

Carlotta Ikeda

# Words of Bone and Muscle

Interview by Jette Bastian

*In contrast to other Butoh dance that I have seen, you have the necessary courage and insight to perform pure nature. What is Butoh to you?*

Butoh came into existence after Hiroshima, in the succeeding emptiness. Butoh is dance. In itself Butoh doesn't mean anything, but through my dance I am Butoh. Butoh is my life.

I don't know why I started to dance; God gave me a dancing life when I was in my mother's womb. Butoh is influenced by my life, it is not just something I embrace. The body is pure nature in its essence, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the body has changed just as much as the world has. The body is exposed to unnatural influences and therefore transforms; this is why I try to present it as purely as possible.

I want dancers to dance from their inner world and I prefer introverted rather than extroverted choreography. If one is empty within one can only show that. In theatre, dance and music there is a relationship between inner and outer energy. When you work with dancers as a choreographer, the first thing you need is to get to know the dancers' bodies. When I work with dancers and with myself I move towards the extreme, in order to cross borders and reach the point where working in the studio and on stage has the same freedom from restrictions.

*In your performance I noticed that you consistently use uneven numbers, for example three and seven, for the dancers on stage and simultaneously for the sources of light, which gives cogency and rhythm to your performance. Is this a conscious choice?*

I like the uneven numbers three, five, seven and nine. Since its beginning our company Ariadone has been composed of seven dancers including myself. I don't use even and uneven numbers because of a theory, but because it has always felt right this way. I also use the possibilities of space intuitively,

*I don't write myself, I paint. Europeans need to write when they work in order to understand and reach meaning.*

*I try to demolish meaning in my choreography, in my performances.*

*Of course there is a meaning in the performances, but it is not interpreted for the audience.*

out of a natural feeling of where and how energy works for the dance.

*Do you use text as inspiration to create a performance?*

I do not use text directly, but I let myself be inspired by literature, music, visual arts and so on. Writing that dialogues with my dance inspires me. I read Nietzsche and various French philosophers. They write words, I create dance. For example, a relationship between text and movement happens when I read Nietzsche and allow the feeling I experience to express itself through movement and dance.

A short verse or a sentence can create images, and consequently choreography in my mind. *Waiting*, the solo performance I created four years ago, was inspired by Marguerite Duras. I have read nearly all her works and I have been inspired by her universe. I identify with it, understand and

feel it. In the presentation of the production I say that Marguerite Duras wrote with her whole body and that I read her with my whole body. Marguerite Duras' words have bone and muscle.

I am also inspired by Japanese calligraphy. It is a source of basic inspiration to me - for concentration. To produce symbols is not just a question of calligraphy, but to a considerable extent also a question of concentration. You sit down, straighten your back, gather all your concentration and use the most minimalistic movements possible. You forget everything that is around you. It is not just a question of Japanese calligraphy, but it concerns the whole of Japanese culture and those elements that contain this concentration and inspiration, which are fundamental to my dance. Dance and theatre are my life. The significance of my experience is tied to Japanese culture, which maintains that we learn from life until we are fifty, and from then on we can begin to



*Haru No Saiten* directed by Carlotta Ikeda  
Photo: Claude Dantenny



Carlotta Ikeda in *Waiting* Photo: Claude Dantenny

call ourselves artists and begin our lives as artists.

When I give workshops, I use words to describe what should happen. It is easier to let the words come first. I have tried to explain only through movement and it does not work.

I use voice in my performances when it naturally finds its expression in the dance. As there is no counting in the dance, the voice can also be used as a cue in order to co-ordinate simultaneous movements. The dancers are usually of different nationalities so the pronunciation of words and sounds is something we must have a clear agreement upon. For example Olia Lydaki, one of the dancers in *Haru No Saiten*, has great concentration and it seems as if even a small movement of hers can function as a cue for the other dancers, but it is not always the case. Therefore Olia was instructed to use voice as a cue in this production.

I don't write myself, I paint. Europeans need to write when they work in order to understand and reach meaning. I try to demolish meaning in my choreography, in my performances. Of course there is a meaning in the performances, but it is not interpreted for the audience. Each spectator can watch the dance from his or her own point of view. I cry, the public cries and not one of us knows why. I express a feeling and the spectators feel the energy and receive their own experience of the feeling.

*Do women and men react differently to your performances?*

They react very differently to my performances. In my dance I try to come out on the other side of the question of gender. I am a woman and I feel like a woman inside. My dancers are women. In the last five or six years I have noticed that my femininity is

expressed more than before. Originally, in the solo performance *Waiting* I did not feel like a woman, more a being, neither male nor female. But when I began performing the same production again after some years, I was surprised by the different reactions of the public and I realised through this that my womanliness is more conspicuous than I originally believed.

At first it was fortuitous that my company was composed only of women. But later I came to the conclusion that the male dancer builds his dance from the head and that women have a feeling and intuition that give them a more natural access to dance.

Assistant interpreter from French: Cathrine Verwildt  
Translated from Danish by Julia Varley

CARLOTTA IKEDA (Japan) is a leading female Butoh choreographer. She started with contemporary dance at the beginning of the 1960s and later choreographed with Ko Murobushi for the company Dai Rakudakan. In 1974 Carlotta Ikeda shocked the morals of good Japanese society by creating her own company Ariadone No Kai, solely composed of women. She is now living and working with her company in Bordeaux, France, and has recently been touring the production *Haru No Saiten: Un Sacre du Printemps* inspired by Stravinsky's classical work *Le Sacre du Printemps*.