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AKTUELLT/ The Body as Friend and Foe in the Dance Suite *Pang*

By Terese Martinsson 29 November 2013 Konst & Scen



Photo: Pia Zeppa Häggström

***Pang* | Atalante | 2013-11-28**

Carmen Olsson's *pang* is being performed this weekend in Atalante. Terese Martinsson reflects on the immediacy of address of this at once subtle and hyperactive dance form – *buto*.

Dance is generally regarded as a “less accessible” art form as compared to concerts, theatre and film. I can't help taking this thought with me when going to see Carmen Olsson's performance *pang* at Gothenburg's chief dance venue, Atalante. Carmen Olsson practices the modern Japanese dance form *buto*, which wouldn't usually be described as the most accessible or crowd-pulling form of art. It is a post-modern dance form which plays with grotesque patterns of movement and hyper-controlled gestures. Performance, dance and theatre all inhabit the same borderland where human bodies use the space to tell stories and ask questions, which puts the performance in an interesting context.

In *pang* Carmen Olsson presents a dance suite. With Harald Svensson's music as a guide, a landscape is created in which the body is both an enemy and an assistant to Carmen's at times so subtle movements that they are almost impossible to perceive. Her body control is so precise and so slow that it almost creates an illusion of the audience moving round her body rather than her moving in front of us. This is in sharp contrast to when the movements seem like electric impulses, but even in the most spastic gestures, no muscles are permitted to sling out body parts erratically in all directions; each muscle is constantly aware of the rest of the body. In the periphery Simon Kriisin performs a hyper-subtle dance that reminds us of the inexorable passage of time.

Time is really made use of in *buto*. Every movement is given the time it requires; and the meticulous choreography puts everyone in the room in a sort of dance trance where it is impossible not to focus totally on what is taking place in front of us. The concentration and presence are so total, and the energy is focused so carefully, that we are all in some way participants in what is happening. Carmen Olsson illustrates the enormous contradiction that the body is a prison in which we all must live

according to our personal preconditions – while at the same time she possesses a unique control over the details of her body language.

In short, *buto* may be described as dance which is unlike anything that we, with a western conception of dance, have previously encountered. The western archetype, classical ballet – where the performer always has an invisible thread holding her head upright; where her gaze and smile must always reach out to the audience; and where grace and normative beauty predominate – appears to be the direct opposite of what is to be witnessed in Atalante's intimate sanctum of dance. And marvellously enough, this doesn't mean that the audience go away disgusted at having seen something ugly. On the contrary, they are filled with a feeling of having been enriched by that which dares to go beyond our usual horizon of understanding with all credit.

As to the question of dance as an inaccessible form of art, I must admit that body language transgresses all spoken and written languages throughout the world. Moreover, *buto* is a forum for showing the relationship we humans have with every form of nature, whether it be water, plants or fellow humans, through physical expression. The existential accessibility is thereby total and universal.