

Dear Chair of the Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund

My trip to Japan to study Budo with Akira Hino in Tokyo and at the Budo Institute in Kumano, 29/07/06 – 29/08/06

I went to Japan in July 2006 and stayed one month to participate in Budo classes and workshops in Tokyo and Kumano. The purpose of my project was totally achieved, as detailed in my report. As well as having personally gained a great deal from my study, I will be utilizing my new skills/knowledge in future workshops of my own.

Thank you so very much for giving me this opportunity. I'm very sorry for the lateness of my report. My tardiness is by no means proportionate to my gratitude.

Yours sincerely,

Maho Ihara

Report: Trip to Tokyo and Kumano to study Budo with Akira Hino

I was very nervous before I arrived to take my first Budo class in Tokyo. I had attended his workshop a year before and it was very shocking and new to me. More than 100 dancers, performers, students and others were taking the workshop and the attitude of the whole group was intensely focused. I have never seen a workshop like that. I had very little prior knowledge about martial arts. I had found his website on Mixi (like a Japanese Facebook) and I'd heard that my one of my favourite choreographers, William Forsythe was interested in his method and that he had started teaching the Forsythe company.

I had previously taken 4 days of his workshops on an earlier trip to Japan, which I had found fascinating and exciting but I had also been left a little confused, as I hadn't gone deep enough into the technique. Also, I had found it shocking, just how much I had changed in my years of living here in England, and because of this I felt insecure and awkward in my communication with the teachers and other students.

In Tokyo, I took several classes starting with physical class. There were about 15 people in a class. Most of the exercises involved contact with a partner, starting with simply making eye contact. The aim is to increase awareness of your body and spatial awareness through the exercises. Of course this is also the case in a dance class but in Budo technique things are much more subtle and sensitive, for example, when allowing yourself to be led by a partner, you have to start and stop immediately with the movement of your partner without any anticipation or interpretation of their intent, and without finishing off their movements or following your own habit. At no time are you working with just your own method, or thinking simply about whether you did well or not, or you're doing right or not. The connection you have with your partner is much more important in the class in a way.

Hino sensei was saying, when you're fighting, your body and consciousness as a whole are totally charged and to catch the very sensitive waves of consciousness from the enemy even when there are many of them could be a matter of life or death.

Through my participation in the exercises, I realized how my senses and concentration were vague and dull, almost selfish in a way, and sometimes, parts of my body couldn't or wouldn't move as intended. At first, I couldn't express my opinion to my partner during the exercises because my knowledge of the exercise and sense of feeling wasn't clear, but after changing partners quite often, I started to feel the difference of everyone's body, consciousness, habits, focus or other things slowly, and when the teacher was showing the technique, his body looked not just extremely relaxed and soft but also very strong. Even when I saw him from the back, he still looked the same. It was very smooth, with no unnecessary movement, completely connecting his whole body with that of his partner and the space around them. He is perhaps as small as I am (5'2") and yet he was so powerful.

The final 5 days of the trip consisted of a workshop for dancers/performers, led by Akira Hino assisted by Yoko Ando, a member of Forsythe Company. In addition to similar exercises to the above, there was an emphasis on group work. Day by day I was increasingly thrilled by the classes. My awareness became more sensitive as did my connection with others. I became aware of my weak points through a constant dialogue with my partners and as a result of this, I could focus more clearly on my progress. Having said this I had moments of intense frustration from the acute subtlety of the work.

In Japan, there is very little arts funding, especially for contemporary dance. Most dancers need to support themselves through another job and rehearsals are often unpaid. If they are lucky maybe they will get some small fee per performance but despite this there were many hard working and passionate dancers/performers at the workshop and I was so impressed by their energy and attitude.

This experience has revitalized me enormously and I have met many new friends and made contacts through the workshops. They have helped me think more deeply than before about my awareness, relationship / chemistry between myself and other dancers on the stage, or even with the audience. I would like to go back to learn again definitely.

Maho Ihara