

## **Butoh Memorandums 2013 by Itto Morita**

(Feb.2; updated. Feb.4,2013)

### **The status quo of Noguchi Taiso gymnastics (1)**

Recently, I got email asking for information about Noguchi Taiso or Michizo Noguchi's physical exercise or Noguchi's gymnastics. I searched web sites written in English, and found several descriptions about it. But, they are not sufficient to understand Noguchi Taiso well. (Some use the word "Noguchi Taisou" that spells the Japanese letters exactly, others use "Noguchi Taiso".)

\* There was another Noguchi, Haruchika Noguchi (1911-1976), who was famous about his body therapy and massage called "Noguchi Seitai" and "Katsugen Undou". Please don't be confused.

**Michizo Noguchi (1914-1998)** used to be a high school teacher, teaching gymnastics before the second World War. He was desperate in the ashes of defeat, devastated by the aftermath of the war, and nearly committed suicide... But, something happened to him. He discovered the fact that he had his own body with its own weight, a tangible reality, and he was somehow alive. He started exploring thoroughly his tangible body and how to move it, and created a new approach to the body called Noguchi taiso by discarding the idea of anatomical skeletal body.

Noguchi taiso, meaning Noguchi's way of gymnastics or his physical exercises, became gradually known to people through his teaching at polytechnics and others in Tokyo. Especially young actors and dancers got interested in his ideas about the body and his unique physical exercises. **In 1970s-1980s, young butoh dancers and students happened to learn Noguchi taiso and started using it for their butoh training. Sankaijuku, lead by Ushio Amagatsu, was one of them.** Noguchi later worked for Tokyo Art University as a professor, and his approach became well known among drama directors and other related people who were keen about how to move or use the body effectively.

When I was in U.K. in 2009, I received the copy of **a Master thesis about the life of Michizo Noguchi written by Katsura Kobayashi (unpublished Japanese paper of Tsukuba University.)**. She studied Noguchi's life and how Noguchi taiso was born and developed.

\*Her shortened paper is available at [\["The development of NOGUCHI-TAISO - Michizo Noguchi' s exploration of gymnastics" \(PDF\)\]](#)

There are a couple of figures describing Noguchi's life trajectory for Noguchi taiso.

- Cited from its short English abstract:

*A chronological history of the pursuits of Noguchi was created based on confirmed information from documents concerning Michizo Noguchi and Noguchi gymnastics.*

*This thesis has been divided into the following five sections:*

- 1) The Life of Michizo Noguchi*
- 2) Noguchi' s Relationship with Techniques of the Body*
- 3) Learning from Objects*
- 4) An Exploration of Words*
- 5) Noguchi' s Pursuit of Gymnastics and the Change in His Perception of Gymnastics*

At that time, I was trying to translate parts of Noguchi's books for my butoh students in London, and was collecting information about him and Noguchi taiso. Misao Hatori, one of Noguchi's disciples, replied to my inquiry about the possibilities of English translation in Japan, and her answer was not assuring.

\*Her Japanese book is "Introduction to Noguchi taiso" (Noguchi taisou nyuumon), Iwanami, 2003 (ISBN4-00-700057-3). It is easy to read (160 pages) and good for understanding Noguchi's basic ideas about the body and body movements. Photographs are helpful for beginners.

Hatori had been working with Noguchi as an assistant for 20 years, and started "Noguchi taiso no kai" (Noguchi taiso party/gathering) after Noguchi died. I read her book, and saw **DVD where Noguchi and Hatori performed together showing some basic movements of Noguchi taiso**. He had a talk in DVD with Yourou Takeshi, one of the most famous brain scientists in Japan.

\* DVD with Japanese explanations was published by Shunju-sha in 2004. ISBN-10: 4393970187.

**Noguchi's first book was printed in 1972, "Man as a primordial life form" (Gensho seimeitai to shitenon ningen) Mikasa shobo publishing company**, and was reprinted and published by a bigger firm, Iwanami Shoten, in 1996 (ISBN-10: 4002602575). I read repeatedly his three major books about Noguchi taiso below.

- Noguchi, Michizo "Gensho Seimeitai to shitenon Ningen" (Man as a primordial form of life) Mikasa Shobou, Tokyo, 1972
- Noguchi, Michizo "Karada ni kiku" (Obey the body) Hakujusha, Tokyo, 1977
- Noguchi, Michizo "Omosa ni kiku" (Obey the weight) Hakujusha, Tokyo, 1978

It seemed that there were difficult situations about the copyright, etc., and Hatori could not answer clearly in 2009, 10 years after his death. But, there was another stumbling block to English translation. Especially, for his later books published in 1977, 1978. **Noguchi used a variety of onomatopoe or onomatopoeia in his book.**

\* His first book is easy to read for general readers as it is with few onomatopoes.

One of the students in London School of Speech and Drama taught me that onomatopoe includes mimetic expressions, and there are not many in English: bowwow, cuckoo, ding-dong are examples of ordinary onomatopoe. However, **in Japanese language, we have a number of mimetic expression, a developed type of onomatopoe**: "Kururi" expresses a situation as an adverb where something light turns only once; "Gururi" shows that something heavy turns only once; "Kuru kuru" means that something light is turning faster; and "Guru guru" shows that a heavy thing is turning a bit slowly. Furthermore, Noguchi preferred Chinese characters, composing Japanese language, and studied and used in his books their primordial forms in the ancient China and their relationship with body postures and movements.

One of Japanese dance therapists, Yukari Sakiyama (Mukogawa Women's University), board member of JADTA (Japan Dance Therapy Association), recently read a paper at ADTA (American Dance Therapy Association) about Japanese onomatopoes and body movements for dance therapy. To her surprise, few participants of the annual conference of ADTA knew the very word, onomatopoe or mimetic expression, and she had a very hard time to explain what onomatopoe is before showing her experimental studies about the onomatopoes and mimetic words in Japanese and their relationships with body movements. (to be continued)

(Itto Morita: undated on Feb.4, 2013)