

## **DANCE THEATRE WORKSHOP FOR THE CSWC**

### **from 22 June 2009 to 7 July 2009: The Second Experience**

It is with a great excitement that I presented myself to the first class of my second teaching experience for the students of the CSWC. I was curious to see who would attend my class this year: some students from the year before; some new students who heard about my class from last year? Had my teaching the year before left any traces?

I will first present myself to the readers who did not read my last year's report. Last year, in May 2008, I had my first experience of teaching at the Center for the Study of World Civilizations. This project has been initiated by Prof. Noboru Hidano, who contacted me and proposed a 30-hour workshop with the goal of introducing students to the world of dance and dance-theatre, with a public presentation at the end of this workshop.

I started to work as dancer and modern dance teacher 33 years ago. Before becoming a dancer, I studied for a few years mathematics, physics and chemistry ; and even though I did not finish my studies, because of my decision to become a dancer, I always kept a scientific curiosity about those subjects ; and, last year, the proposition of Prof. Hidano to teach my art and experience in Dance-Theatre meshed perfectly with my desire to find a way of understanding between my passion for body movement, dance and performing art and my old interest in the scientific way of thinking.

This year I proposed to Head of the CSWC Roger Pulvers not to do any presentation, because I wanted to have more time to concentrate on the pedagogic part and not be under the pressure of a stage presentation. This year, I had the intention to build my teaching following three parallel lines:

- what is dance , and dance-theatre, its history and an introduction to Pina Bausch's work through video showing and discussion about what has been seen.

What is being a dancer (a practical experience), the body as an language instrument?

What is being a choreographer (a practical experience), the movement and stage situations as an artistic-expression language ?

It gave me great pleasure to notice that two of my students from last year decided to attend my class again. When they first came in May 2008, they both had no idea of what dance was about, nor had they any practice of a physical activity of any sort. When I asked them why they were back in my class, they answered: Well, we want to know more about it. Another of my 2009 students had some experience in modern dance, and two others in their first year at the university had heard from another student about my course last year.

The year before, I proposed to my students, as a first step into the world of dance and performing art, an introduction to the discovery of the beauty of forms, of body lines, the melody of body movement, the first approach going through a more abstract path. This year I had the intention to propose an introduction to discover dance-theatre as a language dealing with human matters, and an introduction to the work of the great master Pina Bausch was the best way to achieve it.

There is one very positive point which I could notice during this second teaching experience; after watching the video of «Cafe Müller» one of the masterpieces of her repertory, I had the feeling that the students realized that dance-theatre could be a

language to communicate serious and deep matters, and was not only an entertainment cultural activity. I consider this point as very important, particularly in our context; the students of Tokyo Institute of Technology are serious young persons; already last year, I was impressed by the way they get themselves into what they are doing and studying. Nowadays, if a young student wants to make their way through the long and hard journey to become a successful and respected engineer, they must take studies very seriously and work hard to attain the levels of accomplishment demanded of them. They do not have much time for entertainment, and I can imagine that they do not like so much to waste their time in studying things which do not seem to them full of sense. What I mean is that, once the students noticed that a dance-theatre performance could also talk about serious and deep matters concerning human emotions, and that dance is not only made to show some highly skilled dancers enjoying the beauty of movement, then their motivation and curiosity for this field did gain some respect and intensity.

I do mean to say that they had no interest in abstract dance, not at all; scientists are sensitive to abstract forms and movements, lines, curves, spirals and all geometrical figures evolving through space and time; these are very familiar concepts to them. But maybe because modern dance (in our modern society) has its roots in ballet (which is considered as a fairy story telling art), maybe also because the style of dance which is mainly to be seen on television is modern jazz dance in the background of show business pop, dance has the tendency to be considered by the lay person as an entertainment art. Since most of my students looked at dance in this way, I considered it important to show them how deep and sensitive the language of dance theatre can be. «Cafe Müller» and «Rite of Spring» from Pina Bausch were the perfect choices for this purpose. Also they could see me on stage, and this helped to capture their attention. After the showing of «Cafe Müller» a remark from a student caught my attention; he said: «I feel that there is something important, and I am sure that when I will be older, I will understand better what it is».

About «art», the dictionary gives this definition: *the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, sculpture, dance, but as well as music, theatre play, literature etc., producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.*

Wikipédia proposes:

**Art** is the expression of creativity or imagination. The word art comes from the [Latin](#) word *ars*, which, loosely translated, means "arrangement". Art is commonly understood as the act of making works (or *artworks*) which use the human [creative impulse](#) and which have meaning beyond simple description. While art is often distinguished from [crafts](#) and [recreational](#) hobby activities, this boundary can at times be hard to define. The term *creative arts* denotes a collection of disciplines whose principal purpose is the output of material for the viewer or audience to interpret. As such, art may be taken to include forms ranging from literary forms ([prose writing](#) and [poetry](#)); performance-based forms ([dance](#), [acting](#), [drama](#), and [music](#)); visual and "plastic arts" ([painting](#), [sculpture](#), [photography](#), [illustration](#)); to forms that also have a functional role, such as [architecture](#) and [fashion design](#). Art may also be understood as relating to [creativity](#), [aesthetics](#) and the generation of [emotion](#).

About «culture», in the context that we are writing about, the dictionary states: *the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. the*

*customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group Caribbean culture | people from many different cultures.*

Wikipédia proposes:

**Culture** (from the [Latin](#) *cultura* stemming from *colere*, meaning "to cultivate")<sup>[1]</sup> is a term that has different meanings. For example, in 1952, [Alfred Kroeber](#) and [Clyde Kluckhohn](#) compiled a list of 164 definitions of "culture" in *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*.<sup>[2]</sup> However, the word "culture" is most commonly used in three basic senses:

- excellence of taste in the [fine arts](#) (**Fine art** describes any [art form](#) developed primarily for [aesthetics](#) and/or concept rather than [utility](#).<sup>[1]</sup> This type of art is often expressed in the production of [art objects](#)<sup>[2]</sup> using [visual](#) and [performing art](#) forms, including [painting](#), [sculpture](#), [music](#), [dance](#), [theatre](#), [architecture](#), [photography](#) and [printmaking](#). Schools, institutes, and other organizations still use the term to indicate a traditional perspective on the art forms, often implying an association with classic or [academic art](#).) and [humanities](#), also known as [high culture](#)
- an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning
- the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group.

When the concept first emerged in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, it connoted a process of cultivation or improvement, as in [agriculture](#) or [horticulture](#). In the nineteenth century, it came to refer first to the betterment or refinement of the individual, especially through [education](#), and then to the fulfillment of [national aspirations or ideals](#). In the mid-nineteenth century, some scientists used the term "culture" to refer to a universal human capacity.

In the twentieth century, "culture" emerged as a concept central to [anthropology](#), encompassing all human phenomena that are not purely results of human genetics. Specifically, the term "culture" in American anthropology had two meanings: (1) the evolved human capacity to classify and represent experiences with [symbols](#), and to act imaginatively and creatively; and (2) the distinct ways that people living in different parts of the world classified and represented their experiences, and acted creatively. Following [World War II](#), the term became important, albeit with different meanings, in other disciplines such as [sociology](#), [cultural studies](#), [organizational psychology](#) and [management studies](#).

**I believe that it is right to say that fine arts are a part of the cultural heritage of a population.**

The work of an artist is the expression of their concept of esthetics, as well as the expression of their emotions and soul statement, and in this sense I believe that it is not wrong to say that the arts are part of a cultural heritage of a population, a country and also in a more general sense of a civilisation; the expression of the soul of a population or a country at a certain time in its history. Some works reach an even much larger scale than the national level and become internationally successful works of art or, in time, even masterpieces. I believe that there is much more than just a matter of fashion or marketing success behind their power. If, by example, the work of Pina Bausch is watched by such a great number of people in Germany and throughout the world, and particularly in Japan, it is perhaps because all those people felt touched and concerned by the emotions and message which are expressed in her pieces, even if she represents the cultural expression of the German expressionist dance. The same can be said for the great Butoh dancer and

master Kazuo Ohno, who is now a representative of the Japanese cultural heritage: his wonderful art of dance and expression travelled around the whole planet, and everywhere it created unforgettable emotions in the public.

I mention these two examples among many because there are two works which I do know quite well in the sense that I consider those two fantastic artists as my masters that I had the great luck to approach and learn so much from. I mention them too as examples of creators of incredible works of art which have been produced through human history and which made their powerful mark in the human spirit and soul.

I will go back to Pina Bausch's work, and I will mention again some pieces of her early repertory, such as «Cafe Müller», «Rite of Spring», «Blaubart», because those are the pieces that I could show to my students; those pieces tell about human being and their emotions, fears, needs, hopes, loneliness and all those tears and laughter which make the human being so human; those pieces have been watched by tens of thousands of people around the world, and whatever could be their original culture, those people have been emotionally reached in the same way, **perhaps because beyond the concept of nation, there is the concept of the human being which knows no cultural border.**

I know by experience that when the curtain of such performances comes down, as well as after a splendid classical music concert, or a deep piece of theater, the public comes out of their seat with the feeling that they have been sharing with everyone in the public a profound moment of spiritual awareness, very similar to a prayer in a temple or a church or other place of worship. This moment of awareness makes you more open to human feelings and sharing, and this is one of the important things that I wanted to communicate to my students, and this is why I was so happy to notice their interest, because I know that they represent tomorrow's elite of our society and **their awareness of human sensibility is a great matter of concern for the stability of the society and of the world.**

The public for the fine arts is like a worldwide community, each country, each nationality living in a structured social form; and one of the vital concepts of the stability of a society is to feel concern about the other members of the community. So I see as a vital point the fact of considering that it is something very positive to feel the necessity of being curious about discovering the language of fine arts as a duty that everyone has in regards to the other human beings who are sharing the planet with us.

I feel quite positive about the two teaching experiences which I had the pleasure to conduct for the students of the CSWC since last year, and I believe that the two students who attended for the second time were joining the community of the fine arts public. I asked them to give some feedback after the last class on 7 July, and they said: «Well, we discovered what is dance and dance-theatre, but also we became aware of how important it is to develop a good and strong relation with our body, and we will keep on working on that.»

Ms. Naoko Shimotai, who had practiced dance before she started her studies at TokyoTech, seemed very pleased with the work she did and, next year, I can believe that I will have the pleasure to count her among my students.

This year, I chose not to do any presentation because the time was too short and I wanted to better concentrate on the pedagogical side of my workshop. But I hope to be able next year to get the time to work on a presentation of our next year's work.

There is one more point that I would like to mention in this report. The main theme of my introduction to fine arts to my students was dance-theatre because it is my speciality, but I am involved in all different sorts of stage performing arts. I do practice these as dancer improvisator with musicians, as stage actors, as musician (alto saxophon and voice) as member of the Wuppertal Improvisation Orchestra, as choreographer and also as festival organisator, and it is such a great pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce all those worlds and different languages which enthuse me, to the students of the CSWC. I would like once more to thank, in particular, Profs. Roger Pulvers and Noboru Hidano for permitting me to realize that great experience, and I would like also to express my undying respect for the people who created such a unique project in the world as the CSWC.

**Travelling all around the world with my work and also with the Pina Bausch Company, I have the chance to meet many people, especially in the domain of art, and each time that I explain what the CSWC is about and what the idea behind workshops is, I get an extremely admiring and surprised reaction that such an institution exists in a scientific university.**

For this and all it has meant to me, I am very grateful.

Jean Laurent Sasportes