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Ankoku Buto: The Premodern And Postmodern Influences On The Dance Of Utter Darkness (Cornell University East Asia Papers,)



Synopsis

A brief introduction to the history, philosophy, and techniques of the Japanese avant-garde dance movement, Ankoku Buto. Evoking images of grotesque beauty, revelling in the seamy underside of human behavior, Buto dance groups such as Sankai Juku and Dai Rakuda-kan have performed to wide critical and popular acclaim, making Buto one of the most influential new forces in the dance world today. The monograph traces the development of Buto from its birth in the bleak post-war landscape of 1950s Japan, and then addresses the question of Buto as a post-modern phenomenon, before going on to examine the influence of traditional Japanese performance on Buto techniques. The last chapter analyzes a specific dance (Niwa - The Garden) by Muteki-sha, to show how these techniques are used concretely. Includes translations of four essays on Butō by contemporary Japanese dance critics.

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Customer Reviews

Susan Blakeley Klein is Associate Professor of Japanese Literature at the University of California, Irvine. In addition to Japanese theater, she specializes in premodern religion and literature. Her most recent book, *Allegories of Desire: Esoteric Literary Commentaries of Medieval Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2003) is on the medieval development of secret commentaries transmitted in esoteric poetry initiations. Her current research is on the influence of esoteric commentaries in Noh theater. For her next book project she plans to investigate the political, religious, and visual development of premodern Japanese ghosts.

I read this book just after returning from 12 years in Japan studying Butoh dance and Rinzai Zen. I was hoping this book would trigger my inspiration in how to articulate and explain this inexpressible art form in a way which others can at least catch a glimpse of the transiency and beauty of Butoh. I was left disappointed because it became quite clear that words directly correlate with one's experience. Just as the great Zen Masters can write in a way that captures their clear mind. If someone only writes analytically from the point of view of an observer- then it's clear it's purely information and cannot touch the true heart of Butoh. That being said, this little book is, in a way, an homage to butoh and any/ all fingers pointing to this indefinable artform deserves a 'gassho'

This "college thesis" is a fully developed work on the dancing phenomenon known as the Dance of Darkness. Klein is able to develop an obviously clear understanding of not only the subject but also the tone in which she is able to reconcile doing so while describing a dance that is outside the spectrum of rational thought and analysis. Butoh is a dance that seeks to return to the realities of the Premodern. It rejects any notion of clear understanding, discourse, standardization, subject, internality, and best of all, coherence. It is a dance that seeks to reconnect with not just nature, but a spiritual sense of existing or dwelling in which the external world (i.e.: western thought) is rendered irrelevant, and ultimately nonexistent. The dance, and the [anti]philosophy orient around the sublime, and dwell only in the sublime, and in that sublime lies the embrace of the darkness that exists in the spirit. The Darkness is grotesque, and the grotesque causes discomfort to those who are not connected to the premodern sense of dwelling/existence. Because the [anti]discourse of Butoh completely ignores any necessity for "training" or binary of inclusion/exclusion, Klein's non-participation in the dance does not preclude her from writing about it, and fully acknowledges the contradictory nature of writing a work about something that cannot and should not be written about. Her handling of the subject shows that she is attempting to maintain a sense of integrity in a dance that is already on the brink of being subsumed by the politics of The Spectacle in the realm of the Western Arts.

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