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The Foot in Japanese Culture

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THE BODY AS SIGN

The body has remained segregated for several centuries in the history of Western thought because of the mind-body dichotomy. As a natural consequence, there developed a phenomenon which could be described as the cult of the body. Horace Miner, who used to be known as an Africanist, has pointed out this phenomenon of the separation of mind and body in the following way in his article "The Body Ritual among the Nacirema" ("Nacirema" is "American" spelled backwards) [1956: 503-507]:

While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such a concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique. The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The more powerful individuals in the society have several shrines in their houses and, in fact, the opulence of a house is often referred to in terms of the number of such ritual centres it possesses [MINER 1956: 503-4].

Today, such institutes have been transformed into the urban "Body Building Center" (or Health Center). The desire to escape from the prison of the ugly body, however, remains. The cult of Hollywood stars can be seen as the mythical expression of this desire. That is to say, people try to forget their own defects by identifying with movie stars on the mythical dimension even if only momentarily in the darkness of the cinema.

Thus the cult of the body becomes charged with semiotic duality; the body itself is divided and dichotomized. Some parts of the body are idealized, while others become objects of exclusion, and these two poles are conceived of as complementary.

Aspects of physical form such as disfigurement, obesity, or skin color can serve

as objects of exclusion when the body itself becomes the object of segregation. People try to associate themselves with "the ideal body" by distancing themselves from elements which are charged with negative value. For those who try to locate the ideal body as the nucleus of culture, the elements which are made objects of exclusion are taken as the expression of forces which exist outside of culture. In other words, as the ideal body represents culture and the inside, its inverse necessarily represents nature and the outside. Inside "culture" is dominated by order. The ideal body keeps all of its elements in proper balance. One part of the body must never transgress its limits.

The Medieval European view of non-Europeans presents an interesting example of the image of the body. In the *Encyclopaedia or Natural History* edited by such scholars as Isidor of Seville, we find wood print images of people who live outside of Western Europe. These foreigners are depicted as deformed; they are either one-eyed, three-eyed, or one-legged, and even these body parts are misplaced. We can call these states "chaotic", if by "orderly" we mean the state in which the prescribed part of the body is found in its prescribed place. Deformity is excluded from the arena of culture because it is perceived as the expression of entropy. The contamination of entropy is greatly feared. Ugliness is the word used to denote the body eroded by entropy. "Nature" is feared as a menace to world order. The problem of discrimination against the handicapped is rooted in this very semiotic premise.

The hierarchization of parts within a single body is no less significant than that between different bodies. Because the body is an object of cultural perception, it must be understood as the semiotic construct of a particular culture. The body is conceived of as being composed of welcome and non-welcome elements based on each particular culture's images of purity, cleanliness and morality.

Here, we must introduce the semiotic point of view in the analysis of body image because we conceptualize our body as a totality of articulated parts. The concept of the signifier and the signified can be applied to the body image at large. For example, the image of the hand is the amalgamation of the signifier called the hand and the signified that is the meaning of the hand represented in a cultural and social context. Ferdinand de Saussure tried to prevent confusion between the perceptual aspect of the object and the social and cultural aspect by making the distinction between these two levels. These two aspects may be termed the levels of "corporeal expression" and of "body image".

The body is problematic both for those who send messages as well as for those who receive and decode them. Ted Polhemus, an English anthropologist, explains the relationship between these two levels with the diagram below [1975: 24]:

$$\frac{\text{body expression}}{\text{body imagery}} = \frac{\text{signifier}}{\text{signified}} = \frac{\text{material expression}}{\text{concept}}$$

While this summary may prove useful in clarifying the nature of an individual sign, the relation between these two levels and culture and society is seldom considered

sufficiently.

Soviet semioticians have tried to get out of this dead end by focusing semiotic analysis on three levels; the semantic, the syntactic, and the pragmatic. The semantic level is concerned with the relationship between the signifier and the signified in each sign-object, the syntactic with the relationship between signs, and the pragmatic with the total network of sign, society and culture.

The work of Alan Lomax [1975] offers a semiotic approach to the body that focuses on the socio-cultural context. Making a comparative computer analysis of dance, Lomax pointed out the relationship between gesture and the special context of culture and society. This point was of great importance in the development of performance studies in anthropology. The ritual drama in Japan known as *Ta-asobi* illustrates Lomax's point. *Ta-asobi* (rice field ritual-performance) is the ritual carried out before the start of the agricultural season. The entire process of rice cultivation is performed in reproducing the agricultural calendar. Some of these same gestures have become integrated in the performance of such traditional dramatic arts as *kyogen* (cf. *On-da* [Rice plantation]).

It was Marcel Mauss who first pointed out that representation by means of the body and its parts reflects a cosmological dimension [MAUSS 1935]. Robert Hertz, the French sociologist, pointed out in *Death and the Right Hand* that the classification of body parts, which began with the distinction between the right and left in hands, could be the root metaphor of the cosmology of a culture [HERTZ 1960].

Let us turn now to the position of the feet and legs. The right foot has long been thought to represent man and power promising happiness, while the left foot is thought to represent a woman who does not bring much happiness. Since Greco-Roman times it has been considered far more preferable to begin a journey with the right rather than the left foot. This belief is to be found even in non-Western societies such as the Jukun of northeastern Nigeria.

The idea that the maternal element of benevolence and reproductive power resides in the left foot seems to have been widespread throughout the Greco-Roman world. Antaeus, in Greek myth, is said to have never failed in combat while his feet touched the ground, because the god of the earth endowed him with power.

A similar conception is found among the Japanese. *Sumo* wrestling locates two sources of physical strength. One is that of celestial deities whose power enters the human body through the head and hands: the other is that of the earth which enters the body through the feet. The latter, with the feet serving as its conduit, carries the correct forms with which *sumo*, and theater as well, is to be performed. The earth supplies the "style" by which strength itself transcends the body in which it is housed, while the spiritual celestial element provides the "technique" centered around the hands. Take the *mai* dance for example. Its structure is based on the tension between Yang carried in the right hand and Yin absorbed from below by the left foot.

Feet are considered the most bestial part of the body in many cultures. Because of their half animality the feet are associated with the earth. It is because

of their association with the earth that the feet are spurned in Japanese culture. The feet are the most stigmatized and highly marked part of the body. This is apparent in their metaphorical use in Japanese expressions of human conduit. For example:

- a) *da-soku* (snake foot) means useless addition in explanation;
- b) *ashi-o-dasu* (foot-object-expose): revealing someone's defects;
- c) *ashi-moto-o-miru* (foot around-object-observe): to make somebody insignificant;
- d) *ashi-genisuru* (foot-kick): to treat somebody badly;
- e) *fu-soku* (non-foot): deficiency, lacking.

This dichotomization of the body is expressed by the polarization of the right and left hands. This basic dualism is transferred to other complementary oppositions such as above/below, upper body/lower body, head/foot, mind/body. Hertz explains the opposition between these two poles in the following way [1960: 99-100]:

The same contrast appears if we consider the meaning of the words 'right' and 'left'. The former is used to express ideas of physical strength and 'dexterity, of intellectual 'rectitude' and good judgement, of 'uprightness' and moral integrity, of good fortune and beauty, of juridical norm; while the word 'left' evokes most of the ideas contrary to these. To unite these many meanings, it is ordinarily supposed that the word 'right' meant first of all our better hand, then 'the qualities of strength and skill which are natural to it', and by extension diverse analogous virtues of the mind and heart. But this is an arbitrary construction. There is nothing to authorise the statement that the ancient Indo-European word for the right first had an exclusively physical connotation...We have already met this notion: for the right, it is the idea of sacred power, regular and beneficent, the principle of all effective activity, the source of everything that is good, favourable and legitimate; for the left, this ambiguous conception of the profane and the impure, the feeble and incapable which is also maleficent and dreaded.

In short, uncertainty is ascribed to the left, and it is because of this ambiguity that the left is considered to be the primary source of sinister forces. Hertz explains the cosmological schema of the opposition of right and left as follows [1960: 101-102]:

A no less significant concordance links the sides of the body to regions in space. The right represents what is high, the upper world, the sky; while the left is connected with the underworld and the earth. It is not by chance that in pictures of the Last Judgement it is the Lord's raised right hand that indicates their sublime abode to the elect, while his lowered left hand shows the damned the gaping jaws of Hell ready to swallow them. The relation uniting the right to the east or south and the left to the north or west is even more constant and direct, to the extent that in many languages the same words denote the sides of

the body and the cardinal points. The axis which divides the world into two halves, the one radiant and the other dark, also cuts through the human body and divides it between the empire of light and that of darkness. Right and left extend beyond the limits of our body to embrace the universe.

As seen from this explanation, the opposition of the head=upper body and the feet=lower body is implicit in the right hand/left hand distinction. Thus, to talk about the left hand in a culture is the same as talking about the feet.

The scheme of cosmology based on the opposition of right and left that Hertz proposed became the basis of a theory of symbols that was the starting point for the structural and semiotic studies in anthropology in the second half of the 20th century. The scheme supplied the essential clue to the logic of transformation in cultures. The structural polarity of the right and left hand can be developed into a total cosmology by processing them through such apparatuses as symbolic logic, ritual, and etiquette. That is to say, the body becomes a metaphor for the cosmos. The body thus becomes the arsenal of logic that sustains the basic ideas of a society.

Mary Douglas has used modern anthropological theory to reexamine Mauss's view of the body. She has analyzed the symbolic and cosmological aspects of the body in her books *Purity and Danger* [1970] and *Natural Symbols* [1973], and in her paper, "Do dogs laugh?: A cross-cultural approach to body symbolism" [1975]. Douglas suggests that the human body plays an active rather than passive role as a semiotic medium of communication. She states that the body expresses social situations according to occasions. The body corresponds to situations by, for instance, stiffening itself when under opposition, and relaxing when tension is released.

One can explore Douglas's point by analyzing the movement of silent film comedians such as Buster Keaton. Let us compare, for instance, Keaton's footwork with that of Charles Chaplin. Chaplin's feet are always in constant nervous movement. This technique seems to have derived from the tradition of English Harlequinade to which Chaplin belonged in London. Even before the days of English Harlequinade in the 18th century, the role of the Harlequin (Arlecchino) in Italian Commedia dell'Arte seems to have been characterized by constant foot movement. Chaplin's feet, however, play a relatively minor role and are secondary in importance to facial expressions which take the place of words. Buster Keaton, on the other hand, by erasing all facial expression, turned the face into a mask. Thus Keaton's whole body functions as a face. The potential of the entire body as a signifying medium is realized when it is freed from playing a mere supporting role for the face. The hands usually play an interpretive role secondary and complementary to the face. The face is of course the most expressive and articulate part of the body.

The face is therefore the medium used most often to complement the emotions of daily life; it is that which best transmits surface meaning. Hands tend to serve in a secondary function by supporting the expressions of the face.

In many cultures, the feet and legs are thought of as the poles that support the body. It is the upper half of the body that is thought to house the spirit. The face

is considered the stage of meaning and where beauty emerges, the hair the privileged field of decoration, and the body above the navel in general is given a superior position in the hierarchy of the human body.

Although the left hand is allocated an inferior position in the upper body, it enjoys a position far more favorable than such lower body parts as the genitals, feet, anus, and buttocks. The lower body is considered to house the irrational. Because it is too strong a medium of expression and yet cannot be removed from the sphere of communication altogether, it is concealed and treated as an outcast. The lower body is equated with "Nature" as the upper body is with "Culture". The latter can be compared to the front of a house, and the former the backyard overgrown with weeds. The ideal role of the lower body would in this view be nothing more than that of supporting the upper body much like the *kuroko* of the *kabuki* theater who assist the actors and are covered in black to signify their non-existence.

With Buster Keaton, in contrast to Chaplin, the face loses its privileged position as the center of expression, the hands lose their explanatory role, and the lower body and the feet in particular become the primary medium of bodily expression. States such as astonishment, anger, hesitation, feigned ignorance, panic, instability, and pleasure which are expressed by the face under normal circumstances are externalized by such kinesic foot movement as pace, speed, and change of direction. Foot movement involves other body parts and, by avoiding the simple articulation of the face and hands, is able to achieve a more profound and integrated form of expression. This kind of total physical expression is the strength of dance. Such physical movements as jumping or turning produce a particular rhythm which necessarily motives the rest of the body (cf. Dance in Turkey). This type of rhythm may be experienced as chaotic by the "superior" elements of the body because it springs from the body's hidden and negative realm. Thus the feet because, unlike the face and hands, they belong to the realm of nature, may be a more appropriate medium of expressing of the cosmological scheme of the body.

Referring to the relationship between body image and social model, Mary Douglas uses the phrase, "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived" [1970: 65]. This means that the living body is a part of the social construction of the reality and there exists a close relationship between them. Ted Polhemus [1975: 28] states that by examining peoples attitude to the human body, we should gain some understanding of their other body, that is his social body, his society. That is to say, the body provides the model for the social world.

The feet are the hidden basis of human conduct. One can lay down without using the feet but one can not stand or sit without them. The indispensability of the feet in these acts is clear when compared with the hands. Hands are more efficient signifiers due to their greater ability at articulation, but they cannot perform such actions basic to existence as standing or sitting on the ground. The feet occupy a primary position on the ontological level, and yet they are consigned to a secondary status on the semantic level.

Ishifuku Tsuneo, a Japanese psychiatrist, writes that men conceive of upper

and lower space in addition to front and back [1900]. He contrasts upper space, which is thought of as empty or hollow, with a hard floor or the earth. Ishifuku says that sitting is a variation on standing. He states that a hierarchy of value is formed in the internal structure of body, starting with the construct of standing and sitting. The contrast, however, is ascribed to the fact that the upper body feels, perceives and thinks, while the lower moves. Ishifuku notes the fact that the word head represents the central value of the body in Japanese expressions like "*atama-o-ageru*" (head-object-raise, to raise the head) and "*atama-o-sageru*" (head-object-lower, to lower the head).

As Hertz suggest, "above" dominates our physical sensations with the two-fold structure of awe and adoration. It is understood mythologically in the structural contrast between heaven and earth. In contrast to 'up', the word 'down' is marked with connotations of inferiority and baseness. Instead of defining 'down' merely as a spatial position in space, Ishifuku explains the cosmological extension of 'down' in the following way [1970: 133]:

If bodily activity is carried out centering around the upper body, *ashimoto* (near the foot) means the space below the upper body. The unknown world beneath the earth is 'the lower world' as well. The realm beneath the surface of the skin is a no less mysterious world. If the mind that appears to us at the phenomenal level is understood as the surface, the mind that lurks below belongs to the lower world.

The lower world thus attracts our attention because it holds unfronted possibilities. This is because, as we have mentioned already, the lower body has not been articulated to the extent that the upper body has. The fact that it has not been articulated means that it can integrate human experiences that cannot be captured by articulated media of expression. In other words, its affinities are with the metaphorical rather than logical forms of expression. Ishifuku describes the allure of the lower body as its ability to incorporate existential anxieties in the following way [1970: 135]:

The lower world provokes our curiosity and fear because of our ignorance of it. It is darkness and chaos because it is totally unknown to us. The essence of things do not take shape because it lacks shape. However, this also means that it holds the potential of origination, development and completion. It means too that the truth that does not exist in the upper world is hidden even in chaos and formlessness.

The potential darkness of the lower world is a source of infinite horror in daily life. However, semiotically speaking, one can say that humankind moved one step toward the semiotization of the body the very moment it stood up and started to walk.

According to Ishifuku, everything perishes in the darkness in the sense that it is

reduced to formlessness and chaos. Yet, at the same time, everything also emerges and takes shape from it; the darkness can be said to bridge the evening and the dawn.

Because of their affinity with darkness, the feet exhibit a greater richness of expression than the hands. The stomach, located in the body's lower regions, is where man disposes of the tyranny of reason. The feet do not fit primarily into articulated expressions of meaning. If the articulated meaning corresponds to light and rationality, the foot corresponds to darkness.

BAREFEET IN WESTERN CULTURE

In *The Unfashionable Human Body*, Bernard Rudofsky [1971] described the negative value attributed to the feet in Western culture. He points out that the word "foot" used to be obscene, and is still in decent society. The feet, in contrast to the hands which are 'non-marked', are a marked and provocative sign, a marginal part of the body, and a metaphor of cultural marginality.

Rudofsky writes that, "only outcasts of society who lived on the periphery of proper conduct, such as circus performers, were recognizable as bipeds" [1971: 46]. It was thought that physically handicapped freaks gather round the circus, and Rudofsky ascribes the image of the marginality of the feet to the circus. Tod Browning's film, *Freaks*, was the first realistic depiction of this fact. The director offended the public and was ostracized from the film world because he idealized those whose lower bodies were lost or whose hands and legs were mutilated. He irritated those who consider the physically ideal body to represent order.

As we stated above, feet assist man's movement, but cannot play the leading role of the hands or other upper body parts. It was for this reason that people were shocked by the exposed legs, although heavily shielded in underwears, in the Can-Can dances in Paris in the early 19th century. People were similarly shocked by Isadora Duncan when she danced barefoot on center stage, insisting on a return to the Greek tradition in classical ballet.

The fact that feet have long been considered as something to keep away from is supported by an advertisement published in an American women's magazine of 1960's according to which the answer to the question "Which is the ugliest part of body?" was "The feet". Rudofsky adds: "The feet of most mature people are indeed unsuitable for public display since years of wearing deforming shoes have reduced them to offensive objects" [1971: 49]. The custom of binding women's feet such as in traditional China seems to be based on the idea of feet as wild and uncontrollable parts of the body which must be atrophied to integrate them into the realm of "order". Rudofsky's comment suggests that perhaps shoes in Western culture serve a similar function.

Shoes were originally invented to serve the purely practical purpose of protecting the body from the cold. Accordingly, in cold climates, shoes do not involve any symbolic or semiotic functions other than decorative ones. In warm climates,

however, where there is no practical need to wear shoes, they bear highly symbolic and semiotic meanings. First of all, shoes in the many warmer regions are related to colonial or foreign cultures, symbolizing adulthood, urban life, and some specific social status. That is to say, these signs are not "neutral," but have a provocative character which reflects the central values of a society. Let us compare, for example, shoes with hats. In most Nigerian societies with which I am relatively familiar, the hat is a sort of "neutral" sign. It is in this sense "non-marked," and it is not necessary to take it off even when one meets someone of superior social status. In this case, to take something off is an action that says that a person is ready to offer one of the important parts of his identifying signs in order to make some sort of communication. However, among the Jukun of north-eastern Nigeria, the general rule is to remove one's shoes instead of one's hat to express obedience to a respected person. In this case, to take off one's shoes means to engage in hard work. The custom of removing one's shoes before entering Japanese houses has a different motive for a people who have traditionally considered the contact between barefeet and wooden floors or *tatami* a physical pleasure.

These symbolic explanations, however, have a tendency to go beyond the limits of logic when the problem of psychological subjectivity is introduced. In Jukun society the king must never touch the ground with his barefeet. Needless to say, one cannot live without stepping on the ground, and the king is also expected to walk barefoot in his personal residence quite freely. Thus the prohibition should be seen as an issue of the king's dramatic body expression required in public. In any case, the king is thought to be the carrier of great cosmic energy, so the reason for the prohibition is that if his feet touch the ground, the cosmic energy will flow out into the ground and destroy the plants. The king is a mediator between man and God and is the incarnation of cosmic power. This cosmic power carried by the king must be reduced by various rituals held in the palace so that his power does not endanger the people, and can only then be appropriately dispersed. The point here is that the people are inspired by living in the midst of these ritual/performative systems which offer a means of exchange with a broader cosmic power.

In Western culture, barefeet have been considered semiotic expressions of "non-culture" or "anti-culture", just as the naked body is. According to Rudofsky, people of lower status like slaves, criminals, and confessors did not wear shoes for thousands of years and were insulted by those who did. Rudofsky adds that those who wore shoes thought that this fact was almost identical to receiving the grace of God.

Most Westerners feel somewhat uneasy removing their shoes when entering a Japanese home, although most Japanese think it comfortable. Rudofsky suggests that the Westerner's hesitation can be interpreted as a fear of castration.

Certainly, the act of taking something off involves feelings associated with disarmament. Rudofsky even mentions that the reason for the feeling of castration is that the term "feet" has been used as a euphemism for the genitals. This kind of association between feet and sexual organs is found neither in Japanese history nor

folk culture. Today to take one's shoes off when entering theatres, for example, has the positive meaning of exposing oneself in a communal space. On the contrary, to keep one's shoes on can signify a potential for confrontation, some official phase of communication, or the preparation for an attack or defense. Barefeet are involved in positions of sitting or lying. Accordingly, in a spiritual sense, to be barefoot premises harmony in human relations, and also if we identify a connotation of lying down with sleeping, connotes a return to the womb.

As Hijikata Tatsumi and his Ankoku Buto showed aesthetically, the relationship between the feet and the ground in Japanese culture is a very close one.

Westerners tend to establish order by excluding nature, and this tendency is symbolized by the custom of wearing shoes to isolate oneself from the earth. For this reason sandals have been thought of as obscene "marked" object, because their isolation from the ground is not complete. Rudofsky mentions that in the battlefields of Malaya in 1941, English soldiers were greatly hindered by their heavy boots which caused them to sacrifice much mobility, while Japanese soldiers with their *jika-tabi* (walking socks) suffered no loss of mobility.

As this example shows, the feet in Western culture are a boundary which breaks the continuity between man and nature. At the same time, it is a dangerous point of contact between nature and culture. As culture represents the order created by the image of the body with the hands at its center, shoes are considered a cultural fortress against nature. Putting shoes in between, men living inside culture can confront the "nature" outside. Consequently, shod feet are objects to hide because of their inferiority and association with nature.

In Western culture the concept of the purity of the upper body was already operative in the Medieval Age. However, as Bakhtin explains in *Rabelais and his World* [1968], in the world of the carnival the inversion of up and down is equated with "nature" which overcomes the semantic system of the upper body by its multivocality and thus presents the world in its totality.

Since modern rationalism is based on the Cartesian dualism that excludes the body as a medium of expression, the lower half of the body, the feet and the sexual organs in particular, has become a region strongly suppressed. The expression of the lower body was only permitted in the fields of dance and popular entertainment. After carnivalesque space was expelled from the public view, the feet of women became the objects to taboo, being regarded as a symbol of disorder. The reason that the Parisians of the 19th century were shocked and then attracted by the Can-Can, and that the movie audiences of the 20th century were startled by the exposed feet of Lora played by Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*, is that these spectacular moments are almost identical with the world of the carnival. Furthermore, the dynamic semiotic expressiveness of the Buster Keaton's feet which almost transform the cosmological order can also be explained by the fact that the feet were consciously excluded by the human mind as a dangerous source of entropy. The fresh sense of chaos in not only the films of Keaton but also in the silent comedies of Mack Sennett derives from the carnivalesque anti-structure of their foot work.

The Japanese, on the other hand, have until recently worn footgear made of plant material such as *waraji*, *geta*, *waragutsu*. The feet were thus not thought of as a boundary that isolates the body from the ground, but as a medium of contact with nature. This fact may serve as a basis for comparing the differences between Western and Japanese physical expression especially in the field of dance.

THE FOOT AS SIGN: DYANAMIC EXPRESSION

Dance is without doubt the most dynamic technique of physical expression. It projects the world outside the body (macrocosmos) on the body, externalizes the inner world (microcosmos), causes a short-circuit between them and finally reveals that they derive from the same "existence" free from temporal and spatial limitation.

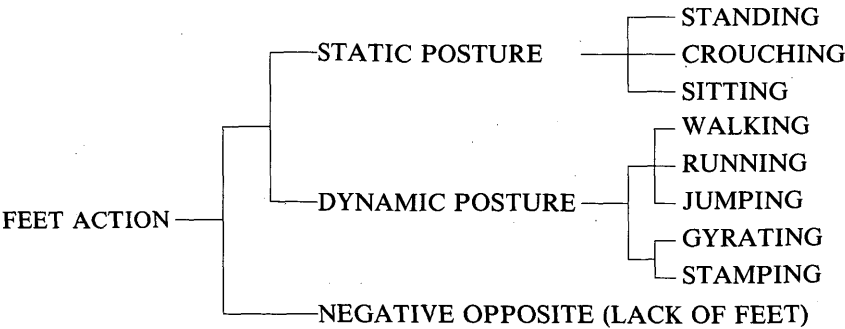
In order to make a semiotic analysis of human physical behavior possible, it will be necessary to clarify the semiotic aspect of the feet. Human actions related to the feet can be classified into several basic postures as Table 1 shows.

The opposition of dynamic and static postures is natural. Static posture includes standing and seated positions, the opposition between which is displayed more effectively in ritual contexts, as we will see later. Between these two positions, there is the generic category of crouching. Crouching also plays an important role in ritual contexts, as will be shown below.

Dynamic postures are of two patterns. The one constitutes linear movements such as walking and running. The other includes actions such as jumping (ascent) and stamping (descent), neither of which intends to move the body from its place. Gyrating movement is another category in this pattern. It is a two-dimensional translation of jumping and stamping on a given point. Although these patterns are not always clearly distinguishable, and there are of course transitional and mixed actions such as crawling as well as an unlimited number of other action patterns, I think of these patterns as the basic "physemes" (cf. phonemes) of human actions related to the feet.

Since walking and running are basic human actions, these are usually "unmark-

Table 1.



ed" unless they are clearly defined; they are not referred to consciously in daily life, rituals, dance or theater. Running, however, is more "marked" than walking unless it is a pre-programmed action such as an automatic conjunction of two points or dashes in athletic meets. Running is done in emergent or critical situations such as escapes, routs and flights. It is related to crimes such as theft and murder or to moments of extreme physical and mental tension such as combat and ritual. This may all seem quite obvious. It is, however, semiotically quite important because it is in these situations in which feet, in comparison to hands, show a decisive predominance. When the performances of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton are compared, the cosmological dimension of the feet, running and walking, will clearly come to the fore.

I have already compared Keaton's footwork with Chaplin's in this chapter, and have praised him on other occasions. The emphasis in Chaplin's performance is in the upper half of the body. His performances are rich in facial expression and eye movement which are generally suitable for expressing melodramatic feelings, but cannot extend beyond the sphere of everyday emotions. Chaplin attracts his audience because he succeeds in leading benevolent human emotions to the point of laughter and tears. While there is a constant movement of hands and feet in his performances, they are generally no more than an accompaniment to his facial expressions.

By contrast, the look of Keaton is in principle null, as his nickname, "the smileless man", indicates. His face is not segmented into mental expressions. It is in charge of expressions that are consigned to the feet by other actors. Even when sorrow is expressed, Keaton's large eyes show nothing but the stillness of deep pools.

Since facial expression is done away with, Keaton's feet and hands gain a kind of autonomy. Although it might have something to do with his short figure, he usually takes long strides, which are suitable for walking autonomously. Sometimes Keaton's feet seem to be not under his control and to begin moving by themselves. He also imitates and exaggerates the cowboy walk to invent his own gesticulation style (*Go West* [1925]). In other words, the feet naturally supply the generating power of human action and its rhythm. *Seven Chances* [1925] shows the feet as a fount of rhythm while running. In this film, Keaton, who must find a bride within twenty-four hours to inherit his uncle's property, escapes from a large throng of bride candidates over mountains and fields. Keaton's feet are most eloquent when he is fleeing. In *The Goat* [1921], for example, Keaton, who unawares throws a horseshoe at a policeman, is chased by a large number of officers on a charge of disturbing their march. His feelings and thoughts are expressed by the alternation of his running speed. If the context is clear, feet can evoke a wider range of feelings than the hands because they are not slaves to segmented meanings. Since the rhythmic evocation of feet is strong, Keaton's footwork touches a deep sentiment in his audience. In other words, Keaton, through his own comic style, ties the markedness of the feet to critical situations, and, in so doing, succeeds in fully reveal-

ing the provocativeness of the feet. Needless to say, his physical performance gives an incomparable grace to this chaotic and provocative energy and the world on which human beings fundamentally depend is reproduced in a more amplified manner. Keaton disclosed in motion pictures, relatively free from spatial restrictions, the markedness of running which could not be expressed directly in theater or dance. In this sense, he may be said to be the first great master of the semiotics of the feet.

Opposite to the linear movement of feet is movement in reference to a point or a two-dimensional space such as in jumping, stamping and gyrating which almost all correspond with the stylized actions of dance.

Jumping, especially according to Gerhardt Zacharias [1965: 142], represents the profound and essential pathos of western ballet. Zacharias explains this by quoting Mircea Eliade:

The jump is a visual expression of a man with the special ability to leave the carnal world and travel in his mind to the past and the future....The desire to break the fetters which tie a man to the ground is...an expression of human existence. The desire to escape from restrictions is...originally a man's own nature. Also, jumping into another world means a transcendental action [ZACHARIAS 1965: 142].

In Japanese dance, jumping which infers flying is expressed by the hands rather than the feet, that is to say, by the fan in the dancer's hands. Jumping is done as a preparatory action to stamping the ground. Gunji Masakatsu [1959] points out that *odori* originally meant jumping and *mai* gyrating, and that *odori* was not necessarily related to flying in the sky. He compares Western dance and Japanese dance as follows:

If we call Western dance an expression of the desire to ascend into the sky, to be freed from the earth and to jump into the outer world, Japanese dance should be characterized as an expression of not being able to leave the earth of having too much love and attachment for it [GUNJI 1959: 131].

It seems that the distinction between *odori* (jumping) and *mai* (gyrating) is ubiquitous in world cultures. Apparently, however, they do not form a fundamental opposition in all traditions. Rather, the contrast between Western and Japanese traditions is conspicuous: in the former both *odori* and *mai* have the intention of freeing oneself from the earth and confirming one's own existence (Valery), while in the latter they are expressions of a closeness to the earth. Starting from the contrast between the Western and Japanese dance traditions, Gunji explores the contrasting world views which inform the two traditions. He says that in Western thought "dance departs from daily human life and moves to another world of beauty, a new time and space" while Japanese dance intends "to turn this world itself into a paradise" [GUNJI 1959: 181-182].

In the Western ballet tradition the feet cut the body off from the earth, while in Japanese dance feet tie the body to it. In order to analyze the oppositional structure of above and below in reference to the feet in the Western tradition, it is better to oppose the centripetal movement in gyrating (*en dedans*) to the centrifugal movement (*en dehors*). Zacharias says that Kerényi emphasizes in *Etudes of Labyrinth* that the former is an expression of death and the latter an expression of a new life (which has revived from the death in the center) [Kerenyi 1950]. Zacharias points out, as an example from ballet, the contrast between the *pirouette en dehors* in Act II and the *pirouette en dedans* in Act IV of *Swan Lake*. In Japanese dance, an opposition exists between the movements of the hands and of the feet, but not between the directions of foot movement.

With regard to the continuity of *odori* and *mai* in Japanese dance, Gunji says:

Mai are consciously ritualized warming-up actions derived from *odori* or from the repeated jumps of shamanic women. *Odori* was thus a wild form of dance or a so-called athletic dance of Grosse. It was quite unconscious and passionate, which made it difficult to relate to literature. By contrast, *mai* is ritualistic, artificial and conscious; it is easy to imitate and relate to literature and narrative [1959: 129].

It is interesting that Gunji understands *odori* and *mai* in terms of the wild dance style and the warming-up actions derived from it. He implies the following oppositioned structures. *odori*: *mai*=unconsciousness: consciousness=wild dance: artificiality=possession: imitation=ecstasy: rituality. I infer that Gunji even supposes an opposition between poetics and narrative as *odori* assumes a repetition of simple phrases while *mai* is related to narratives.

Yanagita Kunio [1963] indirectly refers to this point in his *History of Oral Tradition*. According to him, phrases in *odori* are frequently only a repetitive cry to "dance, dance!". In one *bon-odori*, people "dance all through the night repeating only one very brief song." In the case of *mai*, by contrast, it was emphasized that a throng of countrymen listened quietly to the narration as the following saying indicates: "when a scroll of narrative is read, *mai* is completed" [YANAGITA 1963: 42-44]. It may thus be concluded that *mai* is a form of physical expression based on continuity while *odori* is based on discontinuity.

Gunji compares Japanese dance's proximity to the earth with the meaning of the stage in Western dance. He mentions that the stage in Western dance is a space of another world separate from actual life. In Japan, he says, the stage is a symbolic miniature of the earth's surface where people live, or a piece of space cut out of the earth which maintains continuity with it.

We see magical symbols related to the earth in the legend of *Amenouzume* who danced on a bucket with its bottom upward in front of the cave of *Amenoiwato*. Also, we find them in the sacred dance of *Iki* and *Izumo* where dancers first perform a dance with mat that a shrine maiden then dances on [GUNJI 1959: 138].

The same kind of tradition is found in *p'ansori*, a Korean folk narrative performance, in which singers perform on one mat. The space of the mat is different from quotidian space, and is fundamentally linked to the earth.

This would suggest that the stage is potentially a mediating space to recover the relations between human beings and the maternity of the earth. In this light, the lower half of the body on the stage can be more eloquent than the upper half of the body. For all their negativity and inarticulatedness, feet can play the role of the medium, with their fundamental rhythms, to evoke the power of the earth.

Feet have a special importance in Japanese folk performances. The markedness of feet is expressed in two ways: *henbai*, or stamping, and the lack of feet.

The *henbai* that always impresses the audiences in *okina* of the *Noh* theater and the *sanbaso* is an action to stamp the spirits of the earth with the feet. The entrance ceremony of the grand champions of *sumo* wrestling is composed primarily of *henbai*. By stamping the ground several times, the grand champions solidify the world and make the world well rooted in the earth.

Henbai in this sense is observed widely in Japanese folk rituals. Prior to the *shishimai* performance in a village in Fukushima Prefecture, for example, children with decorations called "mountains" on their heads, along with adult clowns, stamp their feet on the crossroads at the village border in the four directions. In the *Noh* theater, the acoustic effects of *henbai* on the wooden floor is taken into account. It seems that the *henbai* sound in *Noh* has, as an amplified sound of a cry, the effect of arousing the power of the spirits of the earth stamped.

There are quite a few other folk performances which emphasize the feet: the ground solidifying action in the *hanamatsuri* ('flower festival') in Mikawa, the *sanbaso* of *Yamabushi-Kagura*, the *karasu-tobi* ('crow jumps') at the Dewa Shrine at Hagurosan, the *hane-noh* ('jumping *Noh*') in *nishiura-dengaku*, the *odori-nenbutsu* ('jumping prayer') of Saiho Temple in Nagano, and the *rop-po* ('jumping-stamping walk') of the *Kabuki* theater, among others. In all of these *henbai*-related performances, we find a common desire of people to recover a direct relationship with the earth through *aragoto* ('wild play') performances.

On the other hand, the absence of feet is also a marked expression in many cultures of the world. In *Crippled Heroes* [1971], P. L. Hays clarified, from the point of view of comparative symbolism, that the absence of feet was related to the fertility god in Western folklore since the Greco-Roman period. Hays says that protagonists-heroes without a foot or feet symbolized fertility or its opposite concept. They became the symbol of impotence and sterility only after the two world wars. It can be said from our point of view that these figures are semiotically "marked" for their physical negation; they bear an ambiguous image of absence/fertility in their culture.

The search for the relationship between one-leggedness and fertility draws our attention to the *sanbaso* of *yamabushi-kagura*. The most characteristic element in this performance observed near Mt. Hayachine in Iwate Prefecture is the physical

action of the player of the black god who puts one foot through a knot of his belt and jumps rhythmically with the other. It seems to me that the cosmic power of this somewhat clownish old god is magnified by the lack of a foot. The central performance of *sanbaso* is the dissemination of the cosmic power of the god using the gestures of agricultural labor.

It is still unclear to me if there is any correspondence between the *sanbaso* and the one-footedness of scarecrows. In any case, I would assert that lack, as well as excess, functions universally to draw cosmic power.

The late Kogarimai Ken, who died too young after having left many original ideas in the field of comparative theater history, identified the *Tanokami* ('rice-field god') as the original form of *okina*, the old god. Kogarimai showed that the one-footed deity appears not only in Japan, but widely in East Asia: the one-footed demon in Korea, the one-footed beast narrated in Chinese documents, the one-footed dance performed during the Khmer marriage ceremonies, the one-footed posture in the agricultural ritual in Thai Court, etc. He also pointed out that in the village of Iwami in Tottori Prefecture a one-footed deity is drawn on straw sandals at the ground-breaking ceremonies, and the *Tanokami* is believed to have only a left foot. Kogarimai concluded that "this idea of the *Tanokami* being one-footed is probably related to the belief in the *Yamanokami* ('mountain god') being one-footed and to the image of scarecrows" [KOGARIMAI 1977: 151].

The lack of feet thus overlaps with a cosmological lack, which is "marked". This is an unusual situation in opposition to the two-footed, healthy, normal and unconscious state. As we have seen before, feet occupy by nature a structurally inferior position in human body. When these feet are absent, their negativity suddenly begins to turn positive, and the lack of feet makes a man a divine figure. This is the very point that Hays emphasizes.

While the lack of feet symbolically signifies a desire to retreat to and merge with the earth, the elimination of the feet is a sign of the most intensive claim in the semiotics of the feet. I think that the Buto dance of Hijikata Tatsumi has gone furthest in the pursuit of this claim.

As we have seen already, it is an important premise in Japanese dance to get close to the earth so as to gain energy from it. Hijikata's dance pursues this principle thoroughly. His dance is motivated by his yearning for the warmth of the earth. Haniya Yutaka terms this inclination of Hijikata, "womb meditation", and says:

The primordial form of Hijikata's dance is to stay on the floor, holding arms and legs and as a fetus, in other words, the meditation in the womb. This group reveals most clearly the paradox that our fundamental dance and action is stasis and not movement [HANIYA 1964: 230].

Hijikata himself said in an interview:

My feet are very small... So I think it's just super to lay huddled up in bed and eat sweets... I always spent time in the closet. After leaving his mother's belly, man loses the way of measuring his height and weight. So, he cannot figure out his height. In the closet, I feel as if I can somehow measure my height by hitting my head on the wall [SATO 1969].

"Measurable space" is an important concept for us in analyzing the seated posture. This is because the square space surrounding the seated person is conceived as a kind of box, and has long been a basic physical spatial unit for the Japanese. This posture is used when a corpse is put into a coffin. According to the folklorist Miyata Noboru, one form of punishment used in the silver mines of Sado Island was to confine a man to a small box (personal communication). This posture may make it easy for person to go back to the original state of mind and to reconstruct his identity and the relationship with the surrounding space. The sitting position and the fetus posture are thus almost parallel.

Shibusawa Tatsuhiko writes of Hijikata as follows:

Let me state this concretely. A naked man lays down on the floor and curls himself up. This is the archetype of Hijikata's dance, the posture which suggests the womb, meditation, and life and death at the same time. Then the naked man sits up abruptly, quivers his arms and legs convulsively and disproportionately as a polio victim, begins walking jerkily, steps suddenly and raises short and meaningless cries. These are scandalous actions, full of incompatibility, which run completely against the anticipations of our daily and conventional actions that we doubtlessly call *natural* [SHIBUSAWA 1978].

Here Shibusawa sees in Hijikata's dance an alienation effect of the body. He continues:

Surrealist *objets* remove purposes from the tools and things made to serve daily and conventional use and restore their alienated beauty. In the same way, the body in Hijikata's dance tries to deprive the fallacy of purpose adhered to our bodies and reveals their alienated beauty [SHIBUSAWA 1978: 103].

Shibusawa's reading is applicable to the contrast between communicative language and poetic language. Hijikata himself sees the contrast between the daily body and the transformed body:

My dance is a revolt. So, I say to my pupils, 'You have been living only with tame actions and have been treated cruelly, because your concept of the body has always strayed.' I make them contemplate their own bodies [SATO 1979: 16].

"Stray" has a nuance of isolation and alienation from the fundamental. Shibusawa calls "scandalous" and Hijikata terms a "revolt" the actions which reintegrate the strayed body into a fundamental order. The following paragraph of Shibusawa's

helps our inquiry:

For this reason, the body in the Hijikata's dance is erotic. The objects deprived of all purposes as the fetish worshipped by the primitive, will fill their vacant insides with eros. The same mechanism works in the case of body. The flesh, by losing its conventional purposes, fills its vacancy with eros [SHIBUSAWA 1978: 103].

Thus, the body can be integrated in a wider cosmological order by being deprived of purpose, by becoming vacant and being separated from the order of daily life.

In Hijikata's dance, the performer "quivers his arms and legs convulsively and disproportionately as a polio victim, [and] begins walking jerkily" [SHIBUSAWA 1978: 103]. As we have seen, feet are easier to empty of meaning than hands. Feet already occupy a shadowy side in the semiotics of daily life and potentially connote a vacancy. The performance of Buster Keaton, by the very vacancy of his feet, takes on cosmological features.

THE FOOT AS ANTI-SIGN: STATIC EXPRESSION

The semantic segmentation of sitting in Western Europe emphasizes the seated posture on a chair. In the case of war or ritual, one sits in a chair with one's feet free so as to be able to begin moving at any time. The semantic emphasis in the sitting position is in this case placed on the hands.

Yamaori Tetsuo, in his imaginative *Culturology of Sitting* [1981], says that Western sitting, as exemplified by Rodins "The Thinker," is not the rising movement of seated person but is the posture of a standing person taking a seat. He contrasts this with the "Seated Buddha" images stored in Chuguji Temple and Koryuji Temple which show the taking-a-stool movement of a person, by lifting his upper body, from a sitting position on the floor [1981: 1]. Although they are both transitional poses, Western sitting presupposes a standing posture while the Japanese presupposes a seated posture on the floor.

The basic expression of the Western posture is made by the upper half of the body. Although the navel is the center of the human figure in the well-known body ratio table of Leonardo da Vinci, the upper body centering around the hands is in charge of fundamental expression. For this reason, the ideal pose for Western expression is standing. The opposite pose to standing is, thus, no other than lying down or the posture of absolute static rest, as Otto Bollnow contends in *Man and Space* [1978]. He says about lying down:

A lying man has in himself another relationship with the world than a standing man.... In the daily world of the standing man, the possibility to reach the things, i.e., the (potential) movement to take them with their hands, rules the mutual order and the distance among them. If so, the things are put far enough for a man lying on bed [BOLLNOW 1978: 163-164].

When one lies down, one's feet stop being a part of the semiotic system of the body. Sitting and crouching, by contrast, maintain, in a transitional form, their intention as postures. Bollnow says about poses:

Generally speaking, a posture is an expression of mind that a man puts on himself. It exercises reactions to the human relations with the world, other men and general problems of life. Posture, different from behaviour, presupposes a clear attitude to himself and the internal freedom with which he confronts his own nature [1978: 162].

In this sense, sitting, especially sitting on the ground belongs to posture, not to behavior.

I would say that a man can maintain the condition of emptiness when he sits on the ground. Sitting on a chair has a potential purpose of making the feet work at any time. As we see in the image of Bodhidharma, by contrast, the posture which nullifies the feet as well as the hands contains the desire to return to a cubic, maybe an egg-shaped cubic, which cannot be attributed solely to the Zen tradition.

Analysis of the feet leads us to the comparison of sitting styles. Yamaori [1981] pays attention to the fact that Western comparative ethologists such as Desmond Morris rarely mention sitting behavior. This observation is also appropriate to the many books on body language recently published in Western countries. Yamaori says:

Their attention to sitting behavior is too vague. It is classified as a pattern of 'rest behavior', the category to which other physical actions, such as lying on one's face, lying on one's back, and turning over, belong. And that is all. I cannot help having the impression that such an easy way of classifying human sitting behavior, even though from an animal ethological point of view, derives from a prejudice of European scholars. I cannot but think that Morris is not capable of understanding that sitting behavior, a unique cultural pattern in Asia, is pregnant with subtle meanings [YAMAORI 1981: 17].

Literature concerning body language only mentions the feet in some rather minor aspects: if a seated man on a chair hangs his legs crossed or parallel, for example.

Here I would like to proceed with an inquiry into the way of sitting relatively close to the ground. I ignore studies about the relationship between chairs and fundamental human behavioral patterns. Ethnologists teach us, however, that in the course of human history, stone seats began to be used in megalithic traditions such as dolmen and as a place of communication with ancestor spirits. Indian studies supply us with data about the cosmological meaning of the throne in the ancient high civilizations in India. Thus, it is a well-known fact that a person who held a high political, religious or military rank emphasized a social and cosmological distance from their attendants by placing themselves at some distance from the ground.

We do not have a good description of the geographical distribution of the

custom of sitting crosslegged on the floor, *agura* as it is called in Japan. According to my observations, this pose is seen in the Near East, the Middle East, India and East Asia. To my knowledge, there is no such pose in Europe and Africa. In Africa, people squat or sit down stretching their legs sideways. In the Islamic and Hindu areas of Indonesia, sitting tailor fashion is apparently prevalent, and sitting with one knee raised is rather common in other areas. My description is based on rather limited experiences and is only rudimentary. I merely want to direct our attention to the fact that Western culture lacks the *agura* pose.

Yamaori emphasizes that in the Western tradition there has been little corporal expression of a low pose with the back bent. He then proceeds to explain the meaning of low posture in the *Kabuki* theater by taking *Chushingura* as an example. In En'ya Hangan's *harakiri* scene in *Kanadehon Chushingura*, at the moment of committing *harakiri* with a dagger at Hangan's belly, the long-awaited Oboshi Yuranosuke appears. "Bending his back, he approaches Hangan with his knees bent" and prostrates himself before his master. There is almost no conversation between the two in this scene, but their communication is accomplished almost completely. Yamaori analyzes this:

I think this way of communication by means of almost entirely omitting language is possible only because the two entirely omitting language is possible only because the two characters are sitting on the stage. If they were standing, it would be impossible. If they want to communicate to each other their many emotions with only their eyes, it is best that the position of their eyes be as low as possible. It is better that the body's center of gravity be not floating in midair but be as low as if the body is crawling on the ground [YAMAORI 1981: 19].

The method of intensive communication accomplished by touching the ground is also seen in the performance styles of *Noh* and *Kyogen* as movement with bent knees. This movement has the advantage of allowing both sitting and walking actions at the same time, and of being dynamic as well as static. Yamaori says that *Noh* inclines toward the nullification of the feet.

None of the *Noh* actors with costumes, be they *shite*, *waki* or *tsure*, allow the movement of the legs to show when they act a variety of postures on the stage. When their upper body moves, it seems to the audience as though the legs of the actors are still. Their feet slide on the floor in a single moment and erase all trace of movement in another.

Noh actors not only cover their legs with costumes. They also try to mentally negate the physical function of their legs. When they lower their hips and move along the floor with a sliding walk, their legs are not mere legs which carry the upper body. Although the expression might not necessarily be proper, I would say that they are almost nullified legs [YAMAORI 1981: 21].

Yamaori senses in the "nullification of the legs" a traditional idea that sitting on the

ground is the most stable style for man. He contrasts Western culture and Asian culture, including Japanese, as a "culture of standing" and a "culture of sitting".

I do not intend to refute Yamaori's analysis. I am only afraid that his discussion may get stuck if he defines the principle of *Noh* only as the nullification of the legs. I think that it is better to find in *Noh* a bipolarity of the dynamic and the static, which will make it easier to explain the emphasis on feet in *Noh* such as the *henbai* (stamping) performed by the *nochijite*. This is because the bending pose expresses simultaneously the possibility of movement and the stasis.

However, Yamaori's basic contrast between the standing and sitting position is, I believe, correct. He says that feet with shoes are related to standing, while barefeet suggest sitting on the floor/ground. He says that shod feet separate the upper half of the body from the ground and make the body independent from the earth. Yamaori continues:

By contrast, barefeet bring the upper body close to the ground and allow the body to be embraced by the earth.... Sitting with the knees on the ground and hips lowered is related to a desire to identify with the earth, to communicate with nature, and be intuitional [YAMAORI 1981: 31].

Yamaori says that while the standing position directs our thought and sentiment toward visualization, the sitting position leads us to tactile sensations. This view is almost parallel to the aforementioned dance method of Hijikata. The sense of touch, which presumes the "identification with the earth," seems to lead us of necessity to womb meditation.

This reminds me of the idea of Suzuki Tadashi that the Japanese tea ceremony room represents the cosmological expression of the earth. He says that a man who goes into the tea ceremony room through its small wicker door experiences the entrance into a womb. The ceremonial manners performed inside the room become meaningful when a communal sentiment of the womb arises among the attendants seated in the confined space.

The Lio in the central highlands of Flores Island, Indonesia, among whom I carried out research in 1974-75, regard the sitting position as the nucleus of the cosmos. There are commonly seven houses, called "the seven original houses," in a Lio village. The most central of them is called *sao lia*. The model of the house structure is a woman; its interior represents the mother's womb. A rope called a *pus ate*, umbilical cord, hangs down from the ceiling inside the house. A thick plank is placed in the center of the rear of the house, on which a symbolic bas-relief of female breasts is carved. The front entrance of the house is regarded as the buttocks. There are fire-places in the shape of platforms on both sides inside the entrance which are the legs. In this way, the interior of the house symbolically constitutes a woman in sitting position (Figure 1). Lio women give birth to children sitting in front of the central pillar at the rear end and leaning themselves on it. Visitors from outside the community are invited inside the house and sit down reclin-

ing themselves on the central pillar.

The crouching posture reminds one of the fetal pose. According to the Lio mythology, the first ancestor drifted to the island crouching in a boat. *Nguwa lia* is the most important year renewal ceremony among the Lio. It seems to revive the myth. This ritual takes place after harvest and prior to the new agricultural cycle. The central part of the ritual which lasts for a week is the ceremony in which seven priests, sitting on the floor of the *sao lia* (Big House) with knees and elbows bent, eat taro cooked during the ritual out of their palms without using their fingers. This can be seen as a ritual of death and rebirth. The crouching pose of the seven priests is that of a fetus. Crouching posture, attendance of seven priests, and darkness are the fundamental elements which constitute this ritual. Through this ritual, time is renewed and the world is recreated.

Space, the sitting posture, the desire to return to primordial time, the attendance group and the communion observed in this Lio ceremony somehow correspond to the secular ritual system of the Japanese tea ceremony room. Both ceremonies are based on a continuity between the sitting posture and the feeling in the mother's womb.

The sitting pose as a cosmological model in a tribe of the eastern Indonesian archipelago corresponds in our culture to the feet. This fact may be corroborated by the sitting form of the clay human figurines of the Jomon period discussed by Yamaori [1981]. He says about the figurines with bent knees and elbows found in Aomori and Fukushima Prefectures:

We should pay attention to the fact that this crouching style with both knees up is used by a number of peoples and tribes all over the world. This posture can be regarded as a most natural and stable pose which emerged from the

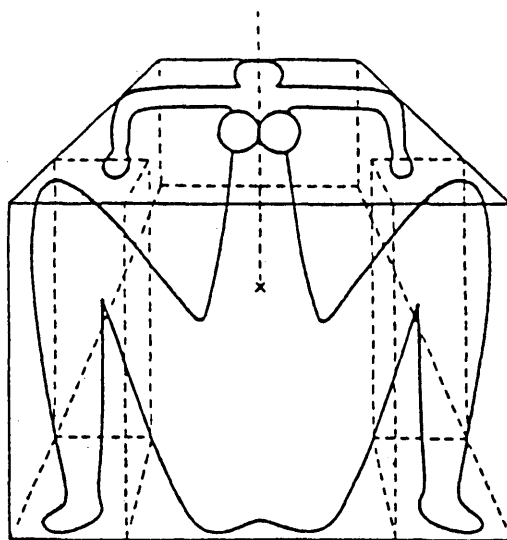


Figure 1.

primitive sentiment of the human beings and their elemental physical movements. Beyond all the differences of class, status or culture, it shows a primordial feature of mankind, for the posture of the fetus sleeping in the mother's womb most closely resembles the crouching pose. ...The fetus who is expecting physiological and physical development, floating in the amniotic fluid, shows in primordial space the archetype of the sitting life [1981: 128-129].

Yamaori continues to say that when we take a crouching position, we "are struck by a sort of sweet-and-sour feeling that the real and quotidian society suddenly begins to disappear and that we gradually leave the world to float to an unknown world" [1900: 130]. He says that this feeling is a sort of mysterious attraction that seduces a man to his primordial place. He also points out that the crouching style infers the beginning and the end of human life and symbolizes incipience and the close of the history of human beings.

By using these ideas of Yamaori, we can understand that the Lio ritual described above has an inclination toward a return to the stage prior to the segmentation. It is significant that in the ritual the anti-segmentation of hands corresponds to that of feet: eating the meal out of the palms without using the fingers is to reduce the role of hands to the level of feet. The sitting posture with both knees up is the pose to return to the place prior to segmentation. Yamaori explains the sentiment immanent in this posture as a "dreamlike feeling of being embraced by the gentle love of mother and being melted into the infinite expanse of the universe [1981: 131].

Analysis of the crouching posture thus begins our inquiry into the symbolic and cosmological sphere of the feet. The posture touches the deepest realm of human existence which can be characterized ambiguously as a light darkness, a peaceful chaos, or an open secret room. By taking this posture, a man, as body, rises above the body and turns into a most gratified cosmological topos.

The paradoxical fact is that the feet, in contrast to the hands, are regarded, due to their fundamental potential, as an organ close to the ground, low, akin to excrement, backward and outside of conscious control. As I have repeatedly claimed in this chapter, because of this strong markedness in the true sense of the word, feet can be the generating power which sustains the cosmological root of the body. It will be impossible to build a semiotics of the body without taking into account these facts.

TOWARD A SEMIOTICS OF BODY EXPRESSION

Generally speaking, books on body language published in Western countries contain much description about hands but little about feet. It is because, as we have shown, feet are not suitable for segmental analysis and are difficult to incorporate into the pattern of established discourse.

In taking an organ of the body as the object of semiotic analysis, we should not separate it from the rest of the body but should discuss it as a part of the whole system. From this perspective, I have discussed in this chapter how the body can be

understood as a semiotic system, the degradation of feet in Western cultures, and the semiotic possibility of feet in various fundamental spheres. Summing up the points which have been clarified throughout my discussion:

- (1) Due to their unsegmental nature, feet and the lower half of the body constitute a negative and marginal part in the semiotic system of the body.
- (2) Because of this, the role feet play in human behavior and culture has drawn incomparably less attention than hands.
- (3) Thus, the potentiality of feet as an expressive vehicle has not yet been sufficiently investigated through the analysis of verbal expression.
- (4) The performing arts, with dance as their driving force, however, have explored the expressive potential of the feet without relying on verbal expression.
- (5) The structure of the expression of the feet can be analyzed, as can all subsystems of culture viewed semiotically, through their static and dynamic features. Static features mean the unreflective and unmarked forms of expression used as vehicles in daily communication. Dynamic features are, by contrast, the tension-bearing expressions which arouse the markedness of the feet. They have nothing to do with the amount of actual movement of the feet.
- (6) The semiotics of the feet should constitute a hidden foundation of the semiotics of performance. This is because the feet in their dynamic aspect have a stronger power to throw a man into his culture's cosmological context than any other part of the body does.

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