

Three conventions of Noh Theatre (Introduction)

a. Kata



(Source: <http://www.culturalnews.com/?p=1008>)

The *kata* is the stylistic movement patterns that form the gestural vocabulary and blocking of the dance. *Kata* means “stamp”, “pattern” or “mold.” Unlike the *mudra* hand language in Indian traditional dance, *kata* do not necessarily have any specific symbolic meaning: they are usually abstract enough to support the emotion of the piece; their meaning is created by their context in the dance.

For an actor inspired by Noh, the goal would not be to imitate the specific *kata* of Noh, but to find a strong physicality and inner energy that taps into the archetypal gestures of the character they are playing. The actor needs intense concentration and a willingness to find freedom within the limitations of that rigorous gestural vocabulary.

b. Ma/emptiness

Ma is a Japanese concept of “negative space” – but “negative” is not really the right word. It’s more about “pregnant” or “potential” space. It’s about a space, pause, interval or gap that allows the imagination of the viewer to fill something in and complete it.

Examples of negative space in Japanese art can be found in ink-brush paintings or a Zen-rock garden; these have an appreciation for emptiness and minimalism.

Noh theatre is full of *ma* – in the design, architecture, text, music and performances. My teacher, the theatre director Anne Bogart, would often talk about this sense of *ma*. She would encourage her actors “to feel the taut line between them and their scene partner” without them being able to look at each other. She would say:

The lines of the actors on stage should never go slack.

(Source: <http://theconversation.com/empire-of-stillness-the-six-essential-aspects-of-japanese-noh-27517>)

c. Mie/pose

The **mie pose** (見え or 見得, *mie*, pronounced 'mee-eh'), a powerful and emotional pose struck ^[1] by an actor, who then freezes for a moment, is a distinctive element of *aragoto Kabuki* performance. *Mie* means 'appearance' or 'visible' in Japanese, and one of the primary purposes of this convention is to draw attention to a particularly important or powerful portion of the performance. It is meant to show a character's emotions at their peak, and can often be a very powerful pose. The actor's eyes are opened as wide as possible; if the character is meant to seem agitated or angry, the actor will cross his eyes. In Japanese, the *mie* pose is said to be "cut" by the actor (見得を切る, *mie wo kiru*).

Audience members will shout out (*kakegoe*) words of praise and the actor's name at specific times before and after the pose is struck.



(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mie_%28pose%29)