

Suzuki Training

„perfection ist he goal –
failure ist he outcome“ –
Tadashi Suzuki

Die Basis Haltung

Basic stance

The upper body is held relaxed but straight, with eyes fixed straight ahead in a soft but intense focus which allows use of peripheral vision without turning the head.¹⁸ Arms hang relaxed by the sides, fingers closed lightly into fists as if holding poles parallel to the floor. The center of gravity is slightly lowered as knees are flexed, heels centered under hips.

This represents what was described in the Melbourne **training** workshop for *Macbeth* auditionees in 1991. **Brandon** does not mention any of the above but records **Suzuki** as teaching two basic postures: *koshi o dasu*, in which the pelvis is “thrust out behind,” which lifts the chest and tucks the chin (Noh posture); and *koshi o ireru*, in which the pelvis is “tucked forward,” which straightens the spine and centers the upper body over the hips (Kabuki posture). By 1985, when Gotoh attended **training**, **Suzuki** seems to have dropped the Noh posture.

Between the hips (*koshi*) lies the *hara* (the psycho-physical center) just below the bellybutton. To create a sense of “presence,” the actor needs at all times an artificial sense of “resistance” in the *hara*. It is the home of the breath, the platform on which we place our torso, the center of gravity. The fundamental importance of this center, used for centuries by Buddhist and Shinto priests and exorcists, samurai, and itinerant performers is evident in 1976 from the fact that **Suzuki** lectured the WLT “several times a week” on it. Today, however, it gets much less individual attention, although all discussion on subsequent disciplines relates back to it. “Basic stance”, although physically relaxed in the upper body, is not a flabby stillness. **Suzuki** describes the actor in this state as like a racing car at the starting line (or a Boeing 747 on the runway just before take-off): engines are revving at high speed but the brakes are on. The actor’s stillness is really a state of highly energized “restrained motion.” Two equal energies – one driving forward, one restraining – are balancing out. In this sort of theatre, any series of movements is a balancing act between a force which drives forward and a force which holds back. Nowhere on stage is this tension completely relaxed. As Kanze Hideo has said, “Energy . . . is the consequence of tension between opposing forces.”¹⁹ In Japanese performance tradition this state is called *hippari-ai*

("to pull something or someone towards oneself while the other person or thing is trying to do the same").²⁰

One of the mental images given to help the trainee find the necessary resistance-energy in the *hara* is that of the actor as a puppet (*pace* Edward Gordon Craig): one string pulls upward from the crown of the head, another pulls down from the pelvis, a third draws forward from the bellybutton, and a fourth restrains from the small of the back. All these imagined lines of force help to build resistance in the center. With practice the actor can get into this charged state instantly just by going into the "Basic stance" (the "ready" position), but the trainee needs further disciplines to help to build deeper awareness of this sensibility.

As Barba notes, this *hippari-ai* can be found, on the one hand, between the upper and lower halves of the body and, on the other, between the front and the back. In relation to the former, one of Zeami's *dicta* is "[v]iolent body movement, gentle foot movement; violent foot movement, gentle body movement."²¹ The image of a swan or duck is used to convey this idea to actors; under water its feet may be paddling furiously, but above water it appears to glide effortlessly (the opposite effect of "active mind/still body" is achieved in the Noh *iguse*). The tension between front and back is based on Zeami's *mokuzen shingo* aphorism,

The side stamp sends an emphatic shockwave back up the body which needs to be stopped in the center so that no jarring is evident in the upper body. It is not so much a stamp as a "throwing out of the leg" (*ashi o hôru*) to establish a new center of gravity to the side. The stamp is only the effect of catching the body at the point of falling. Speed, precision, and energy are important in (1) and (2) while extreme (and extremely painful) restraint is necessary in the slow-motion movements of (3) and (4). Slow movement provides another obstacle to overcome in voice-production, another artificial way of "raising the stakes" to challenge control of the center. It also teaches proper segmentation of the body for expressive purposes; while the center is absorbing the stress caused by slowly raising and lowering the center of gravity (while singing) the upper body must be free of tension – the swan on the surface of the water. Finally it is important to stress that the first step of this exercise is remotely akin to the lower-leg movement of the Genroku *mie* pose. But in Kabuki the more painfully close the actor can bring his center to the floor in an extreme stretch position, the more arrestingly beautiful the effect and the more shouts of appreciation (*kakegoe*) from the audience. This is of no consequence in Suzuki's "*ashi o hôru*."

Die zehn Wege zu gehen

The Walks

As already noted, the Walks have increased in number over the years, from Brandon's Five to Gotoh's Nine and Allain's Ten. One of the ways this may have happened is through the long-term application of Brandon's fifth discipline, "Improvised walk." However, like *Shikko* ("Squat walk," Brandon's "Duck walk"), some were already separate exercises that have since been added to this "warm-up" run of different ways in which the feet can make contact with the floor.

For rehearsal **training** in Melbourne, "Walks" replaced "Stamp and *Shakuhachi*" as the "kickstart" to each session in the Merlyn Theatre, perhaps because the discipline is more group-oriented and less individualistic, and serves to remind the company of the "rules of the group." As Gotoh has noted, different circumstances require different starting disciplines.³⁵ In any case the Walks also begin with a fast stamp (*Ashibumi*).

According to need, they can be done to the relatively slower tempo of *Shinnai Nagashi* music or the faster tempo of *Voodoo Suite*. For beginners the hands are neutral, but in rehearsal **training** performers make

individual choices which may relate to what they are doing in performance. For example, in *The Chronicle of Macbeth* the Farewell Cult entered to "Slow walks," holding a copy of *Macbeth* as their catechism; in **train-**ing the way each actor found to hold the book was meant to be part of the physical exploration of an individual case history of obsession and despair. But whatever the gesture tried out, it had to be maintained through any one type of walk. This is done in sequence, in single file across the stage space, care being taken to ensure an equal distance is kept between each performer in the line (a sense of *ma* helps to develop company cohesion for more complicated performance moves). On reaching the other side of the stage, performers "peel off" and return (via the upstage walkway at Toga) to the starting point for the next type of walk.

1. *Ashibumi* (Foot stamping) – used in Noh, Kabuki, flamenco

This is equivalent to the first part of "Stamp and *Shakuhachi*" except that movement is forward in a straight line. Knees are flexed, and the kneelift for the stamp must be maintained at the same level throughout. For this exercise in Melbourne, Katoh and Ingulsrud encouraged the group to "chase after the feeling of stability following each stamp . . . even if it's only for a split second; you need to get to that point of stillness *between* moves by 'applying the brakes (*tame*).'"

2. *Uchimata* (Inward “pigeon-toed” walk)

This forward walk derives from Kabuki stylization of a court lady kicking the hem of her ceremonial kimono forward so as not to trip on it. Knees are bent and held together, and toes pointed inward in a pigeon-toed manner so that feet slide flat on the floor in an inward sweeping motion. As in all these exercises, maintaining the sense of “stop” at completion of each move is important. Each walk offers a different sort of challenge to the center and a different sensibility.

3. *Waniashi* (Bow-legged walk, literally “crocodile feet”)

Knees are bent sharply out and toes curled in so the actor walks forward on the outside edge of the foot “as if pedaling a bicycle.” The torso is held in the *koshi o dasu* position of Noh, the upper body tilted forward slightly and pelvis thrust out behind. The sensibility is rural and may have been inspired by Kathakali, Toga farmers, or Hijikata’s Butoh.

4. *Sotomata* (Outward walk)

Knees are bent in and held together while heels are kicked out to each side in turn, striking the floor on return with the instep. Great care must be taken to hold the center still in this “throwing sideways” challenge to forward movement.

5. *Tsumasaki* (Tiptoe)

Keeping as upright as possible, performers rise on the toes to take tiny but very rapid steps forward across the floor, as if on stilts. The point is to keep the knees straight, pulling the legs out from the center of the body. A smooth, gliding motion must belie the jerkiness of the steps.

6. *Yokoaruki* No. 1 (Side-step walk) – used in Kathakali

Facing forward, actors move to the left, parallel feet sliding in little semi-circular sweeps, the leading foot starting with the trailing foot closing, as in the first two parts of *Ashi o hôru* but without taking either foot off the floor; in this sense it is like a sideways *suriashi* (see Walk 9).

7. *Yokoaruki* No. 2 (Side-step walk and Foot stamp)

Instead of the feet sliding in sideways sweeps to the left, the right foot is raised to maximum height and made to strike the floor across the left foot, slightly in front and to the left of it. The left foot is then pulled up from behind the right and stamped beyond it to the left so that the center of gravity is equidistant from each foot. This alternating sequence of “cross-legged” and “legs-apart” stamps is sometimes called “Scissor step.” Another, more difficult, variant of it keeps the fast, aggressive leg lifts but takes out the stamp, thus forcing rapid alternation of aggressive and gentle elements.

8. *Ashi o hôru* (Throwing the feet)

Only steps 1 and 2 are repeated here, although the back leg is also stamped into position beside the leading one before the leading leg is again thrown out to the left and stamped. Care must be taken to ensure that the center does not rise involuntarily with either leg lift or stamp.

9. *Suriashi* (Sliding walk) – used in Noh

Actors flex knees and shuffle fast forward, being sure to maintain nearly continuous contact between the floor and the soles of the feet. An even speed is important but the shifts of center in the hips from side to side must be “blocked” so that no shake is evident in the upper body.

10. *Shikko* (Squat walk, Brandon’s “Duck walk”)³⁶

The walk was used for formal presentation to *daimyo*, as in Lady Kaede’s formal presentation of her husband’s war helmet to Lord Jiro in Kurosawa’s *Ran (King Lear)*. Actors squat on the toes, with upright back and arms raised, palms up, as if carrying a ceremonial object on a tray, and shuffle rapidly forward across the space. Great compression of energy is required to hold the center steady and turn a jerky, irregular shuffle into a smooth, fluid glide.

WAS STECKT HINTER SUZUKIS ANSATZ?

All of the exercises . . . are basically impossible. What **Suzuki** is asking you to do are movements that are not seen in daily life . . . that take the body out of a habitual way of moving. Then he asks you to maintain an equilibrium and steadiness as if you held a glass of water inside the body which you don't want to spill . . . So you willfully create a collision in the body and try to control it, keeping a very strong specific outward focus at the same time . . . **Suzuki** thinks the actor should be doing something extraordinary on the stage, something that not just anybody can do.⁴³

“Ten ways of walking” auf Youtube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3TV1Zuf1SU>