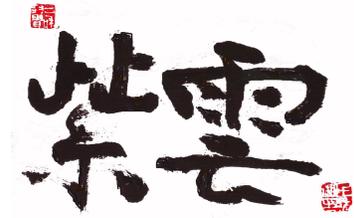


SHIUN



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Dear reader:

This issue is dedicated to a lecture on movement delivered by Robert Cohan on the 20th of August 2003 at the request of Chiba Sensei and in the context of our Summer Aikido Seminar in Mèze, France.

In view of the general interest manifested on this subject we have included the period of questions and answers that followed the lecture on that day.

We feel this to be an exiting opportunity to stimulate thought and discussion among ourselves. We invite you to share your comments by submitting them to Shiun for eventual publication. Please mail to: Norberto Chiesa, Saussine, 30580 Bouquet, France.

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The London Contemporary Dance Theater

**A TALK ON MOVEMENT by
ROBERT COHAN**

Transcription Tamara Kohn

I could say to a group of professional and student aikidoka that would be worth your attention I came to the conclusion that dance, which I come from and Aikido which you are doing have something in common, something that I know something about and that is learning movement.

We all move all the time. We consider movement a sign of life. But there is movement and movement and movement. I am going to say there are three general kinds of movement that our body is involved in, and of these three I am going to concentrate on the third, which I will come to in a moment.

The first kind is autonomic or automatic movement. That is to say we have little or no control over it. It includes all of the automatic bodily functions that keep the body alive and functioning, from heartbeat to digestion, from sneezing to sweating. We start it with the first sound we make when we come out of the womb. That is the first body movement you make in space. Before then your heart has been beating, you've been kicking around, but you didn't actually move the body in space.

That is the first movement you make and from then on you move. We are seldom conscious of autonomic movement, although we can to a degree become conscious. For the most part we don't want to interfere. For those of you who know how to control your heartbeat, you know that at a certain point it becomes dangerous – you don't want to interfere with that.

A second kind of movement is the kind of movement or way of moving that we consciously or more likely unconsciously learned, as we grew from childhood to now. It is personal to us in every possible way and we do it all day long.

It is the very way we move. It is like a signature, an identification of us. It is in fact the physical embodiment of who we are. You can identify people by the way they move– you do not even need to see their faces. It is a demonstration of our egos, of our personalities.

This kind of movement we think of as natural but although the basics of what we do, such as walking, feeding ourselves etc. are similar because we all have the same general structure, two arms, two legs, and a front and back with a head on top, the way we do the movement is not.

Most of us do not naturally move well. For example very few of us can run well although you would think that running is a natural function.

This second way of moving is a learned response to a host of outside social factors imposed on us by needs and the society we are brought up in. That includes all of our influences, from the scale of the space, the style of the furniture and the architecture of our houses to the way we physically related to our family as we were growing up and to the way we conformed to the social or local mores of our group be they ethnic or racial or national.

Think for a moment that in many places in the East people do not have chairs, in Africa people do not have chairs. Their way of moving is totally different as a natural function. They do not have cars, they do not have buses; Kenyans naturally run, very well and very fast.

From simple family orders such as, stand up straight, to the role models we chose to follow or look like or to certain attitudes having to do with gender we altered the way we move. We are under a constant barrage in our early years to learn by trial and error how to adjust our physical movement and body attitudes to conform to our peers, so that we don't seem out of place.



About six months ago, Sensei Chiba asked if I would talk at this seminar about anything I chose. In thinking about what

learn to move from the wrong centres of our body. We frequently learn to move from our emotional or sexual centres instead of a movement centre.

We also learn to move badly. Since no one is really teaching us to move or really correcting us, all kinds of bad habits start to accumulate. Unless we are involved in a physical activity in our teenage years and into our twenties we can start to get weak and lose our ability to learn and coordinate new movement.



The third kind of movement that we do is also definitely learned but it comes from a totally different source. It is the kind of movement one needs to learn to do a craft or an art or a skill of some kind. It is designed to be functional like the kind of movement one needs to learn to suit a particular purpose, to do a particular kind of work.

It is the kind of movement that a surgeon must learn to operate successfully or a tight ropewalker must learn in order not to fall, or a dancer must learn to be able to perform expressively, or a gymnast must learn the kind of movement that you are learning here in aikido.

Someone other than ourselves almost always teaches this kind of movement and once we have decided to learn it, it may be exciting but it is always hard to learn at first.

The problem that we always have is that we think we already know how to move. After all we have been moving all our lives. We think the personal way we move isn't a problem. All we need to do is learn the forms, the language. But this third kind of movement has two qualities that are new to us.

The first is that it is and must be done consciously. This is very difficult because to move consciously is so complicated that we can't even consciously lift a hand to scratch our nose let alone to do a complicated form as you all have found out.

The second is that at first, and maybe for a long time it will not feel natural to us and to complicate matters we have to unlearn ways of moving that we may think are natural to us.

Now most of you have come to terms with this process to varying degrees depending on how long you have been practicing aikido and what physical condition you were in when you started.

This learning process means we have to call on a part of ourselves we may not know too well and that is the part of ourselves that is capable of being objectively aware of our body; what it can do and is doing.

It demands a kind of willing and open mental objectivity to physical learning, a centering, physically, in the body, and mentally, in our attitude, that will enhance our understanding and openness to learning.

Another problem we all face is that all this is going on inside ourselves and we are notoriously un-objective when dealing with our own attitudes towards our own feelings both physical and mental-emotional.

For instance when a teacher shows a movement we have to be careful to see what is being shown. Not what we think is being shown. Instead of seeing we may be keeping up a running commentary in our minds while we are supposed to be watching. If it is something we think we know already we have to be even more careful as most likely we will see what we know and not what is being shown. If we have an injury it is likely to affect what we actually see let alone what we feel or do. If we are feeling nervous or tired again it will affect what we see. The same things will surely affect what we hear.

In this second way we frequently

All teachers have the same experience of a student saying, “why didn’t you say that before” when it may be something that you have said or shown for months. It was just never heard.

Obviously what I am getting at is: who is doing the practise? Who are you when you come onto the mat? Who is present?

Most learning involves the same basic process. The part of yourself that is capable of being taught must be the one who is here and in control. Not someone with any kind of attitude.

My own personal experience as a student and teacher for some 50 years has taught me that we simply cannot take our apparent willingness to learn or our presence in a class as sufficient motivation for the learning process to be effective. Over and over again we must work harder on who we are, at every moment on the mat.



In the ritual of the Dojo you have a very simple way of preparing yourself. You have the ritual of changing your clothing into something which is different from normal daily wear. As you change, be aware of leaving in the changing room with your clothes those parts of yourself that don’t belong on the mat. You have the Dojo itself, which is again, no matter how familiar, a special place. Then you have the removal of your shoes and the bow so that by the time you step on the mat you are the right person for what is to follow.

On television I saw a master class being given to a young ballerina by a great Russian dancer, Natalia Makarova. The dancer already knew the solo so Makarova said, o.k. Lets start. Come on stage from over there and begin.

The dancer went to the side of the stage, took a deep breath, walked to centre stage and took her position; the music started and she danced for 30 seconds.

Makarova shouted, stop! It’s just not right. When you do this you must look here, when you face here you must do this, etc. And you are just not right here. No. Lets start again.

The ballerina went to the wings and entered again. She came to centre stage, took her position and was just about to begin when Makarova shouted, stop, stop! You are just not right when you take your position, to start you must be like this. You are not doing it. Start again.

The young ballerina went to the side of the stage, got ready and was just about to start to walk to centre stage. Makarova shouted Stop! I can tell you’re not going to do it.

This little event is a great lesson. What is it that Makarova saw, or didn’t see. Is this special quality or presence so visible? The answer is yes. We can often see it in other people. The problem is that it is hard to see or recognise it in ourselves.

An attitude is a positioning of the body or the mind and frequently both.

Certainly when we are embarrassed or caught by surprise and we feel dumb or badly “self conscious” we know we are not going to move well or hear or see anything objectively. We all know that blocked sensation only too well but that’s not only what I am talking about.

It is when we think that we are smart or that we know something that we may be most unaware and wrongly centered. As a matter of fact if we have any attitude at all, it is likely to get in the way of our seeing, hearing, and learning.

An attitude is a positioning of either the body or the mind and frequently both. I am going to repeat that: an attitude is a positioning of either the body or the mind and frequently both.

And this is very important, for this is what I'm talking about. Not an attitude in dance, but an attitude in the head. It's not only intention. It's a mental placement; it's a mental filter. A filter so you see only one way, you hear only one way. You hear with your attitude. Sometimes it is a placing of ourselves in a defensive position; sometimes in an aggressive position but sometimes it is just an unconscious positioning of ourselves in a place where we feel comfortable, and this is dangerous.

As a teacher of dance I have had several experiences that may be of use as examples. There is the situation where someone with talent comes to class all excited but so full of themselves and what they know that you can't teach them; you can't give them anything because there is no room. There is a general rule in life that If you want to drink the wine you should come with an empty cup.

Another situation that occurs is when a student who has had some good training cannot seem to expand himself or herself to take in what you have to offer. A defensive or protective attitude to what they already know interferes with any new learning.

I had a very talented dancer in my company who had a perfect physical and well trained body. His problem in learning was not only that he questioned constantly but that he judged everything he saw. Of course to learn well one needs impeccable taste in questioning but too often judgement, what's right what's wrong, what's good, what's bad, becomes a habitual positioning, an attitude that interferes with learning.

As one really learns how to move well the good practise becomes embodied in the muscles and articulation of the body. It becomes part of your experience, at present and living now, representing your good learning and practise in the past. Continual mental judgement becomes unnecessary, as the right moves are evident and transparent. You don't need any attitudes.

Another area I want to comment on is teaching. This also has to do with attitude but I am not going to comment on teachers' attitudes.

In teaching serious dance there are some basic rules for teachers that I have been given and I pass on to other would be dance-teachers. Perhaps they are of some use here as I think they are the same for teachers of Aikido.

Teach only what you really know.

Teach everything you know.

Don't hold back anything. Sometimes you have such a good student you think, I'm not going to tell him that, it took me years to learn it.

You can only go up a step if you put someone on the step you are leaving.

The more you can give the more you will learn.

Teach with love. I don't mean sex.

If you can't love your students you can certainly love the art you are supposed to be teaching.

In French do you have the same use of the word 'attitude' as in English? (From audience: The difference is that in French the word attitude is a lot more passive, it's a position. While in English an attitude has also— has the content of intent.)

Bob: In English, an attitude is mental, mostly. He has a good attitude, or a bad attitude. It is a mental positioning.

time that you teach everything, teach with care and discretion. Not everyone should know everything. Be careful who you teach.

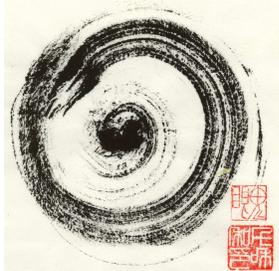
To return to how to learn. The real question is always, “who is doing the learning.”

It may be that the part of ourselves that is capable of learning and directing movement must be the one who is always present, because he has no attitudes but is simply you, yourself.

You will only
get out of teaching
what you can give
to your students,
but, at the same

Experienced,
And Unprotected,
And Open,
And Empty,
And very aware.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Question (Davinder): I can relate, or understand about being empty, as in an empty cup, but what about keeping it (after that)?

Bob: Your emptiness becomes filled with more and more emptiness. As you progress your experience continues. You don't have to worry about keeping it – it is there in you, but you inside must stay empty. If your experience is real, no one will take it away from you, you will not lose it. You may leave it to the side for a while, but it is yours. I don't think you have to worry about that. Every single class that you take you have to come newborn, with your experiences.

I taught my first class in 1946. I stopped teaching about 4 years ago. As I taught more and more, as I taught more professionals, my classes got simpler and simpler. And finally I was teaching in the last years, when I was teaching fully professional dancers, I was teaching basic beginners classes.

(Question about emptiness as a goal to give one focus and learn)

Bob: But why do you need a goal? That's an attitude. That may be the reason you come here. But once you step on the mat, leave it. Because again, what you know will be here, in you. And what you learn you are going to get now, today, this minute. It's a good question because your goal limits what you can learn. It depends on your concept of your goal. The

wonderful thing is to not have a goal, to be open and be filled up. This should be the goal everyday.

Question: What do we mean by the actual centre of the movement – the feeling?

Bob: Sometimes when you move, it moves. You didn't do it, it moves and you think, Oh Wow, that was it. Most of the time a cat moves from the centre of movement. We don't. When a cat becomes civilized and he gets fed too much and gets petted a lot, he begins to lose his catness – he begins to lose his centre of movement.

Question: You said a while ago about how the more advanced students, the more advanced you are, you go back to basics when you teach.... Could you talk more about this?

Bob: Martha Graham, who I worked with for many years, used to give an audition for a dancer. She would ask the dancer to walk to the centre of the room, to do a deep bend of the knees, a plie, in first position, a deep plie, stand up and walk off. That's all she needed to see.

So within the beginning material of any technique, Aikido or dance or gymnastics, the basics are there in the simple movements. If you understand that very well, you can increase your understanding later when you're very good by doing them again and again and again. In other words it's endless. The basic material is bottomless; you never really get to the end of it. I don't recommend teaching that, in that way, unless you have pupils who understand what you're doing. If you are lucky enough to have students who arrive with you at a very sophisticated point of understanding, then you can do the basic work with more sophistication than ever, yes, that's good.

Question: Why is it that kids are learning a lot faster, those kinds of movements, than we do?

Bob: Children learn faster because they have fewer filters. We accumulate our filters all the time, even now. Even when we were teenagers we worried about dressing right and being with the right crowd, and how everybody slouched or stood and how you appeared to be to them— you were taking physical attitudes. And even now in your job, in your work, in your home relations, in your love relations, you take attitudes. You keep filtering more and more and more. It's why, to make a great dancer, the Russians, who did it for many years, take children at four, five, six, and train them. They have not chosen to be artists, they were picked and then never question it – they don't have to. You may not have the most intelligent dancer in the world, but you'll have a good one.



Question: You wrote in your text about the student who was questioning you so much.

Bob: I didn't say only that he questioned a lot, I said that he judged. Questioning is asking for answers. Judgement is making decisions within your own head about what's good what's bad, what's right, what's wrong. They're two separate things which I think you have to be careful about. I was very careful about what I said. Of course to learn well one needs impeccable taste in questioning. Questioning of course is necessary. Yes, absolutely. But you have to question from a certain place in yourself, and that is the most intelligent place, the most aware, the most learning place you can question from. Not just to question. A lot of people question in order to excite energy. You question to excite yourself. You feel good because you question. Oh I have a lot of questions. 'That's not so simple – I have a lot of questions'. This makes me feel good. That 's not the kind of questioning I'm talking about.

I find with myself, that many times the questions that I have are not real questions – they are places where I have become stuck. And if I really look at them – it's not a question – it's how to get through this place that I'm stuck.

Return to what I was saying about attitude. If you have too many questions it becomes an attitude and you cannot see the answers – it's just that simple. A good question in impeccable taste is a good question, but that's up to you, in your own head.

Question continues: ... But this is hard to do...

Bob: If it was easy to do we'd all be like Sensei. It is hard to do, I agree with you. It's much easier for me to sit here and say it. Except I have been through what you are talking about and it is not easy.... The reason you're here.... each person is different... but you're all here to solve some internal personal question or desire or image that you have found within yourself and that's what brings you here to this very special place in Mèze, far away from the normal life that is going on outside. You all have something that brings you here and this is the source of your interest. If you remember that all the time, what your driving force is, the questions start to fall away and it gets simpler and simpler if you can just do that. Does that make sense?

Question: In the text you're not talking about the pleasure, the fun of movement. So is that part of the process that's relevant? Should we go beyond the concept of pleasure in the movement? What really is the place of that concept?

Bob: Everybody has come here for different reasons. Not only here –everybody studies Aikido for different reasons. I think that is the answer. If you find fun and pleasure, then that is your reason. And if it works for you and you have fun and pleasure then that is good, for that solves it for you. For someone else it's a different reason – it's a different kind of fun – it's to find more balance, more centre. Now finding your centre is very serious work – is that 'fun'? For some people yes, for other people, no it's too hard.

Sometime you can learn simply by entering your spirit and that will carry you into the centre.

I don't want to take the fun out of it, because you can find your centre through pleasure. But I'm talking about, mostly, how you learn. Sometime you can learn simply by entering your spirit and that will carry you into the centre. That could be not only fun but also pleasure.

You see I could get very mystical about aikido. Aikido exists by itself. You can enter the world of aikido and if you were sensitive to that world you would do it instantly because you would know it, because Aikido itself can show you how to be, in yourself, in Aikido.

And that is a part of the process of learning. Part of the process is to put on these clothes, come here, see people who have experienced it and enter it, and that helps you to find your centre, just that by itself, that's practical. But I think it's even more mystical than that. That at certain moments, Aikido can take over and make you better than you thought you could be.

Question (Joel): In the case of ritual dancing, which is the origin of dancing, sometimes we have shown that the dancer gets into trance. And when a ritual dancer gets into the state of trance one can see that he can get very centered. Now in the case of contemporary dancing, for example, isn't it sometimes that we like to lose our centre, or to find our centre by losing our centre – to get away from being centered... There is a tendency in modern society...

Bob: Of course there is, because modern society has moved away from centre. It's gone to style, it's gone to excess, it's gone as far away from centre as possible – away from religious centre, political centre, artistic centre, everything – society is breaking apart. You have a choice as to whether you want to go that way, and maybe come back, or stay in the centre.

Question (Joel): If you look at architecture, if you go to the new Guggenheim museum – would you say it has centre, or a centre beyond centre, or...

Bob: OK, for me I don't think that's beyond centre, that's something else. I think in the process of experimenting.... You know the story, to return to centre, of the Prodigal Son? There's a myth about that. That you don't know where the centre is if you've never experienced dispersion. Once you experience everything out there, maybe then when you come back, you know better where centre is, because you've lost your centre and now you've found it again. And art does do that, and artists do that. In particular, artists lose their centre and then find it again in the experience of what they found out there, by bringing that back to centre.

Question: What was your biggest challenge in your dancing career to date? (Laughter)

Bob: You mean today was the biggest challenge? (Laughter) Until today...

Martha Graham, who I worked with for 20 years, was an extraordinary person. She was a very special type of artist. And when I first joined her company I was one of 25 dancers and on stage she never looked at me, she always looked past me. If I was there, she looked somewhere else. She looked through me. And one day on stage she looked straight at me. And I almost fell down, because she was so powerful that when she looked at you it was like being brought into some other world.

Question: How do you relate to the movement in aikido where basically the technique is always done in two – in partnership – and in addition to that – with people who are always different.

Bob: Yes, but you're both trying to do the same... not the same thing but you're trying to work together – you're trying to create something together, and that I think is a wonderful learning process. If you have a good partner, together you make something else which is this perfect shape. Teaching dance, any phrase of movement a dancer does exists in time, from here to there in time – 5 seconds, 30 seconds time – if you could see the whole movement in one moment it should make a coherent pattern. Like a seashell – it is a coherent pattern of the life of the animal. And the same thing is true for two people. When you do your work together, again you should make a coherent pattern, which is that exercise, that form, that shape, and there should be no false moves in the pattern. And I think when you work together that way; again if you try to keep the pattern coherent



ent you can actually learn how to do the pattern better, you can learn what you're doing better, because you're keeping the whole relationship coherent.

Norberto: I'd like to make a remark. I find it very amusing that

while the subject of your lecture is movement, most of the time we have been talking about psychology, personality, ego; then going into higher mystical, metaphysical levels and we are now just short of knocking on God's door...

Bob: And God moves on the surface of the earth in mysterious ways! (General laughter)

Question: Is there a chance that Aikido and dance can develop jointly or do they have to spread apart to diverge?

Bob: That's up to individual people. Because... when I first saw Sensei Chiba teach, I asked if he could come to my school and do a demonstration because I thought it was so important for the dancers to see this work. The result of that was that many of my dancers did go into Aikido. Some a little bit, some more, and we had Aikido taught in my school for a long time afterwards. There is one dancer who was in my company but first he was with Sensei Chiba - Paul Douglas – and he has evolved a kind of dance – I don't know about his Aikido, but I know about his dance – he is doing a kind of dance which is definitely influenced by Aikido.

Question: Is this a type of contact dancing?

Bob: Well that's a different style.... But yes, there's a form of dance called contact improvisation – which is touchy – 'sticky hands' – which is very much following the other person's motivation and how it carries into your body and someone leans on you and you take their weight and then you lean and they take your weight – it's very complicated. And it's very similar to sticky hands tai chi or....

Question: (can't hear full question... but it is about teaching children)

Bob: Yes, I taught children. They're very difficult. But yes, I think children should be exposed – to Aikido, dance – yes, definitely. I think it's very healthy because it gives them some kind of form to their ... Exactly what I was talking about – if you're not taught dance when you're young – or some kind of sport, or anything – you learn badly how to move. We see it now all the time- we see children, especially now with computer games, we see children who can't move at all. In the United States, it's a disaster, because the children have become balls... So I think it's very important that children are motivated and become excited about whatever physical form you do – dance or Aikido. The problem is that it has to be good. This is the problem. Most dance that is taught to children is bad. I don't know about Aikido, but most dance for children is bad dance. Because there are teachers who...-people who wanted to be dancers and can't be dancers so they teach.

Question: In your teaching, how would you position yourself in order to facilitate this change, what we talked about before, from the artificial movement and drawing people back to their natural movement? (elucidates...) A passage from a movement which is external – showable – to some movement that is more interiorized....

Wake up your body by becoming in contact with it.
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Bob: Well-I never start from the outside in; I always start from the inside out. I always taught, as I was taught, from sensation. What is the real sensation of an arm lifting? What lifts an arm, what does it come from? Not motivation but from the sensation of the muscles, of the bone, of the structure that works inside the body. And all my training worked from inside out. For instance the nicest thing to do first thing in morning when you wake up... Don't move, just feel yourself in the bed... if you're in a bed... and just start to stretch ... again, like a cat ...

move your body everyway, feel your weight in the bed – wake up your body by becoming in contact with it.

See if you can find all the muscles, all the bones, all the joints, stretching through your body, just feel your body. This is the sort of motivation that makes movement. Now if you can bring that kind of internal sensation onto the mat, you have come a big step toward finding the centre. I'm not saying that's all there is, not by any means, but if you can come with that awareness of your body into Aikido instead of all those things in your head – "oh God, I didn't see that, what happened, did he go up, down, which way did he turn..." You don't know which way to go, and you're always bent over thinking instead of being straight, and you can't bend your knees. Instead of all that, come in with your body intact, come with yourself in center, come with actual physical sensation.

Question: Could we elaborate a bit on the notion of centre. I have the feeling that frequently when we talk about centre, it's a very centrifugal view, in other words we are on the outside and we imagine the centre at some point in the middle. Isn't there more of a theme of losing balance, of a fulcrum....

Bob: If you put your body horizontal like a seesaw, head here, feet here... Somewhere there is a centre, a balance point. If you put it the other way, somewhere there is a centre, another balance point. If you spin it, somewhere there is a centre. Somewhere there is an atom, like the sun, that is not moving. Everything else is like the galaxy, moving around this one atom.

Now that centre is usually where your ki is supposed to be, in the middle of the lower part of your body – it depends on whether you have big legs or big head where the balance is. But you have a centre and that's physical. Now there's a centre that you feel organized around as well, which is sensational, not just physical, and this is what I mean when I talk about centre. It usually is in the pelvic area, and if you can feel that, you don't have to do all the rest... the rest will happen. If you can go back in... In dance, the muscles that wrap around the arm, go around like this, go into the body here, go under the back, and they join the center of the vertebrae, about the 4th vertebra from the bottom, around 4 or 5. They join on the inside of your body. Now that's where your fingers are attached. And the same thing is true for the legs, obviously, from your toes up into the same place – the fourth vertebra, this way and this way. And that gives you a good idea that your legs are very close to each other in the centre of your body. If you were able to focus on that image alone, if you were able to work from there, you will come very close to organizing yourself around your

centre. And this is the thing that is missing with most of us. Most of us think that our arm is like our shirt, with a seam here and the arms is that, and your legs are like where your bathing suit or underwear finishes, and it's just not attached. You are attached. You are all attached to a centre.

Question: So this centre is not like a bone, it is more like ligaments, tissues in the body...

Bob: It's an image. Use it as an image... it's better.

Question: So what we're talking about here – movement and centre and everything. If you look at most sports – If you look at the best people in a certain sport they move graciously, and it looks easy.

Bob: That's better than moving graciously. It looks easy.

Q continued: And if you look at a beginner, at aikido or a sport with difficult technique, and when you start practicing Aikido you try to memorize, well I do this... now I do this, and you look clumsy. So the road from here to here is what we are talking about, finding the centre... Suddenly (...?) but you need to live it.

Bob: I absolutely agree. This is to give another point of view about learning movement. How to shake off some of the problems that you have when you come in. Nothing will take the place of the training. But, the question is still who is training and how are you training. And who is accumulating the information and how. How are they translating it. This is the important part.

In dance, and I'm sure it's the same in Aikido, in the beginning, it's terrible. But, you move and suddenly you see something, suddenly you feel a little bit better. You have reached a certain point. Then it's very hard to move on again. You have reached a certain level, and then you make another move. You make two or three moves like this and then it's hard. Then it becomes very difficult. After your third move, "ACH – what am I doing this for, what am I killing myself for, I'll never learn it, I'll never look like that" and so forth. But you will find, if you stay with it, that you suddenly understand something different about yourself; you then can begin to make steady progress, you can move on steadily. In the beginning it looks impossible, but once you get up to the third step perhaps you can actually begin to see shape. And then you find– I'm sure it's the same as in dance; you find that before you didn't know how to work. And now you know how to work better. And that will continue. Your steps up will be in learning how to bring more of yourself to the work,

to work better, harder and then, how to bring more of yourself into the work. That's very important.

Question: (How do you) bring the second type of movement you describe, which is the signature of yourself that you get from your upbringing, from who you are, from who you encounter in your life, and combine that with the training that you get at this third level which gives you a sense of ... You see an artist and you can really see something different in them, even though they all trained in the same way...

Bob: Well that will happen inevitably. What will happen is your signature will change. You will actually have a different signature after a while, because the work you're doing is so powerful it will take over or should take over.

Q continued: And if you take it back off the mat and into the street...

Bob: Well if you're lucky you can do that.

Question: But, from a teacher's point of view, isn't it sometimes better to leave that person with his or her signature?

Bob: The teacher's not there to change somebody's life. The teacher is there to help you change your life. The teacher's not there to impose anything on you. The teacher's there to help you do what you want to do. That's the deal. And if you can do that, you're teaching well. So you have to be very careful when you see a student... you cannot give the same information to everybody. Some things, yes... Stand up straight... yes, you can say that, but you cannot be specific on every single person alone. You have to give them a form that they have to fill. That's the important thing – you have to help them to fill the form.

Question: In martial arts, one of the basic elements is the concept of awareness. That awareness is created through a pressure, (MA practice) puts one in conditions where you will feel this intense pressure. So the question is, in dance do you also have this notion of pressure considering that these dancers are most likely very fine, sensitive people, do you think this concept of pressure and awareness also exists in dance?

Bob: Well, if you've ever been performing on a big stage with several thousand people in front of you, watching you, you know what pressure is. You get out on the stage, sometimes wearing very little clothing, and you go out with two or three thousand people sitting in the dark all looking at you. And this

creates a huge kind of pressure, that's the pressure you're talking about. Not only pressure, but awareness of everything around you at that moment. You must be alive to the situation. Now Aikido does the same thing. You must be alive to the situation that you find yourself in on the mat. Suppose Sensei says, OK, come, take a stick and, you're going to dance with Sensei. (Chuckle) There's pressure. But under that kind of pressure you'd better be the right person. You learn very quickly who to be. How to be. And this is very, very important.

The pressure is your own demand upon yourself to be as perfect as possible.

I think that certainly in Martial Arts, ... although Aikido is not like most martial arts.... I'm not saying that you don't have some kind of competitive (bad word but) element in there – I don't think that is a healthy element. I think it's better to get rid of that element and work for the perfection of the moves. I think that is important. If that's what you mean by vigilance and pressure, yes, and you work at it. But if there is a kind of competitive element then it begins to become an attitude again, and that you have to be very careful of.

It all sounds very nice. But there is pressure, and there should be pressure, because the pressure is not with anyone else. The pressure is with yourself; the pressure is your own demand upon yourself to be as perfect as possible. And that's what I mean. When you go on the stage in front of thousands of people, you have practiced for months and years to be perfect. The audience is not going to know if you did it perfectly. If you make a big – if you fall down– yes, but otherwise they are not going to know. You will know, and you will let yourself down. The competition is with yourself, and that's where the pressure is. To be as perfect at a given moment as it is possible to be. To enter into the pressure cooker and come out perfectly cooked.

Question: I have a question about movement and where the centre is. In dance, from a very naïve observing point of view, it seems that the centre comes up – that you want to be light in order to achieve the aesthetic that comes with pointe and being high – in ballet at least – but in Aikido we always try to make our center come lower to the ground. How does that...

Bob: Well that's why I liked Aikido the moment I saw it, and why I asked Sensei to come and show my dancers. Because in ballet the movement is mostly

to escape the ground. Now, even though it is to escape, it's done with a great deal of pressure on the ground, but you don't see that because the whole technique of ballet is to cover up the effort. The effort is there, but you shouldn't see it. In modern dance, especially old modern dance, which I come from, the idea was to show the effort, to show the pressure on the ground. When you stand on the floor with your bare feet, you have roots going right down from your feet into the ground, like a tree, so that you're on the ground. And this is very similar to what you have in Aikido, which is a definite relationship to gravity. But it's the kind of relationship to gravity, centering down, that allows you to move freely above it because you're up.

Question: The last question, Bob, is regarding the last part of the text when you say not everyone needs to know everything. Could you comment on that?

Bob: Yes, there are several ways to comment. One of them was this question about changing somebody's signature. Some people may be better off where they are, and you have to be sensitive to that. That's one aspect. The other aspect is some people will use what you say against somebody else, and you have to be sensitive to that. You have to know your students and take responsibility for what you teach.

Thank you very much.



ABOUT ROBERT COHAN

Born in New York in 1925, Robert Cohan

began his professional career in dance when he joined the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1946. Follows a life long involvement in choreography, teaching and the direction of dance companies.

He was instrumental in the creation of the modern dance movement in England, becoming in 1967 the Artistic Director of the London Contemporary Dance Theater and School, which he directed for the next 20 years.

He met Chiba Sensei in London in 1971. The common interest in body arts led them to sustained exchanges soon developing into a relationship of friendship. In 2002 Chiba Sensei asked Robert to share with us his long experience, the result of which is this presentation.



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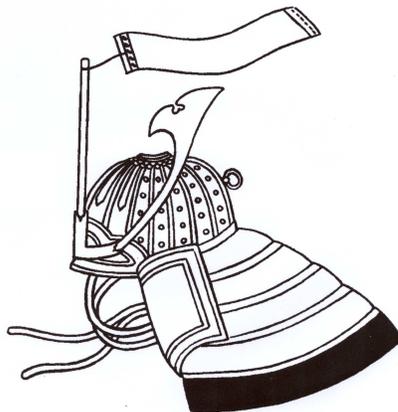
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FUND RAISING CAMPAIGN

The Birankai Continental Europe is committed to a fund raising campaign to help Chiba Sensei with the running of San Diego Aikikai.

The purpose of this effort is to pay the balance of the mortgage on the building amounting to 163.000\$ thus alleviating the financial pressures on the daily operation of the School.

All Dojos are encouraged to conduct their own Fund Raising in the manner most appropriate to their own environment.

The Uzès Summer Camp organizers are planning a raffle to this end to be held during the Seminar next August 2004.

You may also contact directly the U.S.A. campaign Directors George Lyons of Bucks County Aikikai, gp12@comcast.net, and Leslie Cohen of San Diego Aikikai.

Your donations are most appreciated.

Thank you for your support!