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SHIBUSA SHIRAZU ORCHESTRA
through Jazz and *Butō*

Prof.
Gianluca Coci

Candidate
Gianfreda Addolorata
matr. LA/192

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To my family
To my friends

Thanks to

Prof. Gianluca Coci

Alessandro Palmitessa

Associazione Culturale Punta Giara

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INTRODUCTION

The art is one of the means we can use to export the different aspects of a country culture. Among the various kind of art, music is an underestimated source of search. The Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra is an example of this question. It is an example of music, theater, dance, cabaret, art. They export but also import music, a foreign music that influences their performances. The Orchestra is made up by different kind of artists that performe in international festivals and collaborate with important international artists, not only musicians. They play a jazz music mixed to other kind of music and mixed also to more traditional aspects pointed out by *butō* dancers or to more popular aspects as the omnipresent animator in *fundoshi*. The Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra exports a Japan different from the foreigners idea of this country. It exports a Japan that is one of the greatest jazz market. A Japan that, in these last decades, has generated avant-garde movements like *butō* dance. The Orchestra stages past times mixed to the present with geisha and go-go dancers, animator in *fundoshi* and dragons balloons.

Among this different kind of artists, *butō* dancers aren't known by the audience very well, but they immediately attract the attention.

Many articles about the Orchestra refer to these dancers using every type of circumlocution - often in a wrong way - as “mimes of the Japanese theater”. Because of these misunderstandings and also to explain the various features which unify jazz and *butō*, for examples socio-cultural sphere or improvisation, we have chosen to deepen also this art.

Westerns often think about Japanese jazz or about other kind of art which are not strictly traditional, that these are just duplicates of the foreigner original arts. I strongly believe that this is a society’s opinion in which couples of words such as *global village* or *multimedial society* don’t succeed in hiding a reality made of ethnocentric and above all eurocentral societies, that still now are not inclined to accept, to understand and not superficially judge others cultures.

I don’t think that in order to accept a different culture one must inevitably “to do away with differences” according to a more and more dominant cultural-levelling work. I believe that we should simply understand these differences and I think that, to achieve this aim, the music and the art are the closer instrument for people.

1.

SHIBUSA SHIRAZU ORCHESTRA

“Never be cool” is the english translation of this Japanese jazz orchestra’s name. A very appropriate name for this musicians and artists ensemble that comes from Japan and that arrived in Italy last summer, in 2005, exhibiting at the “Santannarresi Jazz Festival”.

An involving orchestra, a fanfare consisting of about fifty artists such as musicians, vocalists, *butō*¹ dancers, go-go dancers, cowgirls, artists, acrobats, fire-players. They play free jazz, new jazz mixed also with *enka*², rap and Japanese pop, latin, folk music, groove, house and funky. Visual arts, dragons balloons from 20 to 50 meters of length, Japanese cartoons songs and film sound-tracks accompany the music. Experimentations and blending without rules. The audience is strongly involved and it is amazed by this explosive mixture that mixes melodies and humour in this Orchestra that represents the avant-garde Japanese jazz.

¹ In the Meiji period (1868-1912) this term meant those dances not belonging to Japanese tradition. After falling into disuse, this word was used again during years '60s and '70s to indicate a new dance.

² Japanese word *enka* derives from *Enzetsu*, talk and *Ka*, song. A kind of music used at first as a means to propagate political dissent. It was the first music to use Japanese musical scale with Western harmonies. Currently this term is used to mean a kind of Japanese traditional music of the Meiji period (1868-1912) and of the Taishō period (1912-1926), but also to indicate the operatic Japanese popular music.

The Orchestra has been founded in 1989 by Fuwa Daisuke (free jazz bass guitar and double-bass player). At the beginning the artist rallied many musicians to perform music for the avant-garde theatre company *Hakken no kai*, but the original project has become the Shibusa Shirazu. The Orchestra gathered various kind of artists and started soon to perform in Japan and in Europe. It is a flexible group: it plays as a small line up for jam session or as a great orchestra on rock and jazz international festivals's stage. Usually they have three formations: Shibusa Chibizu (from 5 to 10 members), Shibusa Shirazu (from 10 to 20) and the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra (up to 50 members).

As Fuwa Daisuke says: “In short, our stage is a big interaction of multimedia, art and improvised music. We are original, and we dare to say: No other band like us exists anywhere on our planet...”³

After the first album, *Shibusamichi*, published in 1993, the group has recorded other 7 albums and 1 single, all with *Chitei Records*, one of the independent labels which represent the pillar of the Japanese jazz. This albums gained prizes and recognitions. According to the Japanese *Music Magazine* the album *Be Cool* was

³ www.yy.ale.co.jp/data/shibusa/tour_site/menu/menu_set.html

one of the three best albums of the 1996. The same magazine selected the 1997 album *Shibusasai* as one of the best five of the year. The magazine *Swing Journal* assigned five stars to 1999 album *Shibusaryu* and according to the annual survey conducted by the magazine, the Orchestra was placed among the best ten in the “big band” category. Their music is a work in progress: a continuous transformation and improvisation. Maybe is just because of this musical, visual, scenographic and choreographic search, that the Orchestra has such a success and that the audience is so involved. During their exhibitions, besides the music, it is surely important the presence of all the artists on the stage, an important visual element. Various kind of artist bring the audience in the Japanese atmosphere: from the more traditional women in kimono to the more contemporary night club hostesses. The *butō* dancers of the *Dairakudakan* company are particularly effective, while ironic is the animator wearing *fundoshi*. All this features have the aim to surprise and to be ironical about a Japan that belongs to past times and at the same time to globalization. *Butō* dancers attract particularly audience and critics’s attention. Critics frequently underline their presence on the stage but they very often don’t know wich kind of art it is and so they call the dancers, for example, “mimes of the Japanese theater”. The madness, a term uxed to excess to define

the Japanese jazz orchestra, is characterized by free jazz, which is simply a starting point among their experimentations, and by *butō* dancers, together with all the other artists on the stage. According to jazz critic Soejima Teruto,⁴ that talks about a “stunning, reverly-like performance”, “Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra is not only a jazz orchestra but also a group that brings together various aspects of contemporary Japanese culture. Some of its performances show the course of Japanese music from the Middle Ages to the present, as the group includes musicians playing traditional Japanese instruments such as shamisen, shakuhachi, and ryuteki (a bamboo flute)”.⁵

Michael Pronko,⁶ in his article on *Japan Times*, April 14th 2002, explores the Japanese jazz scene and particularly those “band that tries to extend their experimentation beyond the jazz tradition. These are band that don’t try to avoid dissonance and confusion, they introduce sounds, styles and structures to create a musical tension. Approaching to free jazz music, blues, funk, caribbean or classical, these bands create a sound that, for some listeners, may not be

⁴ Jazz critic. He has written on several newspapers and magazines; author of books about jazz music; musical events organizer.

⁵ www.japanimprov.com/soejima/

⁶ American Literature teacher at the Meiji Gakuin University of Tōkyō. He writes articles about Tōkyō jazz scene on *Japan Times* and other magazines.

pleasing, but it is often interesting”.⁷ One of these bands is the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra. According to Pronko, “a wild funky group whose principle is spontaneity.” Pronko adds “they are a band one should listen and appreciate in live performances because cds don’t catch the carnival impact that they offer from the stage and above all *butō* dancers cannot be admired”.⁸

The Orchestra founder, director and composer, Fuwa Daisuke, directs and skilfully blends very different elements making it in a very personal way, shaking the hands and jumping up and down. Following his movements, musicians produce a dynamic and energetic sound. The main motif is already written, while the rest of the piece is improvised. When he was a boy, this unusual director has listened to classical music, marches, film soundtracks and in his compositions we can recognize science-fiction music, Santana or Jimi Hendrix influence, gipsy music, jamaican rastafaris and into listener’s mind comes also Sun Ra and Ornette Coleman. Funk, Big band Sound, Fusion, Klezmer and Ska must be added to the list. Fuwa Daisuke affirms: “We don’t try to make something new, we revive only what

⁷ www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pls?fr20020414.mphm

⁸ *ibidem*

we already know: by using these materials our proposal has come”.⁹ He says, explaining the meaning of their name, that the group can not be placed into the “cool frame” of jazz big band but they transversally cross many musical genre. With regard to the varied formation composed by artists of different style, the director explains “they have simply come to me, how could I send them away? During our exchange of theatrical experiences they have been a natural enrichment”,¹⁰ and yet Fuwa Daisuke rallies the best and creative musicians of the Japanese scene. They have different styles and backgrounds: some are classical professional musicians, others have a background as punk rock musicians. All is mixed and is made uniform under Fuwa’s leadership. The only foreign musician is Walti Bucheli, Switzerland. He plays Pan flute, but he also plays others instruments and participates to another musical project with his Japanese wife in the duo Pan Des Deux. A project in which they prize their cultural and musical differences highly. Among the other musicians there is Katayama Hiroaki, one of the most important saxophonists in Japan. He has played with famous groups as Seikatsu-Koujou-Jinkai Orchestra, Doctor Umezu Band (DUB), De-Ga-show. He has become

⁹ www.santannarresijazz.it/Arresi/Gruppos%20-%20Shibusa%20Shirazus.htm

¹⁰ www.musicballkan.com/shibusashirazu_orchestra_biografia.htm#

important among Japanese rock scene thanks to his performances with “RC Succession”. Katsui Yuji, violinist, is bound to the Tōkyō underground scene since ’80s. He is a Shibusa Shirazu’s element from the beginning but he is also the main musician of the rock progressive band Bondage Fruit that played in the United States in 1999. He has collaborated with Leonard Eto, David Mos, Butch Morris, Han Bennink and Jim O’Rourke. He has also founded the band Rovo together with the guitarist Yamamoto Seiichi. Kato Takayuki, free jazz guitarist whose versatile approach to the music makes him an important musician in Japan. Yoshigaki Yasuhiro is a drummer particularly active in the musical Japanese scene. Besides the Shibusa Shirazu he has played with the Alterds States and the Sigths and he currently plays with Oshima Yasukatu (a young singer from Okinawa), Umezu Kazutoki and others. Sasaki Ayako, pianist and vocalist. She has recorded an album with own songs in Japanese language considered a natural union of Japanese aesthetics and jazz. Some members of the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra has also joint her recording. Kita Yoichiro, trumpeter, besides his participation in the Orchestra, he experiments electronic sounds and the nature’s sounds in other musical projects together with the german musician Eberhard Kranemann. An italian musician also has played with the Orchestra.

Alessandro Palmitessa,¹¹ saxophonist, has known the Japanese ensemble at Moers festival,¹² in 2002 and later the Shibusa called him to join them in some concerts in Germany and to collaborate with the Menschensinfonieorchester Orchestra directed by Palmitessa. Alessandro Palmitessa talks about his musical experience with the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra with these words: “It is a unique experience. I feel a sense of liberty, not exclusively due to the music, but because of a common wish to make a sound together. Even if inside the group there is a strong hierarchy, the musicians, director included, don’t try in any way to invade the other’s players spaces. Each of them, in the right moment, expresses himself with authority and freedom, also simultaneously, feeling a strong idea of a common musical project”.¹³

In 1993 the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra joint in a Japanese jazz festival for the first time: the Yokohama Jazz Festival.¹⁴ They were considered the festival clou moment and they have been invited to join in every year. The same year they won the Kirin Contemporary

¹¹ Polyinstrumentalist (tenor, soprano and tall saxophone, clarinet; live electronic and small percussions) and composer. He was born in Atina (FR) in 1969. From 1998 he lives in Germany where he conducts the “Menschensinfonieorchester” orchestra. He is a musical personality rich of elements of Puglia’s popular tradition, African-American and classical European tradition.

¹² The Moers New Jazz Festival is an international jazz festival held every year in Moers, Germany.

¹³ Gianfreda Addolorata, unpublished interview to Alessandro Palmitessa, January 11th 2006.

¹⁴ The Yokohama Jazz Festival is one of the most important of the Japanese jazz festivals. It is held every year in Yokohama city, near Tōkyō.

Award for the video Inugami which shows a performance in collaboration with the Furen Dance theatre company. In 1999 the Orchestra joint in a Tōkyō underground festival for the first time and its fame has quickly grown. It won all the Japanese jazz prizes and at the Moers festival in Germany, its first successes in foreign countries has started. The German press has expressed its opinion about the Orchestra with these terms:

Neue Ruhr Zeitung: “A magnificent spectacle.”¹⁵

Rheineshe Post: “The Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra in a sensational way goes beyond what one could think about the multimedial context of the Moers Festival. The music goes through explosive jazz, free funky flights and march music with free funky and circus-carnival wings.”¹⁶

Schwäbische Zeitung: “The breath-breaking show of the enormous Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra – a crazy mix of opulent wagnerian sounds, Revue with ballerinas and silver dragons, professional butoh dancers representing the life and death game and the Powerjazz as only in Japan could be born.”¹⁷

Tagesspiegel. Berlin: “The most lasting impression has been left by the most extreme outsiders. It is the Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra composed by musicians, butoh dancers and go-go Girls and by completely free improvisations leading to a hypnotic pop power which has transformed the tide of people that was carefully listening, in the most fervent dancefloor of Germany.”¹⁸

From 2001 to 2004, they joint for four times in the Fuji Rock

¹⁵ Cit. in http://www.musicballkan.com/shibusashirazu_orchestra.htm

¹⁶ ibidem

¹⁷ ibidem

¹⁸ ibidem

Festival: the greatest and most famous Japanese rock festival held every year in Naeba, at the northwestern of Tōkyō, in a place that contains 6-7 stages and thousand of people. In these last years international artists like Patty Smith, Iggy Pop, Manu Chao, Björk, Massive Attack, The Chemical Brothers, Pet Shop Boys, Macy Gray, Coldplay, Red Hot Chili Peppers joint Fuji Rock. The Shibusa Shirazu performed on the main stage at the festival opening and closing. They are proud of this success. Fuwa Daisuke organized the third day of “Orange Court-Jazz & world music” stage inviting Sun Ra Arkestra for the 2003 show of this festival. In the same year Shibusa Shirazu performed with Sun Ra Arkestra at the Tōkyō “Shinjyuku Pit-Inn” and they recorded the eighth album, Shibuboshi, with Mashall Allen,¹⁹ Michael Ray,²⁰ Elson Nascimento.²¹ They also participated to a special festival: the “Takao Tengu Festival 2003”. The aim of this festival was to attract people attention on the Takao mountain, situated in the Tōkyō west area, whose ecosystem was seriously threatened by the plan of two tunnels buildings. It was the first example in Japan of musical show that has embraced an environmental cause. In 2004 they

¹⁹ Eighty-years-old free jazz saxophonist. He played with Sun Ra from 1956 to 1993 and, after the Sun Ra’s death, he has started to direct the Sun Ra Arkestra.

²⁰ Trombonist from New Jersey. In 1978 he has started to play into the Sun Ra Arkestra and he played also in the Kool & the Gang band. He is considered a star of funk and jazz scene. He has also collaborated with other artists creating installations with sounds, colors, dance and poetry.

²¹ Sun Ra Arkestra’s percussionist.

played with Think of One²² and Kila²³ at the Shibuya O-East in Tōkyō. From 1994 they organize a special show: the “Tent Shibusa”. A project on large scale which is the only one in Japan. They perform in a great tent with the aim to offer good live performance and to establish a more narrow relationship with the public.

They performed in Europe in 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2005, on the main stages of the Glastonbury Festival²⁴ in Great Britain, at the Moers New Jazz Festival and at the Documenta Kassel²⁵ in Germany, at the Nattjazz Bergen Festival²⁶ in Norway, at the Druga Godba Festival²⁷ in Slovenia, at the Koktebel jazz²⁸ in Crimea and others. In 2005 they performed also at the “Japan Now” festival held in Berna, Berlin and Cracovia. The main purpose of this festival is to introduce the different forms of contemporary Japanese arts almost unknown in Europe mainly because of our difference in language and culture and because of cliché on Japan.

²² Belgian band whose music is a mixture of jazz, funk, folk, rock, dub and reggae.

²³ Band from Dublin founded in 1987.

²⁴ The Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts generally called Glastonbury Festival or Glasto is the world’s greatest music and art festival. It is held almost every year since 1970 in an area situated at six km from Glastonbury city.

²⁵ The Documenta is an international exhibition of contemporary art held every five years in Kassel, Germany.

²⁶ The Nattjazz (Nightjazz) is a jazz festival held every year between the end of May and the first days of June in Bergen, Norway.

²⁷ The Druga Godba Alternatives Music Festival is the greatest Slovenian festival of alternative (druga godba) music that is held since twenty years ago every spring in Ljubiana.

²⁸ The Koktebel Jazz Festival is held every year in Koktebel, Crimea, Ukraine.

From the Glastonbury Festival in 2002 comments talk about the Shibusa Shirazu as the “band of the Festival” especially because of their strong visual element.

“Dancers add a lot to their live performance... the nightclub hostesses and the stewards were the worldly side of the mix. The two men naked and painted like statues and the man covered with bands (like swaddling bands) were particularly attractive. Very few bands remember us that live music is a visual as well as an auditory experience, and the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra does it.”²⁹

At the “International Festival Jazz Koktebel 2005”, the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra opened the festival and performed also the following day with a different show. International musicians participated in this festival which offered not only music but also every aspects of contemporary art. The Shibusa Shirazu, with its multimedial performances, made the stage a work of art.

Enthusiastic comments arrive from Poschiavo, in Switzerland, where the Orchestra performed at the Festival Uncool 2005.³⁰ “Witches run away from Poschiavo, forever” and “lets change the square’s name [...] let’s dedicate it to them [...] let’s call it Shirazu Square.”³¹ These some of the swiss comments. It was a surreal

²⁹ www.freakytrigger.co.uk/glasto.html Glastonbury 2002, *The Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra*

³⁰ Jazz festivals organized by the Poschiavo (CH) cultural association “la cial”. A musical, educational and tourist project with the purpose to promote music in the scholastic education and the international music’s knowledge.

³¹ www.ilbemina.ch/article.php3?id_article=1333

situation in which a procession of musicians has walked from the streets to the stage. Among the artists, Watabe Shinichi and Namba Tomolo's voices and the Otsuka Hiroyuki's rock guitar stood out. From Switzerland to Italy it is fortunately not so far-away and during their 2005 tour they have finally reached for the first time our country.

1.1 The Italian experience

The Orchestra director invites the audience of the Santannarresi Jazz Festival to accept every kind of surprise that will come from the stage. He invites to be free from mental reservations and from preconceived ideas, to openly accept *strangeness* and *devilries* that will surprise the audience. Fuwa Daisuke knows that their performance can surprise spectators and maybe its just this the aim of the Japanese ensemble.

Sant'Anna Arresi is a small town situated in the Basso Sulcis area, in the Cagliari province, Sardinia. It was an unknown town, but thanks to the festival "*Ai confini tra Sardegna e Jazz*", in the last years it has become "the jazz town". The festival is organized by the local Cultural Association Punta Giara and it has reached this year the twentieth edition. It attracts journalists and photographers's attention, not only from Italy. Its fame has reached foreign daily papers as the "New York Times" and the "Herald Tribune", and countless music publications of the whole world, on television also. This year the German television has broadcast one hour and half of the festival and the italian Radiotre more than thirty hours of programs about the festival. This is one of the many jazz festivals that involve every year more and more spectators in the italian summer, the result of a

constant work. But if “July’s shows are all alike or, especially the greatest ones, surrender to business temptations [...]August and September’s festival try to propose something original like Roccella Jonica and Sant’Anna Arresi’s festivals [...]”³² Despite the district’s financial cuts, the Santannarresi Jazz Festival succeeds because it proposes few artists but introduces them from a different point of view. The musicians take advantage from this situation to stake themselves and to risk with a music unknown to the audience. “*Ai confini tra Sardegna e Jazz*” has won such a fame that - as Punta Giara Chairman explains - at this point, the musicians themselves ask us to exhibit in the festival.”³³ Here they can confront each other, go forward and risk. The artistic choices of the association are independent and this makes the relationships with town administrations not easy, but in this way, proposing a festival of previews, exclusive music and collaborations among artists, the show reaches very good results every year.

The 2005 edition has paid homage to the avant-garde. The main theme of the conferences was the influence that Chicago music and the AACM (Association for Advancement Creative of

³² *Il Giornale*, September 29th 2005.

³³ *La Nuova Sardegna*, September 6th 2005.

Musicians),³⁴ have had on the contemporary music. Also the struggle against racial laws was object of reflection, the Vietnam war and all that elements that have represented a strong element of breakup and that are still actual. Basilio Sulis, festival promoter, has thought to the '60s and '70s militant music, to the american avant-garde post free: "In that stream the festival has found its primogeniture and it is through jazz that Sardinia becomes a musical reference point in the world, from Chicago to New York and to Europe."³⁵ He talks about that avant-garde that wanted to delete the word "jazz" as a symbol of music oppressed by the system and as a symbol of anger and creativeness at the same time. In these years, the desire of renewal and the research of one's own cultural roots were protagonists also in Japan. The wish to affirm one's appurtenance to a population, but also the wish to create a new "creative" music and, in general, to create arts free from precepts and fixed patterns, were protagonists both in the West and in the East.

Through this festival, which is a neutral zone where cultures, histories, men meet together, jazz music finds in Sardinia its popular roots, the ability to put people together. The festival promoter's

³⁴ Association founded in the first years of the '60s in Chicago by the pianist Muhal Richard Abrams together with other young musicians. They has had the purpose to transform the Afro-american's music language without setting any limit to its new protagonists's creativeness. During these years poets, singers and ballet dancer also has joint the Association.

³⁵ *Il Giornale di Sardegna*, August 17th 2005

commitment is artistic but also political and human. This festival approaches musicians to the country in which they play. For example, Pat Metheny (this was his fourth participation to the festival) in past times has decided to make over his own's television rights to allow a pine-forest purchasing in order to avoid private speculation.

This last edition, in order to celebrate the festival twentieth anniversary, has had two different programs: the project "Synthesis", from August the 2nd to the 7th, that has offered seminars and concerts with Pat Metheny, and the festival, from August the 24th to September the 3rd, with famous artists as William Parker, Roscoe Mitchell, Don Moye, Anthony Braxton. In this last part, the IV International Seminar was also held: a seminar with the purpose to study and to improve jazz music and dedicated to the double-bass player Marcello Melis. In co-production with Vignola "Jazz In'It" festival, it offers a scholarship and the opportunity to perform in the next festival edition. A conference about the AACM human and artistic story was also held; it has been coordinated by Francesco Martinelli, researcher and music critic. The Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra's performance was the exclusiveness of the festival as well as the newyorker "The Arkestra Chamber". They exhibited together with Marshall Allen in the second part of the festival, on August 29,

and the concert was transmitted by Radiotre. The audience has looked forward with great curiosity to listen the Japanese orchestra that was always mentioned in newspapers articles as a show one can't miss.

Their show has been introduced by the press release transmitted by Punta Giara in this way: “[...] the Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra’s ‘multimedial’ happening”³⁶ and also “[...] a show with a ‘bulimic’ aesthetics, [...] a show that take one’s breath away, a crazy and great mixture representative of the Japanese musical avant-garde.”³⁷ A show that is far away from the most classical jazz and that surprise and involve the audience with a musical show but also a theater, cabaret and dance show. “This band recalls the best European improvisation school that has always conceived of the musical performance as a total art.”³⁸ A performance that perfectly corresponds with that creative music that has been largely expressed during the festival and that has been one of the conferences subjects. This event has also attracted in the Basso Sulcis Japanese people to attend the extraordinary exhibition and to remember the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombardment anniversary occurred sixty years ago, on the 6th and the

³⁶ Associazione Culturale Punta Giara, Press release, August 28th 2005

³⁷ ibidem

³⁸ *La Nuova Sardegna*, June 11th 2005

9th of August. The name of the show was just: “Remembering Hiroshima - 50 artists at the stone giant’s court.”

The Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra performed on the suggestive stage placed at the feet of the imposing nuraghe, in a natural amphitheatre located between a small and modest church and another, anonymous and more recent one. A location that creates an incredible connexion among who is playing and who is listening, without barriers. The Orchestra didn’t go directly on the stage, but it arrived from the opposite side, through the audience, immediately succeeding in the intention of amazing it. From the nuraghe overhunging the audience, just like in a Kusturica’s film, a group of wind instruments players came out. The performance went on for more then two hours and half, too brief according to some spectator’s opinion. They made a show both musical and visual, also with video screened by four cameras and with the silveer dragon balloon that flew in the starry sky above the historical nuraghe, involving the dancing audience crowded under the stage. It was a success, even if some people went away, perhaps disturbed by so much improvisation and sound anarchy. A performance with no rest: even when a brief black-out stopped the amplifiers the Orchestra didn’t stop and continued playing an improvised unplugged version. The audience was introduced in the

free jazz world by Kito Akira's sax and by Ono Aki's electric bass. Some groovedance girls entered the scene from the pit together with *butō* dancers, kimono girls and the animator. The baton immediately after passed to a mouth-organ, two drums and the panflute's sound that wove with the slide guitar ones. This was the performance prelude, followed by the insertion of the whole Orchestra that moved rhythm to funk music, to pass later to a music like the Goran Bregovic's balkanic ones and to ska that definitely involved the audience. The ska was turned into raggaie and there was also a '70s style pure rock solo.

Reviews and articles on the greatest Italian newspaper just as those foreigners, write about Shibusa in an enthusiastic way, often using the term "crazy" with a positive meaning but sometimes criticizing their music that fades into the background in comparison to the whole show that strikes more than the musical aspect. Others comment: "[...] to avoid any misunderstanding, one must immediately say that the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra's show is not at all a show based on choreographies. [...] On the stage there are only musicians who play their instruments very well."³⁹ With regard to this topic, Alessandro Palmitessa, who has played with the Shibusa Shirazu,

³⁹ *La Nuova Sardegna*, August 31st 2005

says: “I think that the ‘show’, or rather the Shibusu’s artistic expression, has its own value in its totality. Since their relationship with the audience is multimedial, images and dance are integral part of the music. In their performances the various arts have the same value. This kind of thinking doesn’t prejudice the musical quality of each players and the show final result. In this way the artistic moments are alternated in a fluent way completely involving all members in a ‘trance’ that creates unique artistic moments.”⁴⁰ Alessandro Palmitessa, the winner of the festival seminar 2004, who had already played four times with the Shibusu Shirazu, proposed the Japanese orchestra to Punta Giara association. This suggestion was successful followed: during the performance the audience was involved very much and the percussionist Famoudou Don Moye was so attracted by such a “madness” that suddenly joint the Orchestra. This was an unforeseen performance but it was exactly lined up with Fuwa Daisuke’s mind, as he tried to explain from the stage. Basilio Sulis “doesn’t like to take all the festival’s merits, but maybe he can take credits for the Shibusu Shirazu’s performance, proposed by the

⁴⁰ Gianfreda Addolorata, unpublished interview to Alessandro Palmitessa, January 11th 2006.

saxophonist Alessandro Palmitessa: «I have seen them once only and I took them at home», Basilio ironically says.”⁴¹

Some of the Italian local and national newspapers’ comments:

La Nuova Sardegna: “An anomalous wave made of forty elements among musicians, dancers and actors, has overwhelmed the audience transforming in a party with dancing people crowded under the stage, one of the more awaited concerts of this twentieth festival ‘*Ai confini tra Sardegna e Jazz*’”.⁴²

Il Manifesto: “Wonderful, simply wonderful. [...] The most plays, but others sing or dance or just stay on the stage being ironical about the musical business, ridiculing everything, first of all themselves. [...] Dressing an electric green gauze, under a bikini, with a big bra - nothing sexy - two girls interpret ‘the disco girls’”.⁴³

L’Unione Sarda: “They have catapulted the stream of people that was listening, in a musical trance from which it was difficult to go out. The little Nuraghe’s square in Sant’Anna Arresi has seemed to thrill with a vitality that has demolished the cultural barriers, has expressed the pure joie de vivre, has revolutionized the concert idea. [...] This time the association Punta Giara has exceeded very much the boundaries. One has the feeling that the most lasting impression has been left by the rich Japanese formation which is continuously renewing”.⁴⁴

La Provincia del Sulcis Iglesiente: “Without prevent from merits the great artists that have played at Sant’Anna Arresi, such as William Parker, Matthew Shipp, Antony Braxton, Evan Parker, the Little Huey orchestra, the Burt Sugar orchestra and so on, the concert that the Festival’s audience will remember for a long time and that surely will characterize the ‘Twenty-year’ edition of the festival, will be the Shibusasone ones with the

⁴¹ *L’Unione Sarda*, September 5th 2005

⁴² *La Nuova Sardegna*, August 31 st 2005.

⁴³ *Il Manifesto*, August 31 st 2005.

⁴⁴ *L’Unione Sarda*, August 31st 2005

thirtytwo elements come from Japan for the only italian date of their long European tour.⁴⁵

The music, in the magic atmosphere of a little Sardinian town, has created a communion among who was playing and who was listening, just as it should always happen. The town has been a meeting place for cultures, histories, musicians, people, ideas, discussions, researches and experimentations.

Few days to the end of the festival all the pros and cons has been weighted. Perhaps at least ten thousand people reached Sant'Anna Arresi and, in some days, the festival has reached takings nearer to that one of a rock concert rather than those of an avant-garde jazz concert, as it has happened for Pat Metheny and Shibusu Shirazu's performances. An average of thousand people per day. The famous Italian jazz festival has been closed with a positive budget thanks to the big audience, the great attention of the press, international also, the music proposals once more interesting and amazing, the conferences's subject, the '60s, a period of great ferments also in the music scene, both in the West and in the East, thanks to the peace message shouted by the Japanese orchestra from the stage, a message against all wars: against bombs, those of sixty

⁴⁵ *La Provincia del Sulcis Inglesiente*, September 8th 2005

years ago in Japan and today's ones. This festival has been an important chance for Italian people, interested or not in jazz, to know different kinds of show, from the most classical jazz to the avant-garde ones, from the Afro-american jazz to the European and Asian ones.

1.2 Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra: the '60s underground movement successors.

Critic Soejima Teruto talks about Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra as “the '60s underground movement successors.”⁴⁶ The same movement which has fomented *butō*'s birth.

The need of renewal felt in Europe in the postwar period and that caused the growth of avant-garde movements, characterized also Japan. Here new languages contrasting Western academic rules were elaborated already in the '30s. Particularly the 1960 is known as one of the most turbulent years of postwar Japan. Political debates, protests and demonstrations was fomented by the center-right government's decision to renew the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. This treaty permitted also the permanence of American military bases on Japanese soil. The demonstrations, culminated with the occupation of the Tōkyō airport, runway with the intention to prevent the Prime Minister departure to United States and later with the demonstration of June 15th, when the Parliament was occupied by about ten thousand people. The police intervention provoked violent fights during which Kamba Michiko, a student of twentytwo years

⁴⁶Teruto Soejima, *A Collaboration of Jazz and Dance*, Komei Shimbun newspaper, November 3rd 1996, cit. in www.japanimprov.com/soejima/

old, died. The American exportation of democracy, values and culture, which has started in the postwar period, had caused many changes in Japan: a new political system (parliamentary democracy), a new constitution and new laws. The historian Eric J. Hobsbawm in *IL SECOLO BREVE 1914/1991* (The age of extreme, The short Twentieth Century, 1914- 1991) speaks about the 1945-1990 period as years of “great, fast and universal transformation of the human history”.⁴⁷ For the most part of the world population, this changes were “sudden and catastrophic.” One of the more considerable social changes was the death of the country class and the consequent urbanization and rapid economic growth. This change happened also in Japan. Here the assimilation of the new culture was stratifying with the others already assimilated in past times and, as the others, neither totally accepted nor totally refused. A life style characterized by consumerism, metropolises loneliness, competition, caused the crisis of the Japanese cultural identity. These people started to feel nostalgia for an almost disappeared Japanese world. Conflictual feeling grew towards America, a hostile country that had changed into a friend country. A common sense of inferiority fomented the desire to equal United

⁴⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *IL SECOLO BREVE 1914/1991*, RCS Libri, Milan, 1997, p. 340.

States in economic and cultural fields. This modernization would also have meant Americanization and, in general, homologation to a universal language to detriment of the Japanese identity, traditions and cultures.

The artistic world revolted. How to escape from modernization? Among the literary scene the answer was found in the rediscovery of shi-shōsetsu (The I-novel), the typical Japanese novel characterized by a personal and introvert style as those written by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Kawabata Yasunari, Dazai Osamu and Mishima Yukyo. Artists of different discipline got together and started to experiment and to collaborate. In their works fine arts, music, literature, dance, phototography were mixed together. At the beginnings of the '60s, John Cage⁴⁸ visit inspired even more research and experimentation. Theater, particularly, was influenced and started to practise improvisation and collaboration with musicians. The Japanese music was influenced by both Western music and Japanese traditional music; composers ventured with different styles also using traditional instruments for modern music.

⁴⁸ John Milton Cage (Los Angeles, 1912-1992). Experimental music writer and composer. He is famous because of his "chance music" (a music in which some elements are chosen by chance), because of a not standardized use of musical instruments and the use of electronic music. He elaborated a very personal and revolutionary language desacralizing all classical and traditional music rules. He is considered one of the most important composers of his era.

The theatrical avant-garde which has begun to include dance, in contrast with both the Japanese tradition and the Western one, intended to make a new Japanese identity. Revolting against fixed artistic rules, many groups made a “poor” theater that refused rules.

So it was this the storic-cultural grounds that caused the growth both of the *butō* and of the jazz avant-garde movements in Japan and it was also through jazz and in general, through the Japanese musical scene, that the feelings of “love and hate”, of acceptance and at the same time refusal of the American culture was shown by Japanese artists.

1.3 Music and art in Japan: The aesthetic values

The conflictual relationship between Japan and America and the more general Japan-West one, is partly due to the Japanese musical and aesthetic values which are different from the Western ones. It is a further cultural distance among these two parts of the globe, due also to the different relationship with nature: the Oriental population doesn't overlap nature but support it taking part in it. Very important is the sound as it is, with also the meaning of noise and silence. The Japanese traditional musical instruments have some features that Westerners can feel as flaws, the use of voice can be felt as unnatural. This is an aesthetic that remains in the contemporary music and which is connected also to the different idea of time. Criticisms towards the Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra's performances could derive just from the different Japanese aesthetical and musical values. The relationship with the nature and the idea of time are two concepts which influence not only music but all Japanese arts. Time, particularly, it is linked to the idea of space: the *ma*, an entity "among". *Ma* is "the white space of a ink drawing, the break between a note and another one, the movement of absolute stasis in the *shite* dance in the last part of a *nō*

passage.”⁴⁹ These features make Japanese music irrational in opposition to the rational Western music. In postwar period there was a search, elaboration, rediscovery of traditions, concepts, autochthonous values, and of that irrationality that makes so different the Japanese music. An irrationality probably due to the concept of time: in the East, breath is at the base of the idea of time, while in West rhythm derives probably from the perception of heart pulsation or from steps which, unlike breath, are measurable. It doesn't exist an idea of time as “absolute” but open rhythmic structures, free intonation, flexibility. Features that we find just in free jazz and in the Shibusu Shirazu's music. And nowadays, music is sometimes irrational, has irregular rhythmic parts, as if in last years the musical world has turned its attention to Eastern music: a continuous exchange between east and west, attracting and rejecting each others.

Unfortunately, while the scholars's interest for historical and ethnographic studies of the Japanese popular culture increases, the musical field is always the less studied one. But music is a source of search useful to understand a society culture. According to E. Taylor

⁴⁹ Luciana Galliano, “Concetti di un'estetica musicale antica nella musica contemporanea giapponese”, *Atti del XXI Convegno di Studi sul Giappone* (Rome, September 17-20th 1997), Aistugia Venezia 1998, p. 214.

Atkins,⁵⁰ jazz can be used to study the importation, assimilation, adaptation and refusal of the American popular culture and the identity problems provoked by such trial. Between the two world wars, while among intellectual and politician started the debate about which way to take: to take part in the global economy and culture or to support the cultural tradition, the emergent urban class chose consumism and life style similar to those chosen by the Western urban class. “The Japanese people dances jazz music day and night. [...] Girls and young married women are able to dance the complicated jazz steps wearing *tabi* and *zōri* (traditional footwears) with amazing facility [...]”.⁵¹ Dance mania has represented a means of sustenance for many aspirants musicians that begins to play in the hotels dance-halls or on the ships that crossed ocean. The Japanese population started to assimilate Western music and its tonal system and rhythm, learning it at school and from media. Jazz, particularly, has met with a great success, so much to make Japan an important jazz market with numerous jazz club and jazz magazine. Many protagonists of the

⁵⁰ History teacher at the Northern Illinois University.

⁵¹ Grace Seton, “Metrome, July 1923” in Bonnie C. Wade, *Music in Japan, Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*, New York Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, p. 18.

international jazz scene play often in Japan and at the same time many Japanese musicians play jazz.

E. Taylor Atkins in his essay "Blue Nippon" analyses the jazz growth in Japan and explains in which way the attitude of Japanese people toward jazz music is founded upon the ambivalence about the authenticity of Japanese jazz. United States appreciated the talent of Japanese jazz musicians but, at the same time, there was a tacit opinion according to which Japanese jazz players, for cultural reasons, "can't swing." For this reason Japanese musicians have often sought strategies to get this sort of legitimation as, for example, to live for some periods in America or at Shanghai or to play jazz striving to make it "more Japanese" by integrating it with Japanese traditional musical forms. Psychological, institutional and sociocultural forces have doubted continuously Japanese jazz authenticity. All this in complete contradiction with the jazz essence: a kind of music that find its way just through enclosures that we use for separating a culture from another and serves as bridge between them.

2.

***Butō*'s birth and growth.**

“Conquerors can deprive their victims of language, art, religion, kings and architecture but dance, always fertile, slips from the conquest grip.”

- Hijikata Tatsumi -

Hijikata Tatsumi, founder of *Ankoku Butō* (“Dance of the Darkness”), together with Ōno Kazuo,⁵² talks about dance using the words above. He talks about it as something that man cannot lose because “[...] always fertile, slips from the conquest grip.” It is something that cannot be conquered because it is a personal expression, one’s own body expression that can show intimacy. It is something so individual to make an eventual attempt of imitations lacking in emotions to be received by the audience. *Butō* was born exactly in this way: from a work of introspection with the aim of express one’s “I” and what it is hidden in daily life, through not standardized movements, but free.

Hijikata Tatsumi, stage-name of Yoneyama Kunio, was born in 1928 in Akita, Tōhoku, and at the end of the '50s he starts his career

⁵² Ōno Kazuo was born in 1906 in Hakodate. He has started to dance at the end of '50s together with Hijikata. Both are considered the *butō* founders.

of modern dance dancer in Tōkyō studying expressionist dance (*Neue Tanz*).⁵³

The '60s in Japan was a period of crisis and dissatisfaction characterized, just as in other countries, by the student movement. Japanese people, after the second world war defeat, had a deep mistrust in Japanese institutions and, at the same time, they had to face the cultural consequences of a rapid occidentalization. In postwar period, classical ballet spreads in the country but, from 1953 enthusiasm decreased. In this state of crisis artists begin to deeply think over the dance nature and they started to show opposition to pre-arranged ideas and, therefore, to dance rules. It was just in this period that Hijikata begins to associate with several people belonging to the '60s artistic avant-garde and to receive the influence of neodada painting and of the informal art movement imported from foreign countries. It is added to this also the collaboration with the Japanese underground theatrical movement. Hijikata worked out a new body idea producing a reversal of the aesthetic values that characterizes *butō*: the ugly aesthetics (*shūaku no bi*). *Butō* dancer emphasizes curved back, bull neck and bow-legs (the *ganimata*; *gani*: crab; *mata*: thigh, groin)

⁵³The expressionist dance was born in Germany in the '20s and it started to be famous in Japan during '30s.

typical of Japanese physique but far away from the dancer body's harmony. Actually, both in Japan and in foreign countries, one intends *butō* as a dance whose dancers have white bodies, twisted limbs and face expressions like grimaces. What it is considered an imperfection according to classical or modern dance rules, in *butō* it is a quality. Through *butō*, the body is liberated from its social role in order to give it a native expressiveness and a natural state. This way makes a break between this style of dance and the others which treat with body according to its social image. Looking at *butō* dancers, I think that whoever would associate them to the common imagine of "primitive man". A reappropriation of the body and of its contact with nature, in the sense of liberation of it from restrictions imposed by the living in a complex society.

The beauty seen by Hijikata in the body is the beauty of a body characterized by a spiritual growth and by experiences and a body that weakens to the death. It is a weakening that doesn't concern muscles but bones whose transformation is imperceptible.

According to Kuniyoshi Kazuko,⁵⁴ "*Butō* is not only a performance, but also the embodiment of one of the most precise

⁵⁴ Essayist and scholar of Japanese traditional and contemporary dance. She has attended and directed the archives dedicated to Hijikata Tatsumi.

critical spirits in the history of the consciousness of body, with a strength of thought which impinges deeply on the history of human spirit".⁵⁵ Actually, unlike the other kinds of Japanese contemporary dance criticized as Western dance imitations by that foreign countries that has an idea of a Meiji Japan, *butō* received a positive criticism because critics has recognized in this dance the awareness of actual problems.

In 1959 Hijikata presented the show *Kinjiki* ("Forbidden colors") inspired by the Mishima Yukio homonymous novel, at the new talents division of the Japan Dance Association. It was a show without music and it was performed in the dark. The theme was homosexuality and the new dance was *Ankoku Butō* (The Dance of the Darkness). Hijikata changed the first name *Ankoku Buyō* (the word *buyō* indicates the Japanese traditional dance) in order to underline the separation from traditional dance and the work of research of techniques useful in changing the body and reveal its authenticity. Performing in the dark was a basic point in order to make the spectator an active participant by stimulating it physically and emotionally, not only visually. According to Goda Nario, a scholar

⁵⁵ Kuniyoshi Kazuko, *Performing arts in Japan now - Butoh in in the late 1980s*, Istituto Giapponese di Cultura, Rome, p.9.

supporting Hijikata, the audience “was forced to feel with the whole body. And it is exactly this the true sense of dance”.⁵⁶ The audience felt homosexuality experience, a subject considered provocative and also a taboo. So the show was no more only something to see, but something in which take part. A show with an important social message: an invitation for Japanese people to look inside themselves and to rediscover their cultural identity. Hijikata’s shows didn’t have an official political orientation but the dissent character was evident and it attracted many young Left activists. Hijikata also, as other artists of that period, joint in the avant-garde creative exchanges.

In 1968 Hijikata presented a performance that can be considered the synthesis of his innovating ideas and whose title is *Hijikata to nihonjin - nikutai no hanran* (“Hijikata and Japanese people – the body rebellion”). Title and performance itself make understand the purpose to rediscover the ethnic-cultural identity and to revolutionize the dance. In a climate of violence and provocation, the true aim was not to simply destroy European academic dance (classical dance) and modern dance, but the reconstruction of the Japanese body’s identity.

⁵⁶ Maria Pia D’Orazi, *BUTŌ La danza sulla linea di confine*, Istituto Giapponese di Cultura, Rome, 1997, p. 17.

In 1960 Akaji Maro, (Nara, 1945), actor of the Kara Jūrō's⁵⁷ *Jōkyō gekijō* (Situation Theater), has known Hijikata and *butō*. In 1971, after having left theater the year before, he has founded the Dairakudakan company (The Great Camel's Boat), the *butō* second generation and he has become dancer and choreographer. During '70s, together with his dancers he performed a show characterized by stylized actions, contorted bodies, violent and sudden movements that transformed human body into an inhuman one. Akaji Maro, talks about “gestures without name” and about “space body”. He has developed his *butō* starting from a search of that gestures distant from the daily actions which are standardized by the man use during centuries. This are that gestures which take place during unexpected events just before completing the common gesture. Another point to analyze is the concept “space body”: it means to imagine one's own body as empty while space is full. In this way it is the space that moves the body and makes it dance. So Akaji Maro inverts the actions's role and the gestures and the relationship between body and space, between full and empty also. Subsequently from the original unit, small regional groups were formed.

⁵⁷ One of the theatrical movement underground's members at the *Jōkyō gekijō* (Situation Theater) also known as The Red tent.

During '70s Hijikata completed some shows that definitely decreed *Ankoku Butō* importance and fame: *Shiki no tame no nijūnanaban* (27 nights for 4 seasons) or *Tōhoku Kabuki*; these shows staged Tōhoku's rural life during '30s. The audience which was critical during '60s, became more and more favorable.

In 1978 in Paris, it was staged the first *butō* performance in Europe and it was followed by positive comments, amazement and wonder. *Butō*'s popularity grew in foreign countries and several companies performed in Europe and in the United States. In Japan, during the same period, changes happened into the various *butō* companies and theaters. The number of *butō* artists increased and, although they often were lacking in technical maturity, they were named *butōka*. Kuniyoshi Kazuko strictly separates *butō* and *ankoku butō*: she uses the *ankoku butō* terms only to indicate the activities of the founder Hijikata Tatsumi and she uses the word *butō* to indicate all the other dancers and their performances.

After the Asbestos-kan theatre closing, Hijikata worked to the production of some Ōno Kazuo's works and to others studying again his previous works's choreographies, teaching in workshops. *Butō*'s success growth among the audience and the media's attention brought about the organization of the *butō* festival in 1985. Hijikata joined

only in the pre-festival and in the course of an interview, underlining that the audience's approval is a danger for *butō* dancers, he said "now *butō* is going through a critical point. I don't intend to go overseas but to come back in the Tōhoku".⁵⁸ Hijikata Tatsumi died in 1986 leaving *butō*'s helm to the Dairakudakan company.

According to Kuniyoshi, after Hijikata's death, his "weak body" idea has been misinterpreted in its literal sense and it happens that dancers don't strive to hide their physical infirmity at all. In this way Hijikata's thought is applied with a passive method that doesn't correspond to its doctrine. After *Tōhoku Kabuki*, artists thought that the *butō*'s body prototype was to be sought in the physique type that Tōhoku, with its climate, life style, habits and other features, imposed to its inhabitants rice-growers. Actually, Hijikata intended something deeper. Apart from one's birthplace and the place where one grows and apart from the homogeneity caused by urbanization, there is a deep area of the body in which the ethnic features reside and are destined to remain and to not be smothered by the process of massification. The troubles of this body's deep area and the subconscious strike not only flesh but the whole existence. The bodies showed by Hijikata were bodies deformed by hard job. The word

⁵⁸ Kuniyoshi Kazuko, op. cit., p. 5.

butō, that literally means “stamping dance”, includes in the second component *tō* with its verb form *fumu*, the meaning “to trample down”, “to stamp the ground”. This movement is brought back to the rice-growers’s movement who sink their feet into the boggy field. Man and nature are inextricably bound together so it is impossible to accept the nature running without also accepting the body’s change.

Body is, therefore, the most important *butō*’s component on which Hijikata elaborates his dance revolution. Particularly the body with the meaning *nikutai* (lett.: “flesh body”). The body in its material sense, made of flesh, nerves, muscles and bones. *Nikutai* is instinct, impulse, pure perception, sensuality, senses: features that bind the body to nature, to chaos, to *Ankoku* (Darkness) unlike *shintai* (body) which is the body as socially recognized. According to Hijikata, Japanese body is anarchic. The walking feet slide on a side and the body is always out of balance. A lack of balance due to nature, to the Japanese landscape where rice-field borders were the only landmark to find again the road. A chaotic body, looking for balance on bow-legs, in juxtaposition to the Western logical body with its firm feet to the ground. Japanese body need to free itself from the superstructures imposed by the Western dance technique that creates a dance constructed to be shown. To refuse codified languages means to reject

a weak body governed by reason letting the body to express itself through improvisation and to perform emotions. A concept that can be interpreted as body and mind liberation from the superstructures derived by living in this society.

A body able to change into everything. The *naru shintai* (becoming *shintai*): a changing body. The concept of transformation has its own roots in the Japanese theatre tradition but, while *Nō* theatre uses a great deal of masks, the *butō*'s body changes without masking.

It is a body that doesn't need to be young. In fact, Ōno Kazuo, ninety years old, goes on dancing just because this dance is lived as a total experience, psycho-physical and inward also. A dance aesthetics related to the "dead body" idea. A body that, since is old, cannot give way to the youth temptations, but it feels emotions, anyway.

A body made up with white colour. One of the elements characterizing *butō* is, in fact, *shironuri* technique, the white dust applied on *butōka*'s body. A feature that makes *butō* recognizable in Japan such as in foreign countries. "White-stained, I always go near children that cry becoming purple".⁵⁹ In this passage of the writing *Yameru maihime* ("The sick dancer", 1983), Hijikata Tatsumi,

⁵⁹ Katja Centonze, "Ankoku Butō Una politica di danza del cambiamento", *Atti del XXVII Convegno di Studi sul Giappone* (Arcavacata di Rende, September 18-20th 2003), Cartotecnica Veneziana Editrice, Venezia 2003, p. 71.

speaking about the white colour, he means just *shironuri*. At first, chalk mixed glue was used; a mixture that gave roughness to the skin. Today, the *Kabuki* technique is used: white makeup mixed water. This technique is used probably with the attempt to stifle the body or to refuse a certain kind of aesthetics. A body that, covered with white colour, a neutral colour, is like died and, therefore, it can be turned into another entity. In *Kabuki*, white makeup was used in order to enhance the skin's natural colour and it was the base on which other coloured lines (*kumadori*) were applied. The *kumadori* showed the character's personality to spectators. A unique and symbolic mask. *Butō* theatre doesn't use *kumadori* technique. The white body and face, and often the lack of costumes, deprive the dancer of any characteristic: the movement of the body stay in the foreground.

According to Ōno Yoshito,⁶⁰ the use of stage makeup has the same purpose of the *Nō* mask but, while in *Nō* theatre actor turns himself into the mask, by using *shironuri* he can freely change. Overturning the point of view, this technique is not just application of white makeup, but a sort of cancellation.

Butōka often apply white makeup in a very thin layer also adding a white dust. In this way during the show, the makeup falls

⁶⁰ Ōno Kazuo's son.

little by little. There are several interpretations about this but, generally, it seems to spectators that the dancer's skin is falling away like dust.

A more technical and practical point of view is linked with the visibility of the body's lines. The purpose is to create a visual effect that makes figures not well-defined using a more dark scenery.

According to the critic Shimizu Masashi, through the use of *shironuri* on the body, a body that lives in this world, the *butōka* liberates the body just from all the things of this world. Moreover, dancers, painting themselves with white colour, make the human existence obscure. One generally keeps his distance from what is dark or different, but at this point *butōka* has been integrated in the system and, according to Shimizu, this means the crisis of *butō*.

Hijikata talks also about anxiety, a diffused symptom. His lessons had also the purpose to liberate dancers inhibited by their anxieties. To make them aware of that side with which they had lost contact. Don't just learn legs and arms's positions, but to start to be in contact with oneself, with one's own soul. He was a dancing-master but a life-master also.

In 1985 Hijikata, even if during the *butō* Festival he expressed his intention to come back in Tōhoku, he worked on important pieces.

According to Hijikata, Tōhoku meant not a nostalgic return journey to his native land and a renunciation to dance, but the *butō* starting-point. The research had to continue just where it started: in Japan and, particularly, in Tōhoku. In other words, a search of one's own origins.

2.1 *Nō*, *Kabuki* and popular culture in *Butō*

According to Japanese critics, there is a great distance between *butō* and past traditional arts. Researcher Gunji Masakatsu, in his studies on *butō*, recognizes some roots in past customs and confirms *butō*'s character of renewal, while according to critic Sakurai Keisuke, although *butō* is a typical Japanese art, there are no direct connections with *Nō* and *Kabuki*. In *butō*, an avant-garde movement in opposition to the West, one expected to find a greater link with native dances but, actually these were perceived as oppressive just like Western theater and dance. At the same time this new dance didn't succeed in avoid completely the theatrical and popular Japanese tradition influence.

“[...] everything in Japanese culture mixes as in a dish of mixed vegetables.”⁶¹ This is Maro Akaji's opinion about the connection between *butō* and traditional and popular theatre. Actually, *butō* gathers elements of prebuddhist Japanese dance and elaborates *Nō* and *Kabuki*'s stage sumptuousness. It refuses the search of a technical form and of a perfect aesthetic in order to liberate the body from fixed models. *Butō* generally uses *Nō* and *Kabuki*'s elements by changing and using them in a different context.

⁶¹ Maria Pia D'Orazi, op. cit., p. 25.

The term *Kabuki* derives from verb *kabuku* used since Middle Ages with the meaning “to hang”, “to tilt”. During the Tokugawa establishment, opposition groups as *kabuki mono* appeared and the verb was used also to mean any kind of rebellion to conventions. Heresy in opposition to orthodoxy: a way lined up with the aim of the former *butō* that wanted to invert rules, conventions and aesthetical conscience. According to Kawatake Toshio’s⁶² analysis, if we consider *Kabuki* plays named *kizewamono* (harsh reality plays), a member of *sewamono* group (actuality plays), we discover performance in which reality is not just represented but showed as it is. Through these plays, also the dark sides of the man is showed to audience in line with *zankokubi* aesthetic (the beauty of cruelty), in other words, “the negative beauty”. The negative one becomes art. This reversal happens also into *Ankoku Butō*. Here the ugly aesthetics is expressed with the distorted and deformed vision of the body that appears with arched legs, curved back, grimacing facial expressions. These grimaces remember the *Nō* mask *heshimu*, the lips shutting with mouth’s angles stretching. So *ankoku*, the *butō* deep darkness, refers

⁶² Kawatake Toshio was born in Tōkyō in 1924, he is a teacher at the Waseda University. He has written several books about the Tokugawa era theater.

to those man's latent sides repressed by society. These dark sides are exposed by *butōka*.

With regard to links between *Nō* and *Butō*, according to scholar Amagasaki Akira, there is a same work on the body which is founded not on the “to do” concept but on the “to become” work. In the immobility of some *Nō* movements there is a concentration of energy after which actor can move through any space trajectory. It is this use of body that Amagasaki calls “work on the becoming” unlike that work founded on the “to do” typical, for instance, of Western classical dance in which the body moves in a mechanical way relying on muscles.

Another feature that draws near *butō* to Japanese traditional theater is the use of lights on stage. In premodern *Nō* and *Kabuki*, without electric lighting, the stage was not particularly illuminated. In this way *butō* draws near to traditional theater keeping its distances from Western theater and from the idea of a stage full of light where a “ideal” world is depicted, a world different and distant from the “real” world represented by audience that stay in the dark pit. A return to the dark aesthetics destroyed, in modern age, by the use of electric lights.

Another side to analyze is the relationship between *butō* and popular culture which has characterized a lot of the '60s avant-garde

in Japan. In her interview to Akaji Maro, Maria Pia D’Orazi⁶³ tells about when the artist showed her a photo in which a woman was dancing with the lifted skirt showing the sex. This woman was the goddess Ame no Uzume no Mikoto who, according to Japanese mythology, with her indecent dance provoked gods’s laughter and liberated world from darkness and disasters. In *Nihonshoki* (“The annals of Japan”, 720) such a dance is named *Wazaogi*; *waza* means “movements recalling magic powers” and *ogi* “to evoke” and, more precisely, “to evoke the gods.” Currently the term *Wazaogi* is read *haiyū* and it means “actor” while formerly it pointed to the art and also to the performer. The term has been used along centuries giving it different meanings, one of these is “to imitate.” *Wazaogi* can mean the use of a performance elements transmitted from the original one or, as it happens in *Ankoku Butō*, restored by avant-garde.

To trample, to stamp foot on the ground is the meaning of the word *butō* second half. It is a movement that we can find in primitive dances as in the Ame no Uzume’s *kagura* dance. *Ankoku Butō* has

⁶³ Maria Pia D’Orazi, op. cit., pp. 21. 27.

many elements of the ritual dances whose main themes are the death and the rebirth and it is strongly connected with *yamabushi kagura*.⁶⁴

There are various references to the divinity and to the *kami* that reminds, therefore, to popular culture's elements connecting dance to divinity. The original meaning of the term *Wazaogi*, as above-named, is connected to the mythological origin of the dance. The artist Maro Akaji, explaining the idea of "space body", affirms that "space corresponds to a demon and demon means also divine"⁶⁵ and it is the space-divine one that moves, and so lets dance, the body. Also Shimizu, in his analysis of the *shironuri* technique, refers to divinity. According to this critic, through this technique the *butōka*'s body is transformed in another person or in a thing, a *kami*, a demon. According to dancers this change can be dangerous and, just because of this, they make up by themselves to protect against bad luck. This method, since it expresses the meaning of embody the death, while one is living, it allows the dancer to represent a coming and going between the two worlds. It may thus be inferred that in this dance there are elements of popular culture, such as elements to trace back to *shintoism*.

⁶⁴ Ritual dances of the *yamabushi*: mountain's ascetics practising *shugendō*.

⁶⁵ Maria Pia D'Orazi, op. cit, p. 9.

2.2 Improvisation in Jazz and *Butō*

Improvisation is an important element both in the Shibusu Shirazu Orchestra's performance and in *butō* dance.

Analysing the musical aspect, we find that some classical musical forms as prelude and fantasia have this feature. Since the XVI to the XVIII centuries many musicians were improvisation teachers and improvisation competitions were also held. Nevertheless, modern music and Western music generally consider more important the fidelity to scores. In jazz, on the other hand, the scores, which are just chords plots and principal or completely inexistent melodies, fade into background, while in the foreground there is the musician's sensitivity manifesting through improvisation and expressiveness. The performed passages, often well known to jazz musicians, are used as basis for improvisation; musicians sometimes change music in such a way that make it unrecognizable in comparison to other performance. To be able to play music in this way musicians must know musical conventions, to have inventiveness, to have a thorough knowledge of the musical instrument use and of the harmony.

The most traditional improvisation is founded on a melodic development of the music's chord scheme. The simplest form consists of playing the notes of the musical scales associate to every chord.

This is a simple way to create improvisation that, nevertheless, can easily result repetitive and monotonous. Only great artists succeed in not annoying using this improvisation style.

Free jazz is a more extreme genre: all the harmonic rules and the structural conventions lose importance. It is a *free* music. A music that frees itself from schemes and that it is characterized by fragmented and irregular rhythms and metrics, by atonality close to noise, by experimentation with different musical traditions and by a tension that sometimes has orgiastic and liberators characters. One of the extreme limits reached by this kind of music have been the quintet score characterized by a simultaneous free improvisation of all the instruments. From a more conceptual point of view, free jazz revises jazz history to recover the music Afro-american origins. For example, the saxophonist Ornette Coleman's improvisations which has influenced the whole free jazz avantgarde, sometimes were not tonal and didn't use harmonic progressions. Coleman's sound and crude technique scandalized purists, but many people recognized in his solo an original musical study combined with a rare sense of form.

Beyond the technical aspect, important is the social value held by this kind of music born in the '60s together with the rising of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X's battles against racism.

Musicians claimed in this way their right to be considered men or simply they freely express by free jazz their emotions to audience.

This last sentence, can be used also for *butō*. Talking about this art we mean dancers who express with total freedom their emotions to audience through a dance that, during '60s, a period of great cultural changes, has rid itself from schemes and, above all, from Western classical dance rules. Just as free jazz, at the beginning *butō* caused a scandal, but in a second time it was approved and revalued.

Improvisation characterizes *butō* and it is one of the features that make this dance so distant from the others. In some cases a whole show is based on improvisation. In this way the dancer reveal his personal world in a continuous exchange with the audience. Improvisation can be total in solo performance or slightly corrected in group performance. Stimuli are music, paintings, literature, poetry, sculptures; the dancer often doesn't follow the music time but the impulses transmitted by notes. It is necessary however to bear in mind that, as in jazz, to improvise doesn't simply mean to act "at random": improvisation is a result of long studies. Moreover, there is no need to consider the term improvisation as the choreography antithesis, but we must intend this two concepts as two different methods of composition which can co-exist. We generally intend improvisation as a

composition made at the same time with execution, while we intend choreography as a composition preceding execution. Dancers, teachers and critics have different opinion on the matter. According to *butōka* Iwana Masaki, if we consider the body as a limit, we should not speak of total improvisation. Moreover, a performance cannot be the same as the preceding show, just because the dancer has had new experiences and emotions or because audience is different and it perceives and expresses different emotions. Dancers often make some exercises to acquire a sensibility that allows them to perceive and to express that stimuli which arrive from outside and at the same time they transmit it again in the form of energy to the audience.

With regard to the discussion about improvisation, technique and method, dancers and scholars generally consider Hijikata Tatsumi as the man who let a formal language stand out from the first forms of *butō* in which improvisation was more anarchic. Ōno Kazuo is considered a great interpreter who, influenced by Hijikata's work, has tried to avoid that technique rigidity which little by little was creating. That same rigidity from which at the beginning *butō* has tried to free itself.

Akaji Maro, in the interview given to Maria Pia D'Orazi⁶⁶, speaks about *shinchū*: “shaping in motion.” His method consists of leaving dancers to freely improvise during rehearsals and later he uses these dances to compose the performance. He intends, therefore, not a choreography preceding movements but free movements used to realize the show. It happens also that he creates a little part of the choreography and then lets dancers to freely express themselves on this kind of plot.

Butō improvisation is, however, a difficult and controversial matter to solve; dancers and critics are trying from long time to define improvisation and choreography's limits.

Anyway, in jazz as in *butō* a hard work is fundamental, and limits imposed by harmony in a case and by the body or by other elements in the other case, represent the real limits of improvisation. In both cases the teacher/student relationship is a basic point. Improvisation is inherent the student unconscious and the teacher must help to free it. Later, the student, now aware, must exploit his technical knowledges.

⁶⁶ Maria Pia D'Orazi, op. cit., p. 23.

With regard to the discussions about improvisation in jazz and in *butō*, we can find an interesting conclusion in the Italian essay “*Suoni inauditi. L’improvvisazione nel jazz e nella vita quotidiana*” (Unheard-of sounds. Improvisation in jazz and in daily life) by Davide Sparti⁶⁷, philosophy teacher at Siena University. According to this essay author, our life is nothing but a continuous improvisation, in which we need to face everything the existence offers us relying on the baggage of competences and accumulated experiences. Davide Sparti uses jazz as a life guide, and he uses life to better understand jazz. He questions the idea that to improvise means to abandon himself to a primitive creative energy completely submitted to instinct, but it identifies it in a duel between liberty and law, invention and constraint, tradition and transgression. As in life, a well planned project could have unexpected developments: it is necessary to face different situations cleverly mixing projects and improvisation. A concept which fits well both to jazz, particularly free jazz, and to *butō*. In both cases there is, in fact, a not close basic project but open to improvisation through which the artist’s expressiveness and individuality are expressed. Both these artistic forms are the result of

⁶⁷ Davide Sparti, *Suoni inauditi – L’improvvisazione nel jazz nella vita quotidiana*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2005.

this duel between freedom and law, invention and constraint, tradition and transgression and both were born in a period, the '60s, during which the need of renewal and at the same time the need of search and redemption of population's own cultural roots were strongly felt. These needs faced the sudden society's changes, the fixed order, the artistic rules also through social struggles with the purpose to affirm individuality, freedom of expression, one's own culture and tradition together with the important need of renewal.

Discography

Shibusamichi (1993)

Dettaramen (1993)

Something Difference (1994)

Be Cool (1995)

Shibusai (1997)

Shiburyu (1999)

Shibuhata (2002)

Shibuboshi (2004) Recording with Marshall Allen, Michael Ray,

Elson Nascimento from Sun Ra Arkestra.

Videography

Jieitai ni Hairo (2004)

On Air East 5.11 - European Tour in Japan (2003)

Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra members*

Fuwa Daisuke (conductor, contrabass / low),

Katayama Hiroaki (sax way),

Murodate Aya (flute and voice),

Komori Keiko (soprano sax),

Kawaguchi Yoshiyuki (tall sax, harmonica),

Tachibana Hideki (tall sax),

Hirosawa Tetsu (sax way),

Kito Akira (sax baritone),

Kita Yoichiro (trumpet),

Tatsumi Mitsuhide (trumpet),

Takaoka Daisuke (tuba),

Katsui Yuji (violin),

Walti Bucheli (panflute),

Nakajima Sachiko (keyboard),

Kato Takayuki (chitarra),

Uchihashi Kazuhisa (chitarra),

Otsuka Hiroyuki (chitarra),

Higo Hiroshi (low),

Ono Aki (bass art),

Yoshigaki Yasuhiro (battery),
Tsuno-ken (battery),
Sekine Mari (percussions),
Sayaka (groovedance girl),
However (groovedance girl),
Hoshino Kenichiro (butō dance),
Matsubara Toyō (butō dance),
Watabe Shinichi (animator in 'Fundoshi'),
Shamojitai (kimono girls),
Aoyama Kenichi (live painting).

*This formation is merely indicative since the artists formation can change according to the show.

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A short interview to Alessandro Palmitessa, January 11th 2006

1. How did you meet the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra?

I met the Shibusa Shirazu in 2002 during Moers festival in Germany. In December 2003 they contacted me to ask if I wanted to join them in some concerts in Germany. They has also started to collaborate with the orchestra “Menschensinfonieorchester” that I direct here in Köln where I live since about seven years.

2. Did you play with the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra only at the Santannarresi Jazz Festival?

We played together in several concerts and festival in Germany such as Moers festival 2005, ‘NRW Japanese Day’ Düsseldorf, Kiel, Loft-Köln, Berna-Switzerland.

3. Which kind of emotions do you feel playing with musicians belonging to a culture, the Japanese culture, so different from ours?

It is a unique experience. I feel a sense of liberty, not exclusively due to the music, but because of a common wish to make a sound together. Even if inside the group there is a strong hierarchy, the musicians, director included, dodn’t try in any way to invade other’s players spaces. Each of them, in the right moment, expresses himself with authority and freedom, also simultaneously, feeling a strong idea of a common musical project.

4. Do you know the Japanese jazz scene? What do you think about it?

My knowledge of the Japanese Jazz scene is restricted to some live concerts I have seen here in Germany and to some LPs that I bought many years ago. I don't have a lot to say but it seems to me that Japanese Jazz players's style is very energetic with also an eccentric musical expression.

5. I have read discordant opinions about the Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra's performances. Some critics speak in an enthusiastic way, while others, even not hiding enthusiasm for the Orchestra's visual effect, say that the music stays in the background in comparison to the whole show. What do you think about?

I think that the 'show', or rather the Shibusa artistic expression, has its own value in its totality. Since their relationship with audience is multimedial, images and dance are integral parts of the music. In their performances the various arts have the same value. This kind of thinking doesn't prejudice the musical quality of each player and the show's final result. In this way the artistic moments are alternated in a fluent way completely involving all members in a 'trance' that creates unique artistic moments.

6. According to some critics, some Shibusa Shirazu Orchestra's artists, for example kimono women, animator

in fundoshi, go-gos girls, represent ironically a Japan which is continuously changing. What do you think about? Have you received this message?

I think that this opinion is partially true because this Orchestra doesn't want to refer to a stereotyped image of Japan. The Shibusa was born as an underground orchestra and uses all the artistic elements that are proper to this sphere.

7. What do you think about the distinction which is generally made between “authentic” or “pure” jazz and “not authentic” jazz and about the strive that a not American must do in order to legitimate his own jazz music and to not be considered a simple imitator of the American jazz player?

I think that everybody should play the “jazz” that one feels. The most important thing is that the musician plays a music which communicates emotions or expresses a form of authentic art to which one belongs to.