, an actor must never abandon his concentration."³⁰ (Stanislavski voiced a similar idea in *An Actor Prepares*.)³¹

Disciplining the Body in *Nô* Training (*Keikô*)

Throughout his treatises Zeami draws strong parallels between training in the Two Arts (*nikyoku*, song and dance) and Zen cultivation. In the *Kakyô*, he writes that training in the Two Arts serves to cultivate and prepare the actor's mind and body for the eventual blossoming of his artistry. Citing a hymn drawn from the seventh-century Chinese Zen (Ch'an) master Huinêng, Zeami implies by analogy that training in the Two Arts is comparable to Zen cultivation in that both involve physical disciplines as a means to attaining mastery.

Before he [the actor] can know the Flower, he must know the seed. The flower blooms from the imagination; the seed represents merely the various skills of our art. In the words of an ancient sage:

The mind-ground contains the various seeds (*tane*),
 With the all-pervading rain each and every one sprouts.
 Once one has suddenly awakened to the sentience of
 the flower,
 The fruit of enlightenment matures of itself.³²

The Buddhist interpretation of Huinêng's hymn is that each of us carries the "seeds" (*tane*) of enlightenment within in that we possess the original "mind-ground" of Buddha nature. However, the "flower" (*hana*) of enlightenment will not bloom unless we cultivate our mind according to Buddhist teachings ("rain"). Perhaps inspired by Dôgen's writings on the importance of disciplining the body as the path to enlightenment ("seed"), the way that Zeami applies this passage to *nô* training means performing techniques (*waza*) or, more generally, in Yuasa's interpretation of the term, the mode of being a body.³³ The actor plants the seeds of his artistry through life long physical training in which the dance and chant become "second nature"—beyond the control of the rational mind.³⁴

By systematizing *nô* training and grounding it in The Two Arts, Zeami created a training methodology that aimed at overcoming the mind in the mastered body. As defined by Nagatomo, training (*keiko*) means "to put one's body in a certain form (*kata*). Specifically, it means an acquisition of various performing techniques (*waza*) by means of *appropriating* modalities of one's body. It is a process of bodily acquisition (*taitoku*),"³⁵ in which the actor learns by imitating forms handed down by tradition and shaped by the master. Originality and spontaneity, valued in Western, actor training methodologies, are seen only as the end products of a system of rote learning. With time, the chant and dance become rooted in the body-memory. As in the Zen cultivation practice of "just sitting," the body becomes mind.

Like medieval Buddhist practices of moving meditation, the repetitive training in *nô* mime-dance functions to still the mind and turn it inward.³⁶ Meditation in motion trained the cultivator to look into the interior of the mind by placing the body in continual movement at the center of which is a core of stillness and calm. "As the cultivator moves his body, whether through continuous walking or repeating prescribed movements over and over, the mind gradually ceases to respond to outside sensory stimuli"³⁷—a state paradoxically termed in Buddhism as "stillness in motion" (*dochu no sei*), in which the mind does not cling to any particular

object, but dwells at the core of all activity with the “calm immovability” characterizing “no mind” (*mushin*).³⁸

The *nô* mime-dance

An examination of the *nô* mime-dance reveals the reorganization of the postural tonus of the body, the limitation and simplification of movement, and the focusing of the mind inward on the body’s vital center that characterize seated and moving cultivation practices.

The *nô* mime-dance is an art of posture more so than movement. The immobility of *zazen* is to be found in the stance and carriage of the dance patterns (*kata*), which, according to Kunio Komparu, “are the bases . . . of the acquisition of the technique of non-movement.”³⁹ *Kata* are essentially sculptural forms, derived from a basic standing position (*kamae*), that are carried through space by a progression or walk (*hakobi*). The *kamae* might be described as a standing version of the seated *zazen* posture. In both postures, the pelvis inclines forward, the back extends straight up from the pelvis, shoulders are relaxed and slightly back, arms are rounded (as though holding an egg under each armpit), and the body leans slightly forward. Most importantly, the center of gravity in both postures is located two inches below the navel in the abdomen—variously referred to as the *seika-no-itten*, *tanden*, and *hara*.

The immobility of the *zazen* posture and the “bound” quality of the *nô* mime-dance are a psycho-physical technique that develops the individual’s will and concentration. (Stanislavski and Etienne Decroux were both aware of the power of immobility to intensify the actor’s will. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski writes of immobility as a means of developing the actor’s “inner intensity.”)⁴⁰

Breath in Zen Cultivation

Counting breaths, or other focused breathing practices during *zazen*, assists the cultivator in opening a path that relocates the mind deeply within. Each breath melts away the habitual tension, signifying the mind’s grip on the body, while training the cultivator to disengage from the affective responses to sensation and emotion arising in the mind and body. Prolonged sitting with attention to the breath leads to the strengthening of focus and augmentation of the vital flow of energy in the body. As the cultivator is gradually freed from the tyranny of thoughts, images, and emotions, a luminous field begins to open up within, signifying the fronting of the body as the lived modality of being in the world.

With time, the discriminating mind that intervenes to adjust the posture or will the breath is silenced, and the body breathes of its own accord. The cultivator begins to experience a sense of “attunement” that Nagatomo defined as “felt inner resonance (*kannô dôkô*) with the rhythms of nature.”⁴¹ Dôgen writes, “the *zazen* of even one person at one moment imperceptibly accords with all things and fully

resonates through all time."⁴² Breath creates an oceanic feeling of the body merging with nature. As distance between mind and body is overcome, so is distance between self (posited here as a unity of mind and body) and the world. When the discriminating mind that inserts itself between the perceiver and the perceived is extinguished, according to Dôgen, "The total body (*zenshin*) is a total mind"⁴³ or the One Mind of Buddha.

The Place of Breath in the Nô

Nô training, as designed by Zeami, reveals a deep, experiential knowledge of the power of the breath to dissolve the boundaries of the ego-self and to relocate the mind in the *tanden*. According to Zeami's son-in-law and artistic heir, Komparu Zenchiku (1405-1468), "Breath," is "the essence of performance."⁴⁴ Zeami writes "breath" using the term *ki* (*ch'i* in Chinese),⁴⁵ which Nearman translates as "activating force."⁴⁶ *Ki* energy is the life force that animates nature and the human being as a microcosm. While it is found throughout the body, it is concentrated in the *tanden*.

In *Zen shugyô*, breath is the principle technical means of strengthening and augmenting the vital *ki* energy in the *tanden*. According to Mike Samayama, "When breathing is concentrated at the *tanden*, each exhalation releases tension in the upper body and gathers the strength of the body in the *tanden*. This causes energy to radiate through the body and perfect its form."⁴⁷ Similarly, training in the Two Arts serves to cultivate the actor's *tanden* as the source of his vital and creative energy. In his writings, Zeami calls the actor a "vessel of nature" using a character that is pronounced *ki* (see glossary, second character is the one used by Zeami in this case) and that sometimes carries the meaning of skill or ability. Zeami writes, "It has been said that the fundamental properties of dance and song have always arisen from the Buddha nature that is stored in all sentient beings."⁴⁸ In the Nearman translation, the "Buddha nature that is stored in all sentient beings" is translated as "the storehouse of Nyorai Buddha."⁴⁹

Throughout a lifetime of training in the Two Arts beginning at age seven, the actor's breath gradually settles in the *tanden*, so that the body *qua* breath becomes the source of his creativity rather than the discriminating mind. Repetitive practice of the conventional dances of the *nô* trains the actor to disengage movement from the mind's control. Zeami indicates in his treatises that the actor's mind should not wander as he focuses assiduously on perfecting the Two Arts. He must have a moment-to-moment focus in his work that grounds his mind and body on the tasks of dancing and singing in order to prepare the way for the body to perform without the insertion of the controlling mind.

Just as *zazen* assists the cultivator in achieving "felt inner resonance" with the phenomenal world, *nô* training assists the actor in reconnecting with the universal rhythms of life. Zeami viewed "all things in the universe" partaking of a universal

structuring principle called *jo-ha-kyū*: “good and bad, large and small, with life and without partake of the process of *jo*, *ha*, and *kyū*. From the chirp of the bird to the buzzing of insects.”⁵⁰ The terms *jo*, *ha*, *kyū* mean “beginning (*jo*),” “breaking away/through” (*ha*), and “rapid” (*kyū*) and are roughly equivalent to the breath’s tri-partite structure, consisting of a pause before the inhalation, rising inhalation, and exhalation.

An actor who has thoroughly absorbed the order of *jo-ha-kyū* and “made the process a natural part of himself,” Zeami writes in the *Shūgyoku tokka* (“Finding Gems, Gaining Flowers”), is one who creates a sense of “Fulfillment” (*jōju*) in the audience.⁵¹ By “Fulfillment,” Zeami appears to be saying that the actor’s performance brings the audience into accord with the universal rhythms of life. Since the source of the actor’s performance lies in the *tanden*, breath is the vehicle that brings both the actor and audience into accord.

Chanting in Zen Cultivation

Chanting of *sutra* texts plays an important part in Zen cultivation where, accompanied by bells and percussion instruments, it often begins and ends periods of *zazen*. Chanting serves several vital, technical purposes beyond its obvious ritual and instructional significance. On its most basic level, it regulates the cultivator’s breath and opens up the *tanden*. Deep breaths must be taken to sustain the lengthy passages of text that are intoned with drawn out vowel sounds. Since the chanting is generally a group activity, the cultivator is urged and constrained by the effort and example of his cohorts not to break the intoned phrase with an inopportune breath. The vibrations of the prolonged vowel tones resonate deeply within the body dissolving tension and opening the cultivator’s inner ear to the vibrations in the meditation hall. Group effort leads to an augmentation of energy that carries the cultivator to a greater level of spiritual intensity and concentration so that, when the chanting abruptly ceases, the resonating and pregnant silence that follows forms a startling contrast that acutely attunes the cultivator to the vast emptiness (*ku*) of the universe. Emptied of tension by the intense vibrations of the chant, the exertion in sustaining breath, and the profound, reverberating silence of the aftermath, the cultivator commences *zazen* with a deepened sense of *mushin*, variously translated as One Mind, no-body, or no-mind.

The vibratory and tonal quality of chanted, sung, and spoken language touches the individual’s soma on a level below cognition, opening his mind *qua* body to the true essence of all things (Buddha-nature—*shō*). The importance of oral/aural tradition in Zen Cultivation, as Bernard Faure points out, has been largely overlooked by scholars.⁵² In Zen Buddhist tradition, sounds and words have frequently been the pretext that brings about sudden enlightenment. Nagatomo

states that of the five sensory organs, the ears are the most open to the external world in *zazen* and are, therefore, the organ most susceptible to stimulation.⁵³ He relates that Dôgen reached enlightenment "upon hearing the words" that Master Nyojô spoke.⁵⁴ In Ch'an and Zen Buddhist tradition, a powerful connection exists between words, as sounds rather than meaning. (In a similar vein, Grotowski experimented with the vibratory power of ritual songs to take over the body and suggest impulse and movement.⁵⁵ He discovered that the tonal vibrations of certain ancient songs affected a "becoming one with the song" and compares their power to Hindu or Buddhist mantra, "a sonic form, very elaborate which englobes the position of the body and the breathing.")⁵⁶

Breath and Chant in the Nô

Zeami indicates that the breath originating in the actor's *tanden* is the source not only of his artistry, but also of the chant and movement. Motoyoshi, quotes his father (Zeami) as saying "to truly grasp the deep and true principles of the chant, one must first master the fundamentals of exhalation and inhalation, train the voice, learn to color melodies, and thus arrive at immovable heights of an art founded on a mastery of the breath."⁵⁷ According to Zeami, "*jo* can be said to be represented by the stage of hearing the pitch and gathering the breath. *Ha* is represented by pushing out the breath, and *kyû* by production of the voice itself."⁵⁸ Of these three parts, "*jo*," the preparation that involves hearing the pitch simultaneously with the inhalation, is the most crucial. During performance, the actor inhales the chant into his *tanden*, attuning his pitch to its vibratory, sound energy. Carried on the path of his exhalation, the vibratory energy of the chant engages his body in movement.

The *nô* texts, which are rich in the poetic language of imagery and allusion, create meaning by the careful juxtaposition of words as sounds that convey emotion, which hovers above and beyond the words as meaning. Since the purpose of the *nô* texts is the lyrical evocation of the most deeply felt emotions of the *shite*, it is this vibratory energy of words as sound carried on the long drawn out vowels of the chanted text to which Zeami seems to be referring in the *Fûshikaden*, when he says that the performer must grasp the "inner music" of the chant.⁵⁹

Sound energy originating in the *tanden* is carried on the breath and engages the body in dance, manifesting in visible outer form the emotion contained in the text. Like the chant, the dance partakes of the tri-partite structure of the breath. The late *nô* actor Kanze Hisao notes that the abstract *kata sashikomi/hiraki*, which is considered a structural element of the *nô* dance because of its frequent occurrence, "is a technique that manages or controls breathing itself. In an instant the surrounding space is congealed, then relaxed and released. Along with these movements, spectators breathe. They breathe, as one, the supercharged air and space."⁶⁰

Zeami was concerned with the power of the chant to affect the spectator's sense of hearing at a level below cognition in such a way as to bring about sudden insight. In the *Nôsakusho* (*Sandô*), a treatise on playwriting, Zeami states that it is important for the playwright/composer to "open the ears" of his audience: "Opening the ears" refers to "a blending of verbal understanding and musical sensation into one aural source of appreciation."⁶¹ Richard Pilgrim translates opening the audience's ears as "opening the audience's *kokoro* ear," indicating that the task of the writer and actor, according to Zeami, is to convey the "emotional *kokoro* content" of the play in order to open the hearts and minds (*kokoro*) of the audience members. The importance that Zeami places on the emotive power of the chanted text was no doubt influenced, in part, by the Buddhist aural tradition. (While Stanislavski says little about the place of breath in actor training, he seems to have been aware of the existence of the flow of vital energy in the body and its connection to the breath. In a section in *An Actor Prepares* entitled "Communion," he tells of experimenting with the Hindu concept of *Prana* (breath) to link the mind and solar plexus.⁶² Although Stanislavski was able to experience a connection between the rational mind and the body, he still continued to view the two as diametrically opposed. For him, the brain was the "seat of consciousness" and the solar plexus "the seat of emotion.")

Overcoming the Self: Generating the Actor's Focus

"When the actor tries to imitate something, he manipulates his body as an object . . . but he transcends the break between his body and mind when he attempts to 'become' the character."⁶³

From the age of seven to fifteen, the actor seeks to master the Two Arts through relentless repetition of forms modeled by the master. While training gradually quiets and focuses the actor's mind inward on the *tanden* at the body's vital center, he remains at the level of *mushufû*—variously translated, literally as "style without mastery"⁶⁴ and functionally as "Externalization"⁶⁵—where his mind continues to direct and control his body. His performance will never be more than a mechanical imitation of his teacher unless he can access the creative source of his art located in a unified mind-body.

Zeami's genius was to recognize the transformative power of role play and to make it the focus of actor training beginning at age fifteen. His writings on role play reflect a realization that the maturing actor needs special challenges in order to thoroughly internalize technique and make it his own. Perhaps inspired by Zen *kôan* practice, which keeps the cultivator from lapsing into sterile, self-absorbed contemplation, Zeami raised role play from the superficial mimicry of the earlier *sarugaku* to an art of *yushufû*—"style with mastery"⁶⁶ or "Internalization"⁶⁷—capable of generating the intense concentration that could lead the actor's mind to fully penetrate his body.

“A true master,” according to Zeami, is one who recognizes “the nature of the differences between external skill and interior understanding.”⁶⁸ Zeami’s distinction between external and internal acting (“Style Without and With Mastery”) is similar to Western notions of presentational versus representational acting. Imitation (*monomane*), as Zeami uses the term with regard to role play, encompasses both types of acting. On the one hand, it means to copy external details of the role, such as carriage, gesture, action, and dress, and to convey these as realistically as possible. However, if the actor were to stop his training at the level of externalization, he might be termed a presentational actor who acts with an awareness of technique. Such acting, according to Zeami, “is to be despised.”⁶⁹ On the other hand, *monomane* also means to physically and mentally merge with the character’s mental-emotional state, which Zeami calls “interior essence” (*hon-i*).

The act of becoming or “mastering” (*yushufū*) the role is the catalyst that brings about mind-body unity in performance. The *nō* actor, according to Zeami, seeks to understand the character’s *hon-i* (true intent)—roughly similar to Stanislavski’s “super-objective” or deepest motivation. However, unlike Stanislavskian acting, he does not search his memory for images or feelings to trigger his becoming the role: His approach is purely external. Zeami’s conception of role play and, indeed, his whole theory of acting reflects the Zen concept of *anatman*—the belief that there is no independently arising “self nature” and that to search for it with the rational mind is futile. Rather than encumbering his mind with fruitless self-analysis, the actor lets go of any ideas about the role at the time of performance and focuses single-mindedly on the character’s *hon-i*, allowing it to totally fill his psyche. Only an actor who has overcome his own ego is able to empathize fully with the character and convey its precise inner, emotional reality to the audience.

Kōan Practice and Overcoming the Self in Zen Shugyō

There is a danger in *zazen* of falling into sterile contemplation and self-absorption without a single point of concentration to focus the mind and develop the will power that is necessary to break through the miasma of endlessly arising sense perceptions, thoughts, images, and emotions. In Buddhist practice, mind and body are not seen as mutually exclusive. As a means to get to the body through the mind, Buddhist cultivation has also traditionally included the study of Buddhist doctrines, *sutras*, and *kōan* of the great masters of Buddhist tradition. *Kōan* are paradoxical, absurd statements or actions of the patriarchs that cannot be understood by the rational mind. The Zen master prescribes a particular *kōan* for the monk to serve as a focus for his concentration during *zazen* and, indeed, through all moments of his waking life.⁷⁰ According to D. T. Suzuki, “*satori* is achieved in *kōan* practice by the most intensely active exercise of all the fundamental faculties constituting one’s personality. They are here positively concentrated on a single object of thought,

which is called a state of oneness (*ekagra*). It is also known as a state of *daigi* or ‘fixation.’”⁷¹ In Rinzai Zen, the only way to solve the essentially unsolvable *kôan*, according to Toshihiko Isutsu, is by “becoming the *kôan* or becoming completely one with the *kôan*” so that there is no room for the discursive mind to intrude.⁷² The cultivator’s desperate search for an answer generates tension in the mind and body that may ultimately lead to the great moment of enlightenment (*satori*) when the rational, everyday mind is broken through and extinguished.⁷³

Role Play and *Kôan* Practice

The actor’s intense concentration on the *hon-i* of the role in performance functions analogously to Zen *kôan* practice to bring about the actor’s confrontation with the foundations of his temporal personality and the blossoming forth of his true artistry. Kanze Tetsunôjô, a contemporary *nô* actor in Zeami’s lineage says,

Keiko, training, truly starts only after the arduous course in singing and moving is over, when through those means of expression and on their basis we start to cope with our own ‘self.’ Then the dancing skills take on personal traits and the character comes to life on stage. In fact the whole of Zeami’s theory is devoted to this subject.⁷⁴

While Kanze Tetsunôjô speaks of “coping” with the “self” when performing a role, another contemporary actor of the Kanze school, Tsumura Reijirô, says that his decision to perform the *shite* role in the *nô* play *Dôjôji* was a desire to “confront myself throughout the piece.”⁷⁵ Such statements would seem to reflect an epistemology influenced by modern, Western conceptions of an ego-self. However, they may also reflect Buddhist-inspired notions of overcoming the limited ego self that were central to medieval actor training as Zeami conceived it. Dôgen states in the *Genjô Kôan*, “To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the myriad things,”⁷⁶ which according to Kyotaka Kimura means “to become free of any consciousness of self and all discriminative judgments and to commune with the embodiment of truth that resides in all that exists.”⁷⁷

Constraining the Body to Get at the Mind: The *Nô* Mask

The *nô* mask is the vehicle by which the actor confronts and overcomes his ego-centered mind in the act of role play.⁷⁸ The actor first wears the mask in the role of Okina, in a coming of age ceremony (*genpuku*) when the actor “has the appearance of a fully-grown man at the age of fifteen.”⁷⁹ The mask functions like the *zazen* posture to turn the mind inward on the breath at the body’s vital center. By limiting vision and constraining natural impulses for movement, the mask severs

the senses' connection with the external world and, thus, the performer's ability to constitute an ego-self. The mask is a microcosm of the restraints placed upon the actor's body that, in denying individualistic and natural expression, assists him in contacting the creativity that is the source of his art. According to Kanze Hisao,

[T]he actor is not only constrained by a cumbersome, many-layered costume, he is bound hand and foot by the prescribed posture called the *kamae* and the walking style known as *hakobi*. . . . By sealing off the use of obvious expressive methods and natural physicality, the pure life essence of the humanity of the actor is brought to the fore.⁸⁰

The mask functions to "suggest" the essence of the role to the actor. Takabayashi Kôji of the Kita School notes that the mask becomes the center of the emotional expression of the stage figure. It is the face of a person with whom the actor seeks to become one.⁸¹ As the actor is drawn out of his entrenched ego-self into identification with the *hon-i* of the role through the examination of the mask's features (those of the face—*men*), he turns it over and contemplates its dark side (*ura*). The black interior of the mask exerts a pull on the actor's psyche away from the limited, temporal self toward a radical confrontation with the vast emptiness of Buddha nature.⁸² Like the Zen adept—who, in assuming the posture of the Buddha in *zazen*, becomes as though dead, a living corpse—the *nô* actor enters a void where his discriminating mind is suspended, and the "dark consciousness" comprising the pre-expressive level of his ingrained body technique rises to meet the mask. As the actor places the mask over his face, he cuts the moorings of his discriminating mind in a radical confrontation with the ground of his original self or Buddha Nature—the void of Non-Being experienced on the mask's dark side.

In a discussion of the Buddhist doctrines of Being (*u*) and Non-Being (*mu*) in his treatise *Yûgaku shûdo fukén* ("Disciplines for Joy"), Zeami provides a clue as to how the mask might signify both the dual nature and virtual unity of a person.

As for the principle of Being and Non-Being [expressed in the doctrine of Buddhism], Being might be said to represent the external manifestation that can be seen with the eyes. Non-being can be said to represent the hidden, fundamental readiness of mind that signifies the vessel of all art [since a vessel itself is empty]. It is the fundamental Non-Being (*mu*) that gives rise to the outward sense of Being (*u*) [in the *nô*] . . . What gives the actor the seeds for endless flowering in every aspect of his art is that interior spiritual power that lies within him.⁸³

The eyes are the organ of the rational mind or “Being” in Buddhist thought and, as such, are only capable of seeing the surface of phenomena. Non-Being signifies both Buddha nature and the actor’s unconscious located in the body.

Kanze Tetsunôjô seems to be referring to the above passage from Zeami when he speaks of the struggle involved in role play as one between “face” and “*ura*” (Being and Non-Being):

I want to repeat Zeami’s thought, that in every part, as in every man, there is his “face,” the role presented to the people, and his *ura*—the reverse, “the other side.” The whole drama evolves from tension between face and *ura*. It is only through this tension that the state of the soul is revealed. While breath and biological energy form the basis for the means of expression.⁸⁴

Kanze Tetsunôjô’s use of the terms “face” (*men*) would seem to signify the ego/rational mind as represented in the carved features of the *nô* mask, which medieval *nô* actors referred to with the term *men* meaning provisional or surface “face.” *Ura*, on the other hand, carries connotations of Buddhist egolessness that is synonymous with mind/body unity. The mask augments the tension between the polarities of face/*ura* and engenders the willpower and concentration that can lead to the opening of the actor’s spiritual heart in performance. According to Kanze Hisao,

The *nô* actor depends upon the mask to lead him into the realm of mindlessness, while also struggling with it and throwing his energy against it, in the work of giving birth to true *nô* acting. The mask is an equal partner with the actor in accomplishing his purpose. During the performance, the actor and the mask are in a state of confrontation, working to create art in a constant struggle to subjugate each other.⁸⁵

The struggle between *men* and *ura*, Being and Non-Being, contained in role play serves as a *kôan* for the actor that focuses all of his energies in performance. Kanze Hisao states, “I think one wears a mask in *nô* to deny oneself the emotions a performer usually conveys when the face is used as a realistic technique for theatrical expression. And the reason why the performer denies himself this technique is to increase the power of what he does.”⁸⁶

Overcoming the Body’s Resistance

As in *zazen*, physical restraints are encoded into the *nô kata* as a means of augmenting the focused energy that can lead to mind-body unity. Contrasts,

oppositions, and withholding of movement serve to physically articulate the struggle between the performer's discriminating mind and the body. As the actor concentrates single-mindedly on the emotional nexus of the character, he constrains his dance *kata* to create a greater emotional charge. Zeami refers to this in the *Kakyô* with the saying, "What is felt by the heart is ten, what appears in movement is seven."⁸⁷ Kanze Tetsunôjô remarks on this process in his own acting as follows:

While everything is alive in me, is moving in one direction, a channel for all my energies, in spite of that, somewhere inside I restrain that movement with all my strength. Following it, I go against it, as if I wanted to stop for a while and ponder once again whether I am for certain doing what I want. Still, I inevitably go where the fate of the character leads me. Going and keeping myself from going becomes the focal point of the drama.⁸⁸

The techniques of opposition involved in role play embody the actor's spiritual meditation on the nature of human imperfection, his own and that of the character, which are overcome in enlightened perception (*kan*) at the highest levels of performance. "One of the main characteristics of the *nô*," according to Kanze Tetsunôjô, is "the reflection on why a human being performs a forbidden act and is unable to stop making such choices . . ."⁸⁹ The oscillations of the actor's energy (*ki*) mirror the character's struggle to understand his fate. As Herbert Benoit states with regard to *kôan* study, "it is precisely the fruitless attempt to seize the unseizable sentiment which results in the awakening of the fundamental mind."⁹⁰ The actor's focus on character's temporal emotions in pursuit of the *hon-i* can trigger moments of awakening that open both actor and audience to the impermanent and non-substantial nature of reality. Like the Zen cultivator, who seeks to solve the riddle of his own nature in the *kôan*, the actor struggles with his own spiritual limitations—embodied as corporeal resistance—through the vehicle of the role. The actor's single-minded concentration on the physical articulation of the character's emotional landscape provides a technical focal point that may ultimately bring about the actor's "dropping off of mind and body."⁹¹ (Etienne Decroux made resistance and contrasts in movement the basis of corporeal mime technique and aesthetics as a means to develop the actor's will—these ideas were later picked up by Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. However, corporeal mime's oppositional movement was not designed to generate mind-body unity. Rather, it was the corporeal embodiment of political struggle.)

Opening the Actor's Spiritual Heart (*Kokoro*)

Techniques of opposition and withholding, which are encoded into the dance *kata* and intensified by the wearing of the mask, can bring about the opening of the actor's "spiritual heart" (*kokoro*) in performance.⁹² *Kokoro*, as used by Zeami, signifies varying constellations of mind-body unity metaphorically located in the heart. On its most basic level, *kokoro* refers to the function of the actor's conscious mind comprised of a unity of emotion, thought, and will.⁹³ Richard Pilgrim writes, "Just as most usages of *kokoro* contain an element of feeling and emotion, there is also a sense in which almost all usages of *kokoro* include some aspect of the rational, object-centered mind (*yôjin*)."⁹⁴ As the actor progresses in his training, the nature of this unity changes and may one day enable the actor to attain a state of *mushin*, a Zen Buddhist term for "the unconscious, void, spontaneous, instinctual, *a priori* mind."⁹⁵ The highest form of *kokoro* constituting a fully unified mind-body is the *kokoro* of *naishin*, or the one mind linking all artistic powers.⁹⁶ While Zeami uses different terminology throughout his treatises to analyze the quality of the *kokoro* operative at any given moment, *kokoro* always includes the undivided totality of the actor's mind, body, emotion, will, and spirit—in other words, varying degrees of mind-body unity. (Interestingly, Stanislavski's conception of the interaction of the actor's "Inner Motive Forces" of "feeling, mind, and will" is roughly equivalent to Zeami's conception of *kokoro*.)⁹⁷

The actor's "becoming one" with the character liberates both his personal creative expression and his ingrained corporeal technique leading to the possibility of the role being performed by a unified *kokoro* at the highest levels of performance. At such moments, the trained body of the master actor overtakes his mind and senses of its own accord how the styles should be performed. Tetsunôjô says of this experience with regard to his own acting,

[A]t the onset I always have to assume some principle of how I am going to play. But when on stage it happens that although I have frequently thought "here I will do this and there that," suddenly I forget completely what it was supposed to be. Or even remembering, I give up my plans. And then who I really am reveals itself—my own life, the state of my soul, its imperfections, its shakiness comes out from "beyond the part."⁹⁸

Kanze Tetsunôjô's statement that who he really is appears "from beyond the part" constitutes an opening in the performance into the realm of the absolute, the One Mind, which contains all things, including the imperfect heart of the actor. At such moments the actor would experience the surfacing of the preconscious or hidden aspects of the body as a powerful feeling of "flow"—as if carried along by a huge current that moves through the universe, erasing boundaries and sweeping away

the temporal self—uniting actor, audience, and the world of the play in a seamless epiphany.

Moments of unified *kokoro* signifying that the actor has overcome mind-body duality are rare for the most part the *nô* actor retains varying degrees of awareness of his performance. Kanze Tetsunôjô believes that “the actor cannot and should not even try to identify himself totally with the character he is playing: I always remain entirely aware of where and who I am—Kanze Tetsunôgô, with my own specific form of existence, experience, and even biology.”⁹⁹ Zeami also speaks about the importance of the actor maintaining his awareness during performance so that he is able to judge his performance, as it were, from the standpoint of the audience (*riken no ken*).¹⁰⁰ Yet Zeami makes it clear that it is the trained *body* that senses and responds moment to moment in the performance of a master actor rather than the discriminating mind.

The concentration and exertion to withhold and modulate energy leaves the *nô* actor perspiring and frequently exhausted by the end of the performance; but such a psycho-spiritual technique exists as a means of attaining those rare moments that Zeami speaks of as “Peerless Charm.” Here, all traces of tension are gone and the actor has become a “vessel,” performing with “an ease of spirit that can be compared to the boundlessness of nature itself.”¹⁰¹ Frank Hoff writes,

At the pinnacle of his system and theory of the arts Zeami placed that which lies beyond language. He calls it *myô* [the marvelous]. It is a realm of insight [*satori*] reached after exhaustive training. As I see it, . . . [i]t is the realm of *mu*; it is the realm of *ku* [emptiness]. It is the realm of transcendent existence, where emptiness gives birth to everything.¹⁰²

Opening the Audience’s Spiritual Heart

Perhaps influenced by the Buddhist “Great Vow” to save all sentient beings through one’s practice, Zeami viewed the actor’s self-cultivation from the standpoint of compassion. He saw the actor’s perfection as a means of imparting a taste of the One True Reality opening the audience’s *kokoro*. The actor of the highest reputation is one who “achieves an intensity of pure feeling that goes beyond the workings of the mind,” that causes the audience to enter a void where judgment is replaced by “Feeling that Transcends Cognition (*mushinkan*).”¹⁰³ Zeami also refers to this type of acting as “*nô* that succeeds through the Heart.”¹⁰⁴

If the actor is not focused on the audience’s response, he risks falling into egoistic delusion. The performance of a truly accomplished actor is marked by simplicity and humility (*nyûwa*) reflecting his inner work on himself.¹⁰⁵ The empty and still mind of the actor can be said to manifest “form is emptiness” and “emptiness is form.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Zeami urges enlightened spectators, awakened by the

incomparable, fleeting beauty of the actor's performance, to exhaust analysis and to open themselves to the vast emptiness of Buddha nature. "Forget the specifics of a performance and examine the whole. Then forget the performance and examine the actor. Then forget the actor and examine his inner spirit. Then forget that spirit, and you will grasp the nature of the *nô*."¹⁰⁷ While Zeami clearly recognized the necessity for critical analysis, he understood that only when the rational mind exhausts itself in a search to discover what is essentially unfathomable can one experience a taste of enlightenment. According to Mark Nearman, "[T]he actor has assisted the spectator in moving toward a more developed spiritual state to the degree that the actor is capable of producing effects that keep the spectator focused on the performance even without 'thought' arising."¹⁰⁸

* * * *

Postscript on Mind-Body Unity in Stanislavskian-Based Actor Training

The impersonal, abstract, and conventional nature of the *nô* actor's art would seem to have little correlation with the modern, realistic acting methodology developed by Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) that has become the basis of much of Western actor training. Yet Stanislavski, like Zeami, grappled with the problem of how the actor achieves a truly creative state in performance in which he "becomes" the role without the interference of the mind. While Stanislavski eventually came to view the disciplined body as key to the actor's organicity (living the role without the insertion of the mind), he was never able to overcome a materialist bias that saw the actor's body as an instrument to be played upon by a superior mind. Unfortunately, it is this tendency that remains today in Western actor training rather than the discovery, late in his career, that the trained body is the *prima materia* of the actor's art and that it is the portal to the spiritual dimensions of acting as well.

Stanislavski viewed the actor as divided between a conscious mind and a hidden subconscious, which he believed was the "ground" of the actor's creativity. His "psycho technique" enables the actor to influence the otherwise inaccessible subconscious by constructing mental and physical stimuli that seek to elicit appropriate, reflexive, physical responses that lead to the actor becoming or "living" the role. Although there is no evidence that Stanislavski was familiar with Zeami's theories, he uses the terms "seeds" and "flowering" as metaphors for the actor's organicity. In *Creating a Role*, he states that the "seeds" of the actor's art lie in the mental stimuli sewn on the "ground" of the body/subconscious, "the physical being of a part is a good ground for the seed of the spiritual being to grow in. Scatter more of such seeds." To his fictive student's question about what he means by "scatter," Tortsov (Stanislavski) replies, "create more 'magic if's,' proposed circumstances, imaginative ideas."¹⁰⁹ These inner, creative, psycho-technique "seeds," which Stanislavski calls the function of the actor's "mind," are tossed

into “the subconscious or super consciousness . . . beyond the tutelage of the mind.” Stanislavski compares the subconscious by analogy to the “storehouse of our most important spiritual material.”¹¹⁰ It is interesting that in his discussion of the sub or super conscious here and throughout his writing, Stanislavski equates it with “nature” in a manner similar to Zeami’s “vessel of nature.” The actor’s “flowering” is the opening of his “inner creative life beyond the range of [his] consciousness.”¹¹¹

At the end of his career, Stanislavski came to realize that emotion, thought, and feeling are centered in the body and that physical action was a more direct and concrete means of stimulating the actor’s creativity. Vasily Toporkov, who worked with Stanislavski in the last years of his life on the Method of Physical Actions, relates that Stanislavski called the actor a “master of physical actions” and had urged his students to “burn” all his early ideas regarding the actor’s psycho technique. Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions rests on the contention that carefully constructed rhythmic sequences of physical actions, discovered through improvisation on the dramatic text, better stimulate the subconscious than mental stimuli. “Seeds,” in the Method of Physical Actions, had evolved to mean the actor’s “tasks,” or the “through line of action.”¹¹² Stanislavski understood that the actor’s organicity blossoms when the body takes over as doer of the action producing images, thought, and feeling that constitute living the role. Toporkov describes the results achieved in a performance of *Tartuffe* by a group of actor’s who had worked for many months with Stanislavski on the Method of Physical Actions, as a novel “opening” of their talent “like a sudden flowering.”¹¹³

Stanislavski was moving toward a truly body-centered, rather than a mind-centered, approach to acting, but at the time of his death his “system” was still dominated by the intellect. While the improvising body is allowed to freely discover the actions comprising the “score” of the role in the Method of Physical Actions, the actor’s mind functions to select and editorialize. The score is then fixed and sedimented into the body memory through extended rehearsal—in effect becoming “second nature.” Habituating the body ideally frees the mind to observe the body in action, giving rise to a “dual consciousness” in which the trained actor is able to dispassionately “observe” the self in performance. However, unlike Zeami’s concept of *riken no ken*, “dual consciousness” does not involve a vantage point from the audience. It is primarily a “self” view originating in an acting methodology that privileges the mind and ego over the body. In Stanislavski’s method, the mind is strengthened by its dominant role in the creative process and has difficulty being still. Thomas Richards, in his work with Grotowski on Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions, discovered that while “physical actions stir(s) the ‘great truth’ of thoughts, emotions, experiences” the mind “must learn the right way to be passive” or get “out of the way” so that the body can think for itself.¹¹⁴ As the result of extensive physical work, Richard’s relates that his “. . . mind started to learn that it was not the unique ruler, that the body also has its own way of thinking, if the mind

would just let the body do its job. As my mind started to learn to be more passive, my body had an open field in which to be active.”¹¹⁵

The emphasis on the mind’s control in Western actor training goes hand in hand with the encouragement of the actor’s ego. The Western actor has been led to focus on his individuality and uniqueness and to engage in self-use in acting that privileges this uniqueness. The effacement of the ego that is an integral part of the process of *nô* training is not valued in the West because of the erroneous belief that it would strip the performer of his creativity. When Stanislavski cautions the actor, “never lose yourself on stage . . . Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself.”¹¹⁶ He strengthens the actor’s focus on himself, away from the discovery of any larger, ego-less conception of being in the world. The incredulous response of Stanislavski’s students that they are being asked to always play themselves from moment to moment is understandable. Art tends to be about that which frees the participant and the observer from the particular, local, and individual. Stanislavski’s statement, “Always and forever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself,” is the single most limiting aspect of the Stanislavski method, as it denies the possibility of the actor moving beyond his own personal history. Ironically, it is the personal, limiting focus on the actor’s temporal ego that is the aspect of Stanislavski’s system, through Strasberg’s Method, that has had the most impact on American actor training.

Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions has had less influence than his psycho technique on Western actor training because it demands years of corporeal training. Like Zeami, Stanislavski taught that inspired acting could only be achieved through constant work on oneself. Toporkov says in words that echo Zeami, the “mastery of our art toward which Stanislavski urged us seldom comes easily. It must be achieved by hard, persistent daily work over the course of one’s whole life. . . .”¹¹⁷ As a basis for a physical technique Stanislavski taught that, in addition to dance and gymnastic exercises, the actor should practice a vocabulary of actions (such as opening a door, picking up a glass, etc.) until they became second nature. Stanislavski tells his students that when they have mastered their bodies, “the inner creative life beyond the range of your consciousness will stir in you of its own accord. Your subconscious, your intuition, your experiences from life, your habit of manifesting human qualities on the stage will all go to work for you, in body and soul, and create for you.”¹¹⁸

When Stanislavski spoke about the actor’s “spirituality” in his writings, he seems to have equated it with organicity. But because he never understood that the body *is* mind, he was not able to fully realize the possibilities for mind-body unity in his Method of Physical Actions. It remained for Jerzy Grotowski and his disciple Thomas Richards to explore the spiritual possibilities contained in Stanislavski’s Method of Physical Actions. Richard relates that one day while working, Grotowski

... had seen the seeds of something I could not yet even sense. He said it was the seeds of "organicity." Although I did not know exactly what that meant, I understood it to mean not forced, something natural, in the way that a cat's movements are natural. If I observe a cat, I notice that all of its movements are in their place, its body thinks for itself. In the cat there is no discursive mind to block immediate organic reaction, to get in the way. Organicity can also be in a man, but it is almost always blocked by a mind that is not doing its job, a mind that tries to conduct the body, thinking quickly and telling the body what to do and how.¹¹⁹

Like Zeami, Grotowski and Richards discovered that a meticulously structured series of actions rehearsed over many years not only enables the actor's organicity, but also provides the basis for the actor's inner, spiritual transformation. Grotowski called the work at the end of his life on the Method of Physical Actions "Art as Vehicle," in which "the elements of the Action are instruments to work on the body, the heart and the head of the doers."¹²⁰ Grotowski and Richards had rediscovered some of the important techniques found in Zeami's system of actor training, as for example, that a carefully constructed framework of action provides the structure to transform coarse, everyday energy "to a level of energy more subtle or even toward the *higher connection*." Grotowski called this elevated state of the actor's energy transformed through physical discipline the actor's "verticality."¹²¹

Grotowski's techniques of actor training are intriguing but have never become mainstream because they do not constitute a method that can be applied to performing a role. Pulled more by the transformative possibilities of actor training, than a desire to perform for an audience, Grotowski's final work on the Method of Physical Actions constitutes a continuation of the psycho-analytic tendencies inherent in Stanislavski's acting methodology. The mind and ego are visible in the performer's solipsistic fascination both with the self and the formal processes of artistic creation.

Glossary of Japanese Terms

dô 道

dochu no sei 動中の静

genpuku 元服

gyô 行

ha 破

hakobi 運び

hana 花

hara 腹

hon-i 本意

i-guse 居曲

jo 序

jo-ha-kyû 序破急

jôju 成就

Kakyô 花鏡

Glossary of Japanese Terms (continued)

<i>kamae</i> 構え	<i>Nyorai</i> 如来
<i>kan</i> 感	<i>nyûwa</i> 柔和
<i>kannô dôkô</i> 感応同校	<i>riken no ken</i> 離見の見
<i>kata</i> 形	<i>sarugaku</i> 申楽 or 猿楽
<i>katachi</i> 形	<i>satori</i> 悟り or 覚り
<i>keiko</i> 稽古	<i>seika-no-itten</i> 点
<i>kokoro</i> 心	<i>shikan taza</i> 祇管打坐
<i>ku/sunyata</i> 空	<i>shite</i> 仕手
<i>ki</i> 気 or 器	<i>shô</i> 性
<i>kuse</i> 曲	<i>Shôbôgenzô</i> 正法眼藏
<i>kyû</i> 急	<i>shôshin</i> 正心
<i>maiguse</i> 舞曲	<i>shugyô</i> 修行
<i>monomane</i> 物真似	<i>taitoku</i> 体得
<i>men</i> 面	<i>tanden</i> 丹田
<i>mu</i> 無	<i>tane</i> 種
<i>mushin</i> 無心	<i>u</i> 有
<i>mushinkan</i> 無心感	<i>ura</i> 裏
<i>mushufû</i> 無主風	<i>waza</i> 技
<i>myô</i> 妙	<i>yôjin</i> 用心
<i>myôka fu</i> 妙化風	<i>yushufû</i> 有主風
<i>naishin</i> 内心	<i>zazen</i> 座禪
<i>nenbutsu</i> 念仏	<i>Zen</i> 禪
<i>nikyoku</i> 二曲	<i>zenshin</i> 全身
<i>nô</i> 能	<i>zenshin</i> 全心
<i>nô shimai</i> 能仕舞	

Notes

1. The *kuse* is a relatively long, climactic moment in the *nô* drama in which the chorus, accompanied by drums, sings a narrative poem during which the *shite* (protagonist) either remains seated (*i-guse*) or dances (*maiguse*).

2. For a translation of *Shunkan*, see *Traditional Japanese Theatre*, trans. Karen Brazell (New York: Columbia UP, 1998) 178-92.

3. Zeami Motokiyo, *On the Art of the Nô Drama: The Major Treatises of Zeami*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer and Masakazu Yamazaki (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984) 96-97.

4. Zeami Motokiyo, "Kakyô: Zeami's Fundamental Principles of Acting: Part Two," trans. and commentary Mark Nearman, *Monumenta Nipponica* 37 (1982): 489.

5. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 97.
6. Benito Ortolani, "Zeami's Mysterious Flower: The Challenge of Interpreting it in Western Terms," *Japanese Theatre and the International Stage*, ed. Stanca Scholz-Cionca and Samuel L. Leiter (Leiden: Brill, 2001).
7. Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993).
8. Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, ed. T. P. Kasulis, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and T. P. Kasulis (Albany: State U of New York P, 1987).
9. Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki-Energy*, trans. Shigenori Nagatomo and Monte S. Hull (Albany: State U of New York P, 1993) 7-8.
10. Richard B. Pilgrim, *Buddhism and the Arts of Japan* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima, 1981) 16.
11. "More generally the artistic Way as spiritual discipline has been understood in Japan as *shugyô* or ascetic discipline. *Shugyô* is a 'seeking a way out of a dilemma,' an absolutely dedicated and concentrated discipline of body and mind through some particular practice, with the purpose of breaking through to spiritual fulfillment" (Pilgrim, *Buddhism and the Arts of Japan* 4).
12. Richard Wilkerson, "Aesthetic Virtues in the Context of Nirvanic Values," *Frontiers of Transculturality in Contemporary Aesthetics Conference*, University of Bologna: Bologna, Italy Oct 25-28, 2000: 3, online <<http://www.unibo.it/transculturality/file>>.
13. See Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* 104-109.
14. A form of folk entertainment dating back to the Heian period and originating in China and Central Asia. Like the Greco-Roman mimes, *sarugaku* included acrobatics, songs, dances, and short, comic playlets performed by troupes of traveling performers. By Zeami's time, narrative elements had become more important.
15. Zen had reached the apex of its prestige and development under the patronage of the Ashikaga shogunate (1338-1573). Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1368-1408), Zeami's patron, was the founder of the Japanese Five Mountain Rinzai Zen temples and practiced Zen cultivation under the guidance of Zen master Gidô Shûshin. It was also the Ashikaga shogunate that fostered the arts as a religious path (*dô*) of spiritual attainment where "discipline in the particular forms and techniques of the art may well be understood as the basis for a spiritual discipline in which artistic processes function as vehicles or means for self transformation" (Pilgrim, *Buddhism and the Arts of Japan* 44-45).
16. The Zen *kôan*, *sutras*, sayings, and complex Buddhist terminology in Zeami's treatises have often been cited as evidence of Buddhist, and in particular, Zen influence on the *nô*. Arthur Thornhill (*Six Circles, One Dew Drop* [Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993]) suggests that, "much of the Zen terminology demonstrates, at the very least, extensive contact with Zen clergy" (18n38). While acknowledging the fragmentary evidence linking Zeami to Zen, others like Thomas Blenman Hare (*Zeami's Style: The Noh Plays of Zeami Motokiyo* [Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986] 31-32) and Mark Nearman (trans. and commentary, "Zeami's *Kyûi*: A Pedagogical Guide for Teachers of Acting," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33 [1978]: 301) assert that the highly personal and idiosyncratic Buddhist references and terms in Zeami's treatises primarily reflect the prevalence of the language of Zen as the dominant mode of discourse during the Muromachi period.

17. Ôtomo Taishi, "Zeami and Zen," *Zeami and the Nô Theatre in the World*, ed. Benito Ortolani and Samuel L. Leiter (New York: CASTA, 1998) 47.

18. See Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory*, and Shigenori Nagatomo, "Zeami's Conception of Freedom," *Philosophy East and West* 31 (1981): 401-16.

19. In all probability, Zeami was a lay cultivator in his early years rather than a monk. The considerable demands of running a *sarugaku* company would have made it impossible for him to have given up worldly pursuits, taken vows, and entered Fuganji monastery. As a lay cultivator, he would have regularly attended *zazen* and periodic *sesshin* (intensive sittings) and participated in dialogues with the master. Seventeen years later, he was to dedicate his first treatise, the *Fûshikaden* ("Book of the Flower"), to both his father and Fuganji's first abbot, Master Ryôdô Shingaku, who had been his father's childhood friend.

20. Taishi, "Zeami and Zen" 47.

21. In *Fûshikaden* (4), Zeami indicates that he adheres to his late father's precepts to avoid "sensual pleasures, gambling, heavy drinking," lamenting that the cause of the decline of the nô is that "many actors become wholly involved in worldly attitudes and give in to vulgar desires" (42). In the *Kakyô* (88), he cites three conditions necessary for an actor to achieve the highest reaches of his art. "First he must possess himself the requisite talent. Secondly, he must adore his art and show a total dedication to the path of nô. Thirdly, he must have a teacher capable of showing him the proper way." Like Dôgen, he admonishes the actor to avoid the temptations of easy fame or thinking that he has attained mastery before his abilities have ripened. Moreover, Zeami indicates that the way to mastery lies in life-long physical training in the Two Arts. Like the body discipline of *zazen*, ceaseless attention to and diligence in *nô keiko* will lead the actor toward enlightened performance. Finally, both Dôgen and Zeami place a great deal of importance on the student having the open, enthusiastic mind of a beginner (*shôshin*).

22. Antonio Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt, 2003) and *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Grosset, Putnam, 1994).

23. Dôgen Kigen, *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dôgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi and trans. Robert Aikin, et al. (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985) 32.

24. Shigenori Nagatomo, *Attunement Through the Body* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1992) 113.

25. Dôgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop* 29-30. In *Zazen-gi* ("Rules for Zazen"), Dôgen provides detailed instructions for sitting *zazen*, specifying the correct mental attitude as well as the exact placement of the body on the cushion, alignment of the spine, AND proper position of the legs, hands, tongue, and eyes.

26. Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* 62. Yuasa makes a distinction between the "bright" consciousness or the discriminating mind and the "dark" consciousness that resembles the unconscious, autonomic nervous system. The "dark consciousness" is the realm of the body.

27. Nagatomo, "Zeami's Conception of Freedom" 407.

28. Dôgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop* 30.

29. For example, *kinhin* (walking meditation) both functions to alleviate pain and tension in the body after lengthy periods of sitting and to train the cultivator to maintain his concentration while

engaged in walking. There is a saying, "When walking just walk." In other words, the mind must be still and the focus reside in the simple activity of walking.

30. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 98.

31. Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1948). "Outside of the work in the theatre, this training must be carried over into your daily lives. . . . When you have gone to bed at night, and put out your light, train yourself to go over the whole day and try to put in every possible concrete detail. . . . Conscientious, daily work means that you have a strong will, determination and endurance" (83).

32. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 30.

33. Yuasa, *The Body, Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* 105.

34. Throughout his treatises, Zeami speaks of the development of the actor's artistry in terms of stages of the flower (*hana*): The actor "can be said to hold within him the seeds of flowers that bloom in all seasons . . . As he possesses all the Flowers, he can perform in response to any expectation on any occasion" (Fûshikaden, *On the Art of the Nô* 53). A real flower, Zeami writes, is always "novel" to the spectator, as is each flower blooming at its allotted time each Spring. The highest flowering of the actor's art in "The art of the flower of peerless charm" (*myôka fu*) may be interpreted as the blossoming of the actor's spiritual heart (*kokoro*) in performance (Kyûi, *On the Art of the Nô* 120).

35. Nagatomo, "Zeami's Conception of Freedom" 404.

36. During the Muromachi period, the practice of "meditation in motion" exerted an important influence on the Japanese martial arts and the *nô*. It took such forms as walking meditation around an altar and dancing *nenbutsu* involving recitation of Amitabha Buddha's name while dancing (considered by scholars to be a source of the popular folk arts of Japan). Yuasa, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki Energy* 12-13.

37. Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* 13.

38. Yuasa, *The Body, Self-Cultivation, and Ki Energy* 30.

39. Kunio Komparu, *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives*, trans. Jane Corddry (New York: John Weatherhill, 1983) 216.

40. Constantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*. "Frequently physical immobility is the direct result of inner intensity, and it is these inner activities that are far more important artistically. The essence of art is not in its external forms but its spiritual content" (34-35).

41. Shigenori Nagatomo, "An Analysis of Dôgen's 'Casting Off Body and Mind,'" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (Sept. 1987): 227.

42. Dôgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop* 147.

43. Dôgen, qtd. in Shigenori Nagatomo, "An Analysis of Dôgen's 'Casting Off Body and Mind'" 232.

44. Zenchiku, qtd. in Thornhill, *Six Circles, One Dewdrop* 55.

45. Zeami, "*Kakyo*." "Ch'i is a Taoist-derived term for the universal creative force responsible for the production of all phenomena. In the arts, it refers to the creative energy that the artist consciously experiences within himself and manipulates in order to effect an art expression" (343n26).

46. Mike Sayama, *Samadhi: Self-Development in Zen, Swordmanship, and Psychotherapy* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1986) 130.

47. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 77.
48. 77.
49. Zeami, "Kakyô" 363. This term, according to Mark Nearman (translator), apparently derives from esoteric Buddhism, where it "refers to that aspect or function of mind which is the source of all ideas and impulses that arise into consciousness. It is the source or 'womb' for all that is imagined by the actor, but is not the imagination per se. On a psycho-physiological level, it is associated with the viscera as the source of vital or passionnel [sic] energy."
50. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 137.
51. 140.
52. Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 295.
53. Shigenori Nagatomo and Gerald Leisman, "An East Asian Perspective of Mind-Body," *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 21 (1966): 228.
54. S. Nagatomo and Leisman, "An East Asian Perspective" 227.
55. Jerzy Grotowski, "From Theatre Company to Art as a Vehicle," *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, by Thomas Richards (London: Routledge, 1995). "When we begin to catch the vibratory qualities (of the song), this finds its rooting in the impulses and the actions. And then, all of a sudden, that song begins to sing us. That ancient song sings me; I don't know anymore if I am finding that song or if I am that song" (127).
56. 127.
57. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 204.
58. 139.
59. 55.
60. Frank Hoff, "Kanze Hisao (1925-1978): Making Nô into Contemporary Theatre," *Zeami and the Nô Theatre in the World*, ed. Benito Ortolani and Samuel Leiter (New York: CASTA, 1998) 78.
61. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 158-59.
62. Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*. "They (the Indians) believe in the existence of a kind of vital energy called *Prana*, which gives life to our body. According to their calculation, the radiating centre of this *Prana* is the solar plexus. Consequently, in addition to our brain which is generally accepted as the nerve and psychic centre of our being, we have a similar source near the heart, in the solar plexus" (187).
63. Masakazu Yamazaki, "The Aesthetics of Ambiguity," *On the Art of the Nô Drama* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984) xl.
64. Nagatomo, "Zeami's Conception of Freedom" 404.
65. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 66.
66. Nagatomo, "Zeami's Conception of Freedom" 405.
67. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 145.
68. 90.
69. 66.
70. One of the most famous Zen *kôan* that a master frequently assigns a student is: "A monk asked Zhaozhou (one of the greatest Zen masters in China), Does a dog have Buddha nature or not? To

which the enlightened Zhaozhou replied 'Mu' (Vast Emptiness)." There is no rational or logical correlation between the statement and the answer that expresses the master's enlightenment in the *kōan*. It primarily serves the cultivator as a impetus to bring about the extinction of the discriminating mind through ceaseless meditation on its meaning.

71. D. T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki*, ed. William Barrett (1956; New York: Doubleday, Image Edition, 1996) 150.

72. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, no. 26 (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977) 173.

73. Zeami was no doubt familiar with both Sôtô and Rinzai *kōan* traditions. Monks of both sects were known to study *kōan* at each other's temples. Zeami was apparently friends with a well-known Rinzai priest, Kiyô Hôshû, with whom he was reported to exchange "humorous tales of Zen." It is entirely possible that Zeami verbally sparred with this well-regarded master as a means to both develop and test his spiritual awakening. Certainly the emphasis that Zeami places in the *Kakyo* and, indeed, throughout his secret tradition treatises on the importance of the actor "creating an intensity of mind that transcends consciousness" derives from an experiential knowledge of the power of *kōan* practice, as well as *zazen*.

74. Jadwiga Rodowicz, "Rethinking Zeami: Talking to Kanze Tetsunôjô," *The Drama Review* 36 (Summer 1992): 104.

75. Tsumura Reijirô, "Dôjôji: Preparations for a Second Performance," *Nô/Kyôgen Masks and Performance*, ed. Rebecca Teele (Claremont: Mime Journal, 1984) 109.

76. Dôgen, *Moon in a Dewdrop* 70.

77. Kiyotaka Kimura, "The Self in Medieval Japanese Buddhism: Focusing on Dôgen." *Philosophy East and West* 41 (July 1991) 330.

78. *Nô* masks originated both as sacred objects that assisted the performer in becoming the god in early Japanese rites of exorcism and rice planting and in the popular mime plays that were a part of *sarugaku*. As Zeami perfected the *nô* to appeal to his aristocratic patrons by making it an art of exquisite beauty (*yugen*), the crude masks of the earlier *sarugaku* were refined and became objects of beauty that were carved to reflect subtle human emotions. While Zeami says little in his treatises about masks, it is clear that the aesthetics and training in the *nô* revolve around the psycho-aesthetics of the mask in performance. The mask is not only the primary means by which the *shite* effects a transformation into the role: it emblemizes the manner in which he internalizes his art.

79. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 65.

80. Kanze Hisao, "Life With the Nô Mask," *Nô/Kyôgen Masks and Performance*, ed. Rebecca Teele (Claremont: Mime Journal, 1984) 70-71.

81. Monica Bethe, "Okina: An Interview with Takabayashi Kôji," *Nô/Kyôgen Masks and Performance* 99. In the preparatory ritual in the Mirror Room immediately before entering the stage, the actor studies the carved features of the mask. In the West, we tend to believe that the actor is magnetized by latent emotion recorded deep in his subconscious that is evoked by the mask. But according to Mark Nearman, "The particular feelings that seem to emanate from the mask as the actor turns it in various positions do not constitute simply the projection of his personal, subjective responses, but

appear to rise from the mask itself" ("Behind the Mask of Nô," *Nô/Kyôgen Masks and Performance* 44). Apparently the actor connects with the artistic intent infused into the mask by the carver.

82. The interior of the nô mask is painted a deep blackish-purple.

83. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 118-19.

84. Rodowicz, "Rethinking Zeami" 103.

85. Hisao, "Life With the Nô Mask" 71.

86. Kanze Hisao, qtd. in Hoff, "Kanze Hisao" 83.

87. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 87.

88. Rodowicz, "Rethinking Zeami" 101.

89. 101.

90. Herbert Benoit, *The Supreme Doctrine: Psychological Studies in Zen Thought* (New York: Viking, 1965) 134.

91. Dôgen, *Moon in Dewdrop* 29-30.

92. Nearman, trans., *Kakyô*. "Heart" originally referred to the organ, but over time took on extended meaning as in English. However, unlike the West, where "heart" has become associated with feelings and emotion, "Sino-Japanese tradition has combined feeling, thought, and will, and metaphorically situated them in the heart as the seat of the conscious mind." The reason for this, according to Nearman, is that "thinking (both rational thought and mind images) and feeling (emotional responses) are not viewed as discrete functions but rather as two related types of mind-created responses to sensory awareness or to some previous content (thought, image, or feeling) in the consciousness" (474).

93. 474.

94. Richard B. Pilgrim, "Some Aspects of Kokoro in Zeami," *Monumenta Nipponica* 24 (1969): 396.

95. 398.

96. 400.

97. In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski states that the interaction of these three motive forces form the basis of the actor's "psycho technique" (229-36).

98. Rodowicz, "Rethinking Zeami" 102.

99. 99.

100. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 81.

101. 119.

102. Hoff, "Kanze Hisao" 84.

103. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 91.

104. 101.

105. Nearman, trans., *Kakyô* 321

106. Zeami, *On the Art of the Nô* 115.

107. 102.

108. Nearman, *Kakyô* 476.

109. Constantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961) 229.

110. Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 80.

111. 231.
112. Vasily O. Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal* (London: Routledge, 1998) 219.
113. 219.
114. Thomas Richards, *At Work With Grotowski on Physical Actions* 65.
115. 68.
116. Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares* 167.
117. Toporkov, *Stanislavski in Rehearsal* 216-17.
118. Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 230-31.
119. Richards, *At Work With Grotowski* 66.
120. Grotowski, "From Theatre Company to Art as a Vehicle" 122.
121. 125.