

THE BODY IN TIME BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

By Jee-Ae Lim

1 INTRODUCTION

I have been engaged with reexamining the borders between the individualized notions of traditional Korean dance and the contemporary European dance. Revisiting the codes and the idea of tradition is a tool for creation and the central interest of my work. .

Through my work, such as the trilogy *10 YEARS IN 1 MINUTE*, I attempt to build a re-analysis and re-definition regarding the concepts of tradition in the modern stage, the role of the past, and the links with identity.

The trilogy started from an idea of *Body As A Moving Archive* – to see a body as a form of documentation containing a personal dance history layered by the external conditions like the education, the culture and society as well as the diverse esthetics, philosophies, and ideologies that I have learned and experienced since I started dancing.

The first part of the trilogy, *Still Moving*, was created and premiered in Hamburg in March 2014, and the second part, *Transition*, was produced and performed in Busan in April 2014. The third part, *Reprise*, is based on my research in Japan titled *Body Archive* as a Saison Foundation Visiting Fellow from June to August 2014, with Pijin Neji-san as my collaborator.

2 BEING IN JAPAN

After finishing the first two parts of the trilogy, I began my research with Neji-san in Japan. It was very productive to be in a place with all the new inputs and impressions, which kept pushing my thoughts onto the relationship with him and myself.

2.1 Grasping Butoh

My growing interest in Butoh was motivated by the need to understand Neji-san. Before going to Japan, my idea of Butoh was a bit fuzzy. It was an appreciable moment for me to enter a new world full of artistic thoughts and directions about Butoh from Yukio Waguri-San, Min Tanaka-San, Setsuko Yamada-San, Ko Murobushi-San, Akaji Maro-San. Furthermore, seeing live performances and feeling the spirit in real life, constantly fed my growing perception of Butoh. Today, I respect its unique form of escaping from limitations of formalistic expressions and criticism of reality through the human body. In addition, I found a strong connection between my field of interest and the idea of Butoh. On the other hand, there is something that constantly holds me to question why I feel a distance from watching Butoh performances, and watching Butoh made me look back at the problems in the past, not in the present. This might be because we still have unsolved problems and it is looping through the generations.

In contrary to Korean traditional dance, Butoh refuses to constitute forms, which was the biggest interest and challenge in my work. Consequently, Neji-san and I started to work with different parameters to discover common ground.

We created physical practices by bringing each other's practice from the past and diffuse it into the current practice based on the following questions:

- How do we navigate our body memory rather than simply displaying the general idea or image of Butoh and traditional Korean dance? How have two dances been existing and defined through the years when different aesthetics and styles of dances came forth? How can my work be fed or charged by material which is an already established convention?

We realized that the key to successfully navigating particular dance traces in the process of creating new movements is not the movement itself, but rather understanding the ideology within its original dance practice.

2.2 Visiting Sapporo and Naha

While I was visiting Sapporo and Naha, which are far north and far south from Tokyo, my interests were also drawn onto other directions. It was a valuable moment to witness how the local folklore has been preserved and how it is reacting to the artistic flow nowadays. One of the most appreciable things is that the dance wasn't frozen in history. It has been constantly readopted through the generations. Some young artists appeal their critical point of view about the westernized civilization by using tradition in their language. It seems that folklore and modern are coexisting and touching each other between past and present.

3 RESEARCH AS AN ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE

One important angle of my research in Japan was to see our body as an independent archival storage and the extraction of its content, which was absorbed through the time. As a dancer my body has been trained by education and influenced by the environment consciously and un-consciously. This time remains as a complexity of physical memory and personal history that are retrievable.

3.1 The chain of creation

The principal intention of my work lies in the creation of new knowledge as apposed to something, which is done by pure intuition. Having an artistic experience within the research as a mode of a process is like a distanced and hence objective observation of my own work in unison with a first-hand experience, which is always subjective. The theory is reflected in my practice and the practice produces knowledge and terminologies – a simple chain.

3.2 Creating by practicing

The basis of the first theory component was fed with gathered samples of movements and dance choreographies using media such as text, voice recordings and images. Beyond reconstructing and adapting particular dance moves from theory, we tried to combine and permute these elements by applying diverse movements with different parts of our bodies in order to identify how dance traces from different locations and time can harmonize, crash or simply coexist. Furthermore, we used the so-called *Chinese Whisper Effect* as an instrument in our daily practice. The main idea is that specific content is learned and taught to the dancing partner, where the transported material is slightly distorted due to varying interpretations of the content, not necessarily on purpose. Several iterations of teaching the same content back and forth like in a Ping-Pong game can boost the creation of new knowledge and material tremendously. We found that this method, if utilized correctly, can be a powerful source of creation.

This process embodied the basement for the performance of the third part of *10 YEARS IN 1 MINUTE* entitled *Reprise* that I created for the Festival Tokyo 2014.

Reprise attempts to reflect the past to connect Neji-san and myself into the future by creating our own contemporary tradition in the present time from a wide range of movement languages, gestures, representations and the production of cultural images in dance. It focuses on the tension and gaps between our current body and the old forms of dances that have been established ages ago.

Given the opportunity to work alongside an artist who is from a different dance background allowed me to investigate on how my work will be influenced from the experience of sharing it in a place that has a different cultural and artistic perspective.

This opened new perspectives on how various traditions and backgrounds – not necessarily artistically – can interfere, interweave and coexist.

4 FUTURE PLANS

My work on *Reprise*, the last part of the trilogy, was mainly driven and shaped by the following question:

Can a new and alternative history of art be written by transforming the cultural past?

As this question still remains partly unanswered, it will play a central role in my future work. I would like to create a possible future into a fictional past, to display our present. Exploring history that is not written in history books will extend my field of interest in tradition. A lot of facts might have disappeared or are still in shade. I am eager to discover unknown sides of history by creating a fictional past that never existed in history.

Jee-Ae Lim

Jee-Ae Lim came from a traditional Korean dance background, and has been working between the notion of tradition Korean dance and contemporary sensibility. After she finished her M.A. in choreography Solo/Dance/Authorship (SODA) at HZT/UDK in Berlin (Germany), she was invited 'Visiting Fellows Program 2014' at the Saison foundation in Japan and selected in the artist residency at K3 Tanzplan Hamburg 2013-2014. Jee-Ae has received grants from foundations in Germany and Arts Council Korea. Additionally, she has been selected as a "leading emerging artist of the next generation" by publications in both countries. Her solo work '*Raw Material*' has been presented at the various festivals internationally (Korea, Germany, Bulgaria, Belgium). '*New Monster*' has been invited to the Tanztage 2014 in Berlin. She has been awarded 'Less Movement' at the ImPulsTanz 2013 as part of the '8 Tension'. Her collaborative work '*Co-lab: Seoul-Berlin*' and series work trilogy – '*10 Years in 1 Minute*' have been invited to Festival Tokyo in 2012 and 2014 respectively.