

Epiphany of expression

Butoh dance requires maximum focus from the audience. Owing to its drug – like effect they are put into a trance, get profoundly absorbed by the experience. Reversion to their own body and mind will take time since one is totally captured by butoh and the transparent expression of TO - EN's powerful performance entitled *Embers*.

To my mind, the very concept of butoh brings forth an association with the concept of Zen art, however unsupported it may seem. The common bottom line of both these artistic and philosophical traditions constitutes a link between them: on the one hand the strategy of grasping life in its movement, and on the other – the effort to express it by non-verbal means of communication. The role of the performer as she initially appears on stage made me think of her as “transparently expressive” allowing the dance itself embody the inner blast. What we were invited to was the choreography of mystery, since *Embers* could be seen as an explicit evocation of the profound, meaning the essence of life, its passions, desire, emotional ups and downs. The epiphany of expression.

Emotions expressed in the performance provide a matrix for the meanings derived from the natural world, which is accentuated by the original costume created by oluhi with extraordinary ingeniousness. Of the two distinctive elements TO-EN's crimson dress depicts fire providing therefore a link with a traditional Japanese kimono of geisha; the other one – water is symbolized by the blue robe and a glistering cap. Whether the initial effect was an outcome of purposeful planning of the light operator Chrisander Brun is not easy to tell, however our perception is deceived by delusive mirage: the silhouette of the performer emerging on stage seems to twitch each time she approaches the light making the contours of her body vaguely recognizable.

The unhurried process of kindling the fire - embers, dying out and sudden inflammation is skillfully emphasized by the music changing over from retarded cadence to its counterpoint – anticadence. At this point the dance resembles the flames almost dying out, nevertheless vivid enough to be renewed by the new logs allowing for short – lived inflammation constantly endangered, at the verge of turning into ashes. What is both reconstructed and preserved by the body of the dancer originates from experience (individual or witnessed) but also accounts for the projection of our insights into external reality. *Embers* makes us capable of seeing the identity of both these dimensions saturated with involuntary feelings temporarily eclipsing, almost erasing the rational.

The whole act reaches its climax in the epilogue, when her mad dance accompanied by the monotonous music calms down, making the dancer into a horizontal position. There, at first we can observe the snake – like movements of her tongue to be immediately followed by the gesture of rubbing dirt into the thigh. The broad semantics of the act allows for numerous interpretations such as the biblical seduction of a man leading to his defilement by sin. Both snake and dust pertain to the telluric images calling forth yet another element of nature.

Embers takes us for a ride into an infrequently attended niche, uneasy to grasp by the audience accustomed to European melpomenic tradition. And that is exactly the key to its beauty – uniqueness, originality, otherness in every detail. Therefore I should earnestly recommend it to all those seeking hitherto unexplored sensations.

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