

# Jette Bastian

## Words as Movement

*When the contact  
between words  
and choreography,  
and images and choreography,  
is achieved,  
inspiration comes by itself,  
like an inner cell partition.  
The word can keep  
the choreography flowing.*

*There is a writing so old,  
it seems to emerge from the background,  
as if a bird with open claws has scratched its mark into the whole  
to reveal that which cannot take the form of words.*

The word's craving is to create movement. Therein lies its motive in relationship to dance, as a condition for the choreography of movement.

A field of tension where the potentiality of all things is found precedes the word. While one tries to see and give form to that which is before one's eyes, the word looks into the field of tension that lies behind. It creates a bridge between diffusion and substance and gives shape to the arcane images, from which ideas can originate and flow to find their form.

### **BELOW THE TEXT**

The Hebrew alphabet of twenty-two letters derives from Tetragrammaton (from Greek *tetra*: four, and *gramma*: sign, letter), the designation for Jahve that is written with four consonants. The ancient mystics believed that different combinations of the alphabet described the process of creation and therefore could function as a guide to create life; that through the creative use of letters and words human beings could express qualities which were derived from God and which they shared with God; that this creativity informed religious and mystic experiences; that the word could function as an ethical shield against self-sufficiency; that purpose and practice could be clarified by putting into writing the reflection of nature in all the things that God and humans had created, as a source of self knowledge.

In South Korea many years ago, I learned about the country's unique alphabet, Hangul, and the symbolic meaning of each of its characters. My knowledge of the Roman alphabet is negligible, but through the strange distance given by being abroad I found a new dimension in

the potential of words through the underlying signals of progression, sounds, elements and movements belonging to the characters.

### THE EVOCATIVE WORD

A work performed in nature is movement given in the exterior space. Presenting work in a closed room with the aim of creating a natural identification for both performer and spectator demands that nature's movements be invited into the interior space. The choreography is initiated from the inner space.

When carving wood, the particularities of the wood, its hardness, dampness and structure will influence the carving. If the carving is forced to follow a pre-established idea, the wood will naturally demonstrate "a pre-established idea". If the carving follows the idea and the wood's characteristics in equal measure, the sculpture will show a movement, a meeting, a recognition. The same is valid for the expression of the dance. A word is like a chisel that can draw and choreograph movement from a chosen material.

To imagine making a stone bowl out of your hand is in all its simplicity more dramatic than extending a hand that is hollow; The stone bowl makes the figure solid, gives it weight, purpose and direction.

### THE TURNING POINT OF THE MOVEMENT

One word or one constellation of words can be the turning point for movement as well as text. Turning points are central components of choreography. With the help of the axis of the word, an overall action or meaning that cannot find its expression in the movement can locate the movement's natural source and present it in a form that may give the dramaturgical process new dimensions. The skill is to find the code words.

That words have an effect on the meaning of movement is evident to me,

even if the human understanding of the same words is often different. When there is no involvement, an interval of meaning is created that may benefit the progress of the choreography.

### NATURE'S LAW ON MOVEMENT

*There is a language to either shout or whisper,  
which steers you through heavy doors  
and out into the midday heat,  
where the grass is yellowish green and quivering  
and the hand becomes relaxed and open  
like a flower, with music in its fingers.*

Some dancers have an ability to immediately communicate the basic strength and refinement of an instruction with a minimum of movement. Others, who are not in close contact with this "vein", use a great physicality to achieve the same result. Something this high, this long, this wide can give the spectators the possibility to project themselves into the dancer's body and receive a momentary life confirming experience of a physicality without limits. On the other hand, the experience of nature's limitlessness is eternal. It continues beyond the moment.

A dancer does not need to "understand" the flow of action or the dramatic motives in order to effect the nature of movement. That she "forgets" the concrete course of action can be helpful. Repetitions, tempo switches and word constellations that fragment the action can for some dancers induce a more present and direct contact to the movement and create a union between the inner "glow" of the dancer and the meaning of the movement. Dramatic sequences of action release an immediate subjective, emotional and self-centred response in many dancers, resulting in postulated movements that are predictable in comparison to an instinctive recognition. Representation is based, as it were, on a technique without "glow".

Nature's law that all movement follows the course of least resistance takes time into consideration. If the time has not yet come and the mind is tense and closed, images, words, music and movement are taken from emotions distracted by the awareness of opposition. When an idea surges from emotionality, it is difficult to reach "that which lies behind", the arcane images, the source of creativity. Postulates are contrived instead.

When entrance to the inner creative space cannot be attained, practising artists can use spontaneous and aggressive elements as initiators and diversions. Afterwards they often experience an exhausting emptiness, feeling exposed and vulnerable. In my opinion, this results in the use of a fire that burns aggressively and dies out quickly instead of reaching for the inspiration given by the fire of the spirit, that is just as attainable and continuous.

## SHAPING

Creating the dance performances *Epi Phanic I-VII* (a solo with Kitt Johnson performed in South Korea, Japan, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia and Denmark) and *Skyggefang* (Shadowcatcher; with fourteen women between seventy and ninety years of age, performed at the National Museum in Copenhagen), I used text as an approach for myself as director and choreographer. The text was in the form of manuscript, prose and fragments of isolated images.

I am at the moment elaborating the text for a new production. Here, one track in the text is used as a verbal dramatised accompaniment, electronically filtered in different sound houses. Another part functions as reference for the draft of choreography and a third part is injected into the solo dancer as her personal "vein". The tracks are parallel in time and dramaturgical development, but not in intention. In some sequences the partnership of words and movements acts as



*Skyggefang* Photo and computer montage: Jette Bastian

if in opposition, in others as if identical.

### SPREADING OF THOUGHTS

Choreography is an objective prototype. It can be like water. It can reach its target by flowing uninterrupted. Filling every cavity before flowing on, at first as a spring that proceeds sparsely towards a delta of movements which finds its way by itself. It can fill out all the territories it floats over in a dancer's body and mind. It does not need to recede at falls, expansions and altitudes or lose its characteristic in the body. It can penetrate an inner meaning and expand like a fan. When the contact between words and choreography, and images and choreography, is achieved, inspiration comes by itself, like an inner cell partition. The word can keep the choreography flowing.

The starting point can be a given image inside the eye, a fleck of a dream, a sentence out of the blue, an external inspiration. It can also be an idea for trying out a process or a method. My first impulse is always the word - painted, tasted, thought or spoken. I draw, photograph and paint as parallel activities and, amongst other things, I use computer graphics as a tool.

To start with, I spread words and text pieces over the paper. There is no overall synopsis. Thoughts are let loose and the words gallop over the paper like wild horses. I ride overjoyed towards a fence of tiredness, where everything falls to rest. From there I choose supporting constellations one by one and I match them with the strongest and most obvious ideas. I must move forward like a kind of horse whisperer and relate myself to the words' conditions to find the mutual

synchronisation that gives life to sentences.

*In dance one can stretch the skin like a golden net of word frequencies and let it fall in a big soft wave of fragrance over the image one has chosen.*

*And you will be able to look into the dance as into a burning sun-ray, but with closed eyes, until the red cranberry colour behind the eyelids begins to shine like blood alight.*

The statement creates a reality. It may seem transient, but there is a great creative force in the word. In the touch of a word as in another person's movement rests the recognition of change.

Translated from Danish by Julia Varley

JETTE BASTIAN (Denmark) graduated from the Danish School of Arts and Crafts in 1972. She has worked as illustrator, animator, film and still photographer and editor-in-chief of a theatre magazine. As stage director and choreographer she has worked on performances internationally in cooperation with various dancers and choreographers. In recent years she has functioned as artistic leader of the theatre association Art Attack (former Ass.Ozone).