Towards The Bowels of the Earth

Butoh Writhing in Perspective

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The reason that we suffer from anxiety is that we are unable to live with our fears. Anxiety is something created by adults. The dancer, through the butoh spirit, confronts the origins of his fears: a dance which crawls towards the bowels of the earth.

Hijikata Tatsumi (quoted in Viala and Masson-Sekine, 188)

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Convulsions: An Introduction

The first time I witnessed butoh dance the emotional intensity left me in tears. In front of me a convulsing figure slowly rose to the sky and collapsed violently back to the earth. Painted white and dressed in tatters, she looked like a ghost, like a being come undone. Every tiny movement sprung organically into the next; her fingers, toes, arms and legs growing out into space, only to come shriveling back inwards as her life faded away. After a time death seemed to have claimed the dance, and all was still. I felt my heart beating slower, my limbs aching in sympathetic strain. But then, she stirred again - transcending the pain to greet the dawn with a smile. In time I realized I was witnessing the process of death and rebirth, of struggle and transcendence. I noticed my breath had slowed and a strange calm had descended. I stared, unblinking, at the vision before me.

This happened in the summer of 2001, at a rare, large-scale butoh production in a new theatre bordering Tokyo Bay. Up to this point I never took much of an interest in dance. Instead, music was my medium – minimalist music; ambient music; sparse, empty music with lots of space left open for mystery. Listening to this music late at night in the darkness of my room, time slowed and my awareness opened and sharpened, eventually collapsing the distinction between my body and the sounds that resonated with it.

In butoh I found a movement form that paralleled these transcendent listening experiences. Not surprisingly, it was music that brought me to that first performance in Tokyo. In high school a friend lent me a compact disc of improvisations by guitarist Derek Bailey (1930-), featuring butoh dancer Tanaka Min (1945-) (*Music and Dance*, Revenant Records, 1997). The cover displayed a picture of the recording space: Tanaka leaning naked against a concrete wall, about to spring into action. In the music on the CD, Bailey's guitar provided shimmering outbursts of atonal picking to accompany the movement of Tanaka's body. All one heard of the dance was the occasional thump or slap of body hitting wall, body hitting floor. Bailey seemed to be improvising tightly around Tanaka's movements, even pausing for lengths to let Tanaka focus on the sound of the rain falling on the roof the abandoned forge. Or at least this is what I imagined while listening. Tanaka's audible thumping was the only clue to how the dance may have looked. The echoes of Bailey's guitar in the empty forge and the intermittent rainstorms on the ceiling of the space rushed in to fill the si-

lences. What was Tanaka doing there in the quietude? I became fascinated by the idea of a dance soft enough to improvise with falling rain. The silence pulled me in. Listening to Tanaka move silently through space hinted at a dance that could match with movement what I had so far experienced only through sound. This was the subtle experience of total awareness - art in its full sensorial impact. By the time I traveled to Tokyo for a summer internship in 2001, four years had passed since my friend lent me the CD, but its effect lingered on and I was determined to see a butoh performance for myself. Within a few weeks of arriving in Japan I found this Tokyo Bay performance listed in the classifieds, and eagerly took the train across the city to see it. And I was blown away. Here was the same delicate, transcendent quiet I knew from music, just as I had hoped. But this was just the beginning.

Flowering

My butoh teacher last year liked to speak of a flower. The butoh flower is born, rises up, and dies, only to be born again. The roots of the butoh flower are just as important as the blossom, and nothing is ignored. This is the built-in ecology of butoh. All that rises must fall to the earth. All that is built will be destroyed. With this understanding the dance does not seek to control nature. Butoh is humble. Butoh training techniques strive to remove the will of the dancer entirely to create movement in total union with the environment. Butoh is what happens to dancing when the rational mind stays out of the way.

In butoh one must become what is danced. Instead of applying an image onto the body from the outside, butoh works from the inside out. When dancing a flower, it is of no consequence if the dancer *looks* like a flower to the spectator, rather, the dancer must *feel* like a flower, and let this feeling lead the movement. Every gesture is drawn from a body consumed by the flower's perspective. To allow this to happen the dancer begins with an empty form, a body free from likes, dislikes, and habitual movements. This is the *dead body* of butoh. Ohno Kazuo (1906-), one of the founders of butoh, writes:

> If you wish to dance a flower, you can mime it and it will be everyone's flower, banal and uninteresting; but if you place the beauty of that flower and the emotions which are evoked by it into your dead body, then the flower you create will be true and unique and the audience will be moved (quoted in Viala and Masson-Sekine, 22).

Butoh is made up of the very stuff of life: birth and death, growth and decay, impermanence, and absurdity. Even watching butoh causes a deep sympathetic response in the depths of the body. Stilling the ego, buried emotions rise up to trigger a deep, cleansing catharsis. The conscious mind is calmed and emptied, but the memories stored in the body awaken and vibrate with the energy of the dancers on stage.

Lessons

After moving to Kyoto at the end of August 2001, I began monthly butoh workshops with Kansai-area butoh dancer Ken Mai. The lessons were intense. Each four-hour workshop pushed me to feel deep inside my body, bring up deep, amorphous feelings from the depths of my memory, and let them emerge through movement. Through this practice an incredible variety of feelings surfaced: tranquility, violence, compassion, fatigue, helplessness, release, anger, love, and above all, emptiness. For several hours after each class (before the bruises and aches set in) I floated in the stillness of the calm-after-the-storm. My mind and body felt ten times lighter from all the energy the dance had released.

Ken Mai's butoh training pushed us over and over through cycles of death and rebirth, decay and growth. We practiced feeling energy come up from the ground into each part of the body, bit by bit, until we were standing straight up reaching for the sky, then POOF, all the energy vanished and we crashed limply back to the floor. We repeated this basic cycle of creation and dissolution over and over and over, sometimes violently fast, sometimes excruciatingly slow. We felt our way inside the emotion of a flower, growing towards the sun, then decaying to nothing, only to grow again. Over and over, we tried to find a way to understand impermanence not just conceptually but physically, confronting the knowledge that our bodies were continually dying and dissolving and turning to dust.

Attempting to feel out my own death often pushed me over the limits of sadness into the humorous. I started acting silly, making faces and stomping around wildly. And our teacher placed random goofiness in his exercises to throw off anyone who began to take butoh's preoccupation with death too seriously. Once we performed a piece where after moving excruciatingly slowly for five minutes, feeling the weight of gravity sap all life away, we suddenly turned back to the audience with a clownish grin. The message: Life is absurd, lighten

up! Butoh shares this sense of humor with the 14th century Tibetan Buddhist monk Longchenpa, who writes:

> Since everything is but an apparition, perfect in being what it is, having nothing to do with good or bad, acceptance or rejection, one may well burst into laughter (Cited in Hart, 2000, 27).

As I practiced butoh, eventually the transience of life became physically tangible. Realizing this impermanence, I had to laugh at myself for ever getting so worked up over something so fluid and ephemeral. Hahahahihihihohoho. Butoh contained a laughter of release.

Our teacher wanted us to drop the ego, the discerning mind, and just dance. Always we asked questions: am I thinking too much about how it looks to the audience? Am I paying too much attention to the music? Is this the way it is supposed to be? Am I thinking too much about not thinking too much? But we were given no standard to measure "right" and "wrong" outside of focus and sincerity in allowing the body at that moment to manifest itself through movement. Our teacher replied, "Telling yourself not to think will never work. Just think and think until your mind is exhausted and gives up. Then dance."

Initiations, Continued

After the Tokyo Bay performance in June of 2001 I traveled around Tokyo every weekend taking in as much butoh as I could. I often found myself in small, dark, underground theatres, scrunched up elbow-to-elbow with the rest of the audience. These smaller performances took in no more then twenty-five, often squeezing in a few more than could comfortably fit on the cushions. Most of the audience was in their twenties and thirties. At concerts of the more well-known groups (particularly DaiRakudaKan), a few foreigners were often present (besides me): sometimes a dedicated butoh fan, but just as often someone who read a small snippet about butoh in the tourist literature and decided to give it a try.

Butoh in Tokyo centers around several small venues with names like *Terpsichore* and *Plan B*, mostly in the western side of the metropolis. These venues are not strictly butoh-oriented, but provide a space for musicians, dancers, and performance artists of all styles. When we filed into these small venues, we were asked to remove our shoes and check all belongings at the door in or-

der to maximize seating space. At DaiRakudaKan performances we were literally shoulder to shoulder, knee to knee. Once I ended up in the back row with the speaker right behind my head. Too loud!

One exception to the dark, small, multipurpose performance spaces was the relocated *Asbestos-kan* (Asbestos Hall), the original all-butoh venue created by butoh founder Hijikata Tatsumi (1928-1986), and now run by his widow Motofuji Akiko (1928-). After some searching one afternoon I found the Asbestos-kan in a residential district of southwest Tokyo, in what looked surprisingly like a family home. Later I learned the space did function much like a house, serving as a place where dancers could live and train at all hours of the day. Compared to the other crowded, urban butoh venues, the Abestos-kan was relaxed and suburban. I arrived for an early afternoon concert a half-hour ahead of time, and chatted with a man with a shaved head who was lounging in front of the house in the summer sun. He brought me inside and showed me pictures of himself dancing in a recent performance. The Asbestos space was clean and bright, the walls full of butoh photography. A few rows of cushions were laid out in the back of the room for seating. When the performance ended, the dancers came out to chat with the eight people in the audience, many of whom appeared to be friends with the performers. One of the dancers offered me some tea as we filled out our *ankêto*. The *ankêto* is a questionnaire handed out with the program at small Japanese dance events.[1] The *ankêto* asks questions like "How did you like today's performance?" "What would you change?" "How did you hear about us?" "What was your favorite part?" Invariably, my Japanese would fail me during these moments, and while I wanted to describe the subtle and complicated reactions floating around my mind, I would be reduced to short first-grade sentences: "It was fun. Thank you."

I could have said a lot. The performances that summer were by turns transcendent, unsettling, silly, boring, meditative and obnoxious. But what surprised me most was how varied they were. Every time I thought I had a clear grasp of what "butoh" was, I found myself watching a butoh performance that frustrated my working definition. At first the essence of butoh seemed to be mostly aesthetic style: white painted bodies, tattered costumes, twisted hair, no hair at all, grotesque imagery, and slow, ritualistic movement ending in violent cathartic release. But while some performances were circus-like and gaudy, oth-

[1] The name comes from the Japanese transliteration of the French word for inquiry, *enquête.*

ers were ornate and stately. Where DaiRakudaKan moved to a loud mish-mash of "ethnic" music (lots of bagpipes), one solo dancer at Terpsichore ran around in circles to the music of Enya, turning butoh in the former instance into an over-the-top avant-garde circus, in the latter into a softly New Age experience. Another butoh dancer at Asbestos-kan did something closer to performance art than dance: after walking calmly out on stage, she sat down next to me in the audience and started mimicking my gestures. Some dancers wore next to nothing, others wore tattered fabric, and some wore jeans and a collared shirt (these were the strangest). Many were painted white, but some wore no paint at all. So much for aesthetic unity.

Giving this up, I started to guess at some *ideas* that seemed to tie these groups together: a particular openness to working with the subtle energy in the body; the malleability of time; the power of the grotesque. I found at least one of these qualities in all of the butoh performances I witnessed that summer. But there were simply too many variations to develop any solid notion of what butoh is and is not. A few groups seemed far more interested in wild spectacle than looking for dance within the body. Many dances contained sections of meditative slowness and catharsis, but others were just as happy running around in circles. Some were experimental improvisations, others seemed to be tightly choreographed. And at the Asbestos-kan, the home of the butoh tradition if there ever was one, I found butoh pieces which abandoned everything even remotely butohesque.

Included in this group was the last butoh performance I experienced in Tokyo, a solo by Motofuji Akiko, widow of butoh founder Hijikata Tatsumi. Here, I thought, was a woman who lived with Hijikata as he was designing and perfecting his butoh method. If there was an authoritative style in butoh practice, I hoped I would find it in her dance. And then, she came on stage in a big flowery dress and danced a flamboyant tango with a live turtle! The dance was hysterical – the turtle kept running away into the audience instead of dancing its part. But I left the studio more confused than ever.

Definitions

Almost two years later, in spring of 2003, I am sitting here next to a large stack of butoh research, still pretty confused. I now know that attempting to find a single, solid link between all butoh performance is a futile effort. Butoh hovers

around certain ideas and qualities, as I will describe, but the genre stretches so wide it undermines all attempts at a clean, tidy definition.

Recently while reading a book on the Anthropology of Religion I discovered structural anthropologist Rodney Needham's concept of *polythetic* classification, describing a taxonomy in which "each member shares something in common with at least one other member but in which there may be nothing shared by all members" (Lambek, 11). Butoh is certainly a polythetic art form. In the literature on butoh, the style has been described as a particular aesthetic, a particular technique, a particular philosophy, a rebellion set against all codification, and a universal quality present in all performance. Butoh is all and none of these in turn, as the genre both congeals around certain points and continues to transform itself at the same time.

This raises questions as to the usefulness of the term 'butoh' to describe anything at all. Writers on butoh have spent many pages struggling over a clear definition of the genre, often ending in one of two compromises. The first group of authors chooses to ignore artists who do not fit their chosen definition. The second group refuses to admit any specific butoh technique or training exists, and describe the form simply as a process of continual revolt against established norms - a perpetual avant-garde. This viewpoint, shared with many butoh dancers, tends to shroud butoh in a mystical haze. Dancer Tanaka Min writes:

> The more people try to understand butoh, the less they understand. But that doesn't matter. There are things like the stars, the moon, which you can't reach. Nothing is so beautiful, so marvelous, as the intangible, the incomprehensible (quoted in Bergmark 1991, 9).

Butoh dancer Iwana Masaki is even more oblique:

> *Butô*[2] does not exist and has never existed anywhere (quoted in Scholz-Cionca 2000, 330).

I find both perspectives to hold some truth. On one hand, butoh certainly has some central tenets (discussed in Perspective 3), a specific historical context

[2] 'Butô' is the same word as 'butoh,' but transliterated in the now standard Japanese transliteration system. I have stuck with the original 'h' spelling, as it is the spelling used by butoh dancers worldwide. When quoting I keep with the original writer's (or translator's) choice.

(discussed in Perspective 2), and even some typical exercises and movements, even if dancers sometimes choose to abandon them. On the other hand, the goal of most butoh – "to act with a minimum distance between impulse and reaction, without intellectual preconception" – is itself by no means unique to butoh, and is at the center of many creative endeavors (D'Orazi, 330-1). According to DaiRakudaKan founder Maro Akaji (1943-), "Butoh is just a Japanese name. There are many parallel dances elsewhere" (quoted in Holborn, 76). I would add that, in non-performative contexts, this goal of acting without intellectual preconception is shared with many mindfulness practices throughout history and across cultures, including much of what falls under the rubric of "meditation." All such practices strive for a way to interact with the world as directly as possible, unmediated by the rational mind.

Hijikata, the founder of butoh along with Ohno Kazuo, often used the word *butoh-sei* (butoh quality) to describe this basic state of unmediated awareness. He pointed out how this quality appears in many parts of life, describing how "…strictly speaking, the gestures of great actors are all butoh. They are brought into consciousness in a state where the actors seem to forget that they are speaking" (quoted in Kurihara 2000, 69). Reading Hijikata, I am reminded of 20th century writers on Zen, who similarly speak of how Zen principles may be discovered in all aspects of everyday life, if only one is ready to see them.

So how do we reconcile these two views? In trying to find a way to describe butoh faithfully I felt like I was continually walking around in circles. When I pursued either viewpoint to its logical end, I ended up at the opposing viewpoint:

a. If butoh can be generally defined by some commonly occurring principles, techniques, and aesthetics, then we should be able to find some central tenet to hold everything together. But at the center of butoh practice is this idea of continual revolt against codification – meaning the dance opens back up again to include whatever dancers feel is appropriate and necessary. Butoh cannot be defined by any one element.
b. But if butoh cannot be defined by anything in particular, than what about all the white paint and writhing gestures typically thought of as butoh? What about all of Hijikata's work devising a specific technique and performance style? What about the his-

> torical reality of butoh as a distinct genre? Butoh must have something in particular to offer us.

I created this book while struggling to find a place to stand along this oscillation between definite and indefinite, order and chaos. Eventually I realized that this oscillation itself is part of what makes butoh so interesting. The genre stubbornly refuses to solidify into something solid, but it never quite breaks up completely either.

Attempting to create a codified dance technique to erase all codification in the body is a paradoxical task. Ever since Hijikata established a distinct technique and aesthetic, butoh artists have struggled with the danger of slipping into pure aesthetic form and losing touch with butoh's initial rebellious spirit. All butoh practice contains this creative tension between codification and rebellion.

I asked San Francisco/Berlin based butoh dancer Shinichi Momo Koga for his definition of butoh:

> Cohesive definition of Butoh.... hmmmm. In 1999, 12 butoh dancers from Japan, North America and Europe convened in Broellin, Germany to do that [find a definition][3]. I was one of the dancers. After all the workshops, performances and discussions, we ended up with more questions that answers. There were arguments from some that Butoh could be used for therapy, and there was passionate response that Butoh is NOT therapy. Some said that Butoh is very new and there was response (also passionate) that Butoh was very old and not to be mixed with the "avant garde." Any position anyone could take, there was an opposite response. There is the essential spirit of revolt and dissolution of reason. Do we live in the age of reason? If so, all the more reason to be un-reasonable.
>
> To define a thing like Butoh in the end is to kill the spirit of it. That is partly why it changes form so drastically. There is no room for becoming comfortable. At the same time, I am very much in favor of deepening essential training which focuses on the body being danced, not dancing. The body exists at the whim of nature. To

[3] At a symposium called *EX-it 99*.

> mentally construct a choreography that ignores this is to create a false dance. The very act of construction is dangerous […] In my training, there is breath control and there is imagery. But in the end, we cannot keep the breath control and the imagery and remain true. But these are tools to use because as a human I need a focusing device, a seed to hold on to, to avoid drifting into some abstract and vague cloud. I haven't discovered how [to] teach without these tools (personal communication, 4 Feb 2003).

Butoh artists continually strive to find ways to avoid both the stagnation of codification and the unsustainability of complete rebellion. This is a difficult road to tread, and the wayside is littered with casualties of those who have taken on butoh aesthetics without completely dedicating themselves to the hard path of personal investigation Hijikata's butoh demanded. Butoh critics and butoh artists often accuse dancers of appropriating butoh aesthetics while not taking the rebellion far enough. The two best-known butoh groups, DaiRakudaKan and Sankai Juku, have been derided for this sort of empty aestheticism. On the other side of the spectrum we find dancers like Ohno Kazuo, who refuses to teach butoh as a codified form at all, and asserts butoh is not a particular dance style but simply the expression of the dance that resides in each individual. However admirable his position, this has meant that Ohno's particular brand of butoh is unteachable – and will end with him. Some of those inspired by Ohno, like the Eiko and Koma duo in New York, have chosen to abandon the 'butoh' label entirely in order to more freely explore their own personal dance.

This trend of the more revolutionary butoh practitioners leaving the genre behind, while perhaps true to butoh ideals, raises questions as to the future of butoh as a genre. If Hijikata's work is to continue developing into the future, butoh practitioners must master past butoh methods even as they develop their own styles. Some butoh dancers have done so. Third or fourth generation butoh dancers often advertise themselves as working within the lineage of a particular teacher, whether it be the Hijikata method or Tanaka Min's Body Weather School. But butoh still lacks a strong core of agreed-upon methodology against which new developments can be measured, the type of structure that may be necessary for an art form to develop and advance over a long period. This need was beginning to be addressed in the late 1990s as more of Hijikata's writings and films became available to the public thanks to the efforts of his widow Moto-

fuji Akiko, his disciple Waguri Yukio, and the establishment of the Hijikata Tatsumi Archive at the Keiô Gijuku University Art Center. But with the bankruptcy of the Asbestos-kan in 2002, the future of Hijikata's butoh is on shaky ground.

This Book

Here in this text I work towards building a greater understanding of butoh by approaching the genre from three perspectives: butoh discourse and literature, the history of butoh, and butoh as a liminal art form. My hope is that by placing these three perspectives side by side, this work will provide a broad look at the diversity of butoh practice, highlighting both its particularity and its multiplicity.

Perspective 1 contextualizes English-language butoh discourse, describing the varied approaches writers use to describe the form. My aim here is to outline some of the problems inherent in interpreting a Japanese-born art form from an outside culture, especially when the form is quickly becoming international in scope and was influenced greatly by non-Japanese artists to begin with. What does it mean to attempt a cultural interpretation of a multi-cultural practice? I also explore the ways in which the literature and discourse surrounding a non-verbal medium like butoh may influence and alter our perception of it.

While the historical perspective will never be the final word in describing contemporary butoh practice, it remains crucial to understanding the development of butoh as it exists today. Perspective 2 pulls together for the first time what I consider the three stages of butoh history: Hijikata's first decade of butoh (1959-68); his systemization of butoh technique after 1968 until his death in 1986; and the expansion of butoh from the second generation of performers after Hijikata to the international diversity of butoh in existence today (1972-present). Narrating the history of butoh also allows me to delve into some recurring issues in butoh practice: the idea of the avant-garde, social identity (including gender), and the sustainability of butoh as a genre.

2.1 begins with Hijikata Tatsumi's debut choreography, *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colors, 1959), a performance widely considered to be the birth of the butoh style. In this period *Ankoku Butoh* (the Dance of Darkness - Hijikata's chosen name for his work) came to be at the center of the theatrical avant-garde. Hijikata organized the first decade of his choreography around a rejection of preexisting dance styles, Japanese and western. These early works strove to undermine everything that had so far been understood as "dance." Hijikata went out of his way to

flout taboo and make the audience uncomfortable. But, as Donald Richie points out in his essay "Japan's Avant-garde Theatre," the nature of an avant-garde is to be short lived – eventually the audience becomes accustomed to the new style and no longer finds the form so provocative (Richie, 132). Sometime in the late 1960s Hijikata realized the initial avant-garde stance of butoh was bound for obsolescence. After performing *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* (Hijikata Tatsumi and the Japanese: Revolt of the Flesh, 1968), Hijikata turned away from creating dances based on the rejection of other dance techniques, and began developing butoh as a technique to stand on its own. He moved away from the social and towards the personal, investigating ways to create a type of avant-garde independent of society. Instead of striving to replace one set of social norms with another, Hijikata's butoh became a revolt of the body itself, against *all* forms of socialization. He explored the social construction of the body to find methods to bring it to a more open and intuitive state. From these investigations the methodological basis of butoh emerged – the body dancing free of the mind.

The second stage (2.2) follows these investigations through the 1970s and early 1980s, when his work shifted to reflect a growing interest in his northern Japanese roots and in the female body. Working with his chief disciple Ashikawa Yôko in the 1970s, Hijikata brought a new precision to his work that was lacking in his rebellious avant-garde pieces of the 1960s. I investigate Hijikata's understanding of the female body and his use of ascetic and communal training methods to enable his dancers to objectify their bodies.

The third stage (2.3) traces a spiral outward from the works of Hijikata's immediate disciples to the wider world of butoh we have today. The second generation of butoh dancers after Hijikata brought butoh to Europe and America in the early 1980s, leading to greater recognition of the form both in Japan and abroad and the first appearance of non-Japanese butoh dancers. In light of this internationalization, I propose a new understanding of the role of "Japaneseness" in international butoh, and examine the current health of the field and its prospects for the future.

Finally, Perspective 3 builds a working understanding of butoh's effects on mind and body, based on my own experience and aided by the liminality theory of Victor Turner. Liminality is a mode of awareness found in ritual and performance that destabilizes and subverts the participant's attempts to situate their identity in relation to society and the environment. As my experience with butoh

grew and I attempted to discern the source of butoh's mystery and power, I came to Turner's work on liminality and realized how illuminating a liminal analysis of butoh could be. This chapter analyzes how butoh techniques generate liminal states, creating an undifferentiated mode of awareness in both dancers and audience members.

In writing this book I attempt to discern the core of what makes butoh performance such a deeply emotional experience, while resisting the urge to create yet another structural interpretation of butoh that ignores the inherent heterogeneity of butoh artists and their anti-codification aims. Turner's conception of liminality has allowed me to work towards describing the functional means by which butoh achieves its effects while avoiding any ill-fated attempts at proclaiming exactly what butoh *is*.

My own personal interest in butoh has charted a singular course. To begin with, I wanted to know what these people were thinking when they went up on stage with loud music and white painted bodies and stuck their tongues out for five minutes at a stretch. But soon, my curiosity turned inward, to what was going on psychologically and physiologically within me as I watched. Often after a period of slow, delicate movement onstage, my thoughts became calm and my body began resonating in sympathy with the dancer before me. This is the experience that draws me to butoh performances. Perspective 3 explores butoh methods and techniques in this light.

Perspective 1.
Butoh Literature: The Five Rationalizations

The English-language literature on butoh reflects the tension between a dance that aims to be elusive and a critical audience striving to make sense of it. In categorizing butoh scholarship I find it useful to think of five main approaches scholars and critics use to frame butoh performance. These five approaches are the descriptive, the historical, the polarizing, the universalizing, and a careful balancing of the first four, the hermeneutical.[4] All five of these methods sometimes appear within a single text, but in most cases a writer emphasizes one over the others. In outlining these five approaches, I hope to demonstrate the range of interpretations writers wrap butoh with, and the major discrepancies between them. By including this examination right at the outset, I hope to open up our understanding of butoh as wide as possible, and maintain this width throughout the book. The history of butoh discourse in English-speaking countries reflects the acculturation process of a foreign art form: first there is the fascination of novelty, then exoticism, then finally a deepening understanding of the art's own discourse and historical context. I will argue that the most successful interpretations of butoh reach this latter stage by engaging the material but resisting the urge to stuff the more open-ended elements of butoh into too strict a conceptual framework.

The Descriptive

Articles on butoh appearing in newspapers and popular dance periodicals are largely *descriptive*. Journalists writing these articles approach butoh from a traditional concert dance perspective, with the assumption that butoh, like other concert dance, exists primarily to satisfy an audience who has paid to be entertained. Despite their merits as individual reviews (providing a concise interpretation and evaluation of a performance for a particular audience of readers), purely *descriptive* articles on butoh often end with a simplistic portrayal butoh as simply mysterious and strange. Religious-tinged adjectives like 'ritualistic,' 'trancelike,' and 'arcane' often appear. A recent article in this vein is Anna Kisselgoff's review of Sankai Juku's *Hibiki* (Resonance from Far Away, 2002), entitled "Rebirth and

[4] The last two categories I am borrowing from J.J. Clarke in his discussion of European scholarly interest in Asian cultures, in his *Oriental Enlightenment* (Clarke, 127).

Healing By a Shaman" (Kisselgoff, B1), where she immediately connects the ostensibly non-religious performance to a shamanistic rite.

Part of what keeps reviewers working on the surface level (besides the time and space restrictions of the format) is a lack of experience with the cultural and historical context of butoh performance.[5] This is not to blame the critics by any means, as butoh performances certainly do not often offer much help in deciphering a piece.

The Historical

Yet there are books out there, particularly concerning the history of butoh. Jean Viala, co-author of *Butoh: Shades of Darkness,* describes the need for a butoh history:

> Although audiences have begun to appreciate this new form of dance, certain preconceptions and misunderstandings still persist. It has therefore become indispensable to place butoh in its cultural context, to trace its history, and to point out its essential characteristics (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 16).

Nearly every piece of writing on butoh includes some sliver of butoh history (if nothing else mentioning Hijikata's *Kinjiki* as the first butoh piece), and some of the later texts I will consider include significant historical material. But what unifies the four historical analysis to follow is their focus on historical material alone as a means of contextualizing the dance.

The call for a butoh history in English began to be addressed in the late 1980s with the publication of two photo-&-essay books: *Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul* (Hoffman and Holborn, 1987) and *Butoh: Shades of Darkness* (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 1988). In addition to the photographs, both books contain several pages each on the historical development of butoh and excerpts of prose and poetry from major butoh artists. Mark Holborn's butoh history in *Dance of the Dark Soul* focuses on the influences guiding Hijikata in the creation of butoh, while in *Shades of Darkness* Jean Viala takes the reader through a range of different artists' butoh performance styles. An even wider context is provided in the

[5] For several insightful articles about the struggles of covering international dance styles as a dance critic, see the collection *Looking Out: Perspectives on Dance in a Multicultural World* (ed. Gere 1995).

chapter on butoh in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (Munroe, 1994). This chapter, part of a full-length analysis of post-war Japanese avant-garde movements, examines butoh's central position in this radical era and its heavy influence on the experimental theatre and art of the period. Lastly, a more pessimistic butoh history appears in *High Performance* magazine the year of Hijikata's death (1986). In "Butoh: An Avant-garde Dance Form Becomes An Institution," Micki Mcgee describes the gradual shift of butoh from the provocative avant-garde style of Hijikata's early works to the passive, codified form of the 1980s, blaming butoh's increased popularity for its loss of vitality.

The Polarizing

In the more theoretical works on butoh, non-Japanese authors often fall prey to one of two overgeneralizations: either they try to explain butoh *as* 'Japanese,' or they ignore the dance's Japanese roots and emphasize butoh's universality. In the first group, authors *polarize* their analysis along the lines of national culture in an attempt to anthropologically understand butoh as a "Japanese" art form. At its extreme, this approach essentializes differences between Japan and 'the West,' and aims to understand butoh's uniqueness in terms of this east-west binary. These writers ignore or downplay Hijikata's antagonistic relationship to organized religion and the institutionalized theatre of *noh* and *kabuki*, and instead employ Buddhist ideas and the concepts of traditional Japanese aesthetics to explain butoh practice. In "Dancing the Dark Soul of Japan: An Aesthetic Analysis of Butô," Vicki Sanders describes butoh using traditional Japanese aesthetic terms like *mono no aware* and *ma*, talks of Zen, and references Junichirô Tanizaki's famous defense of the 'Japanese character,' *In Praise of Shadows*. She concludes, "The dance is wholeheartedly oriental, from its squat-bodied movement idiom to its spirituality, from its post-Hiroshima rebelliousness to its present-day codification" (Sanders, 161).

But Joan Laage performs the most extreme acts of polarization in her dissertation, *Embodying the Spirit: The Significance of the Body in the Contemporary Japanese Dance Movement of Butoh*. She outlines her foundation of nationalist body typology in the introduction:

> Conceptually and aesthetically, Butoh is based on the body – more specifically, on the Japanese physique, which for hundreds of years

> has been genetically shaped by lifestyle and livelihood (Laage 1993: 11).

While her methodological analysis of the use of each body part in butoh is sometimes insightful, much of her critique relies on gross overgeneralizations and stereotypes of Japanese culture. For example, her section on the use of the human head in butoh proposes that "The low profile assumed by the Japanese, and the submission which such a profile suggests, is but one indication of the individual's subservience within the group-oriented society…" Laage uses this notion to explain why her butoh teachers sometimes pushed a student's chin down towards their neck. She goes on to compare this to how "Westerners unconsciously stick out their chins to take an aggressive posture" (Laage 1993, 43-44). She repeatedly uses cultural stereotypes to explain butoh particularities, usually in contrast to a stereotype about "Western" culture. After noting such a cultural difference, she does not feel the need to provide any further explanation of why such an element appears in butoh performance.

Bonnie Sue Stein, in an early and insightful article on butoh in America, finds American and European butoh audiences often tend, like Laage, to define butoh by its 'otherness.' She notes how foreign audiences tend to accept butoh at face value, because the dance is 'Japanese' and seems to match up with stereotypes about Japanese culture - slow, sparse, ritualistic, non-verbal, passive, incorrigible, and Buddhistic (Stein 1986, 112). This strain of Orientalism (in the sense introduced by Said in his book of the same name) is distressingly alive and well in Laage's dissertation. It is also present in many newspaper articles on butoh appearing today. For example, Anna Kisselgoff's Sankai Juku review mentioned above calls the dance "Shamanistic," despite the absence of any direct reference to Shamanic practices anywhere in the performance. For a writer faced with an enigmatic art like butoh, cultural difference becomes an easy way to explain away any unfamiliar (and possibly unsettling) encounter with the unknown.

Such Orientalizing tendencies are not limited to those living outside Japanese culture. For example, Japanese critic Ôyama Shigeo finds the choreography of butoh group Sankai Juku to be

> unmistakably a product of modern Japan; it speaks to the Japanese people so eloquently because its creator, Amagatsu Ushio, has

> tapped the Japanese feeling in the very center of his own physical being and, with his troupe, presented it with power and truth (Ôyama, 69-72).

In fact, Hijikata and other butoh artists, influenced in part by anthropologist Yanagida Kunio (see 2.1), have on occasion adopted a number of semi-essentialist discourses of Japanese identity, stemming from a romanticized vision of a rural Japanese past. Vicki Sanders' "squat-bodied" idea stems from Hijikata's claim that his bow-legged butoh movements were based on the stooped-over bodies of farmers in rural Tôhoku, where he spent his childhood, and the pervasive myth that the Japanese body is somehow unsuitable for western modern dance (Stein 1986, 117). While I don't mean to excuse the English-language writers' essentializations, it is important to note that an essentialist notion of Japanese identity certainly has strong precedent in the (often nationalist) discourses on "Japaneseness" with Japan.[6] While Hijikata was resolutely anti-nationalist, he did share in a nostalgia for pre-modern Japanese life, leading to the essentialist comments about the "Japanese body" that Laage drew inspiration from. But, as we shall see later on, much of what Laage describes as "Japanese-like" in butoh more likely has its genesis in Hijikata's personal feelings *in opposition* to mainstream Japanese culture.

Of course, there are ways to find elements of mainstream Japanese culture and ideology within butoh dance without essentializing (I will bring in Zen for comparison purposes several times myself). But such a project must be done with the utmost subtlety and care, for it is ripe with the potential to mislead and over-generalize.

The Universalizing

A contrasting group of writers pull butoh in the opposite direction: instead of defining butoh by its 'otherness,' these writers portray butoh as a *universal* dance style not specific to any one culture. At its extreme this approach is also essentialist, downplaying the dance's specific historical links to the post-war Japan and defining butoh only by what can be adopted across cultures. This tends to mean an interpretation of butoh only as a certain approach to working with the body rather then a specific technique. Instead, universalizing authors assert that

[6] There is actually an entire genre of Japanese publications (mostly by right-wing authors) called *Nihonjinron* (Theories of Japanese-ness), which set out to assert Japanese racial uniqueness.

butoh is based each performer's individual body and body history. Thus the look of Hijikata's butoh is only one version of butoh practice, specific only to him. Maria Pia D'Orazi explores this in her article "'Body of Light': The Way of the Butô Performer":

> If the only appropriate definition of *butô* style is that corresponding to *Ankoku butô* [Hijikata's form], it happened that one result has been confused with the dance method that made it possible. Hijikata's style is the external image of his own "inner landscape," very peculiar to him, but it has been largely confused with a dance language universally effective for each dancer. *Butô* has never been a codified language and we should not consider it in terms of form (D'Orazi, 330-1).

D'Orazi then attempts to discern what is unique to the entire scope of butoh practice, finally concluding it is the identification of the body and body memory as the exclusive inspiration for all dance movement (D'Orazi, 339-340).

Like the polarizing approach, the universalizing approach has a foundation in the discourse of butoh artists. At the same time as Hijikata was making comments about butoh's links to a forgotten Japanese culture, he was proclaiming the essence of butoh to be universal. He described butoh as 'beyond philosophy' and believed the body must first be de-socialized before being able to dance in tune with the natural world. He once stated that everyone has a "Tôhoku" (his birthplace in rural northern Japan, for him a mythical past) from which to pull primal memories, no matter where in the world a person lives. The foreign writers above, often desiring to authenticate a non-Japanese butoh practice, have focused on this universalist strain of Hijikata's thought.

As Marie-Gabrielle Rotie explains in her own 'universal butoh' argument, this focus on the individual body allows butoh to "transcend any culturally specific reading," and "creates the possibility of a truly international and contemporary dance" (Rotie, 35). This attitude appears to be especially prevalent in contemporary European dance communities, where butoh has maintained popularity for several decades now and is a familiar source of inspiration even for choreographers outside the butoh genre.

But she is not ready to completely abandon butoh's Japanese origins. Rotie's article also carries the message that for butoh to exist as a vital force in

Europe, moving beyond its original exoticization, there must be a greater understanding of butoh history and context. She writes,

> In the west, [butoh] has been open to misinterpretation, partly because of its marginalized presence and the rarity of its performances, partly because of the formalization of its original aspirations. The creative development of butoh by European practitioners depends on an awareness of the impulses from which it was born (Rotie, 34).

For Rotie, butoh's future lies in dancers' ability to separate butoh's universally applicable methodology from the culturally-specific forms the dance may take. This sentiment is echoed in the statement of intent by her organization, the London Butoh Network:[7]

> - To encourage the avoidance of poor imitations of historical Japanese approaches and post questions around methodology…
> - To encourage the evolution of butoh away from stereotypes and clichés originating from the imitation of historical Japanese butoh and to look for the creation of new possibilities through dialogue between east and west[…] (London Butoh Network, 2002*).*

This growing awareness of the trans-cultural complexity of butoh provides a bridge to my final category, the *hermeneutical* approach.

The Hermeneutical

Hermeneutically-informed authors attempt to describe butoh in all its multifaceted paradoxes and cultural complexity. They strive to avoid overgeneralizations while still critically engaging the material. The hermeneutical approach "involves the recognition of diversity, otherness, difference, without thereby separating out East and West into substantive and incommensurable enclaves" (Clarke, 125). Unlike the descriptive and historical writers described above,

[7] Now called *Butoh UK*.

these writers address the issue of cultural relativity. They avoid the over-simplifications of the polarizing and universalist approaches, placing butoh in somewhere in between the two. This does not invalidate the usefulness of the prior four approaches - on the contrary they all continue to be central to a hermeneutically-aware work. But these readings are now presented as just that: *possible* interpretations. Their analysis does not attempt to reductively explain the entirety of the butoh experience. Instead, it leaves open a space for the unknown; for the greater complexity that always exists beyond the written word. The past few decades of academic writing in the humanities has proven this approach is able to achieve greater honesty and explanatory accuracy in writing on any topic. For an art as trans-cultural and purposefully elusive as butoh, I believe it is vital.

Examples of hermeneutic butoh writing include Susan Blakely Klein's excellent essay *Ankoku Butô: the Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness*. Klein draws insightful connections between butoh and postmodernism while remaining aware of the differences between her objects of comparison. Judith Hamera's "Silence the Reflects: Butoh, *Ma*, and a Crosscultural Gaze" uses feminist film theory and the idea of 'the gaze' to examine the affect of Orientalist thought on butoh artists, proposing that "having been read in terms of difference from a Western movement model, butoh artists might appropriate and reappropriate shards of this reading into their performances, consciously or unconsciously, perhaps even to create the tension between adherence to and deconstruction of a traditional religio-aesthetic paradigm" (Hamera, 59).

Another hermeneutical tactic for allowing butoh to retain its overall complexity while still providing an insightful analysis is to narrow the focus down and be as specific as possible. Rather than attempting to capture the entirety of butoh practice, these authors focus on a particular aspect of butoh in great detail. Filmmaker and journalist Nanako Kurihara focuses on the life and work of Hijikata Tatsumi. Her dissertation on Hijikata, *The Most Remote Thing in the Universe* (1996), and her later articles and translations of Hijikata for a special butoh edition of *The Drama Review* (2000), reveal a whole new side of Hijikata's life and butoh practice than that presented elsewhere. Crucial to her success is the exclusive focus on Hijikata, building an understanding of his own personal cosmology and perspective rather then attempting to draw the highly heterogeneous butoh community into a single grand narrative. The flood of new information she

is able to present is greatly aided by her abundant use of Japanese-language sources (Japanese-language proficiency is sadly still a rarity amongst butoh writers of the English medium). Another successful paper on a specific butoh issue is Susan Kozel's short article on butoh and gender in *Dance Theatre Journal*, where she succinctly reveals how butoh subverts gender by abandoning male/female dualism (see page 58) (Kozel, 36-37).

It is possible to traipse throughout the whole butoh world while respecting (even celebrating) its complexity. But one needs to traipse lightly. Bonnie Sue Stein attempts this in her early overview of butoh in *The Drama Review* (1986), perhaps the first major articles on butoh in English and one that served as many English readers' first major introduction to the dance. She takes a toolbox approach, introducing many interpretive approaches without cementing any one as *the* way to interpret butoh. She starts with evocative descriptions of several butoh performances, then provides a list of adjectives describing the form, moves into some history, some comparisons to 'western' dance, butoh philosophy, butoh methods, and finally a series of short introductions to major dancers. This sort of toolbox technique is effective for providing great deal of context without becoming reductive.

As is hinted at in Stein's list of adjectives and eclectic use of forms, one way to try and re-present butoh while leaving room for fluid interpretation is to break down the rigidity of academic language. Scholarly journals tend to favor a form of language biased towards the rational, objective, and factual, which is in some sense antithetical to butoh artists' emphasis on exploring the irrational, desocialized, and subconscious mind. In *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen, and Japan*, dancer and movement therapist Sondra Horton Fraleigh begins to widen the palette of butoh writing by incorporating other, less essay-bound forms. In addition to a few academic pieces, the book includes ruminations, poetry, and interviews with butoh dancers and critics. The book is a highly personal account, humbly presented as "based on the experiences of an American in a culture not her own, who has made aesthetic and spiritual ties." (Fraleigh, 17) While her romanticized understanding of Japanese culture as connected to the mythic feminine steeps her book in an implied and perhaps naïve Orientalism, the expansiveness and reflexivity of her writing makes it clear that she is speaking as much about herself as about her three subjects. When it comes to butoh, this expansiveness allows her to poetically explore butoh's relationship to a broad

range of spiritual and historical ideas while staying careful not to push any of these connections beyond their inherent complexity.

Judging from the abundance of poetry in butoh program notes, butoh dancers too are drawn to the open form of poetic language as a means to express the butoh experience. Butoh critic Eguchi Osamu writes:

> Butô is like poetry in that it, in its very essence, resists the substitutive function in which words are used to express some *thing*. In poetry, it is the words, in Butô it is the body – the movement encloses within *itself* the extreme point which it must seek, while, at the same time, by twisting, jostling, and touching it opens up a symbolic space that enfolds both the reader and the spectator. Needless to say, within that symbolic space, any explanation that takes the form, 'this means so-and-so' becomes meaningless (quoted in Klein, 28/89-90).

Searching for new forms capable of more fully capturing the complexity of butoh also opens butoh scholarship out to non-verbal approaches. In addition to the two photography books mentioned above in the history section, a small group of English-language documentary films present butoh on screen, including Michael Blackwood's *Butoh: Body on the Edge of Crisis* (1990) and Edin Velez's *Dance of Darkness* (1989). The availability of butoh performances on video is limited, and these documentaries provide a valuable, if brief, glimpse at butoh in motion.

❦

As butoh moves into its forth decade, those seeking to interpret and understand the dance continue to grapple along the edges of its ineffability and trans-cultural complexity. For such a viewer, like myself, the tension continues between the self that loves butoh for its power to move beyond the logical mind, and the self that is driven to figure out how exactly butoh manages to do this. Butoh itself is born from this eternal struggle between order and chaos, as we strive to understand life even as we struggle to remain free. The literature, too, comes to reflect this dialectic, searching for a way to provide constructive critique while leaving the chaos inherent in butoh room to wiggle.

In the next perspective we turn to the historical issues surrounding the development of the dance. Who was Hijikata Tatsumi, and why did he create butoh dance? How did butoh move from Hijikata's avant-garde works in the early 1960s to the diverse international movement it is today? What can butoh history tell us about the role of dance, performance, and the avant-garde in social and personal life? In this analysis we bring in not only the historical narrative but also the ethical, social, and identity politics that surround and intersect with butoh practice.

> Western dance begins with its feet firmly planted on the ground whereas butoh begins with a dance wherein the dancer tries in vain to find his feet. What has happened to the tucked-in feet? What has become of our bodies?
>
> Tatsumi Hijikata (quoted in Viala and Masson-Sekine, 189)

Perspective 2. Butoh Chronicles

2.1. Hijikata's Wild Years

Tatsumi Hijikata is the creator of butoh dance. To understand where butoh came from, we must first understand his life and work.

Hijikata began his life in 1928 in a small farming village in Akita prefecture, in the *Tôhoku* (Northeast) region of Japan. His family owned a small noodle shop, and tended their own rice fields. His father loved *gidayu*, a form of dramatic balladry, and was a heavy drinker (as Hijikata was to become) (Mai, 2002). Hijikata spent many hours alone while his mother worked in the fields. This isolation led Hijikata to develop a richly inquisitive relationship with the natural world at a young age. He spent many hours peering down at his reflection in the shadowy liquid of the water container in his family kitchen, curious as to what lay beyond. One day he picked up a sickle to slash the surface, and was fascinated by the fragmentation of his reflection. Later in life he often used the phrase "cutting the surface of the water" as a metaphor for destroying the barrier between the external world and the deeper layers of imagination (Holborn, 9).

Tôhoku is home to a unique culture known for its harsh winters, foreign influences, and abundance of demons. A local legend reveals Jesus Christ once visited the area. For Hijikata this Tôhoku of his childhood in the thirties would later come to have mythological importance to his dance, as he dug deeper and deeper into his body's past. But in his early adult years Hijikata's enthusiasm shifted to western culture, particularly modern dance. This meant moving to Tokyo. Before World War II, Eguchi Takaya had introduced the German modern dance style of *Die Neue Tanz* to Japan after studying with Mary Wigman in Germany. In the late 1940s, Hijikata left Akita for Tokyo determined to study with Eguchi. He carried a bag of rice (rare in the immediate postwar years) as a gift

for Eguchi in asking to become a disciple. He turned over the rice, but Eguchi refused, and Hijikata returned to Akita unsuccessful.[8]

After a brief period studying German modern dance in Akita, Hijikata moved to Tokyo in 1952 at age 24 with ambitions to become a professional dancer. He was enthusiastic about the new cultures pouring in from American and Europe, and took up every style of western dance he could find – ballet, modern, jazz, even Flamenco. He lived a bohemian lifestyle, taking odd jobs to survive and building friendships with fellow dancers and artists. While his determination earned him modest success as a dancer, appearing on television as a member of Andô Mitsuko's group, over time the realization set in that he would never be fully accepted by the modern dance world. His northern accent and brusque manner set him at odds with the urbanite dance community, and physically he was stiff and bowlegged, with one leg noticeably shorter than the other as a result of a childhood injury. Andô remembers him to be a "clumsy but eager student," who spun so violently when doing spins he would crash into the other dancers (Kurihara 1997, 15-16). Eventually he was forced to confront the fact that he lacked the body type necessary to make it to the top ranks of the dance world. This frustration became the impetus for his eventual rejection of all western dances and the creation of a form that would accept his body (or any body) just as it is.

Post-war Japan in Turmoil

Meanwhile, a parallel sense of frustration festered in the wider Japanese cultural climate. Angered by the destruction of the Japanese landscape through imported technology, the ever-present threat of more nuclear warfare, and the conflict in Vietnam, many in 1950s Tokyo began challenging the predominant view of American and European history as the mainstream of cultural development. This frustration peaked in 1959 when the U.S. Japan Mutual Defense Treaty (*Nichibei Anzen Hoshô Jôyaku*) came up for renewal and was passed despite wide protest (Klein, 9). This treaty allowed the United States to continue to keep military bases in the country, aligning Japan with the American war effort in an act that many in the politically activated youth movement (*Zengakuren)* understood to be in violation of Japan's anti-war commitments. Violent student protests filled the years to follow. Artists and students became increasingly uneasy

[8] Ohno Kazuo was already a disciple at this time

about the culture of modernity Japan was so eagerly importing from the west. David Goodman, creator of the avant-garde theatre publication *Concerned Theatre Japan*, describes the critical voices of the time:

> Our view was that Japanese imperialism, the Vietnam War, and other distortions and atrocities of our century had resulted from the pervasive and dehumanizing power of modernity. Modernity had to be transcended in order effectively to address the political issues of our time. Powerless to directly influence the course of events – to block renewal of the Security Treaty or end the war in Vietnam, for instance – the best alternative was to create a politically effective kind of theatre capable of transcending the modern (Goodman, 348-9).

A group of artists in the performing arts world, spurred on by this political activity, rejected institutionalized forms of western culture in search of an independent Japanese voice capable of challenging the western cultural hegemony. The old avant-garde, *shingeki*, was itself too westernized for these purposes. *shingeki*, originally a radical form of western realist theatre in the early 20th century, became in postwar Japan a mainstream institution, and the younger generation no longer felt it to be a politically viable medium. Ironically, while rejecting the originally provocative *shingeki* as being too western, the new theater artists found inspiration in other contemporary and historical avant-garde movements of Europe: the French literature of revolt, Dada, Surrealism, and Existentialism. The writings of Comte de Lautréamont, the Marquis de Sade, Jean-Paul Sartre, and later Antonin Artaud exerted a major influence on Japanese avant-garde theater in the 1960s, many of which appeared were first translated into Japanese during this period (Holborn, 8). Hijikata lived in close proximity to all this literary and theatre activity, and was close friends with the translator Shibusawa Tatsuhiko (1928-1987), who had translated de Sade's *100 Days of Sodom* into Japanese (Holborn, 11).

A frustrated and alienated Hijikata found particular inspiration in the work of Jean Genet (1910-1986), a French writer who used his imagination to turn his outcast status into a source of freedom. In works such as *Notre Dame des Fleurs* (Our Lady of the Flowers, 1944), Genet created his own moral order, turning criminals into saints, glorifying evil, and freely violating the taboos of the

day. Rejected by society - he wrote the book in prison - Genet created through literature a world to affirm himself as he is, inverting society's notions of beauty and morality. Hijikata found in Genet's writings a way to turn his alienation in metropolitan Tokyo into a creative force, and he began applying Genet's negative-affirming principle to every aspect of dance (Kurihara 1997, 18-26). This process led up to his 1959 debut, *Kinjiki* (Forbidden Colors). *Kinijiki*, universally noted as the first appearance of butoh dance, revealed a shocking new challenge to the dance community and signaled Hijikata's decisive break from the modern dance community.

Hijikata Tatsumi debuted *Kinjiki* at the 6th Annual Newcomers Performance of the All-Japan Art Dance Association, held on May 29, 1959 (Klein, 79). Two men were on stage, Hijikata and a young boy named Ohno Yoshito (son of Ohno Kazuo). After several minutes of slow, oblique movements, the boy smothered a live white chicken between his thighs, simulating sex. The older man (Hijikata) made advances towards the boy, the boy fled, and the dance concluded in darkness with the sound of the boy's retreating footsteps (Munroe, 190; Kurihara 2000, 18; Klein, 1). The soundtrack was a recording of heavy sexual breathing sounds. What had happened? Was this dance? The audience was stunned. Several members of the association threatened to resign if similar pieces appeared in the future. Hijikata preempted their protest by resigning himself from the organization a few days later (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 62). From this point on Hijikata associated less with the dance community and more with those in the new avant-garde – writers, artists, and theater people - all who came to share elements of his style. While lacking many of the later methodological and aesthetic elements associated with butoh, this first dance captured the form's intensity, rebelliousness, and cathartic quality. Hijikata based *Kinjiki* on the novel by Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) of the same name. The two men later became compatriots, united in their mutual quest to bring sublimated taboo emotions to the surface (Holborn, 11). Mishima was a major emotional support in the early days of Hijikata's artistic rebellion (Kurihara 2000, 42).

Together with graphic artist Tadanori Yokô (1936-) and theatre directors Terayama Shuji (1935-1983) and Kara Jûro, Hijikata created a "theater of poverty," which sought to reveal the deep sicknesses of modern civilization. If modernity was a system by which everything causing discomfort could be hidden from view, including sexuality, death, disease, the handicapped, and the material waste of modern development, *Ankoku Butoh* and the avant-garde theatre op-

posed this system by putting these very things on the stage for all to see (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 14).

Links to the Past

In addition to European avant-garde literature, the new theatre sought commonalities within the Japanese past, particularly the Japanese arts that shared Genet's negative-affirming aesthetic of grotesquery and taboo-breaking behaviour. The theatre was aided in this search by a revival of interest in Japanese anthropology, particularly the work of Yanagida Kunio (1875-1962). Yanagida was the first anthropologist to write about Japan as an autonomous Asian culture, refusing to employ western academic frameworks. He insisted that understanding the marginalized elements of Japanese society (women, the elderly, the children, the insane) was crucial to understanding the culture as a whole (Munroe, 192). Applied to the history of Japanese theatre, this focus on marginality revealed what critic Masakatsu Genji calls the history of *shûaku no bi* (aesthetics of ugliness) in Japanese art (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 15).

Tamotsu Hirosue, professor of Japanese literature at Hôsei University, carried on this line of thought with essays like *Mô Hitotsu no Nihonbi* (An Alternative Japanese Aesthetic), which argued that "'beauty' was not the only or even necessarily the most significant principle operating in the premodern Japanese imagination; that religion and eros, cruelty and the grotesque were at least as important principles governing premodern Japanese art" (quoted in Goodman, 349). The popular art of the Edo period (1603-1867), for example – Kabuki, literature, and woodblock prints - was full of horror and cruelty, depicting ghosts, terror, crime, and bloody revenge. As art historian Alexandria Munroe describes, "In both periods, such expressions of the darker impulses of the Japanese psyche were a form of protest against the oppressive social system – late Edo Confucianism in the former, and the hypocrisy of postwar democracy in the latter" (Munroe, 190). After Kabuki was co-opted and sanitized by the government at the beginning of the Meiji period, vaudeville and burlesque forms like *yose* and *misemono* carried on the tradition of obscenity into the 20th century. These forms came to be a great influence on Hijikata and the new theatre (Klein, 13-15; Richie, 135).

Ohno Kazuo

Ohno Kazuo is often considered the co-founder of butoh practice along with Hijikata, and before moving on we must take a look at his life and career. Butoh historians and dancers often contrast the two men's roles in the genesis of the dance, calling Ohno 'the light' and Hijikata 'the dark,' or Ohno 'the soul' and Hijikata 'the architect' (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 62; Klein, 6). While Hijikata is the source of butoh's avant-garde spectacle and the one who finally organized butoh into a cohesive method, it was Ohno who developed butoh furthest as a unique form of personal expression, aided by his experience with German modern dance and his deeply personal Christian faith (Klein, 8). Hijikata describes their relationship early on in his career:

> Mr. O, a dancer of deadly poison and a pioneer of experiential dance, an awe-inspiring teacher and a friend, helped carry my dance works to the theatre. He is both a cabinetmaker and a poet who, with a fond gaze, singles out every work of unhappy heartburn (quoted in Kurihara 2000, 39).

Ohno Kazuo was born in the 1906 in Hakodate, Hokkaidô, the oldest of 13. After graduating from university he became a school teacher for a short time, then left to enroll in the National School of Athletics in Tokyo. After graduating from the School of Athletics, he began working as a gymnastics teacher at a Christian school in Yokohama, a position he held until his retirement in the 1980s. A few years after starting at the school he embraced the Christian faith and was baptized. Ohno's very personal interpretation of Christianity became a guiding light to shape the rest of his dance career, providing a framework for his exploration of joy and pain.

His early transformational encounter with Spanish dancer La Argentina (Antonia Mercé) at a Tokyo performance convinced him to become a dancer. After a brief time in the army during World War II, he returned to perform his first dance recital in 1949, already in his early forties. By the time he met Hijikata in 1954, he was becoming established in Tokyo as an expressionist dancer of rare talent. At this time Ohno was 48 years old, and Hijikata was 26 (Klein, 6-7; Viala and Masson-Sekine, 20). In 1959 it was Ohno's son, Yoshito, who danced along with Hijikata in *Kinjiki*. For the next 27 years Hijikata and the Ohnos collaborated

off and on, with Hijikata often stepping in to choreograph Ohno Kazuo's most famous dances, including *La Argentina Sho* (Admiring La Argentina, 1977) and *Watashi no Okâ-san* (My Mother, 1981).

From Dance of Darkness to Revolt of the Flesh

Hijikata's work remained fiercely avant-garde throughout the 1960s (Klein, 25). His primary objective was to break the established rules for dance, to reject the superficiality of everyday life, and to "not speak through the body but let the body speak for itself" (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 17). *Kinjiki* was a beginning. Gathering dancers inspired by his debut, Hijikata formed the *Hijikata Tatsumi Dance Experience* in 1960 and produced their first performance. With a few early exceptions, his dancers were primarily men, another way for him to reject the female-dominated modern dance community (Kurihara 1997, 49).[9]

Soon after Hijikata retroactively named his form *Ankoku Buyô*. '*Ankoku'* literally means 'pitch black,' while *buyô* is the generic term for Japanese dance. Later he changed *buyô* to the dance term used for foreign dances, *butô* (or *butoh*) (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 64). Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh-ha* (Ankoku Butoh Group) performed throughout the 1960s. In the middle to late 1970s, when the second and third generation butoh groups begin to feel the dark tone of the "*ankoku"* label was too limiting, the name became shortened to simply *butoh* (Klein, 2). But the early days of Hijikata's career were very much focused on the *ankoku* side of life, full of violence, grotesquery, and madness. Hijikata's works during this period include his choreographies *Notre Dame des Fleurs* (Our Lady of the Flowers) (based on the Genet novel and danced by Ohno Kazuo, 1960); *Hanin-hanyosha no Hirusagari no Higi* (The Secret Daytime Ritual of a Hermaphrodite, 1961); and *Anma – Aiyoku o Sasaeru Gekijô no Hanashi* (The Blind Masseur – A Theatrical Story in Support of Love and Lust, 1963).

During the four year period running from *Kinjiki* to *Anma*, Hijikata's violent choreographies were most inspired by writers like Mishima, Lautréamont, de Sade, Bataille, and Genet, who used images of death and eroticism to rupture their readers' sense of individuality and in doing so create a "sacred move towards universality" (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 64; Kurihara 1997, 28-29). Hiji-

[9] Kurihara notes two early exceptions to this trend: 1959's *Bonzai Onna* (Bonzai Woman), about the ceremony to send soldiers off to war by yelling 'banzai!' and 1960's *Yome* (Bride) about a country bride. Both dances featured women (the later Onrai Sahina, his partner at the time), and were based on memories from his Tôhoku childhood – a source of inspiration he returned to many times later in his career (Kurihara 2000, 19).

kata's audiences and dancers, forced to confront the darkness of life on stage, also confronted the latent feelings these images awakened within their bodies, building a recognition that all aspects of life in the outside world (particularly the parts suppressed by modernity) were also present within themselves. This challenge to the boundary of me/not-me became the philosophical foundation of butoh dance and one of the central structural principles of most butoh performance to follow.

Influenced by the 'happenings,'[10] taking place across Tokyo in the 1960s, Hijikata's early works were often a loosely constructed assembly of events rather than strict choreographies. *Anma*, to take the clearest example, had *tatami* mats in the audience area where old women played the *shamisen*,[11] some dancers throwing a ball back and forth on stage and some riding here and there on bicycles (Kurihara 2000, 19).

After *Anma*, Hijikata began to weave a detailed examination of the human body into his theatrical spectacle. He became convinced that social conditioning contaminates the body, and devised ways to work with the body and body memory in order to eradicate this conditioning. Kurihara writes:

> Hijikata believed the human body becomes domesticated – trained to function within specific patterns – beginning the moment we are born. For example, we grasp an object automatically, without thinking about which muscles to move and how to move them. We walk by placing one leg in front of the other, without thinking which one should come first, which muscle to move, when, how, and where. This unconscious ability for functional movement and muscle coordination is learned in infancy. Hijikata believed that for his dance to be successful, these deeply imbedded patterns had to be destroyed (Kurihara 1997, 98).

Sometimes this investigation became an overt presence onstage, as in the *Bara-Iro Dansu* (Rose-Colored Dance, 1965), which featured a stage covered with the diagrams and charts of Chinese Medicine, with the dancers' skin painted as if it was peeled back to reveal the internal organs (Holborn, 12).

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[10] An improvised, spontaneous performance style often involving audience participation. Happenings were popular in many world avant-garde communities during the 1960s.
[11] The *shamisen* is a traditional Japanese lute-like instrument with three strings.

After the 1966 performance of *Tomato – Seiai Onchôgaku Shinanzue* (Tomato – Introductory Lessons in the Blessed Teachings of Erotic Love), the *Ankoku Butoh-ha* disbanded, leaving Hijikata free to pursue other projects (Klein, 17). Hijikata returned to Tôhoku with photographer Hosoe Eikô (1933-) to produce the dance drama *Kamaitachi* (The Sickle Weasel). The two men collaborated earlier in 1960 on a symbolic film about the atomic bomb, and both were from the north. To perform *Kamaitachi* Hijikata visited local towns to improvise in the fields among the local farmers, playing an innocent fool character possessed by a demon spirit. Hosoe based the portrayal on his childhood memories from the late war years. Both men were rediscovering their personal roots (Holborn, 12).

Returning to Tokyo, Hijikata withdrew into a period of introspection. In June of 1968 he emerged to perform in a recital by one of his disciples, Ishii Mitsutaka, entitled *Ojune-Sho* (Excerpts from Genet). Hijikata developed two solos from this dance, *Hanayome [Neko]* (Bride [Cat]) and *Kirisuto* (Christ), into a long solo entitled *Hijikata Tatsumi to Nihonjin: Nikutai no Hanran* (Hijikata Tatsumi and the Japanese: Revolt of the Flesh), performed in October of the same year (Kurihara 2000, 55).

In *Revolt of the Flesh* Hijikata pulled all his literary influences and his newfound interest in his rural past into one big cathartic spectacle. The dance radiated an unmistakable sense of desperation, as Hijikata's pushed his body and his *ankoku butoh* rebellion to its breaking point. Gôda Nario, an influential butoh critic and a close friend of Hijikata, proposes that Hijikata's intense determination to rid his body of social conditioning alienated his dancers, who eventually abandoned him, and it was this isolation that led to the frenzied self-denial of *Revolt* (Klein, 85). This obsession may also have been the cause of the earlier breakup of the *Ankoku Butoh-ha*. In the month leading up to the performance Hijikata brought his body to an extreme physical condition, running every day and fasting on milk and *misô* soup until his ribs protruded. He also used artificial lights to tan his skin a deep shade (Holborn, 12).

The dance begins as Hijikata is carried onstage in a palanquin carried by several men, followed by a pig in a baby crib and a rabbit on a platter dangling from the end of a pole.[12] Reaching the stage, Hijikata removes his white kimono

[12] Kurihara notes this entrance was inspired by Artaud's seminal theatre text *The Theatre and Its Double*, translated into Japanese in 1965, which features a similar scene in the section "From Heliogabulus, or The Anarchic Crowned" (Kurihara 2000, 20).

to reveal nothing underneath by a g-string and an attached golden phallus. He begins throwing himself manically against the metal sheets hanging down from the ceiling. Before disappearing, he kills a rooster by snapping its neck. He then reappears wearing a huge gown with a white satin train, and dances violent, fragmented renditions of a waltz and a flamenco dance, all at an excruciatingly slow pace. Later, he wears a girl's kimono and socks, jumping and twisting as if disabled (Kurihara 2000, 20). At the dance's climax, ropes pull Hijikata's limbs in opposite directions until he is suspended over the heads of the audience, in biblical allusion to the crucifixion and Ascension of Jesus. The performance lasted two hours (Holborn, 8; Viala and Masson-Sekine, 66).

Ashikawa Yôko, then a new disciple of Hijikata, was in the audience: "The responses were extreme. Those who didn't like it, felt like they had been made to see something they did not want to see, something offensive. They may have felt they were being attacked or scolded from the stage" (Hoffman, 16).

The title, aligning Hijikata with the Japanese people as a whole, yet also separating him out, reflected Hijikata's growing interest in developing a dance form that drew from a specifically Japanese past and was not dependent on western styles in any way. *Revolt of the Flesh* was Hijikata's last dance to contain movements reminiscent of western dance forms (Holborn, 13).

The world of butoh was transformed in 1968. In addition to *Revolt of the Flesh*, the two most important female butoh dancers, Ashikawa Yôko and Nakajima Natsu (1943-), gave their first recitals as disciples of Hijikata. The same year, Hijikata wed Motofuji Akiko, taking her last name to make his legal name Motofuji Kunio.[13] Here, the first wave of butoh ended. In the following years Hijikata completely refocused his choreography, abandoning purely intellectual challenges and focusing more intensely on the depths of the human body.

[13] Hijikata Tatsumi ("Hijikata" means something like "person of the land") is a stage name. Hijikata was born Yoneyama Kunio, began using the name Hijikata Kunio in 1954 after his first performance in Tokyo, and finally chose Hijikata Tatsumi in 1958 (Kurihara 2000, 29).

> Hijikata conceives of dance as the need to break through the shell formed by social habits, which keep the body lagging behind the revolutions already accomplished in contemporary thought. For him the body is not a means but an end, not to be used to transmit ideas, but on the contrary, to question, to rethink, to recreate. Dance is not a linear composition, not a syntactical arrangement of body movements, but rather the exploration of the exemplary depth of the body itself; not a desire to pronounce a discourse, but to search for meaning.
>
> Jean Viala (in Viala and Masson-Sekine, 64)

2.2. The Butoh-fu: A Method Develops

The Female Body

In 1970, two years after *Revolt of the Flesh* and one year after Mishima's spectacular suicide, Hijikata withdrew into a new creative period with his new disciple and muse Ashikawa Yôko. Before meeting Hijikata in 1966, Ashikawa was an art student, not a dancer, but after two years of working with Hijikata she became a serious disciple (Holborn, 16). Of Hijikata's newfound creativity, she writes:

> There was a feeling of liberation from 1970 when he entered a new, unexplored territory. He was going to become more like a child, not through reviving his childhood memories, but by starting something new. It was from this period that he decided not to think too much, but to be more like a child, with less concern for self-identification. He then began to work in this way with his students (Holborn, 16).

In the 1960s Hijikata primarily worked with men (including Ohno Kazuo and his son Yoshito, Kasai Akira, Ishii Mitsutaka, and Tamano Kôichi), creating a masculine dance of social rebellion, spectacular and flashy. But in the four years of retreat following *Revolt of the Flesh*, Hijikata's work shifted to focus on his new troop of young female dancers and on a way to express his Tôhoku roots (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 84). Hijikata brought his prior exploration of ways to deso-

cialize the body in line with a growing nostalgia for Tôhoku, and searched for a way to regress in time towards the unsocialized life of childhood.

Hijikata internalized his rediscovery of femininity. As time past, he began saying he had an older sister living inside him. This sister he carried as a scar of the traumatic memories of his youth: his parents had sold one of his sisters into prostitution when he was young, [14] and at least one other had died in his youth. According to Hijikata, keeping this sister inside him was his way of learning about the dead, knowing the dead, and not fearing death (Kurihara 2000, 77). He wrote, "When I am immersed in creating dance, she scratches away the darkness inside me, finally devouring it all" (quoted in Munroe, 192). Perhaps in a gesture to make this sister feel at home, he began wearing a women's kimono, kept his hair long or tied in a bun, and used female language when speaking (Kurihara 2000, 20).

Hijikata also drew from Yanagida's emphasis on marginalized groups within Japan, which included the female gender. Hijikata believed that "because they are not considered to be fully apt persons in society, women, children, physically or mentally handicapped people are liminal; their bodies and minds are not fully molded into the sensorial and perceptual culture of society" (Calukusu, 56). Compared to men, Hijikata writes, women retain some distance from the conditioning of modernity, and thus "are able to embody the illogicality of dancing" (quoted in Holborn, 56).

Hijikata's concern over the socialized body holds interesting parallels to feminist theory and gender studies. Feminist literature, perhaps more than any other academic discipline, emphasizes the body as a site of both oppression and resistance to culturally constructed identities. Like Hijikata, some feminist scholars find a recovery from disembodied alienation must first begin with a deconstruction of the culturally-defined body. In her essay "Identity's Body," Sidonie Smith writes

> The palpable play of discomforts, of an experience of homelessness inside the body, forces us to ask about the relationship of the body to culture's body and the body politic. Although bodies provide us, as individuals, the boundaries of our isolated being, they are obviously and critically communal and discursive bodies; and

[14] This was at one time an accepted practice for poverty-stricken families in the impoverished northern countryside.

> community creates a superfluity of "body" that marks us in practices, discourses, and temporalities. For communities surrounding us normalize certain bodies and render abnormal or grotesque other bodies (Smith, 268).

Hijikata investigated ways to disrupt this normalizing process throughout his career. After being rejected by the modern dance community, he strove to reclaim authority over his bodily identity. He used Genet's negative-affirming principle to authenticate his own bow-legged, male, asymmetrical physique as perfect just as it was.

In an interesting reversal of feminist resistance to male-domination, Hijikata's early *Ankoku butoh* troupe was purposefully comprised of men doing highly masculine dances, as a challenge to the *female* dominated world of modern dance. After *Revolt of the Flesh*, however, Hijikata was no longer interested in simply opposing the Tokyo dance community. He deepened his focus inward to investigate the social history of his own body and its Tôhoku roots, and expanded his focus outward to take on modernity and socialization in total. More focused on society in general now, he came to recognize the disruptive potential of the female body - the greater potential for female butoh dancers to subvert a male-dominated society.

Hijikata's relationship to femininity is difficult to sort out. Hijikata's negative-affirming system placed the greatest value on that which is furthest away from mainstream society – a continuum including femininity, sickness, madness, and finally, death. The further away from the corrupting powers of modernity, the more primal, and for Hijikata, the more "natural," you become. Hijikata's sister, both female and dead, turned him into the most primal being of all.

In 1972 Hijikata debuted *Tôhoku Kabuki*, signaling a revival of interest in indigenous Japanese theatrical forms (Klein, 83). The performance combined elements of pre-Meiji Kabuki (when the dance still retained its plebeian grotesqueries) with movements and motifs remembered from his childhood in rural Akita. The rural agrarian elements in the dance coincided with a wave of premodern nostalgia that was sweeping the country, and for the first time a butoh performance met with mainstream success. This new acceptance brought Hijikata the chance to work at the corporate-owned Seibu Theatre, a major shift from his earlier days in small underground theatre houses. Hijikata enjoyed the recognition, but some more devotedly avant-garde intellectuals and artists (including

his friend Shibusawa Tatsuhiko) began to distance themselves from Hijikata and his work (Kurihara 2000, 21).

The Butoh-fu

A year later Hijikata stopped dancing altogether to focus on working with his disciples. After 1974 he developed a series of works at his newly acquired home and theatre, the Asbestos-kan. In this series of works for the Ashikawa-led *Hakutôbô* (White Peach) group, Hijikata worked more extensively with images and associations remembered from his childhood days in Akita. A clear methodology began to develop. A student of his at the time, Waguri Yukio, describes his choreographic method as working to "physicalize images through words." These words were called *butoh-fu* (butoh notation). Hijikata verbally improvised streams of *butoh-fu*, and the dancers, triggered by the words, danced them (D'Orazi, 339). Here is an example of *butoh-fu* from Waguri's CD-ROM collection of notes on Hijikata's work, *Butoh-fu Kaden*:

> YOU LIVE BECAUSE INSECTS EAT YOU
>
> A person is buried in a wall. He becomes an insect that dances on a thin sheet of paper. it makes rustling noises, trying to hold falling particles. The insect then becomes a person, so fragile that he could crumble with the slightest touch, who is wandering around. (quoted in Waguri, 1)

Each image is taken into the body and given full expression. The dance becomes more complex as the images pile up on top of one another.

Hijikata developed an intense working relationship with Ashikawa during the 1970s. Every morning the two of them went down to the studio alone, where Hijikata beat a small drum and spit out a stream of *butoh-fu* for Ashikawa to dance. In this way Ashikawa trained to memorize and embody thousands of Hijikata's images, switching between them endlessly. No one else was allowed to join them in the studio (Holborn, 14; Kurihara 2000, 21). Initially an art student, Ashikawa's sensitivity to imagery and lack of prior dance training contributed to her ability to internalize Hijikata's *butoh-fu*.

According to Ashikawa, Hijikata spoke of "writing dance," and found parallels between the writers' craft and his own (Holborn, 16). He was a voracious reader, often copying down influential pieces and tacking them on the wall of the studio (Kurihara 1997, 4). Hijikata disciple Nakajima Natsu remembers Hijikata handing out a list of books to read during the week: "Whenever we weren't dancing, we were discussing books" (quoted in Klein, 55). In addition to the *butoh-fu* method, Hijikata developed in his own journals and essays a unique take on the Japanese language, abandoning traditional grammar structure and often making up his own terms. This oblique writing style often read like surrealism. For example, here is a segment from his book *Inu no Jô Myakuni Shitto Suru Koto Kara* (From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein, 1976):

> When I think about spirit exalted to physiology, my taste remains unperturbed, remorselessly smashing even the shadow of a naked body sobbing on the edge of the abyss. After that, however insignificant, however indistinct, I feel that a piece of me that is difficult to discern remains in subtle light. This is the way things are. I am someone who rejoices when people die. It makes no difference if they are intellectuals or even those who defend writers. There is a wind-bell echoing in my cursed head and I want only to sit down, like a child on the threshold of wholeness who is waiting for something to be handed out. But in three years my hair grew too heavy to flutter in the wind. I make the "farmhands" who come to my house in Meguro eat like cows, with their eyes closed, and urinate standing, with their heads hanging down. I have transformed myself again and again into a strange and brutal musical instrument that does not even sweat and I live my life turning a stick of silence beating on silence into a shinbone. I have transformed myself too into an empty chest of drawers and a gasping willow trunk. I have also seen ghosts doing sumô [wrestling] in a parlor and have been able any number of times to create a baby who picks up their bones and bleeds at the nose. One day an evil wind, like a beautiful woman, came moving in a clot, and when it touched me there on my head I, too, hardened into a lump (Kurihara 2000, 58-59).

Hijikata scholar Nanako Kurihara writes, "Undeniably, Hijikata created a smoke screen of strange behaviors and language, but this was all part of his conscious strategy to make a mythic image of himself and his work" (Kurihara 2000, 14). Like the American composer John Cage, who smartly crafted his personal image to appear as an aloof genius, Hijikata carefully nurtured an image of his work and persona as bizarre and inscrutable. Both men were led by an intense conviction in the importance of their work to take pains to package their public face in as suitable an atmosphere as possible, even if it meant a tendency towards self-mystification. Hijikata's wildly impressionistic writing style reflects the anti-intellectual, anti-establishment aims of his butoh practice.

The Cult of Hijikata[15]

In addition to demonstrating Hijikata's writing style, I quoted the above paragraph to raise several issues surrounding Hijikata's working methods during the 1970s. The first involves Hijikata's treatment of his "farmhands," the group of female and male disciples he organized around him into a sort of personality cult. Living with his dancers communally in close quarters and submitting them to physical and psychological abuse, Hijikata placed his dancers under great emotional and physical strain, producing the "body on the edge of crisis" that he believed was critical to butoh performance (Kurihara 1997, 154). Hijikata demanded his disciples succumb to his every whim, forcing them to participate in demeaning rituals, including stealing food from neighbors in order to eat. Rehearsals ran from late night to sunrise, placing great strain on the dancer's ability to sleep. He made some disciples work as cabaret dancers in the evenings at a string of nightclubs run by his wife, purposefully subjecting them to the salacious gaze of the clubs' clientele. This difficult lifestyle served to build a sense of detachment from the thoroughly objectified body. The dancers then brought this detachment back into their butoh work with Hijikata, emptying the body of emotional attachment to better commit themselves entirely to Hijikata's imagery. A structure thus emerged where Hijikata used these extreme disciplines to create submissive (usually female) bodies to use with his *butoh-fu* (Kurihara 1997, 87-89).

This intentional use of the cabaret audience's gaze is another instance of an odd inversion of feminism - this time the idea of the "male gaze," a strain of

[15] This section is indebted to the work of Nanako Kurihara, who first explored these ideas in her chapter of the same name. See Kurihara 1997, 153-192.

thought which appeared in the 1970s in Europe and America and revealed how the presentation of female bodies in art constructs the (assumed male) viewer as a voyeur. Usually this is inferred to be a harmful process, as it perpetuates the objectification of the female body. But here Hijikata is using the gaze of the nightclub clientele to purposefully generate this experience of objectification in his dancers. Hijikata was interested in women for their marginalized outlook, and having them work in nightclubs pushed this sense of marginality even further.

In creating his communal butoh troupe on the fringes of society, Hijikata tapped into the Japanese heritage of performing artists as outcastes. During the Edo period (1603 – 1867), laws kept performing artists in a restricted theatre-and-prostitution district called the *akusho* (evil place), and prohibited them (after 1842) from socializing with people of other classes. This distance from the 'civilized' world enhanced the actor's ability to transgress social taboo. Hijikata similarly tapped the powers of outsider identity by developing his own communal group of outcast dancers with himself as their leader (Kurihara 1997, 160-174).

Artistic motivations aside, the way Hijikata ran his dance commune also appears to have been a matter of practicality. Even after Hijikata achieved some mainstream success, surviving in Japan as a dance troupe was still difficult economically, as there was very little financial support from the government or from private institutions.[16] A dancer's lifestyle necessitated an austere existence, and Hijikata's cabarets were likely an essential source of income to keep the troupe going. Rehearsals were held late at night partially because the dancers all had jobs to work during the day (Flesh and Blood Mystery Theatre, 1). As in a Zen monastery, where even routine cleaning becomes part of mindfulness practice, in Hijikata's butoh commune the practical necessities of keeping the group financially afloat were melded with conditions contributing to the dancer's emotional development as butoh dancers. The more strenuous the lifestyle, the better equipped the dancers were to give up their attachment to the body and achieve the emptiness of the "dead body" on stage.

Still, such a system of extreme (sometimes bordering on religious[17]) devotion to a group leader makes one wonder about the relationship between Hijikata and his disciples. According to all reports the dancers devoted themselves willingly to Hijikata's demands, and found the lifestyle suited to their development as

[16] There is still little today.
[17] See the "Cult of Hijikata" chapter in Kurihara, 1997 for examples of the severity of Hijikata's student's devotion to him.

butoh dancers. But how much were Hijikata's demands driven by purely artistic motives, and how much by a need for power and ego gratification?

Kurihara proposes that Hijikata possessed from childhood a psychological need to turn his own fantasies into reality, and he needed submissive bodies around him to enable this process. Hijikata faced an abusive, alcoholic father as a child, and psychologists have found this sort of retreat into the world of imagination to be a common coping mechanism for children traumatized at a young age (Kurihara 1997, 25). While this does help explain the often obsessive nature of Hijikata's working methods, I am a little uneasy about the implications this cultish incarnation of butoh holds for butoh practice as a whole. Like tantric ritual, butoh purposefully (sometimes violently) taps the volatile energy space surrounding sex and death in order to redirect this energy towards challenging the notion of an individual, continual self. But as in tantric practice, the initially high-minded use of the negative-affirming principle may all too easily fall prey to the selfish desires of the individual, especially when inequitable power structures are involved. Hijikata's charisma and popularity in the 1970s may have engendered just such a case of the individual ego coming before the emotional health of his disciples.

The Legacy

Hijikata continued to work with Ohno Kazuo in the latter part of his career. Ohno Kazuo's later works, molded into choreographic unity by Hijikata, became along with Hijikata's *butoh-fu* the guiding impulse of many later butoh artists. In contrast to Hijikata's tones of dark anguish, Ohno dances to communicate the joy of being alive, anchored in his strong religious faith. He attempts to pull all of existence into his movements, generating an incredible presence on stage (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 22). In 1981's *My Mother*, Ohno attempted to create an entirely spiritual dance, stripped of all descriptive imagery. Movements were triggered by early memories, working all the way back to Ohno's memories of his own birth, and the cyclical nature of life and death. Now in his nineties, Ohno continues to dance his solo improvisations (assisted by his son, Yoshito), and gives workshops at his studio in Yokohama.

From 1974 until his death twelve years later, Hijikata continued to choreograph works for a wide number of the different dancers and butoh troupes that had collected around him and under him as butoh expanded in the 1970s and 1980s. He also published articles and books and gave lectures about his butoh

method. Many of these works were later collected as the *Hijikata Tatsumi Zen-shû* (The Collected Works of Hijikata Tatsumi). Hijikata passed away in 1986 of liver failure, performing his final dance on his deathbed as he sat up to perform for the many who had come to pay tribute. He was 57 years old.

Hijikata's butoh springs in large part from the details of Hijikata's life: His experiences of poverty and abuse in rural Japan, his feelings of alienation in the Tokyo dance community, and the
avant-garde environment at the time. He arrived in Tokyo at a moment of the fracturing of national and personal identities in the decades following World War II, when Japanese artists attempted to reconstruct an authentic Japanese voice to fight the dehumanizing effects of modernity. Hijikata adapted the negative-affirming principle to invert and reject the socialization of the body. He then moved further inside the body, investigating ways to empty the body of intellectual inhibitions and realize a true metamorphosis onstage, led by the *butoh-fu*.

While Hijikata's butoh dance encountered no major changes in the latter period of his life, the next generation of dancers he inspired began to diversify his butoh practice into a multitude of forms. The next section reveals the many paths taken by later generations of butoh dancers.

2.3. Butoh After Hijikata

New Groups

Butoh expanded at a rapid rate in the 1970s, with 20-25 groups performing across Japan at the movement's peak (Klein, 19). The first, and among the most notable, is *DaiRakudaKan* (The Great Camel Battleship), formed by ex-*Jôkyô Gekijô* (Situation Theatre) actor and Hijikata student Maro Akaji in 1972. In DaiRakudaKan Maro carries on Hijikata's butoh aesthetic, adding to it a greater sense of theatricality, or in Maro's words, "enlarging the spectacle" (quoted in Holborn, 76). DaiRakudaKan focuses more on staging and imagery then on detailed movement. These images are a mixture of the grotesque and the carnival, often accompanied by loud music from around the world, creating a sense of chaotic danger onstage. Maro emphasizes the radically anti-materialistic aspect of butoh in his work. He writes:

> In Japan there is a great materialism and a great contradiction in people's attitude toward nature. If the unique economic situation in contemporary Japan is described as a miracle, then Butoh is another Japanese miracle; it is the antithesis of the economic miracle and it is a total rejection of the values of that materialism. We need to stop the accelerated activity of development. We need to block the velocity. Butoh is therefore a dangerous force. The way of Butoh is dangerous (quoted in Holborn, 76).

In the summer of 2001, I was able to see several of DaiRakudaKan's new productions in Tokyo. Without fail some image in each of them stayed with me long after the show, troubling my subconscious and refusing to fade away. Often these images involved tongues, a DaiRakudaKan specialty. At the start of one dance, three women writhed in a bundle on the floor, each painted white with tattered white dresses. All three pushed their tongues out and single-mindedly attempted to lick the body of the person next to them. This quest led them to crawl over and under each other, led by their tongues, turning the bundle into a throbbing mass of weaving white limbs and blood-red tongues. That evening I learned

how subversive you could be simply by sticking out your tongue and refusing to put it away.

The DaiRakudaKan of 2003 has a considerably different membership than when the group started. By the late 1970s most of DaiRakudaKan's original dancers had left to form their own 'spectacle-butoh' groups, including Hoppô Butoh-ha; Dance Love Machine; Suzurantô; Sebi, and Tenkei-sha. In 1975 dancer Amagatsu Ushio (1949-) left DaiRakudaKan to form the second major butoh ensemble, a group of five men named *Sankai Juku* (The School of Mountain and Sea). In the 1980s, Sankai Juku moved their headquarters to Paris, spearheading the expansion of butoh into Europe and America.

Amagatsu's aesthetic is refined and deliberate, presenting a highly choreographed ritual in contrast to DaiRakudaKan's unruly spectacle. The violence and grotesquery of Hijikata's original butoh is still present, but submerged within a graceful poesy. In Sankai Juku's *Hibiki* (2002), the grotesque only surfaced briefly in a slow segment where the five dancers gathered around a pool of red liquid, gesturally connecting the blood inside their veins to the pool in front of them. This is a far cry from throwing yourself against metal sheets. Many critics have criticized Sankai Juku for creating a domesticated, sanitized version of butoh, lacking the energy and the confrontational character of Hijikata's work (Klein, 19; Fraleigh, 176). In any case it cannot be denied Amagatsu has succeeded in developing his own unique brand of butoh performance, one that has received great acclaim from audiences around the world and has contributed greatly to the international recognition of butoh.

Across the Oceans

In the last two decades butoh has gained a steady following in Europe and America. Hijikata's dancers first took his work to Europe in the late 1970s for a small series of performances, and the Butoh-ha Sebi (a DaiRakudaKan spin-off) also traveled to Europe early on. But the first major introduction to butoh for European audiences came in 1980, when Ohno Kazuo and Sankai Juku performed at the Nancy Dance Festival in France. Two years later DaiRakudaKan appeared with Ohno, and in 1983 Hijikata's group participated in the "Six Country Festival" (Klein, 69). In America, Butoh first arrived in the form of Tanaka Min's New York performances and workshops in 1981, DaiRakudaKan's 1982 show in Durham, North Carolina, and Sankai Juku's performance at the 1984 Los Angles Olympic Arts Festival (Stein 1986, 111-2). Butoh soon achieved great popularity

in Europe and America, especially as audiences began to see past the exotic spectacle and glimpsed an approach to theater more direct and emotive than the detached, technical style of modern dance that had taken hold a few decades before (Stein 1986, 114). In 1986 the first two books on butoh became available in English, and a smattering of articles began to appear hoping to explain the form to new audiences.

With growing popularity in the west, butoh began to attract mainstream recognition in Japan as well. Stein credits this to *gyaku-yunyu* ('go out and come back'), a process by which elements in Japanese culture at first ignored are finally given credence after they achieve popularity overseas (Stein, 114). This newfound domestic popularity reached an apex in 1985 when the national public broadcasting station NHK televised two weeks of sold-out Tokyo performances by Ohno Kazuo, Tanaka Min, DaiRakudaKan, Dance Love Machine, and others.

Other important dancers include Hijikata disciple Kasai Akira, who left Hijikata in 1972 to establish his own school, the *Tenshi-kan*. In the latter part of the decade he became increasingly influenced by the Eurythmics practices of Germany's Rudolf Stein, and in 1979 Kasai left for Germany for further study. Upon his return to dancing butoh in the 1990s, he focused on what he called the "community body," the necessity of moving beyond the individual dancer to focus on the larger communal and ecological picture (Fraleigh, 236).

Ishii Mitsutaka follows Ohno's lead in stressing improvisation over structure, and abandoned the 'butoh' label in favor of his own "*Mu*-dance" (Nothing Dance[18]). He also became the first to utilize butoh as therapy in his work at psychiatric hospitals (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 152).

After Hijikata's death Ashikawa continued to work with Hijikata's dancers, directing *Two People for Three Nights* in 1987. She writes, "The lesson I most took to heart was what the master himself said, 'consign the Hijikata method to flames, send it to the gallows, put it back in the forge and redo it'" (quoted in Laage, 151). How to carry Hijikata's butoh into the future has been a major question running through the minds of critics and dancers ever since Hijikata's death.

[18] "Nothing" is not a perfect translation of *mu*, but it is the closest I can get here.

The Present Moment: Spring 2003

Hijikata's work continues to be assessed. In November 1998 a week-long symposium on Hijikata's life and work took place at the Theatre Tram in Tokyo, and the Hijikata Tatsumi Archive opened at the Keiô Gijuku University Art Center. While Japanese readers can obtain several books of his writing, including the *Hijikata Tatsumi Zenshû* (The Collected Works of Hijikata Tatsumi), the first major English translation projects appeared only recently, beginning with Nanako Kurihara's translations in *The Drama Review* (2000). Around the same time Waguri Yukio, an earlier disciple of Hijikata, published his notes on Hijikata's methods in the bilingual CD-ROM *Butoh-fu Kaden*, revealing Hijikata's butoh-fu to the public for the first time.

International and Japanese dance festivals continue to program and support butoh. The Japan Arts Dance Festival (JADE) in August of 2002 featured an extensive butoh program entitled "Butoh in the World," featuring performances by major Japanese, American, and European dancers. For the last eight years butoh in the western United States centered around Brechin Flournoy's annual San Francisco Butoh Festival, which featured themed performances (for example "American Butoh," "Traditional Butoh," "Women in Butoh") and played a central role in bringing major Japanese butoh artists to San Francisco to hold workshops and build a lasting interest in the form (Ts'ao, 1).

And beginning in the 1990s, a small but steady stream of foreigners began traveling to Japan to learn butoh dance from Japanese teachers. My butoh classes with Ken Mai in Kyoto (2001-2) included students from England, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Canada, and the United States. They ranged in age from their early twenties to late thirties. Several of them came to Japan solely to study butoh, teaching English on the side to finance their lessons.

Butoh as Japanese Culture

These travelers often arrive in Japan hoping to learn butoh in its original context. But how Japanese is contemporary butoh practice?

Butoh is a dance created and developed in Japan as an alternative to the contemporary dance forms invading from the west (Modern Dance still reigns in Japanese university dance departments, just like in America). Hijikata's own butoh style is based in part on the bodies of rural northern Japanese working in the fields. At the same time, the founders of butoh (Hijikata and Ohno) were greatly influenced by German expressionist dance and began their careers studying

modern dance, and Hijikata drew literary inspiration from primarily European sources. So there is already a high degree of internationalism embedded in the butoh style. What then happens when a non-Japanese person assumes the title of butoh dancer? How much is the dancer's conceptions of Japaneseness intertwined with conceptions of what butoh dance must include? Each new performance demands a cultural context, even if the main content is highly abstract. Often the cultural relationships are negotiated through costume, stage design, venue, and program. Some dancers imply Japanese butoh is just one variation on a universal style. For example, Sweden's SU-EN says she is searching for the "Scandinavian butoh body"(SU-EN Butoh Company, 2002). Butoh as a contemporary art is an international medium, freely influencing and being influenced by multi-national sources, yet with undeniably Japanese origins.

So what does it mean to call butoh a Japanese dance? If dozens of non-Japanese dancers have adopted and interpreted the medium to suit their particular needs and backgrounds, has the 'Japaneseness' of butoh been lost or compromised? Can the Japanese elements be removed, leaving some kind of essential 'butoh' intact? Or should international dancers attempt to recognize and preserve the 'Japaneseness' of the dance, in ways that either accept or challenge essentialist constructions of Japanese culture? International butoh dancers have answered these questions from every angle, some asserting the dance's Japaneseness, some working to create a form of butoh native to their own culture.

Moreover, the passage of time may make the "Japaneseness" of butoh a non-issue. In the last few years, as butoh dance enters its third decade as a European and American art form, international butoh artists appear less and less concerned about addressing butoh as a particularly Japanese art. In America, the Americanization of butoh mirrors the Americanization of Zen described in Helen Tworkov's book *Zen in America.* In both cases, non-English-speaking Japanese first introduced the form, and audiences approached it with little understanding of the original Japanese cultural context. Understandably, American responses to these initial encounters involved a great deal of exotification, cultural misunderstanding, and misinterpretation. For many at the time, the practice seemed irrecoverably foreign and mysterious. But with increasing contextual knowledge and (perhaps most importantly) the appearance of American, English-speaking teachers, the Japanese origins became less and less of a preoccupation. Currently the established butoh artists in the United States have mostly

studied with Japanese teachers either in Japan or the USA. But much of the next generation of American butoh artists is learning butoh from teachers in their home country. This makes the question of butoh's compatibility with non-Japanese cultures less and less of an issue.

This is not to say the dance's Japanese origins should be ignored. As I argue in Perspective 1, understanding of butoh suffers when one attempts to view it either as completely Japanese or as universal and beyond culture. The historical reality is always somewhere in between, and I believe that as dancers and scholars continue to work towards a greater understanding of butoh history and practice, this happy medium will be reached.

A Panorama of Butoh Today

Even among dancers who use the butoh name, we find an incredible variety of approaches. The form is as heterogeneous as the bodies that perform it. Hijikata Tatsumi's original butoh was marked out by the white paint, the contorted gestures, and the grotesque elements. Ohno Kazuo's style of butoh dance, in contrast, is light, austere, improvisational (as in non-choreographed), and steeped in his Christian faith. Ohno's personality shines through his dance. In Japan, the Ohno family continues to give improvisational workshops, and a steady stream of students flows through his Yokohama studio.

Maro Akaji centers his DaiRakudaKan butoh on a sense of theatricality. Amagatsu Ushio explores his ideas of 'primal resonance' through the refined poetics of Sankai Juku. Tanaka Min uses butoh to explore the relationship of movement and location. My teacher Ken Mai's dance veers towards wild comedy, as he pulls people from the audience to dance with him. Kasai Toshiharu presents his "Butoh Dance Method" as a technique for psychosomatic healing. At the Asbestos-kan butoh theatre, I watched one performer writhe on the floor for five minutes, one show a video, one sit next to me in the audience and copy my movements, and one (Hijikata's widow, Motofuji) dance a tango with a live turtle.

In California at the 2002 San Francisco Butoh Festival, an outdoor performance featured several groups in all white paint moving slowly. At one of the main concerts a week later, performance artist Kathy Rose swayed through a highly technical animation-and-dance piece, Los Angeles artist Michael Sakamoto told the flamboyant story of a socially-repressed salaryman, SU-EN performed a bleak, grotesque solo about the fragmented body, and Hijikata disciple

Tamano Hiroko transformed from an old woman to a young girl to a demon to everything in between. At this concert, none but Tamano wore the white paint.

Elsewhere in the city, Shinichi Momo Koga's group Inkboat combines butoh with action theatre to create a type of gothic spectacle. Koga produces ongoing butoh workshops with solo dancers in the region combining butoh with other methods of body awareness. In Los Angeles, solo dancer Oguri gives slow solo performances, and teaches site-specific workshops based on Tanaka Min's Body Weather technique.

One unique project at the University of California, Irvine, named Ragestries, utilized the *butoh-fu* choreographic process to create a performance working through the grief felt after the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York (Ragestries Theatre Company, 2003). But the latest incarnation of butoh in California is "butoh protest" - using butoh tactics and aesthetics as a form of civil disobedience. Recently, Corpus Delicti planned an anti-war butoh protest in downtown Los Angeles, gathering 20 to 100 individuals to cover themselves in white paint and tattered gauze and march in a slow procession during rush hour traffic.

In Japan, the United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, France, Germany, England, Italy, Thailand, and elsewhere, other dancers do their own butoh in their own way...

The Future

So how stable is butoh as a genre? Will it be around a few decades from now? How about fifty years? The long-term vitality of butoh as a living genre is uncertain. In Europe and America, where butoh has achieved the greatest acceptance, the form often appears in combination with other styles, rather than a distinct and vibrant tradition in its own right. As Jean Viala notes, even when the butoh name is used the boundaries are often stretched far beyond the Hijikata-lineage butoh described in this book:

> Butoh has attracted a lot of followers, and it would be impossible to name all these solo dancers. The line between professionals and amateurs is not very clear, because there is no formal butoh school, no precise butoh technique. Many people who call themselves butoh dancers are motivated not so much by any particular talent for dance as by a desire to rebel against society. They have

> joined the butoh movement because they feel more comfortable there; for them, butoh has become a refuge from conventional society (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 167).

Perhaps it is butoh dancers' anti-codification aims that have turned the genre into a loose, confusing mass of styles, with no formalized development. Many butoh artists tend to keep one foot in the butoh tradition while continually incorporating other genres. Koga, who studied with Hijikata disciples Tamano Kôichi and Hiroko after they relocated to Berkeley, doesn't use the word 'butoh' except in workshop descriptions and in listing influences. Following Tanaka Min, Oguri prefers the title "body weather" to butoh. Others featured in the "American Butoh" section of the 2002 San Francisco Butoh Festival similarly slip in and out of the butoh frame, using the title when advantageous (mostly for workshops), but refusing to place themselves squarely in the genre. The boundaries are slipping.

In Japan, major groups like Sankai Juku and DaiRakudaKan seem to be continuing on with what they have been doing since the early 1980s. There are sporadic festivals and conferences centered on butoh, but these are few and far between. In Tokyo there is a steady stream of small butoh works at experimental performance spaces like Terpsichore. But, as D'Orazi perceptively notes,

> Most of the unassuming, principally solo performances at such venues would be more correctly called *etude*-style trial pieces than substantial works. It could be judged that these dancers have undertaken a re-examination of butoh in terms more related to the individual body and its abilities, but the impression left by their work is one of self-obsession (D'Orazi, 330).

Meanwhile, the few who do seek to establish a unified, structured focus for butoh face challenges of their own. The "butoh.net" webpage provides listings of butoh classes, teachers, and performances, but there is currently no centralized governing institution, and no magazine or newsletter serving as a means of communication between dancers, choreographers, and audiences.

And finally, the butoh community is currently faced with a series of institutional setbacks that threaten to uproot what advances have been made towards assuring butoh's future as a genre. With the end of the San Francisco Butoh Festival in 2002, butoh is left without a major home in California, and the

effect of this loss remains to be seen. In Japan, the Asbestos-kan, Hijikata's original studio, recently declared bankruptcy. After a failed campaign led by Ohno Yoshito and others to raise the requisite funds, the building was auctioned off on January 21st, 2003. In a cruel irony, this was the anniversary of Hijikata's death. Previously the Asbestos-kan was used as a performance space, for butoh workshops led by Motofuji Akiko (Hijikata's widow), and for periodic film screenings of Hijikata's major dance works. All this disappeared with the closure of the Asbestos-kan. And finally, the Dance Box series at Torii Hall in Osaka, a key venue for butoh artists in the Kansai region, ended its run in the Spring of 2002.

So butoh today is vast and diverse, but not at all solidified or stable. As we shall see in the next perspective, perhaps this chaotic environment is befitting to a dance form so intent on destabilizing the mind.

> Dance is a humble determination. It is a will to struggle, so that the self remains open-ended in its relation to the world.
>
> Tanaka Min (quoted in Holborn, 48)

Perspective 3: Liminality and Butoh

Whether or not butoh survives as a distinct genre, its influence has already spread far and wide in the international dance community. I believe this interest in butoh is driven primarily from the type of deep emotional states awoken while dancing and watching butoh. In this Perspective I explore the extraordinary effects butoh has on both dancers and audience members. Butoh doesn't exist to entertain, but to unsettle. Hijikata developed his butoh method based on these understandings:

(1) Our experience of the world is usually mediated through the habitual interpretations of the intellect, which is the product of pervasive socialization. This is especially true in modern societies, which have foolishly attempted to separate the mind from the body and so alienated us from the natural cycles of birth and death, aggregation and dissolution.
(2) Socialization alienates us from a fluid and natural relationship with our surroundings. Destroying this socialization and learning to move from a more open awareness brings one back in line with natural law. "Hijikata wanted to 'restore the body to its natural state' by having the dancers experience firsthand the principle that in nature, before an individual plant or animal can develop its own distinctive voice, it must begin by adapting itself to its place in the natural order" (Klein, 39). This means quieting the discriminating intellect and raising sensory awareness, so that the dancer is fully sensitive to all stimuli that reach the body and is able to respond to these stimuli fully and non-judgmentally. This stimuli is the source of all butoh movement,

and includes: (a) the surrounding environment, and (b) imagery (body memory) pulled up by the mind (the *butoh-fu*).

(3) Building sensitivity to the surrounding environment and the inner conditions of the body, the butoh dancer is able to tap into a universal consciousness, bridging the gap between 'self' and 'other.' This is a move from an individual body to a "community body" (in Hijikata disciple Kasai Akira's terminology), an eco-logical, integrated way of being in the world (Fraleigh, 230).

(4) The butoh audience picks up on (a) the physical transformation occurring onstage, and (b) the non-dualistic structure of butoh performance, leading to heightened sensitivity and a non-dualistic mode of awareness that parallels the dancers' experience onstage.

The goal of butoh performance is to reach a state of awareness where both dancers and audience abandon intellectual constructs and judgments. Hijikata and Ohno called this state of awareness the "dead body," a body that has dropped the discerning, socialized mind and moves in perfect resonance with the world around it. Unlike a "living body" in which actions and thoughts are filtered through inhibition and intellectual tropes, the dead body acts as an empty vessel into which an emotion can be placed and fully express itself without the interference of the rational mind (Viala and Masson-Sekine, 22).

Butoh employs a vast array of techniques to achieve this "dead body." These can be divided broadly into two groups: aesthetic techniques focused on the audience, including design, costume, music, and structure; and the kinesthetic techniques used by the dancers in butoh training and choreography. By resisting the usual binary conceptual frames employed by the mind, these techniques undermine the audience's ability to categorize, developing instead a state of undifferentiated awareness where all attempts at categorization are abandoned. For example, gender ambiguity subverts the audience's ability to categorize a dancer onstage as "male" or "female." Instead, the performer remains floating between the two poles, and the gender trope is destabilized. This process happens over and over in each butoh technique, as a whole working to subvert all intellectual attempts to categorize the dance into a recognizable framework. Kept in this in-between state, unable to gain an intellectual distance

from the performance onstage, the audience is forced to open themselves up to the full reality of the event.

The Liminal

In this section I wish to compare the "dead body" in butoh to what anthropologist Victor Turner calls the *liminal* experience. When participating in a liminal act the participant enters into a state of ambiguity, where learned social context falls away. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1969, 94). The liminal is the space of creative flux that destabilizes custom and convention. It is the chaos that lies underneath our rational attempts to order the world. In past societies, liminal rituals destabilized social relationships to realign an individual's relationship with the wider community. For Hijikata, the liminal "dead body" experience empowered dancers and audiences to transcend social and historical constraints and discover the deeper reality of the body.

Variations of the liminal experience are found in many other traditions: the Yogic *samadhi*, the Zen *satori*, the Christian *unio mystica*, the Quakers' *inner light*, and the Freudian *oceanic experience* (Turner 1986, 15). In his essay "Liminality and Communitas," Turner describes how the appearance of the liminal in cultural practice changes when moving from the "rites of passage" rituals of preliterate, small scale societies to the complex social relations of technologically advanced societies. He explains it in this way: "what appears to have happened is that with the increasing specialization of society and culture, with progressive complexity in the social division of labor, what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities "betwixt and between" defined states of culture, and society itself has become itself an institutionalized state" (1969, 94). Whereas the role of liminality in a simpler society may be a ritual with a distinct social purpose, in contemporary post-industrial societies it includes not only mendicant and monastic religious practices, but also the secularized 'entertainment' of festivals and artistic events (raves, Mardi Gras, etc.). In highly institutionalized societies the liminal becomes a threat to the hegemony of the dominant powers, and is thus marginalized to (a) monasteries and (b) the arts. The arts (our concern here) provide a relatively benign outlet for society as a whole to have a taste of the liminal without letting the experience undo the ruling ideologies of social con-

trol (created by what the social theorist Althusser calls "Ideological State Apparatuses").

How does the liminal experience in artistic practice differ from that of ritual? In later works, Turner distinguishes between the *liminal*, which is an experience required by society that permanently transforms the participants' sense of self, and the *liminoid* action, which is voluntary and only temporarily transports the participants into a liminal space. The liminal is characteristic of traditional rites of passage and other social rituals, while the liminoid is closer to artistic performance, where an actor or dancer may be transformed on stage but go on leading a relatively unchanged life afterwards (discussed in Schechner, 61-63). Butoh, like other performance styles, is generally liminoid rather than purely liminal - viewing or dancing butoh is unlikely to permanently restructure one's relationship with the world (although this is always possible). But the liminoid experience does provide the participant a taste, a glimpse of life outside of her or his usual understanding. This taste can lead to another, and then another, and perhaps eventually a substantial reconfiguration of one's relationship to society. Liminality in butoh is remarkable for the degree to which not just performers but *audience* enter into a liminoid/liminal mode.

Liminal Arts and Postmodernism

While all arts include some degree of liminality, experimental, postmodern, and avant-garde arts like butoh make the creation of liminal states a priority. In her book *Liminal Acts* (1999), Susan Broadhurst notes that in recent decades a spattering of forms focusing more exclusively on creating a liminal state began to appear in theatre, music, film, and dance (Broadhurst, 1). Generally speaking, I attribute this shift to the effects of what is called 'postmodernism' (the increasing juxtaposition of disparate systems of meaning). Postmodernism leads to an increasing familiarity with the liminal experience in the daily lives of artists and their audiences, a familiarity reflected in their artistic practices. Emphasizing liminality, these new forms are closer than most art to the "rites of passage" rituals described above. While their effects are still often liminoid (temporary), they aim to be as transformative (as liminal) as possible, aggressively pushing audiences towards the unknown. Not surprisingly, these arts often draw inspiration from the techniques of pre-modern ritual-theatre[19]. Butoh is no exception, drawing from

[19] Antonin Artaud's "On the Balinese Theatre" in *The Theater and Its Double* (1958, 53-67) is a classic and influential example of ritual influences on the avant-garde.

premodern Japanese traditions at the same time as it furthers the work of Artaud and other European avant-garde artists. Butoh is often said to exist in the realm between theatre and ritual (Kurihara 1997, 2), or between *liminoid* and *liminal*.

Butoh and Liminality

The numerous points of similarity between butoh and the fundamental characteristics of liminal ritual Turner outlines are striking. Butoh and liminal rituals share an emphasis on holistic rather than intellectual modes of awareness. Liminality, Turner writes, "implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (Turner 1969, 95). The barriers between the various spheres of life are revealed to be false dichotomies as the interconnectedness of all beings is revealed. The same unifying impulse is found over and over again in butoh performance and philosophy. Hijikata writes, "the dirty is beautiful and the beautiful is dirty, and [life] cycles between them forever" (Kurihara 1997, 38). To fully experience the reality of existence, butoh reveals the aspects of life kept hidden by modern civilization, forcing the audience to recognize the existence of these elements within their own lives. Hijikata writes,

> The reason that we suffer from anxiety is that we are unable to live with our fears. Anxiety is something created by adults. The dancer, through the butoh spirit, confronts the origins of his fears: a dance which crawls towards the bowel of the earth […] There is no way that one can understand the nature of light if one never observes deeply the darkness. A proper understanding of both requires that both their inherent natures be understood (quoted in Viala and Masson-Sekine, 188).

Butoh critic Goda Nario describes the audience response to the grotesque elements in *Kinjiki*, the first butoh performance:

> [The viewer's] physical sense of repulsion leads to a dim feeling of identification which in turn triggers a sense of release. This liberation of man's 'darker side, connected with the vulgar and possibly orgiastic growth processes in the depths' is seen as the crucial first

> step towards bringing the 'high' and 'low' in to balance, with the eventual goal of reintegrating man into nature (quoted in Klein, 30).

In the process of unifying "high" and "low," Turner finds liminal rituals often include references to death, to being in the womb, and to darkness (Turner 1969, 94). Butoh, originally called the "dance of darkness" (*Ankoku Butoh*) emphasizes all three.[20] But rather than simply referencing birth and death, dancers aim to experience the process physically. Ohno Kazuo writes,

> I don't believe that the body can transform itself, unless it undergoes the fundamental changes of life and death. Therefore, when I try to prove my own existence it is impossible not to follow the thread of my memories until I reach my mother's womb: for it is there that my life began. So I try to carry in my body all the weight and mystery of life, and I believe dance is born of this experience (quoted in Viala and Masson-Sekine, 38).

Butoh reflects the Hindu and Buddhist emphasis on the cyclical nature of existence, envisioning life as a continual oscillation between growth and decay, light and dark. In this way, birth and death are collapsed into the same moment – what dies is born again, and what is born eventually dies. Dancers often start or end in the fetal position, and often at the climax of a butoh work the lead dancer appears to perish onstage, only to rise again in the end. Ken Mai, in his solo work *Flower City* (2001), slowly withers away about thirty minutes into the performance, eventually lying completely still. The audience applauds, assuming the dance is over. But then something odd happens: he still doesn't move. After a few minutes the ushers come up on stage to carry his perfectly limp body offstage. The house lights do not go up for a few minutes, and just as the audience begins to wonder whether something really did happen to him up there, he reappears in a new costume from the wing, smiling.

Liminal Strategies

[20] On a literal level, the dance is often performed in near-darkness, reducing the gap that usually exists between the darkened seats and brightly-lit stage (Klein, 49).

Butoh strategies to challenge dialectical thinking of the audience include unusual costuming, androgyny, a focus on marginalized members of society, and an emphasis on the materiality of the body. All of these find precedent in Turner's description of liminal ritual.

The costuming of the body in butoh undermines the usual dialectical tropes of human presentation, instead creating a creature that is firmly outside of known experience and thereby liminal. Turner's description of liminality summarizes the butoh wardrobe quite well: "Liminal entities… may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system…" (Turner 1969, 94). Butoh often features painted bodies (usually a ghostly white), shaved heads, tangled hair, distorted faces, nakedness, tattered clothing, and grotesque gestures, stripping the dancer of all vestiges of individuality and any marker of social identity. The human form barely looks human at all.

Butoh costuming involves the confusion or destruction of gender tropes, matching Turner's findings that attributes of sexlessness and androgynous dress are highly characteristic of liminality (Turner 1960, 98). Susan Kozel examines gender in butoh in her article "Moving Beyond the Double Syntax," noting how "Western gender strategies in performance require the basic male/female distinction for dramatic effect and political impact." Even when a man dances in a dress, the fact that the "man" is disguised as a "woman" is framed as a self-conscious role-reversal, and the dualism persists. Butoh, in contrast, "subverts gender along with the dualistic structure that sustains its logic… Transformations in butoh, gender included, are less reliant on static notions than on flow and dynamic…techniques [like butoh] are means for suspending critical and interpretative functions in order to reach 'beneath the sway of thought and language' and to control human reaction from within" (Kozel, 36-37).

When butoh dancers *are* recognizable as particular characters, they most often take the form of marginalized beings in society. Hijikata learned through Genet of the subversive power of the marginalized. Turner finds this same emphasis in liminal ritual (Turner 1969, 125). Beings on the margins of society live further from the socializing power of civilization, which makes them inherently more liminal. As a result, assuming the perspective of these marginal beings is a good place to start in renouncing the socialization of the body and reaching a

liminal state[21]. Taking a cue from Yanagida Kunio (see Perspective 2.1), butoh stages are full of beggars, old prostitutes, grotesque monsters, and pathetic old men, who perform actions breaking all manner of social taboos. Hijikata's later interest in the liminal female body also has its basis here.

Finally, both butoh and liminal ritual destroy notions of individual uniqueness by emphasizing the utter materiality of the human form. Turner writes,

> "The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate... The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly psychological character, to which neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence... *They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society"* (Turner 1969, 99, my emphasis).

In the butoh dancer's training, the familiarity of the body is deconstructed. Hijikata drew influence from the early stages of developmental movement: "…an infant treats its hands as if they were not his own. He feels that his arm is not his. Here is hidden an important secret. The basis of butoh is enshrined here" (quoted in Kurihara 1997, 99).

Butoh techniques involve using the *butoh-fu* to embody all manner of material forms, summoning their properties within the body. Butoh images I encountered in lessons include air, water, mud, plants, animals, telephones, café ole… anything imaginable. In lessons with Ken Mai we were instructed to move like various plants and animals across the evolutionary chain. I distinctly remember the pain of several workshops where I ended up with a bruise on my chin from pulling myself across the floor like a worm. In a group butoh workshop I took in August of 2002 with SU-EN, a Hijikata-method butoh dancer, we were led through a series of exercises in which the body was felt to be made of rubber. In pairs and individually, we pulled and stretched this firm rubber of our skin and muscles, eventually trying to walk as if made of this solid substance. SU-EN called this exercise the "rubber struggle." The challenge was to truly feel the body to be made of another substance, to feel the emotions this substance gen-

[21] I talk here of liminal "states," but it is impossible to draw a sharp demarcating line between "liminal" and "non-liminal." In truth it is more of a continuum - between the extremely socially constructed (a big-name politician, perhaps) and the extremely liminal (a baby in the womb).

erated in the body, and how these emotions connected with the movement. As I constrained and stretched my body to struggle slowly across the floor, I felt a new understanding of the dense elasticity of rubber as felt from the inside. Hijikata described this process when he said "[In Butoh] we humans learn to see things from the perspective of an animal, insect, even inanimate objects. The road trodden every day is alive… we should value everything" (quoted in Klein, 54). Kurihara describes becoming a dirty wet rug in a workshop with Ashikawa Yôko: "I soon found it very liberating to become something meaningless and dirty – qualities I avoid in normal life. Embracing the negative enables you to discard your ordinary values and be more open" (Kurihara 1997, 131). In this way the embodiment exercises build an awareness of the interconnectedness between the elements of the outer world and the inner universe of the body.

The New Liminality

Moving beyond Turner's investigations of liminality, Susan Broadhurst outlines more specifically the traits of contemporary "liminal performance" (a new genre she proposes). While she does not mention butoh anywhere in her analysis (focusing instead on theatre, film, and music), she does expand Turner's framework to begin looking at how contemporary liminal practices differ from the liminal ritual of societies outside of modernity, and how they differ from other less liminal art forms. Broadhurst characterizes this new brand of postmodern liminal performance as:

> Corporeal; Chthonic; Technological; Heterogeneous; Experimental; Hybrid; Indeterminate; Intersemiotic; pointing to "content" only indirectly; and triggering "a feeling almost of awe somewhat akin to discomfort" (Broadhurst, 12-13).

Except for the technological (which often, but not always, conflicts with butoh's anti-modern impulse), here again we have a list of primary butoh characteristics. As an anti-symbolic dance form employing pastiche and constant metamorphosis, butoh frees itself from reducible meanings, and remains *intersemiotic* (moving between systems of meaning) and inherently *hybrid* (connecting these disparate systems).

In her book, Sandra Horton Fraleigh focuses on butoh's hybridity:

> Butoh anticipates a growing global amalgamation of previous distinctions: racial, cultural, and aesthetic. It shows Japan's historical/spiritual ties with other Asian countries in its contemplative movement modes. Butoh also unsettles traditional gender distinctions and East/West differences in its eclectic use of music and costumes. As the twenty-first century dawns, it is becoming more difficult to trace pure identities, and Butoh celebrates this fact even as it asserts a Japanese essence. Its beauty stems from its search for corporeal universals amid folk roots (Fraleigh, 3-4).

Butoh rejects the choreography of the body from the outside, asserting that dance must be born from within, from the *corporeal* (embodied) manifestation of sensory impulses. Butoh is unique among liminal art forms in its extreme focus on the body. In butoh, the body is the primary locus through which the socialization of the individual is deconstructed. To help this process butoh focuses on the *chthonic* (that coming from the earth) by asserting humans' inherent ecological connections with the soil. This includes Hijikata's use of a lower center of gravity in his later choreography, when he drew inspiration from the bow-legged posture of Japanese farmers who squat all day in the fields (Holborn, 9). The chthonic also surfaces in some butoh dancers' desire to 'return to the earth,' or to return to premodern times before society became estranged from the natural environment. Another method for recognizing the materiality of the body is to raise the audience's sense of danger. Especially in the early part of his career, Hijikata often set out to make the audience *uncomfortable*, assaulting the audience with grotesque imagery and subverting all attempts at interpretation. This sense of chaos carries over to the choreography itself: butoh performances are usually loosely structured, but the individual movements are often *indeterminate*, changing with every performance and every performer.

Transformation

Having established butoh's similarities with other liminal arts, we move now to investigate the intent of liminality in butoh performance. What does the creation of the liminal state enable the performers and the audience to do? Dialogue surrounding butoh often describes the goal of butoh practice as inherently transformative and purifying. Hijikata said butoh was a way to return to the natural state, to throw off all socialization. We have heard Ohno speak of regressing

all the way back to the womb. Butoh dancer Tanaka Min, quoted at the beginning of this perspective, dances "so that the self remains open-ended in its relation to the world" (quoted in Holborn, 48). Butoh dancers speak of returning to a state of undifferentiated awareness, a type of perpetual liminality, opening oneself to the point of crisis and eliminating all traces of socialization.

Certainly, few (if any) butoh practitioners make it this far, if in fact it is even possible. It is my sense that further discussion of butoh's potential for extreme liminality inevitably raises the difficult question of whether butoh can be used as a serious path of spiritual/moral development in addition to being an aesthetic art form. Some readily take butoh to this level, at least in speech. One figure does stand out who may have successfully realized butoh as a spiritual practice: Ohno Kazuo. Ohno is often described as "saintly," and is often pointed to by other butoh dancers as one who has fully embodied the principles of butoh in his very being.[22] Most butoh practitioners, meanwhile, remain like most religious practitioners – working towards union with the absolute, but still all too human in their attempts.

Watching Butoh

These material embodiment and transformation practices are ostensibly centered on expanding the liminal potential of the dancers, unlike the aesthetic devices considered earlier which focus more on creating a liminal experience in the audience. And yet, in butoh the divide between performers and audience is never very wide. In my experience the liminal states achieved onstage by the dancers creates a powerful energy that resonates out into the audience. The audience is then able to participate in the liminoid experience along with the dancers. This entails a subjective collapsing of space between the viewer and the performers, where time seems to stop and watching the dancer on stage results in the viewer's acute awareness of his or her own body. This sympathetic muscle-response is similar to the sports spectator who feels their hamstrings respond while watching a player run across the field.

For me this enhanced corporeal awareness leads to a focused yet openly aware state of consciousness very similar to that reached during long sitting meditation periods. The intensity of the meditative state achieved during a particular performance is directly correlated to how much I felt the performance to be

[22] As Edin Velez notes in the video documentary *Dance of Darkness*. (1989).

successful and/or "entertaining" – i.e., the quality and intensity of the dancing and the effectiveness of the choreography. This meditative state is cultivated through butoh's array of liminal aesthetic and corporeal techniques, which serve to calm the chattering intellect while focusing the senses. The extremely slow, repetitive motions that begin many butoh dances are the clearest example of a technique used to heighten the audience's concentration. After building this concentration, butoh choreographers will often play with the audience's focus, including great dynamic changes in the visual and audio stimulus. In visual flow this might mean a shift between harsh lighting and complete darkness. In audio this often means wild juxtapositions of music and big jumps in amplitude.

My favorite example of amplitude shift comes from the performance described at the beginning of this book, held in a large theatre near Tokyo Bay. In the fifteen or so minutes before the show, as we in the audience filed in and found our seats, the soft melodies of whales singing drifted at low volume through the auditorium. As the curtain time drew near, the lights went out, leaving us in complete darkness. Over the next five or so minutes, the whale song slowly became louder and louder. In the darkness, with nothing else to focus on, no other sounds to use as reference, there was no way to judge just how loud the songs were becoming. What started as calm underwater lullabies at high volume transformed into violent screaming, resonating deep within our lungs. And then, just as the scream felt like it could get no louder without the theatre crashing down on us, the sound suddenly vanished. And then there was silence. Staring into the darkness, ears ringing, slowly we noticed a small white figure inching out slowly onto the stage…

One interesting variation I noticed watching my girlfriend watch butoh dance is that rather than entering a meditative state, she *sleeps* during the best performances! Or rather, she moves in and out of sleep, pushed by the performance to that very edge of consciousness between sleeping and waking life. Interestingly, she also tends to fall asleep during sitting meditation. I was excited to find a mention of this phenomenon in Bonnie Sue Stein's consideration of the butoh audience:

> Audiences are drawn in by the direct and raw emotions. I have seen spectators staring with wide eyes, and I have seen them sleeping – which I consider an escape from the spectacle rather than boredom. In Japan, especially at noh drama, a hypnogogic

> "dozing" is an acceptable way of taking in the performance. This state is a version of "attention" usually not found in the west (Stein 1986, 114).

So perhaps this "hypnogogic dozing" is an autonomic response to the sensory intensity created by butoh performance. But is it really merely an escape, a recovery from the intensity of the experience? Like all-night Balinese gamelan performances, where audience members will slip in and out of sleep during the performance, butoh taps the liminal space between waking and sleeping, the conscious and unconscious, to open up expansive areas of awareness and communicate directly with the deep levels of the viewer's consciousness.

Thus the liminal practice of butoh creates a profound level of interaction between performers and audience, taking place in a space of fluid chaos far outside the habitual realm of everyday life.

Final Writhing

Fluid chaos does not exist in a vacuum – rather, this chaos slides alongside and within the rational, structured side of life. Both sides give birth to one another. In this book we have looked at some of the structures upon which butoh's chaos festered: at the discourse surrounding the form, at the peculiarities of Hijikata's life as a dancer, at the relationship of butoh to gender and national identity, at the spread of butoh from Hijikata out into the world, and finally, at how butoh functions to disrupt the intellectual mind and reach into the depths of liminality. We have built a window to frame the elusive, rebellious, ever-changing substance of the dance. This window, the recognizable form of butoh history and technique, is only a pathway to something much deeper: the part of life that lies in the darkness, hidden and unspeakable. The chaos that underlies all our attempts at reason.

For a last glimpse into this unknown, we must turn one more time to Ohno Kazuo. Ohno is a vital figure in the development of butoh dance, and here at the end of this book I realize I have been unable to give him the full attention he deserves. But Ohno is important. Working with Hijikata from the very beginning, and fiercely dedicated to the work, he is the living embodiment of butoh philosophy and practice. He dances his way past the habitual fears and compulsions of the intellectual self to a world where he can embody endless amounts of suffering and joy. He does not stop to intellectualize, distancing himself from the complexity of the world as it is. Instead he remains aware and open, bringing the whole universe into his body. In 1997 Ohno published *Keiko no Kotoba* (Words of Workshop), a collection of stories and aphorisms told during his long-running weekly butoh workshops in Yokohama. Here is my favorite:

考えてやっていると、見ていてわかる。次はああしよう、こうしようと考えながらそれを隠そうとしても百パーセント、隅から隅まで伝わってしまう。だから自分のやることに責任を持って。でたらめでもいいから。

わかりました、何がわかったのか。そう言われると困るんだけれども、わからないままやってみる。わからないけれども感動した。そのために躍っているですよ。だから、わかりましたと言われると困ってしまう。頭で考えるのもいいんだけども躍るときは、それを全部忘れてしまう。

> When you move after first thinking about it, one look and they will know. Even if you try to hide that you are thinking of what to do next, you can't help but betray it 100% from corner to corner. So take responsibility for however you move. It's okay if it's haphazard.
>
> "I understand" – what do you understand? If that is asked you are in trouble. But just try to act without understanding. You don't understand, but you feel. This is why we dance. When we say we "understand," then we are in trouble. It's okay to use your mind to think, but when it is time to dance, forget everything (Ohno, 15, my translation).

For Ohno, butoh is a way past the limits of intellectual understanding. As Shinichi Momo Koga put it in the introduction, "Do we live in the age of reason? If so, all the more reason to be un-reasonable" (12).

Butoh is an unreasonable foil to an overly reasonable world. The spirit of butoh is perpetual revolt, an action against the estrangement of the self from the dirty realities of life as it is. This revolt always takes place in the moment, in the dancer moving - without understanding, without preconception, but honestly and openly. It does not matter so much what the movement is, or what it is called. What we have is the fertile darkness of unleashed creativity. The legions of butoh dancers set out not to find answers to life's unanswerable questions, but to forever question the questions. They reveal for us what the reasonable ones keep hidden.

Hijikata said it best:

> "Now I am a frog, far away from the shadow of an idea…" (quoted in Bergmark, 6).

❦

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