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 I think we have to learn the rhythm of Earth, of nature. Once we reach that level, we will inevitably realise what is our rhythm, how is our rhythm. Our rhythm should synchronise with that of Earth's, and not to be defined by era. I don't believe that "era" is the real world. The real world rests itself on the Earth and exists as such. It is neither modernism, postmodernism nor post-postmodernism. It is neither capital, technology nor a trend. Earth is Earth. Its rhythm is its own truth. We have the duty to dance along to that rhythm. Only then can we enjoy this Earth. Great art should come from that kind of enjoyment.”

*From 'Jodmai Jak Nakkian Num' (Letters from a young writer) by Kanokphong Songsomphan*

Performance at Patravadi Theatre's Fringe Festival in Chet Samian, Ratchaburi.

**Y**oung architect Chawanad Luan-sang, along with others of his occupation and Silpakorn University architecture students, were thrown off balance in a space stretchable by their bodies and imagination—a space, which, once they entered, was not controllable by their drawing instruments and their architectural knowledge, only malleable through their movements, physical knowledge and instinct. Their bodies gave it life. And as their bodies made contact with it, they drew from it the energy to continue giving it life.

Perhaps like the young writer, the young architects were going through a process of rediscovering knowledge—both intellectual and innate—of and within the body. Strangely enough, the structure has evoked sensations of “being in a womb” for a number of those who have experienced its wondrous pliability.

Tetsuro Fukuhara, second-generation Butoh master and founder of Tokyo Space Dance, recently held a Space Dance in the Tube workshop and performance in Thailand with dancers, architects, multi-media artists, teachers, kindergarteners, orphans and youth with autism, down syndrome and learning disabilities.

The visionary dance artist and thinker is entering old age, but he said, in a mischievous whisper, “I feel very young when I'm on stage.” Seventeen years old to be exact.

Unlike ballet and other forms that place aggressive and unnatural demands on the body, Butoh is one of the dances that preserves its practitioners. Many continue to perform into their geriatric phase. Butoh pioneer Kazuo Ohno, now aged 102 and in a wheelchair, didn't quit the stage until he was well into his nineties.

Perhaps Fukuhara never has to rediscover his youth to keep performing and keep his intellectual fire burning. He recalled a time when he was dancing with a German dancer, who began the dance with vigorous energy. As the dance progressed, his energy decreased while Fukuhara's remained stable.

“I don't need to create energy by myself. It comes from my relationship with my environment. It's about the relationship between the body and the space. Butoh is about how to manage the energy within your body, while many Western dances create energy and use it until it's gone. I continually fuel my body with energy that comes from my physical contact with the floor, the surface, my environment,” explained Fukuhara.

Space Dance in the Tube workshop and performance stems from the desire to reconnect with our body in the Information Age, and the perceived need to return to it in order to awaken our ability to distinguish reality from the virtual world. The project began in Japan and has travelled to cities in other Asian countries, as well as to Europe, Africa and North America, with performances occupying spaces from school playgrounds to science museums. It is a meeting place of



Workshop with architects and dancers at Santichaiprakarn Park.

# REDISCOVERING THE BODY

How dance and the body can redefine the way we interact with architecture, technology and each other

Story by **AMITHA AMRANAND**



Working with orphans, kindergarteners and children with mental disabilities. PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOKYO SPACE DANCE



Patrick Palucki filming a dancer.

dance, architecture, design and information. Once inside the tube, however, all disciplines disappear and only the body matters and exists. The goal of the workshop is for people to regain and sharpen their kinetic sense and awareness of the body.

The Tokyo Space Dance web site often makes mention of the “amicable body” and an “amicable relationship” with the space. In the young architect Chawanad's “journal”, which chronicles and reflects on the two-day workshop at Silpakorn University and Santichaiprakarn Park on Phra Athit road, he details one of Fukuhara's instructions to him as he entered the tube for the first time: “Relax. Start from enjoying the act of walking and follow your senses.”

The tube is designed to throw people off balance. Naturally, this forces the participants to try to regain their posture and equilibrium. The structure, suspended in the air by ropes, is also designed to provide those inside it a “beloved feeling”, a sense of being touched and enveloped. It has induced a range of reactions and emotions from participants—from liberation to claustrophobia, from fun to fear, from feeling adventurous to reserved, from disoriented to found.

“Reactions of kids all over the world are not so different. People in African countries move instinctively inside the tube. Being in a highly developed information society, Japanese children get very confused. Thailand is less developed in information technology. So Thai children tend to have more individuality than the Japanese. When they're inside the tube, they're always thinking about how to use the body and they're always trying. They can keep their knowledge in their bodies better and they have more body intelligence,” observed Fukuhara.

“Architects and designers all over the world share something in common and their reactions to the tube seem to be the same around the world. Dancers in Istanbul, Thailand, Africa and Japan don't know each other and still retain their distinctive cultural characteristics.”

Fukuhara revealed that an architect from the biggest art university in Tokyo had told him he could no longer find the body.

“He said to me, 'Where is the body? This is a body, but not our body.' Designers, architects, scientists have lost touch with the body. Now they need to go back to the body.”

Tetsuro believes that the use of the body in the existing space may be the answer to architects looking to build something to serve the fast-changing human society. In the workshop with architects and dancers, Tetsuro challenged them to find a way to fit three people comfortably on a stool without

extending or creating a new space.

“The human body can move in more ways than we think, but we forget about it. We may not need to change the space, but we may need to use and know our body differently,” said dancer Thanapol Virulhakul.

It is this information-age symptom of the disconnection between the body and sensory perceptions that dance can address. The form can be utilised as a vehicle to narrow the gap between virtual and actual realities and transform the human relationship with the media into a less passive one. Recognising this potential of dance to transform human relations and media interactions, Dhamma Theatre West, an international non-profit arts and education organisation, decided to bring Tokyo Space Dance to Bangkok and Patravadi Theatre's Fringe Festival in Ratchaburi in January.

“The question is how to control the media through the body. In the tube, the relationship with the space is one on one. One person can change space by using the tube as an extension and tool of the body. With that same idea, the body can change media interactions. In the future, we can use the body as an interface to control events or actions in virtual space—the whole body, not just fingertips,” said video artist Patrick Palucki, co-founder of Dhamma Theatre West.

During the workshop in Bangkok, each dancer wore special glasses as he or she moved in the tube. Outside, a cameraman filmed the silhouette of the dancer and the image was transmitted onto one of the lenses of the glasses. The dancer had to continue moving as his or her brain tackled the video image in one eye and the actual surface in front of them with another. At the performance in Ratchaburi, the pre-filmed image of the dancers was projected onto the tube as they danced. To the audience, the projection and the dancers appear to have a relationship because they exist simultaneously in the same space. Fukuhara, however, expressed the need to further develop the technology in order for a real interaction between the live and the virtual world to happen.

“Right now it's the dancer that's making the piece more beautiful and interesting. If we cut out the media, it won't make a difference because there's no real relationship between the two worlds. The media programme can't, at the moment, form a relationship with the dancer. It must be developed from the dancer's point of view,” said Fukuhara.

The idea of bringing life to a space through the body and human activity also strikes a chord with an architect like Chawanad, who recently formed Openspace with a fellow architect and a documentary film-maker. Described as a space for “interdisciplinary collaborations”, the group works with communities and experts in relevant fields to tackle housing issues.