



Sakiko Yamaoka / Action-Performance Art

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The following reflect some aspects of my imagination concerning the body in Performance Art. In my case, I call it Action-Performance Art.

They are not all of aspects, off course; since I have tried to enumerate only those I am interested in these days. In my works, some of the elements are brought together and then expressed, though not all together at the same time since they are in opposition to each other.

1. "The Body as Moving Sculpture"

In this, the body is the foundation of the Action-Performance Art for me. I construct a sculpture for the movement of "the body (my body, her body)" that responds to "my" commands. I don't want to have it move like a machine and in repetitive choreographed sequences. And then such movement or action as an Action-Performance Art would look irritating because the command has come from a distance and it emphasizes the gap between my own consciousness and body.

2. "The Material body (The Body that is not named)"

I made performances often by this type of body. Many materials exist in the world, which have no name. Our material body comes into the world without a name. When this body moves, sounds are created from the friction among clothes and skin and bone and so on. There are also the sounds of clapping, of knocking on a wall as well as the sound something makes as it falls on the ground. This body makes the sound of a heartbeat, the clearest sound with which we feel life. All these sounds make us conscious of the fact that all of us, as well as all the material on the earth have weight, and that sounds are not just an idea or something from our imagination but something substantial. They make us aware of the fact that this body is an entity that existed before a name had been attributed to it. I imagine the clarity of these sounds, each with its own peculiar life, high spirited and robust; with its own destiny.

Besides sound, there is a lot of other material without a name that still makes us feel life in our bodies. For example, a particular breath is difficult to explain with words, but we perceive it very clearly. A special smell we experience and never forget. In fact, most things caught by our perception that I don't want to ignore actually have no name. On the other hand, things that have names are useful for human society. People need them to distinguish one thing from the other. So, they give each thing a name. Even to countries. I sometimes wonder, how do we give a name to a piece of land? What things have been forgotten by giving them names?

3. "The Social Body (The Body that is named)"

This is about the body with obligations and rights in society as a citizen. With this body we should express our own will and right to do with our own bodies not any others. This body doesn't play a certain part or character, because this "body" has its own social position and life under its own peculiar circumstances, that is to say, its age, sex and nationality, the times it lives in; and its own outlook on life. These have an influence on some habits, on behavior and on culture. It also belongs to society and country, so there are often times when it has no freedom for itself. In my artworks, I use these characteristics of the body intentionally. The use of this body in this manner in guerilla-action style street performances is very effective because people look at me not as a street performer but as just another person on the street. When I work with people, it is more interesting.

4. “The Body that is Conscious of its Distance from Other People”

This is about the various aspects of one’s relationship with the bodies of other people. Discrimination, unpleasantness, allowance, approach, familiarity, unity, love, respect, yearning, feeling somebody divine. All of these concepts or perceptions are not separate. Sometimes, An opposing idea can appear in the same situation. This comes from the idea of distance and it is a way of mapping the relation and measuring distance in human society.

In Japan, for example, in the past although we respected people who carried out work related to God and religion, traditionally we also discriminated against them as outsiders; nowadays, we might simply regard them as people who are merely living separate from us and outside of what is considered normal, everyday life, but not sure in our under consciousness.

5. “The Body that is a Vessel for Personality”

In an attempt to interpret “an unknown or unfamiliar person “ as “a stranger”, we can perhaps play with a fictional image. When a part of our personality leaves a body, we create a blank space for that part of the body. What will happen to it? In one of my art-project experiences I was separated from my body in the street and into the blank that remained another artist placed other personality. The artist made a film work of the project. It was not a happy story but it was a really good experience for me, although painful.

6. “The Body that would Experience Life as Another Creature”

Cats are sometimes under the illusion that they are members of the human race, you know. I would like to try to create a similar situation, for myself. For example, I would try to see what it is like to become a body that believes I am another living thing. Such a situation would not be a case of simply imitating that creature; I would be studying its inner truth or reality by going through the same experiences.

7. “The Invisible Body”

In this we have a body whose image is created only by information and memories. In the action representing the concept it is sometimes not necessary to look. We do not need to watch or observe. And we can imagine it before or after or the same but from separated places. And when the body appears, we can watch the body with our memories of imagination. I will have performance with this idea for the piece “Wind from Sky”.

The “Instruction Pieces” by Yoko Ono might be one such work.

8. “The Body as Nomad (Living beyond Space and Time)”

This body is one that doesn’t belong to any particular place or location. It is one that goes on pilgrimage, one that never ceases in its desire to migrate. It is a body that has been broken and is in a state of transformation from a “Social body”. In relation to this, we can imagine it as opposite to the body that settles down on a “plot of land”. It is very important.

9. “The Body as an Ideal for the New Century”

Throughout history, humans have expressed various “slogans” through numerous body stances and gestures. From the 18th through to the 20th centuries it was a period of democratic revolution; people exalted with the gesture of raising their fists. The sense of unity and exaltation was wonderful, but for the ideal to be achieved other people had to fall or be defeated; and this was no small thing. In the 20th century we had to make too many sacrifices. And we remember it well.

Now it is time to create appropriate body stance or gesture for the 21st century. I am researching for it, interview and communication and discussion and collaboration and symposium and tour and festival and talk as eating together, through art and having the relax time, with many different kind of people.