

Covering letter dated 4.10.2010

Dear LUTSF

Please find attached my report about my visit to Tokyo, Japan from the 23rd July to the 10th August 2010, to collaborate and train with performance company *Gekidan Kaitaisha* and document the process to contribute to research for my PhD, and to develop my professional practice. In addition, enclosed is publicity material, and images from the performance.

The award made it possible for me to undertake this trip, which was invaluable in terms of both my professional development as a practitioner, and my doctoral research. It was also a very rewarding experience in terms of artistic exchange with practitioners outside of the UK. I was able to attend a Kabuki and Butoh performance whilst in Tokyo, which were interesting and useful experiences. I intend to publish the documentation and findings from my project as part of my doctoral thesis, and eventually I intend to publish aspects of this at conferences or in journals. I am also in discussion with the British Library, who intend to catalogue film recordings of *Kaitaisha's* work.

Thank-you to the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund for making this opportunity possible for me. The application process was very straight forward, as was dealing with the travel agent.

If you need further information, I look forward to hearing from you.

With very best wishes,

Rebecca Woodford-Smith

REPORT

Collaboration with *Gekidan Kaitaisha*, Tokyo, Japan July/August 2010

Collaboration and training with performance company *Gekidan Kaitaisha*, documenting the process to develop my professional practice and to contribute to research for my PhD in performance practice.

Background:

Japanese 'body-theatre' company *Gekidan Kaitaisha* (Theatre of Deconstruction) was founded in 1985 by Shimizu Shinjin in Tokyo, and is widely regarded as one of the most prominent alternative theatre companies in Japan. The company has gained an international reputation and a wide following in major contemporary art centres around the world. They have toured extensively in Asia, Europe and America. *Kaitaisha's* work focuses on contemporary movement, text, and raw, emotional performance. The work draws on elements of Japanese Noh theatre and contemporary dance, such as, Tatsumi Hijikata's *ankoku* butoh (dance of darkness), and the work of choreographers Martha Graham, and Pina Bausch. The Japanese dance form butoh emerged after the Second World War, and posed a social critique of the nuclear attack on Japan, through a deconstruction of the body.

Drawing on the movement vocabulary the company have developed through their understanding of butoh, *Kaitaisha* presents a 'theatre of the body' that stages a cultural and philosophical deconstruction of the body, and focuses on its representation in war, history and globalised systems.

I have been collaborating with *Kaitaisha* as a performer on various projects since 2004, following an international residency project at Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff entitled *Dream Regime*. As a theatre practitioner with a background in contemporary and butoh dance, and devised physical theatre, my ongoing collaboration with *Kaitaisha* is of interest to me in terms of my personal development as a practitioner, and in terms of informing my current practice-based doctoral research. My interest lies in the performance of 'memory', and how this manifests itself in the body of the dancer. Through my work as an independent practitioner, with *Memopia Theatre* and with *Kaitaisha*, I explore memory and notions of history and find ways of using the body to give form to memory. I am currently conducting a PhD in Performance Practice at Middlesex University, my title is 'Exploring a potential overlap between 'European' and 'post-WWII Japanese' aesthetics and ways of seeing, knowing and doing in performance'.

In July, August and September 2010 *Kaitaisha* devised and presented a trilogy of performances in their CANVAS studio in Tokyo. With support from the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund, I travelled to Tokyo to participate in the August performance entitled 'With Eternal Revolution'. Through this work, I intended to develop my doctoral research and further my understanding of, and training in, *Kaitaisha's* movement techniques through observation, participation, and documentation of their work.

The Last Living Trilogy: With Eternal Revolution:

During the three weeks of rehearsals with *Kaitaisha*, I was able to film and photograph rehearsals, training and discussions, interview company members, and document the working processes of the company. At the beginning of the rehearsal process, I presented to the company a solo-choreographed piece that I had devised in response to the themes of the work. This was then developed throughout the rehearsal process and performed as part of the final piece of work. The process of developing this solo, through working with director Shimizu, and choreographer Hino Hiruko, was challenging and invaluable in terms of my research and developing my training in the company's techniques. I intend to develop this fragment as part of a solo performance. The final performance included a layering of choreographies, text, and projection, and was well received by the audience. Following the three public performances, I was able to have a dialogue with audience members regarding their responses to the performances; this feedback was useful for my research.

I was able to observe how the companies training methods have developed and address various questions, in connection to my research, regarding:

- If translatable, what can the complex disciplinary-specific training system, as seen in post-WWII Japanese performance, offer a 'European' performer; can it exist outside of the cultural framework of Japan, and how can these techniques be used to develop performer consciousness and physical 'mastery'?
- To what extent does my hybridised, transcultural understanding of the ambiguous butoh body relate to Hijikata's butoh that he danced specifically from his own history, culture, and memory, and from his 'unconscious' body? What implications does this have for the teaching of butoh, and more generally for the hybridisation of 'Asian' and 'European' practice?

Time spent with the company considering such complex questions from a practice-as-research perspective was invaluable, and will inform the focus of my PhD.

With thanks for the support from the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund.

Rebecca Woodford-Smith
October 2010