

a language. And indeed, I have often thought of that as our general attitude toward foreign languages in Japan. On the other hand, people believe that one language, their own, must be something special, that there has to be a clear and hard border between Japanese and other languages.

T: It is most interesting that you bring in the musical dimension of language here. More than visual art, music is said to be the very art form of new generations. Compositions with sound harmonics already constitute models of speed design. I have always emphasized both in my films and in my books that it is through language that one hears the music of a person and of a people. One distinguishes one neighborhood, one town, and one region from another by the sound and rhythm of each location. When I travel, what allows me to recognize where I am across ethnic borders is the intonation of people's vocal interactions. Our language and music are our identity.

The use of Japanese sayings, sentences and words in *The Fourth Dimension* was initially triggered by an encounter with the performer herself. I heard Shoko Hikage's koto and vocal performance shortly before the montage of the film, when I went to see a Butoh dance in San Francisco. I was highly inspired, so I ended up asking her to perform (with Greg Goodman) for the film soundtrack. I wanted very much to hear Japanese in *The Fourth Dimension*, rather than simply to understand its meaning. But to invite the viewer to hear it as well, I had to mark it, and hence the need to have it both "ordinarily" spoken and "ritually" performed. I'm reminded here of *gidayu*—this stylized and highly emotive use of the voice common to Japanese music and theater, in which a chanter and a *shamisen* player are usually included. Voice and language are emphatically non-naturalistic in performance. Shoko's vocals play a very important part of the film—one in which I directly appeal to the Japanese-speaking viewer, while offering all viewers another dimension of language.

Poetry—the poetry of one's existence—arises when words are brought back to music. Although my films can all be said to be music of the eye, this one stands out for me both as a spectrum of time and a musical latticework. Japanese language has a wide range of subtle inflections; its sentences can easily eliminate the subject and thrive on ambivalence. Paradoxically, it is by working on its very musical attributes that one marks a language (or a people's identity) in its specificity and at the same time, displaces its rigid codes. In the play between sense and sound, *The Fourth Dimension* weaves a number of different time zones. There is, for example, a dialogue between the stream of koto music drifting and swelling with the images, and the stream of narration pensively read in my own voice. In contrast to this English narration's steady excess of sound, thoughts and meanings, the occasional, single Japanese words performed by Hikage powerfully irrupt into the sonorous fabric. They are sound-hieroglyphs that punctuate the film space. Since sounds have their own internal lives, and every word stands by itself as a powerful magnet, it is largely through their interactions that the film comes to life and resonates.

Y: *You were born in Vietnam, spoke French in school, moved to the USA and studied there, taught English in France, and taught music in Senegal. And the many authors who have inspired you also reflect this multiple linguistic/cultural background. In contrast, the majority of Japanese were born into a society which is thought of as strictly*