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Finding *Kokoro* through the Eyes

Butoh in Roberta Carreri's Work and Pedagogy

Abstract

In 1984, Roberta Carreri, Odin Teatret actress since 1974, saw *Niwa* (The Garden), a Butoh dance performance by Muteki-Sha, and attended a three-day workshop with Natsu Nakajima, direct heir of the Butoh pioneer Tatsumi Hijikata. In 1986, she traveled to Japan to work with Natsu Nakajima and Kazuo Ohno. The meeting with the Asian masters changed her approach to training and the creative process. For her, the most remarkable aspect of this apprenticeship was the work with the eyes. The way the eyes are used in Butoh conditioned Carreri's training and the creative process of her solo performance *Judith* (1988). Since those same years, the Italian actress has been developing her own pedagogy. Today, she travels globally leading the workshop *Dance of Intentions*, which includes "flexing the eyes," an

exercise whereby the actress transmits to trainees how it is possible to shape the quality of scenic presence through the eyes. Drawing on a rich bibliography, Roberta Carreri's work diaries, unpublished documents, and audiovisual materials kept at the Odin Teatret Archives, this paper aims to analyze how the actress embodied the ability to find the *kokoro* (Japanese for "heart" or "soul"), its application to the creative process and the performance, as well as her pedagogic work, and how this Butoh apprenticeship conditioned her professional identity.

Keywords

Butoh, *kokoro*, theatre anthropology, intercultural training, creative process, theatre pedagogy, Eurasian theatre

Abstrakt

Oczy w poszukiwaniu *kokoro*: Butoh w twórczości i pedagogice Roberty Carreri

W roku 1984 Roberta Carreri, aktorka Odin Teatret od 1974, zobaczyła spektakl tańca butoh *Niwa* (Ogród) w wykonaniu grupy Muteki-Sha i wzięła udział w trzydniowych warsztatach prowadzonych przez Natsu Nakajimę, bezpośrednią spadkobierczynię Tatsumiego Hijikaty, pioniera butoh. W 1986 roku Carreri udała się do Japonii, by pracować z Natsu Nakajimą i Kazuo Ohno. Spotkanie z azjatyckimi mistrzami w znacznym stopniu zmieniło jej podejście do procesu twórczego. Najważniejszym aspektem tej praktyki była praca oczu. Sposób, w jaki oczy traktowane są w sztuce butoh, wywarł głęboki wpływ na proces twórczy Carreri, szczególnie podczas pracy nad jej monodramem *Judith* (1988). Włoska aktorka od końca lat osiemdziesiątych rozwijała własną pedagogikę i dziś podróżuje po całym świecie, prowadząc warsztaty *Dance of Intentions*. W ich ramach przekazuje uczestnikom technikę pracy oczu, która wpływa na jakość scenicznej obecności aktorów. Celem tego artykułu jest przeanalizowanie, w jaki sposób Roberta Carreri ucieleśniła umiejętność odnajdywania *kokoro* (w języku japońskim „serce” lub „dusza”) i jak to wpływa na jej proces twórczy, a także na jej pracę pedagogiczną. Korzystając z bogatej literatury przedmiotu, dzienników pracy Roberty Carreri, niepublikowanych dokumentów oraz materiałów audiowizualnych przechowywanych w Odin Teatret Archives, artykuł stara się rzucić światło na to, w jaki sposób praktyka butoh ukształtowała tożsamość zawodową aktorki i wpłynęła na jej karierę artystyczną.

Słowa kluczowe

butoh, *kokoro*, antropologia teatru, praktyka międzykulturowa, proces twórczy, pedagogika teatru, teatr eurazjatycki

The First Meeting with Butoh

In 1984, Odin Teatret was invited to the Jerusalem International Theatre Festival, in which it presented the performances *Brecht Ashes* and *The Million*.¹ On this occasion, Roberta Carreri had the opportunity to see *Niwa* (The Garden), performed by Muteki-Sha, a Butoh ensemble founded by Tatsumi Hijikata and Natsu Nakajima in 1969. In *Niwa*, Nakajima traces “a woman’s life passing through her garden. It is a profoundly personal, introspective performance, physically demanding in its shuddering restraint.”² In fact, Carreri was fascinated by the “extreme slowness and intensity” of the Muteki-Sha dancers’ movements. At the same time, at the festival, Natsu Nakajima led a workshop in which the Italian actress took part. Carreri was impressed a second time: the training exercises proposed by the Butoh dancer were “fast and violent, with elements from martial arts,” deeply contrasting characteristics compared to those she had noted in *Niwa*. This fact increased her interest in Butoh.³

Butoh: Politics and Spirituality

In order to understand what Butoh is, it is essential to focus the attention on the dance experiment by Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986), a modern dancer born in northern Japan who, after the World War II, moved to Tokyo and studied modern dance, ballet, jazz, tap, flamenco, and mime. In 1959 he impressed the world with his first choreography, *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colors), “in which an older man intimates having sex with a younger man and then forces him to kill a chicken.” But the body-dance language adopted in his first choreographies was not very different to the form of other Japanese modern dance of the time, and at the beginning of sixties he

became dissatisfied with representational dance and led a small group of dancers, including Ohno Kazuo, Ohno Yoshito, Kasai Akira, Nakajima Natsu, Ishii Mitsutaka,

¹ Program of *Israel Festival, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Sherover Theatre, 1984), 18. A copy of the festival’s program is kept in OTA (Odin Teatret Archives), Fonds Odin Teatret, Serie Performance-F, b. 9.

² Bonnie Sue Stein, “Twenty Years Ago We Were Crazy, Dirty, and Mad,” *The Drama Review* 30, no. 2 (1986): 122, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145731>.

³ Roberta Carreri, *On Training and Performances: Traces of an Odin Teatret Actress*, trans. and ed. Frank Camilleri (New York: Routledge, 2014), 105.

Takai Tomiko, and his partner Motofuji Akiko in experimenting with new forms of bodily articulation that rejected pre-existing dance concepts and categories.⁴

Important political considerations emerge concerning this approach. Hijikata and his group felt the necessity to find a contrast with the aesthetic roots in modern dance to which they belonged. In essence, it was a question of imposing a new form of dance that contrasted in some way with the dances that Hijikata himself had learned during his apprenticeship. As the American theatre critic Vicky Sanders noticed, Hijikata

was a teenager when the United State dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He intended a career in classical dance, but just that atomic assault forever altered the course of Japanese political history, so did its aftershocks indelibly mark the nation's emerging artists and their attitude toward the aesthetic roots from which they sprang.⁵

Japan was a country that had never previously been occupied and, for the first time in its history, had suffered the American occupation, which affected the political aspect and influenced the local culture. As Marilyn Ivy excellently pointed out in *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (1995), in post-war Japan, Japanese artists felt the need to recover elements of Japanese culture that were vanishing.⁶ In 1997, during a lecture delivered in Taipei at the Fu Jen University, Nakajima illustrated the origins of Butoh, identifying it “as a rebellion” which aimed to recover principles coming from “the great traditional arts, such as Noh, Kabuki, and Nihon Buyo,” which were lethargic, stagnant, and alienated from the masses, in order to contrast them with the popularity of American modern dance forms.⁷

Carreri, while working with Nakajima, a direct pupil of both Hijikata and Ohno, “discovered that the first walk she taught [her] had the same body rules

⁴ Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario, “Introduction: Dance Experience, Dance of Darkness, Global Butoh: The Evolution of a New Dance Form,” in *The Routledge Companion to Butoh Performance*, ed. Bruce Baird and Rosemary Candelario (London: Routledge, 2019), 2.

⁵ Vicky Sanders, “Dancing and the Dark Soul of Japan: An Aesthetic Analysis of Butō,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 5, no. 2 (1988): 148, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25161489>.

⁶ Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁷ Natsu Nakajima, *Ankoku Butoh*, lecture at Fu Jen University conference, Taipei: “Feminine Spirituality in Theatre, Opera, and Dance,” October 1997, 2, https://uwaterloo.ca/communication-arts/sites/ca.communication-arts/files/uploads/files/nakajima_-_feminine_spirituality_in_theatre_opera_and_dance.pdf

... as the Noh dances.”⁸ In fact, Inata Naomi, analyzing Hijikata’s work identifies that the basic form of Butoh

is similar to “tucking the pelvis” (*koshi o ireru*) in noh and kabuki—which is the polar opposite from the balletic Western form of extending the legs and back straight to the heavens—and is regarded as a typical form of Japanese performing arts.⁹

Moreover Natsu Nakajima, referring to her master, argues:

Hijikata’s Butoh is thus intended to counter the Western dance available in Japan after the Second World War by drawing on Japanese oral and dance traditions to create a new kind of “action language” whose forms and content are determined by linguistic structures and their use.¹⁰

Butō is a word composed of two Chinese characters meaning “dance” and “tread” or “stomp.” It refers to Western style dances such as flamenco, ballet, and waltz. So *ankoku butō* originally meant something like the “waltz of darkness” or the “ballet of darkness.” In time this was shortened to *butō*, and then was Romanized “Butoh.”¹¹ It is difficult to understand what “darkness” means in Hijikata’s language. For Nakajima, it is a kind of “spirituality,” but

Hijikata hated the word “spirituality.” He preferred to talk about “yami,” (shadowy darkness). When seen from the point of view of Occidental dualism, spirituality appears to be superior to the flesh. *Ankoku Butoh* is fundamentally in conflict with this because it is based on the eastern belief of body-mind/body-heart unity. We hold the belief of the total body, and the view of “body as the scene of a full life.”¹²

Besides a political rebellion, these assumptions given by Nakajima underline a socio-philosophical approach to the dance by Hijikata. He and his disciples needed to rediscover a contact between the body, the mind, and the emotions

⁸ Ian Watson, “Interculturalism and the Individual Performer: An Interview with the Odin Actress Roberta Carreri,” in *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and the Intercultural Debate*, ed. Ian Watson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 79.

⁹ Inata Naomi, “Rethinking the ‘Indigeneity’ of Hijikata Tatsumi in the 1960s as a Photographic Negative Image of Japanese Dance History,” in Baird and Candelario, *Companion to Butoh Performance*, 61.

¹⁰ Natsu Nakajima in Michael Andrew Y. Sakamoto, *An Empty Room: Butoh Performance and the Social Body in Crisis* (PhD diss., University of California, 2012), 203, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8xq5x42n>.

¹¹ Baird and Candelario, “Dance Experience,” 3.

¹² Nakajima, *Ankoku Butoh*, 4.

they felt. The solid social changes experienced by the Japanese population during the sixties and the seventies, and the fast technological development in those years, created a context in which “one can more clearly read that Hijikata’s struggle was to present the real in a time when the body is constantly simulated.”¹³

Kazuo Ohno (1906–2010) is considered the co-founder of Butoh, he was the core participant in Hijikata’s experiments from 1960 to 1968. But he

maintained his own dance studio and students, and had very different methods of teaching and ideas about what dance is for. Yet his solo work and international renown as a Butoh dancer did not come until more than twenty years after Hijikata’s choreographic debut.¹⁴

Illustrating Roberta Carreri’s Butoh apprenticeship, we will see in the following paragraphs how Nakajima and Ohno used images and imagination to shape Carreri’s scenic presence; we will try to identify what Ohno intends for *kokoro*, how it was helpful for Barba and Carreri in creating the performance *Judith*, and how the Italian actress transmits the Butoh modality of using the eyes to her students.

Working with the Eyes

Carreri traveled to Tokyo in the summer of 1986 to work for five weeks with Natsu Nakajima. At the same time, for three nights a week, she went to Yokohama to learn the training of Kazuo Ohno.

The technique on which Carreri focused her attention concerns the use of the eyes: “For me, the most remarkable aspect of this apprenticeship was the work with the eyes.”¹⁵ For the Italian actress, who had already participated in two ISTA international sessions¹⁶—in Bonn (1980) and Volterra (1981)—and had previously had several contacts with some Asian traditions, it was a strange technique to

¹³ Kurihara Nanako, “Hijikata Tsatsumi: The Words of Butoh,” *TDR* 44, no. 1 (2000): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1162/10542040051058816>.

¹⁴ Baird and Candelario, “Dance Experience,” 3.

¹⁵ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 108.

¹⁶ ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology) was founded in 1980 by Eugenio Barba and several artists and scholars, both from the East and West. From 1980 to the present, ISTA organized 16 sessions, each dedicated to a different theme, in which Asian and European artists and scholars confront themselves having as the main aim “the study of the behaviour of the human being when it uses its physical and mental presence in an organized performance situation and according to principles that are different from those used in daily life”, Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*, 2nd ed., trans. Richard Fowler (London: Routledge, 2006), 5. See also <https://ista-online.org/>, accessed February 25, 2023.

PHOTO NICOLA SAVARESE



FIG. 1 Sanjukta Panigrahi, Indian Odissi dancer, International School of Theatre Anthropology, Bonn, 1980

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embody. Regarding the particular use of eyes in Butoh, Carreri noticed that “in Indian and Balinese dances the focusing of the eyes means a lot. . . . But the situation here was just the opposite.”¹⁷ Typically, Asian performers use the concrete nature of the gaze to “establish a precise spatial quality for the spectator and to make historical and theatrical characters and animals come alive, even though they are physically non-existent on the stage.” In other words, the gaze being focused outside and pointed to a particular spot in the space modifies the spatial perception of the spectator, who can “follow both the performer’s interior and exterior life” through the expression of the eyes.¹⁸ For example, in some Odissi¹⁹ dance figures, the performer uses their arms and hands to highlight the gaze and enhance the eyes’ expression (**FIG. 1**). In Butoh, the situation is the opposite:

¹⁷ Roberta Carreri, “The Actor’s Journey: *Judith* from Training to Performance,” interview by Erik Exe Christoffersen, *New Theatre Quarterly* 7, no. 26 (1991): 141, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X00005418>.

¹⁸ Barba and Savarese, *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 126.

¹⁹ Odissi is a popular dance of the region of Odisha in Eastern India. It was a dance performed already in the first century bc which was recreated in post-independent India, between the forties and the fifties. The greatest exponents and initiators of this dance were Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra with his disciple Sanjukta Panigrahi. See Dhirendranath Patnaik, *Odissi Dance* (Bhubaneswar: Orissa Sangeeta Natak Akademi, 1971); Jiwan Pani, “Odissi,” in *Indian Dance: The Ultimate Metaphor*, ed. Shanta Serbjeet Singh (New Delhi: Bookwise India, 2000), 147–162; Ileana Citaristi, *The Making of a Guru: Kelucharan Mahapatra, His Life and Times* (Delhi: Manohar, 2001); Alessandra Lopez y Royo, “The Reinvention of Odissi Classical Dance as a Temple Ritual,” in *The Archaeology of Ritual*, ed. Evangelos Kyriakidis (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, 2007), 155–181, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2r21b9wc>.

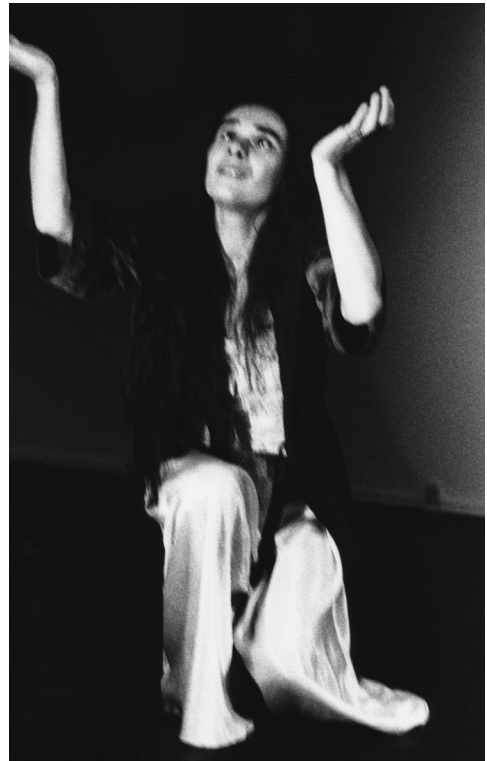


FIG. 2 Roberta Carreri during the rehearsals of *Judith*

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PHOTO TORGEIR WETHAL

the performer does not direct their gaze to the outside, and does not give the spectator any spatial coordinate; it is as if they look inside.

The indications given to Carreri by Natsu Nakajima suggest that in Butoh the eyes serve the dancer to look inside themselves: “You no longer see what is in front of you, you do not want to see it. . . . Do not direct your gaze to the outside, but to the inside.”²⁰ The technique consists in relaxing as much as possible the muscles of the eyes until the sight becomes wholly blurred. From the outside, the eyes of the performer are perceived as two black holes, as “‘the eyes of the dead’: you see everything and see nothing”²¹ (FIG. 2). Through this technique, Carreri discovered “an unexpected quality of presence” in herself, a quality that we could call “presence through absence.”²²

²⁰ Nakajima in Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 108.

²¹ Carreri, “Actor’s Journey,” 141.

²² Roberta Carreri, “A Handful of Characters,” *The Open Page 8* (2003): 49, https://themagdalenaproject.org/sites/default/files/op8_RobertaCarreri.pdf.

Usually, when an actor works on the gaze and its orientation, they know perfectly how their eyes should appear outside. Nevertheless, in this case, it is not possible, so much so that, after having applied the technique in some scenes of her solo performance *Judith* (1987), Carreri remembers “how shocking it was for me to see, for the first time, photographs of my character in *Judith* because I did not have the faintest idea of how I looked.” Although she could not see how she appeared outside, through this modality of using the eyes, the body of the Italian actress “became a bell jar inside,” in which she felt safe and according to which her “*kokoro* could move freely without the body hiding its dance.”²³

The Hidden Emotions and Needs of the Performer: Butoh Apprenticeship

Kazuo Ohno believed that the performer must be in contact with his *kokoro*, a Japanese word that refers to the heart as the seat and resource of feelings. In a 1986 work diary, Carreri underlines the importance that *kokoro* had for Ohno: “*Kokoro*. This, I think, is the most important word of Ohno and Japanese culture. To be in constant contact with the heart.”²⁴ It is precisely under this principle that Ohno insisted on this gaze technique: “When the eyes do not see, they allow the *kokoro* to shine through—that is, the center, the soul-heart.”²⁵ In Western culture, when we think about dance, we imagine one or more dancers performing coded movements on stage. However, the Butoh dance compositions derive from improvisations which act as catalysts of the performer’s inner emotional universe.

In the summer of 1986, just before traveling to Japan, Carreri was in a period of personal crisis:

When I went to Japan in 1986 . . . I was in a period of personal crisis. . . . I longed to have a child with Torgeir, with whom I had been living for years, but I could not make up my mind whether to do so or not, and this filled me with anguish.²⁶

²³ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 109.

²⁴ Odin Teatret Archives, Fonds Roberta Carreri, Carreri, b. 210, “Japan 1986,” work diary. For a more detailed inventory of Odin Teatret Archives in Holstebro (Denmark) see Mirella Schino, *The Odin Teatret Archives*, trans. Gabriella Sacco (London: Routledge, 2018), 317–357.

²⁵ Kazuo Ohno in Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 109.

²⁶ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 111.

When Carreri arrived in Japan, she found an emotional climate for which it was natural to dance her painful nostalgia: Natsu Nakajima had just lost Tsatsumi Hijkata, her master and point of reference for more than twenty years; the other Nakajima apprentice, Lili, had also just lost her twin brother, who had killed himself. Both wanted to dance the death of their loved ones. When Nakajima asked Carreri for a theme to work with, she answered “a woman waiting for a child,” without too much deepening her emotional background of that moment. Carreri and Nakajima began to work calling the character Mary: Nakajima immediately thought of Jesus’s mother, and they composed a choreography which the Italian actress “felt dealt with the ‘unborn prince,’” Carreri’s so much desired child, “while Natsu thought it was about Mary.”²⁷

Initially, Carreri found Nakajima’s work language abstract and foreign, but “after thirteen years of training at the Odin Teatret, meeting another physical form as different as Butoh” was extremely fertile as her “body-mind was prepared for all the inputs” the Butoh master gave her.²⁸ Even if in some cases parts of physical scores deriving from training were used in Odin Teatret’s performances, the primary function of the training is not creative, but aims to educate the body “to think and adapt itself continually to each situation as it arises.”²⁹ Referring to theatre laboratory and Grotowski physical exercises, the American scholar Lisa Wolford pointed out that “physical exercises can prove useful in helping to prepare the actor’s body as instrument, and especially in allowing the actor to address specific limitations.”³⁰ In other words, when Carreri met Butoh masters, her body-mind was educated to receive hitherto unknown inputs and at the same time to approach and face the challenges the new scenic language placed before her.

Following Nakajima’s indication, the Italian actress began to build a physical score inspired by the forms and expressions of the sculptures by the French artist Georges Jeanclous. However, the precision that the Japanese teacher demanded of Carreri was not based on the physical nature of the movements but implied a mental effort aimed at the exploration of the movements and their physical

²⁷ Carreri, “Actor’s Journey,” 141.

²⁸ Odin Teatret Archives, Audiovisual Fonds, 10-13-c,d, *Judith Film Project* (Odin Teatret Film, 2010): 38:10–38:35.

²⁹ Eugenio Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, trans. Judy Barba (Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999), 71–72.

³⁰ Lisa Wolford, “Grotowski’s Vision of the Actor: The Search for Contact,” in *Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 201, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203861370>.

improvisation in order that the resulting physical score could be shown “each time as if it were the first time.”³¹

To better understand this last concept, we can refer to a work demonstration Natsu Nakajima held during the ISTA session in Bologna in 1990. The Japanese master described her composition method in the demonstration, starting from a series of images and assembling them to draw her choreography. In a second phase, Nakajima repeated the same movements but establishing three different types of resistance and energy that the body had to deal with: first, she proposed movements as if they were being carried out inside solid and hard matter like rock, then in a liquid, and finally in the air. Eugenio Barba did not focus his attention on the physical and sequential precision of the movements, but in observing Nakajima re-proposing the sequence, he had the impression that the dancer was “improvising her dance.”³²

Carreri could work according to her needs and make her emotions dance through her apprenticeship with Ohno and Nakajima. The dancer’s emotions, needs, and biography are fundamental elements of this genre, so much so that Ohno in *What Is a Lesson?* argues that the dance must necessarily start from two constituent elements of human life: “1. Humanitarianism—an idea based on profound love or idealism. 2. Pragmatism—based on people’s immediate desires and needs.”³³ Lucia Schwelling, the German scholar expert in Butoh, examined Kazuo Ohno’s work methodology, pointing out how the Japanese master started to compose from improvisation using emotion “as an initiator of movement,” since the emotion was for him “a significant factor that has to prevent a particular dance becoming set or routine, even in the face of repeated rehearsals and performances.”³⁴

In the work diary, Carreri transcribed the passages of an exercise she performed with Ohno: “1. Walk carrying with you your heart, your feelings. 2. Someone calls you and see who it is. You merge with that person. 3. Continue to walk with that person inside you.”³⁵ In essence, the actress composed her own “dramaturgy of the actor,” according to which:

³¹ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 108.

³² Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe: A Guide to Theatre Anthropology*, trans. Richard Fowler (London: Routledge, 1995), 70.

³³ Kazuo Ohno, “What Is a Lesson,” in Noriko Maehata, “Selections from the Prose of Kazuo Ohno,” *The Drama Review* 30, no. 2 (1986): 156, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145736>.

³⁴ Lucia Schwelling, “Ohno Kazuo: Biography and Methods of Movement Creation,” in Baird and Candelario, *Companion to Butoh Performance*, 120.

³⁵ Carreri, “Japan 1986.”

The actor drew this logic from her biography, from his personal needs, from his experience and the existential and professional situation, from the text, the character or the tasks received, and from the relationships with the director and with the other colleagues.³⁶

The employment of emotions, imagination, and feelings is functional to the construction of the dramaturgy of the actor. To make the physical action real, the performer must build his own “subscore,” that, according to Patrice Pavis, can be constituted of their “personal, emotional journey,” which gives life to the physical manifestation, and of “what is essential for him” at that moment.³⁷ Carreri wrote down in her diary some words of Nakajima, who stated that “it is the action that makes you and not you that make the action. Whoever moves on the stage is not an actor or a person, it is matter, it is like a spirit.”³⁸

In other words, Carreri was able to find the dialogue between the visible and the invisible. According to Barba’s terminology:

The value of the visible (the physical score) and the invisible (subscore) generates the possibility of making them carry on a dialogue, creating a space within the design of movements and their precision. The dialogue between the visible and the invisible is precisely that which the actor experiences as inner life and, in some cases, even as meditation. And it is what the spectator experiences as interpretation.³⁹

Although they have a pedagogical intent, the exercises aimed at constructing the dramaturgy of the actor have the primary purpose of teaching the actor “how to think with the entire body-mind.”⁴⁰

In Carreri’s apprenticeship, the shape of the movement resulting from a montage of physical actions, the rhythm dictated by the resistance encountered by the body, combined with her imagination guided by her emotional needs, allowed her to achieve a credible organic flow, “the premise for a spectator to react with an unconditioned ‘I believe.’”⁴¹ The Italian scholar Marco De Marinis asserts

³⁶ Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House*, trans. Judy Barba (London: Routledge, 2009), 24.

³⁷ Patrice Pavis, “Underscore: The Shape of Things to Come,” in “Presence and Pre-expressivity,” ed. Ralph Yarrow, special issue, *Contemporary Theatre Review* 6, no. 4 (1997): 38.

³⁸ Odin Teatret Archives, Fonds Carreri Carreri, Carreri, b. 218, Roberta Carreri, work diary “1985–1986.”

³⁹ Barba and Savarese, *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 114.

⁴⁰ Eugenio Barba, “An Amulet Made of Memory: The Significance of Exercises in the Actor Dramaturgy,” *TDK* 41, no. 4 (1997): 129, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1146664>.

⁴¹ Barba and Savarese, *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 206.

that a real physical action “needs to be founded on an organic correspondence between the actor’s inner and outer self. It must be accomplished by the whole body-mind.”⁴²

To quote Antonin Artaud, we can identify Carreri as an “athlete of the heart.” In 1938, Artaud theorized “Affective Athleticism,” sustaining that physical and muscular effort is “the effigy of another effort, their double, and in the movements of dramatic action are localized at the same points.” According to Artaud, on the same points on which the athlete uses leverage to run, the actor also leans to shout “a passionate curse, but the actor’s course is altogether interior.”⁴³

Reflecting on the apprenticeship of the actor, Barba clarified that while an actor performs a training exercise they do not aspire to play a character but “must only concentrate on a humble and irksome task combining precision and a capacity to repeat. Yet repetition, in its fight against automatism, is transformed into personal expression.”⁴⁴

Through this process of learning, Carreri conducted an inner research that allowed her to break clichés, applying what Grotowski calls an “act of self-penetration,” thus being able to “construct her own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words.”⁴⁵

In an interview with Ian Watson, Carreri declared that “the work with Butoh people and their techniques helped me find something very deep inside myself that allowed me to express myself, many layers of myself, and that I express in spite of myself.”⁴⁶ Richard Schechner, in a speech entitled *Training Interculturally*—held during a conference at the University of Toronto in 1981—outlined five functions of the actor training, the fourth of which is “to help performers achieve self-expression. . . . This kind of training specializes in getting the inside out—it is more concerned with psychology than behavior.”⁴⁷ Carreri approached through Butoh what Zarrilli intends as a *psychophysical* acting technique, in which

⁴² Marco De Marinis, “At Work with Physical Actions: The Double Articulation,” in Barba and Savarese, *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 212.

⁴³ Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 133.

⁴⁴ Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, 93.

⁴⁵ Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (New York: Routledge, 2002), 35.

⁴⁶ Watson, “Interculturalism and the Individual Performer,” 85.

⁴⁷ Richard Schechner, “Training Interculturally,” in Barba and Savarese, *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 280. The text published in *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* is an excerpt from an intervention by Schechner given at the University of Toronto, Canada 1981. The same intervention was expanded and published as a chapter titled “The Performer: Training Interculturally,” in Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 213–260.

the first point of reference for the *psycho-* within the compound term, *psychophysical*, is not psychological per se, but rather the actor's complete engagement of her energy, sensory awareness, and perception—in-action in the moment.⁴⁸

The psychophysical training is necessary in order to put back together the mental and the physical dimensions of the actor.⁴⁹ The English performer and scholar Frances Barbe has recently pointed out three principles on which Butoh training is based: *distillation*, *receptivity*, and *transformation*.⁵⁰ The distillation implies a slowness of movement, an almost immobility which allows the actor to intensify self-awareness and to access creativity. In this case, the particular use of the eyes permitted Carreri to focus her inside and generate a change of energy perceptible also in the immobility. Focusing her inside, Carreri followed her emotions, danced them; it was not her but the inner receptivity of her emotions which conducted the actions. In this way, the emotions have been transformed into authentic movements, the impulse coming from the actor's inner emotional universe.

Applying Butoh to the Performance: *Judith*

To better individuate the methodologies and theoretical approaches through which the principles of Butoh embodied by Carreri were applied to the performance, we can refer to a series of interviews carried out in 2010 by the OTA (Odin Teatret Archives) team. The main topic of these interviews is the creative process of *Judith*, examined through comments given by Eugenio Barba and Carreri, who analyze a video presenting the training of the Italian actress in August 1986.⁵¹

After the meetings with the Butoh masters, once back in Denmark, Carreri showed Eugenio Barba the choreography created with Natsu Nakajima. The director pointed out the disorientation of the spectator in the use of the eyes and

⁴⁸ Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Psychophysical Acting: An Intercultural Approach After Stanislavski* (London: Routledge, 2009), 21.

⁴⁹ Rose Whyman, "Explanations and Implications of 'Psychophysical' Acting," *New Theatre Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2016): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X16000051>.

⁵⁰ Frances Barbe, "Embodying Imagination: Butoh and Performer Training," in *Intercultural Acting and Performer Training*, ed. Phillip B. Zarrilli, T. Sasitharan, and Anuradha Kapur (London: Routledge, 2019), 179–201.

⁵¹ See in particular: *Judith Film Project*, Odin Teatret Archive, Audiovisual Fonds, 10-12, *Eugenio Barba and Mirella Schino Commenting Roberta Carreri's Training 1986* (Odin Teatret Film, 2010). For Carreri's training and the choreography created in Japan with Natsu Nakajima see: Odin Teatret Archive, Audiovisual Fonds, 86-03-a,b, *Roberta Carreri's Training* (Odin Teatret Film, 1986).

the lack of a succession of stimuli in the slowness of the rhythm. Therefore, it was a question of building an “organic dramaturgy,” the “performance’s nervous system” that “makes the spectators dance kinaesthetically on their seat.”⁵² It was necessary to consider the “*primordial body-mind state*.” It cannot be ignored, as a performance cannot only be based on its aesthetic density or cultural purposes but must also establish the “foundations of its organic nature.”⁵³ The choreography created by Carreri with Natsu Nakajima constituted a performance, but in an interview with Mirella Schino in 2010 the Italian actress was conscious that “performances have different levels and cannot be stopped at the aesthetical moment. Even if there were dance performances such as *The Book of Dances* and *The Million*, our performances always had another message coming from the dramaturgy of the director.”⁵⁴ In consequence, Barba began to work on a “dramaturgy of the director” that requires the elaboration of

the dramaturgy of the actor in order to set in motion the dramaturgy (the execution) of every spectator. I worked on the level of the physical and vocal actions, on the music and the lights, on the characters, stories and events. I upset their obvious relationships, but remained faithful to my shadows so that the performance might resonate diversely in the different world of each spectator.⁵⁵

For Barba, in order to build organic physical actions a director must be “plural”; they must behave like:

a first spectator, with a double mind-set of estrangement and identification. Estrangement from the “audience,” but also from myself. And identification in the dissimilar experiences of my spectators-fetishes, who reflected the diverse ways in which a performance is alive.⁵⁶

However, we cannot overlook the compositional aspect Barba identifies as the “narrative dramaturgy,” i.e., “the intertwining of events which orientate the

⁵² Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, 10.

⁵³ Barba, “Angelmanimal: Tecniche perdute per lo spettatore,” *Teatro e Storia* 20, no. 27 (2006): 21. The text is the speech of thanks given on the occasion of the Honorary Doctorate bestowed on Eugenio Barba by the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts on July 7, 2006. An English version of this text, translated from Italian by Judy Barba, is available at Odin Teatret Archives, among Eugenio Barba’s Critical Bibliography organized by Lluís Masgrau in collaboration with Francesca Romana Rietti, Odin Teatret Archive, Fonds Odin Teatret, Series Publications-A, b. 2/25, 06-4 (E), Eugenio Barba, “Angelmanimal: Lost Techniques for the Spectator.”

⁵⁴ *Judith Film Project*, 48:45–49:10, translation – SD.

⁵⁵ Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, 13.

⁵⁶ Barba, 184.

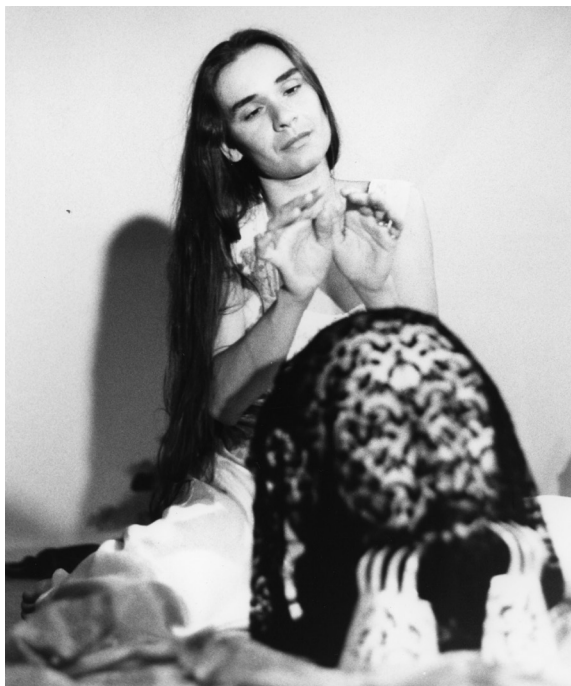


FIG. 3 Roberta Carreri and Holofernes's head in *Judith*

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spectators about the meaning, or the various meanings, of the performance.”⁵⁷ In the case of *Judith*,

the story was the frame that compressed the many scenes, preventing them from fragmenting into disconnected images. In the first scene, the actress (Carreri) told the biblical episode about Holofernes' murder by Judith. Subsequently, the performance became an orchestration of variations on already known facts.⁵⁸

From a practical point of view, Barba felt the necessity to give spatial coordinates leading the spectator in the sequences in which Carreri, using the eyes as in Butoh, did not focus her gaze anywhere. The head of Holofernes was thus introduced, and in the moments the actress projected her gaze inside herself, the spectator was still oriented from a spatial point of view (FIG. 3). There are moments in which the actress defuses the inner gaze and directs it outside, making the spectator perceive a world even outside of her. According to the

⁵⁷ Barba, 10.

⁵⁸ Barba, 107.

Danish scholar Erik Exe Christoffersen, this metamorphosis of the eyes, sometimes fixed and focalized and at other times far and oriented inwards, generates a gap between “two forms of reality.”⁵⁹ At certain moments of the performance, it is as if the actress went from peace to war, from sweetness to violence. The change of focus is used here as an expedient to set in motion a change of energy, to transport the spectators into an “evocative experience” that provokes in them a “*change of state*.”⁶⁰

Another element worth focusing attention on is Holofernes’s head. This object became part of the performance only in the final phase of the creative process, contributing to a changing of the performance plot. From a narrative point of view, Barba and his actress were initially inspired by the figure of Mary Magdalene. They used as a source *La Maddalena tra sacro e profano* (La Maddalena between sacred and profane): the catalog of an art exhibition that took place in Florence in 1986. The introduction of Holofernes’s head involved a reference to the character of Salomé. Only later did Barba come to the biblical character of Judith, who on the one hand is “a holy woman who performs a ritual and acts under holy command,” but on the other, a “cold and calculating woman who falls for Holofernes’s charms and kills him because she cannot resist him.”⁶¹ If we refer to Mary Magdalene as a sacred figure and Salomé as a profane entity, we can identify in Judith the synthesis between the first and the second, a synthesis that allowed the actress to swing “between the sacred and the profane.”⁶²

From a technical and organic point of view, this oscillation between characters encountered during the creative process permitted Carreri to “dance” with her body in the plot of the story, setting in motion the expedients that allowed the actress to “not remain yoked to the plot,” nor “interpret a text,” but “create a context, move around and within the events.”⁶³

Some elements of Butoh were also essential in constructing the final scene of the performance. During the rehearsals, the director asked Carreri to show him a scene from an old Odin Teatret performance entitled *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours* following the logic of the Butoh dance. For the actress, the challenge was represented by the fact that the sequence requested by Barba was performed in tandem with Tom Fjordefalk, an Odin Teatret actor from 1974 to 1984. To solve this issue, the actress applied an instruction given to her by Natsu Nakajima,

⁵⁹ Carreri, “The Actor’s Journey,” 144.

⁶⁰ Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy*, 183.

⁶¹ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 116.

⁶² Carreri, 112.

⁶³ Barba and Savarese, *Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 104.

who suggested that in Butoh “you can alternate between the subject and the object of an action.” In the sequence of *Come! And the Day Will Be Ours*, Carreri was the subject performing the action to undress and redress Fjordefalk who, on the contrary, was the object that suffered it. However, referring to the advice of the Japanese master, the actress took turns “between doing and receiving the action.” The result was “an increase in the intensity and a reduction of the speed” and “change in the energy” of the eyes.⁶⁴

The elements coming from Butoh were here used as catalysts of the performance’s energy and rhythm to cause those changes of state that act on several levels. From the spectator point of view, the use of the Butoh scenic language in the performance generated a bodily communication consisting of authentic actions. According to the Italian photographer Maurizio Buscarino, “the body and especially the face of the actress open a whole landscape, a place of conflicts and emotions, of desires and thoughts, of promises and decisions that we feel without the need of intellectual mediation as actions and not simply as signs or scenic lies.”⁶⁵

The Transmission of the Principles: “Flexing the Eyes”

The period dedicated to personal training lasted fourteen years for Carreri, from 1974 to 1988. Soon after, the Odin actress began organizing and directing seminars in which she developed her research on training employing “a pedagogical practice which began to grow through teaching.” From January to April 1989, Carreri led in Holstebro *Winter Seeds*, a four-month-long workshop with six participants. Through this first workshop, Carreri undertook pedagogical research according to which the transmission of knowledge is not directed only towards the pupils but offers “the possibility of research even for the teacher.” The basic principle of the workshops conducted by Carreri consists of teaching the pupils to shape their energies through their bodies and voices, with the aim of “maintaining a specific quality of presence.”⁶⁶

Already in this first seminar, Carreri worked with the students on how the quality of presence can be managed through the eyes. The actress wrote on a page of her 1989 work diary:

⁶⁴ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 114–115.

⁶⁵ Maurizio Buscarino, “Judith, Fotoarticolo,” *Teatro Festival* 12 (1989): 39.

⁶⁶ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 183–184.

with active eyes with fulcrum or passive: inside, backwards until they meet the wall of the skull and look backwards. The eyes (like the voice) are the extension of our body: they arrive where the body does not.⁶⁷

These are indications given to the trainees present at the very first seminar, through which it is evident that the principles that Carreri transmits concerning the use of the eyes have not only Butoh as a reference but also other Asian performative genres. Butoh became part of the actress's professional biography only in 1984; but in fact, the work with the eyes had become essential for Carreri already previously. In 1980, in Bonn, during the first session of ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology), the Italian actress attended work demonstrations by Katsuko Azuma, Nihon Buyo's Japanese master.

At that moment, she was talking about how she could improvise by changing the focus of her gaze at three hundred meters or five meters. This completely changed her presence. And this was an incredible revelation for me. Naturally, I also tried to do it, and from there, a whole new experience arose.⁶⁸

Since 1989, Carreri has perfected her pedagogical methodologies for the transmission of knowledge. An evolution of *Winter Seeds* is currently represented by the *Dance of Intentions*, a workshop Carreri periodically conducts in Holstebro, which also takes place all over Europe and the world.

The *Dance of Intentions* includes an exercise called "Flexing the Eyes," according to which the pupils must "choose a spot on the wall in front of them" and "burn that spot with their gaze." Subsequently, the gaze must be led up to the internal surface of the pupils. The third step, which is repeated twice, consists of burning the spot identified on the wall again, returning the gaze to the surface of the eyes, and finally letting it fall inside the body. At this point, with the gaze kept internally and the facial muscles relaxed, the pupils sit down slowly and then get up, let their gaze resurface, and burn the spot on the wall again. While this first part of the exercise aims to teach the students "to do the action of 'not seeing'" with the idea of using the eyes "to create the impression of absence or presence in another dimension", the second one wants to "enable students to feel concretely the change in the focus of their eyes." The attendees arrange two rows, one in front of the other. The members of one of the two rows raise their index

⁶⁷ Odin Teatret Archives, Fonds Roberta Carreri, Carreri, b. 23c, Roberta Carreri, work diary "Winter Seeds"

⁶⁸ *Judith Film Project*, 27:24-27:57.

and middle fingers until they reach the height of the companion's eyes placed in the other row, who, in the first instance, focuses their gaze on the fingers of the partner in front. Subsequently, the row with the raised fingers proceeds, slowly and in a synchronized way, towards the companions arranged in the other row who, as the companion's fingers in front approach, relax their gaze until it falls inside the body. Arriving with the fingers raised two centimeters from the partner's eyes, the arm is dropped, while the students placed in front must keep their gaze inside the body without letting the eyes focus. Now, the fingers are raised, and the row proceeds backwards, while the companions in front slowly make their gaze re-emerge as the companions proceeding backwards distances themselves. When the row that worked with the eyes returns to the focus point, the row with the raised fingers drops the arms. At this point, the students repeat the exercise reversing roles.⁶⁹

Carreri transmits two opposite principles to let the students learn techniques to model their quality of presence through the eyes. It is evident that on the one hand, the actress refers to Butoh, for example, when she asks the workshop's participants to let their gaze go back to behind the students and then let it fall inside their body; and on the other, she uses principles learned from other Asian traditions, according to which the student "burns" the space by orienting and focusing the gaze towards a precise spot.

To conclude, regarding the work with the eyes, we can affirm that the principles of Butoh and the principles deriving from other Asian traditions, in particular from the Nihon Buyo, represent two opposite points of reference, between which the pupils must oscillate in order to modulate and shape the quality of their presence through the gaze.

Conclusions: Embodying and Transmitting Eurasian Professional Identity

The Swedish researchers Lindgren and Packendorff analyzed professional identity in theatres, pointing out that project-based work constitutes the basis on which individual and professional identity is constructed.⁷⁰ More recently, the Romanian scholar Alina Cristea argued that professional identity is based on

⁶⁹ Carreri, *On Training and Performances*, 196–197.

⁷⁰ Monica Lindgren and Johann Packendorff, "Performing Arts and the Art of Performing: On Co-construction of Project Work and Professional Identities in Theatres," *International Journal of Project Management* 25, no. 4 (2007): 354–364, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2007.01.005>.

cultural identity, “heritage and pre-expressiveness,” but that it can also be considered as the result of a “transcultural and timeless connection.”⁷¹ According to Barba’s terminology, professional identity “develops in contact with other cultures, but also at an intracultural level, to discover and incorporate the ‘different’ in our culture.”⁷²

Referring to Carreri’s experience with Butoh masters and *Judith’s* creative process, we can state that they constitute two occurrences that have enriched the professional identity of the Italian actress. On the one hand, the training in Japan with Ohno and Nakajima represented for Carreri a transcultural connection that allowed her to embody performative principles distant from her cultural context; on the other hand, *Judith’s* creative process was a working project to which the principles and techniques of Butoh were applied.

It must be said that Butoh is only one of the many nodes on which Roberta Carreri’s professional identity is based. In fact, from a pedagogical point of view, the transmission of some Butoh principles occurs in relation to other techniques that the actress has learned through contacts with other Asian and European masters. However, we can affirm that compared to the other techniques used and transmitted by the actress, Butoh represents the exact opposite. If by taking up the Nihon Buyo techniques, the actress transmits to the students how to accentuate the *action of seeing*, through the principles of Butoh she tries to convey the *action of not seeing*.

Finally, we can define Roberta Carreri as a Eurasian actress, not because, as a European actress, she learned and embodied Asian techniques, but rather because through the influences received, both from the East and the West, she was able to build her own professional identity and disseminate a transcultural knowledge in which the boundaries between European and Asian acting techniques do not exist.



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⁷¹ Alina Cristea, “The Cultural and Professional Identity of the Actor or the History of Cross-Cultural Theatre,” *Revista Română de Studii Eurasiatice* 16, no. 1/2 (2020): 211–216.

⁷² Barba, *Theatre: Solitude, Craft, Revolt*, 248.

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