The *Butoh* Body Performed: Aesthetic and embodiment in *butoh* dance

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ABSTRACT

The *Butoh* Body Performed: Aesthetic and embodiment in *butoh* dance

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The Japanese dance style of *butoh* provides a rich co-mingling of traditional Japanese dance movements with a new cultural and artistic expression developed in the post-war avant-garde period. The focus of this project will be an analysis of the intersection of this post-war aesthetic with theories of dance and movement in *butoh* in order to more fully understand the role of the dancer as a vessel for embodying meaning in performance and the role of the body in *butoh* dance to communicate cultural and emotional meaning. By examining the writings of *butoh* originators, this project explores the various elements of an original *butoh* aesthetic and examines that performance aesthetic in its relation to forging an emotional connection with its audience. By drawing on concepts and approaches from the fields of kinesics and phenomenology, this project explains the human capacity to embody meaning, how this is achieved, and how that relates to the communicative goals of *butoh* performance as laid out by originators of the dance. The project concludes by examining the intersection of aesthetic ideals with theories of human movement and embodiment in an analysis of the recent performance *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth*.

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Introduction

The History and Development of *Butoh* in Japan

Project Overview

The Japanese dance style of *butoh* 舞踏 provides a rich co-mingling of traditional Japanese dance movements with a new cultural and artistic expression developed in the post-war avant-garde period.[1] The focus of this project will be an analysis of the intersection of this post-war aesthetic with theories of dance and movement in *butoh* in order to more fully understand the role of the dancer as a vessel for embodying cultural meaning in performance and the role of the body in communication of that meaning.

The historical context from which *butoh* developed coupled with the grotesque and violent nature of the performance and the ambiguous meanings and varying interpretations of the dance in motion have made *butoh* the subject of many academic pursuits. Much of the literature on *butoh* has focused on one or more of the following concepts: a contextualization of the dance form within the avant-garde

[1] The term *butoh* is made up of the characters 舞, meaning "to dance," and 踏, meaning "to step." Using the Hepburn system of Romanization, as I have throughout this paper, the term 舞踏 would be rendered as *butō*. However, in the Japanese language there are cultural connotations attached to various terms for dance. In this case the term *butō* has a cultural counterpart *buyō* 舞踊 (舞 here being the same character as above, "to dance," and the character 踊, also meaning "to dance"). *Buyō* is used to refer to more traditional dances that are native to Japan (i.e. kabuki, noh, etc.); *butō* on the other hand, is used to refer to dances appropriated from foreign cultures, most commonly used to refer to Western-style dances (i.e. modern dance, ballroom dances, etc.). Because of this cultural distinction, and because the term *butō* has come to refer to not only non-native dance styles, but also as a shorthand reference to the avant-garde dance style *ankoku butoh*, I have differentiated the Romanization of the words as follows: *butō*, italicized and with a macron, is used to demarcate dance styles appropriated from foreign or Western sources, while *butoh*, rendered without a macron, refers in shorthand to the dance style *ankoku butoh*.

and its historical circumstances; an explication of the development of *butoh* into a fully fledged dance form through the collaboration of Hijikata Tatsumi 土方巽(1928-1986) and Ohno Kazuo 大野一雄(1906-2010); or an exploration of the aesthetic of *butoh* in regard to its popularization in post-war Japan. I intend to add to this corpus of material by situating *butoh* within its post-war historical context, exploring the development of a specifically *butoh* aesthetic, and by interpreting *butoh* as a cultural form. I will do this by using theories of dance centering on cultural identity, the body as a vessel for meaning, and concepts of embodied experience. Through this exploration I hope to combine movement theories and dance aesthetic in an innovative way to illuminate the dancing body in *butoh* as a vehicle used to communicate a new Japanese artistic identity, incite a cultural revolution, and ultimately transcend both popular Western modern dance forms and traditional Japanese dance forms.

I will structure the work into three parts in addition to the introduction and conclusion. My introduction will illuminate the origins of *butoh* and the collaboration between Hijikata and Ohno that led to its development. I explain the historical context of the post-war avant-garde that gave rise to the cultural climate from which *butoh* developed and discuss influential contributors to the various avant-garde movements that helped shape *butoh*. Multiple books have been written on the lives and philosophies of Hijikata and Ohno; however, because the personal histories of both men had profound influence on their individual styles and ultimately contributed to the *butoh* aesthetic I intend to touch on their personal

experiences in order to give the reader a more solid foundation for understanding the material covered in chapter one.

In my first chapter I will discuss the complex aesthetic of *butoh*. I will start with the early development of the *butoh* aesthetic and its manifestation in performances created by Hijikata and Ohno as individuals, and through their collaboration. I will tie certain aspects of the *butoh* aesthetic into the personal experiences of Hijikata and Ohno covered in my introduction. Using the intersection of Hijikata's and Ohno's experiences with their dance styles, I will introduce the concept of dance as a vessel for embodied experience and sensational knowledge. I will collect information from the *Hijikata Tatsumi zenshū* 土方巽全集 as well as published interviews with Ohno Kazuo and, drawing on this material, I will explain the grotesque aesthetic of *butoh* in relation to the post-war mentality of the 1950's and 60's. From there I will explore the evolution of the *butoh* aesthetic as the dance style changed from an underground movement to a widely practiced and highly developed artistic form. When looking at a modern *butoh* aesthetic I plan to use personal interviews with, and collected writings by modern *butoh* practitioners.

In my second chapter I will discuss theories of movement and dance in relation to *butoh*. I will first examine what constitutes the non-quotidian movement we call dance and clearly define *butoh* within this framework. By examining *butoh* movement using a phenomenological framework I intend to explore what differentiates dance from other forms of human movement. Much of what is considered dance theory has been appropriated from other fields of research and applied to the world of dance. Thus, drawing on approaches from anthropology,

kinesics, and phenomenology, I will explore the kinesthetic origins of the human body in motion as well as embodied meaning in the performance of *butoh* dance. In order to accomplish this, I will use ideas of signification in movement appropriated from the field of kinesics, as well as concepts from scholars who approach the study of human movement and dance from an existentialist phenomenological perspective. I also intend to use the writings of Hijikata Tatsumi in tandem with recorded interviews from other *butoh* practitioners to discuss the concept of embodied culture and knowledge specifically in relation to the development of *butoh* and an original *butoh* aesthetic. Using this approach I will show how meaning and culture are embodied in *butoh* movement and performance.

My third and final chapter will be an analysis of *butoh* performance. In the analysis of the performance I will bring together the aesthetics discussed in chapter one and the theoretical frameworks explained in chapter two and apply both to the *butoh* performance *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth*, performed in Seattle, Washington on February 20, 2016. By combining the concepts outlined in chapters one and two I hope to expand our understanding of the dancer's body in *butoh* as both a vessel for embodied experience and a medium for signification and communication.

The Post War Avant-Garde and *Shingeki* Theater

Following the end of the Second World War, Japan experienced a boom in intellectual and artistic experiments that defined the post-war avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s. Since the early 1900s, Western ideals of beauty in dance,

including line, center of gravity, and proportion, as well as theatrical constructions, like the proscenium arch, had been slowly overtaking traditional Japanese performance aesthetics. During the avant-garde movements of the 1950s, Japanese writers, artists, performers, and choreographers struggled against these Western ideals of beauty that had seeped into various artistic forms—from literature to art, as well as theater and dance—and attempted to re-establish a Japanese national, intellectual, and artistic identity

Western-style dance was first introduced to Japan in 1912 when Giovanni V. Rossi was hired by the Imperial Theater in Tokyo to teach European operatic theater and creative ballet.[2] Four years later, Ishii Baku 石井漠 (1886-1962), one of Rossi's most talented students, became the first Japanese dancer to perform a Western-style piece in public.[3] Over the next five decades, Western-style theatrical productions became widely performed, and Western theatrical and dance aesthetics grew to overshadow those native to Japan.

The post-war avant-garde gave birth to groups and individuals who sought to confront and transcend Western influences with artistic experiments ranging in media from literature, to canvas, to street performance and dance. One of the most productive and provocative artists to come out of the post-war avant-garde movements was Terayama Shūji 寺山修司 (1935-1983). A poet, photographer,

[2] Giovanni V. Rossi was a famous Italian ballet master and choreographer who worked in Tokyo from 1912 to 1918. He introduced Western-style dance forms, like ballet and modern dance, to Japan during this time. Jukka O. Miettinen, "Modern Dance in East and Southeast Asia," in *The Modernist World*, Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 43.
[3] The dance performed by Ishii Baku was a "dance poem" inspired by the work of W.B. Yeats. Susan Blakeley Klein, *Ankoku Butō: The premodern and postmodern influences on the dance of utter darkness* (Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1988), 7.

writer, film director and dramatist, he particularly influenced theater and in 1967 began his own theater troupe called Tenjō Sajiki 天井桟敷. Active between 1967 and 1983, the troupe's performances were defined by Terayama's experimentalism, the erotic grotesque, and social provocation. Another prominent figure of this time was Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925-1970). One of the most well-known literary figures of the time, his work drew from both modern and traditional aesthetics, displayed overt sexual themes, and emphasized death as well as political change. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature twice, but is most notably remembered for his ritual *seppuku* after what is known as the *Mishima jiken* 三島事件, or "the Mishima incident," a failed coup d'état in 1970.[4] His work had great influence on the theatrical movements of the time and he frequently wrote for the major *shingeki* 新劇 troupes. His work *Forbidden Colors* (*Kinjiki*) 禁色, published in 1951, became the partial inspiration for the identically-named performance, created and performed by Hijikata Tatsumi in 1959, that was later deemed to be the original performance of the dance style that became known as *ankoku butō* 暗黒舞踏.

Shingeki, or "new theater", was one of the most active movements in the years following WWII and was the most dominant form of reactionary theater for writers and performers of the time. *Shingeki* consciously sought to deconstruct the Western theatrical norms that had become integrated into popular Japanese theater through exhibitions that both reveled in the violent, grotesque, and orgiastic potential of performance, and worked to incorporate the normally passive audience

[4] Nobel Prize Nomination Database, http://www.nobelprize.org/nomination/archive/show_people.php?id=12680 (accessed March 27, 2016).

as an active participant in the works. The dance style *butoh* developed in large part from the reactionary attitudes and movement experiments of *shingeki* and draws heavily on the artistic philosophy and ideology of post-war avant-garde movements. *Butoh* developed as an underground, revolutionary, and experimental dance style; shrouded in mystery, emphatic of the grotesque, and ever evolving, *butoh* has expanded to be a renowned performance style, with practitioners and thriving communities based around the world. As a complete treatment of the *shingeki* movement is far beyond the scope of this project, I will focus on the development of the *butoh* aesthetic and examine the movement and philosophy of *butoh* through ideas of cultural embodiment, and movement theory.

The Creators and Creation of *Butoh* in Japan

The first instance of *butoh*, originally called *ankoku butoh*, or "the dance of utter darkness," was a performance created by dancer and choreographer Hijikata Tatsumi. However, *butoh* as an articulated and established style developed out of a collaboration between Hijikata and his contemporary, Ohno Kazuo, to create an explicitly Japanese dance style that confronted and transcended both Western modern dance forms as well as traditional Japanese dance forms.

Hijikata Tatsumi, the tenth child in a family of eleven, was born Yoneyama Kunio 米山九日生 and was raised in a small farming village in Akita prefecture. As a child Hijikata knew great poverty, and in his autobiographical work *Ailing Dancer* (*Yameru mai hime*) 病める舞姫 he recollects aspects of this poverty like the day that his older sister was sold into prostitution:

"One day, as I looked around the house I realized that all the furniture was gone. Furniture and household utensils are things you can't help but pay attention to. And around that time, my older sister, who was always sitting on the porch, disappeared too. I figured perhaps this is just something older sisters do – suddenly disappear from the house."[5]

His older sister had been ever-present in raising him and numerous authors have pinpointed the devastation Hijikata felt at her death as a motivating force behind the development of his dance style. In a speech titled "Wind daruma" (*Kaze daruma*) 風だるま, Hijikata evokes his sister and the continued existence of her spirit living inside of and animating him:[6]

I say this often, but I have a sister living inside of my body. When I am feverishly creating a *butoh* piece she rips at the darkness inside my body and eats more than is needed. When she stands up inside my body, I sit down without thinking. Me falling is the same as her falling.[7]

In addition to the experience of his sister dying, Hijikata's experiences growing up in poverty in the Tōhoku region and living through the Second World War greatly influenced the aesthetic of his dance style. He grew up in a farming village and found that that environment produced a specific movement quality in the people who lived there. Hijikata strove to incorporate in his dance the movement quality of his

[5]「ふと家のなかに目をむけると調度類がなくなっていることに気がづくこともあった。調度類や什器には注意を払っていなければいけない。その頃から、縁側にいつもすわっていた姉がふいなくなっていた。姉とは、突然に家のなかからいなくなるものだ、と私は思っていた。」 Hijikata Tatsumi, *Yameru mai hime* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 2011), 89-90. All translations contained within this work are mine except where otherwise noted.

[6] Kaze daruma was a speech given by Hijikata the night before the Tokyo *Butoh* festival in February 1985. For a full transcript of the speech see Hijikata Tatsumi, "Kaze daruma," in *Hijikata Tatsumi zenshū* vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kawada Shobō Shinsha, 2005), 110-122.

[7] 私はよく言うんですが、私は私の身体の中に一人の姉を住まわしているんです。私が舞踏作品を作るべく熱中しますと、私の体のなかの闇黒をむしって彼女はそれを必要以上に食べてしまうんですよ。彼女が私の体の中で立ち上がると、私は思わず座りこんでしまう。私が転ぶことは彼女が転ぶことである。Hijikata, "Kaze daruma," in *HTZS* vol. 2, 120.

hometown natives. Hijikata's specific movement aesthetic, and the trademark emphasis on death and darkness came to be defining characteristics of Hijikata's *butoh*. In the same speech, Hijikata said:

> I would like to make the dead gestures inside my body die once more, and I would like to make the dead themselves die once more. A person who has died once can die over and over again inside my body…that's why they are my teachers; the dead are my *butoh* teachers.[8]

Hijikata embodied death in his dance by channeling his deceased sister and playing the part of an animated corpse. He drew his inspiration from the earth, and his vision of *butoh* was a return of the broken, dead and decaying human body to that from whence it came.

If Hijikata represents the darkness of *butoh*, then it is said Ohno Kazuo represents the light. Quoting from a personal interview she had with Ohno, Susan Blakeley Klein tells that "Ohno himself has said that the creative energy that produced Ankoku Butō was the outcome of the collaboration of two men with personalities on the extreme ends of the spectrum; Ohno sees himself as the light, Hijikata as the dark, both poles of which were necessary to create the energy that is *butoh*."[9]

Ohno Kazuo was born in Hakodate village, sharing a similar Northern Japanese heritage with Hijikata. He was the oldest of thirteen children and also suffered great poverty throughout his youth. In a lecture Ohno delivered at Cornell

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[8] こういうことは私の身体の中で死んだ身振り、それをもう一回死なせてみたい、死んだ人をまるで死んでいる様にもう一回やらせてみたい、ということなんですよ。一度死んだ人が私の身体の中で何度死んでもいい…だから教師なんですね、死者は私の舞踏教師なんです。Hijikata, "Kaze daruma," in *HTZS* vol. 2, 119-120.

[9] Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 6.

University he recalled his youngest sibling dying because his family did not have enough money to take them to the hospital.[10]

Athletically gifted as a child, Ohno attended the Japan Athletic College (*Nihon tai'iku daigaku*)日本体育大学 from 1926 to 1929, and found his early calling as a physical education teacher at the Kantō Gakuin 関東学院 high school shortly after graduating from his university. Ohno began his immersion into dance in 1933 at the Ishii Baku dance school in preparation for a post at the Soshin Baptist Girls' High School in Yokohama. After spending a year under Ishii Baku, Ohno began to practice German expressionist dance under Miya Sōko 宮躁子 and continued to study under her and her husband Eguchi Takaya 江口隆哉 until drafted into the Japanese armed forces in 1938.[11] He served in a reconnaissance unit and was, for the most part, removed from engaging in actual combat. He spent a year in an internment camp in New Guinea before being returned to Japan in 1946. Upon his return to Japan, Ohno resumed his lessons with Miya and continued his study of German expressionist dance.

Ohno and Hijikata first met in 1954 while performing together in *Crow* クロ (a play on the Japanese word *kuro* 黒 or black), a German style modern dance performance choreographed by Andō Mitsuko 安藤三子. Ohno and Hijikata began their collaboration creating "dance experiences" in 1959, performances that would later become known under the heading of *ankoku butoh*.

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[10] Ohno Kazuo, "The Origins of Ankoku Butoh: The dance of utter darkness." Lecture recorded at Cornell University, November 25, 1985. Audiotape.

[11] Ausdruckstanz, or German expressionist dance, was a dance movement that grew in popularity in the early 1900's as a challenge to the stagnation of traditional ballet. This is the dance tradition Miya and Eguchi taught at their school in Japan.

While Hijikata reveled in the darkness of death, ugly beauty, sacrifice, and mud, Ohno found his inspiration in spirituality, the giving of life, and the perpetuation of the spirit. Ohno converted to Christianity before being drafted into the Japanese armed forces, and his work stemmed in great part from this spirituality. Ohno felt that the dance embodied one's soul, or spirit, and that through dance one could also channel the spirit of others. Below is an excerpt of Ohno discussing the importance of the soul in movement from *Kazuo Ohno's World: from within and without*, translated by John Barrett:

> Our souls are continually in motion; they divide, they scatter, they proliferate themselves. Sometimes they grow bigger, at other times smaller and so forth…There's an infinity of ways (sic) in which you can move from that spot over there to here. But do your movements allow us to feel your spirit? Have you figured those movements out in your head? Or are we seeing you soul in motion? Even that fleck on the tip of your nail embodies your soul. That's why I am forever telling you to take great care of every single movement; every single stride you make is carrying your soul.[12]

Not only did Ohno believe that every movement carried your soul, but that by channeling the souls of others you could give them a temporary rebirth, or an appearance in the realm of the living. Ohno was most famously inspired to dance by the flamenco dancer known as La Argentina.[13] In his work *Words of Workshop* (*Keiko no kotoba*)稽古の言葉, Ohno speaks of his relationship with La Argentina, and in one of his most well known performances, *Admiring La Argentina* (*Ra aruhenchīna shō*)ラ・アルヘンチーナ頌, performed fifty years after he first saw her dance, Ohno channels her spirit and dances in her memory. Below is Ohno

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[12] John Barrett trans., *Kazuo Ohno's World: from without and within* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 209.

[13] Antonia Mercè y Luque (1890-1936), stage name La Argentina, was a flamenco dancer famed for her use of neoclassical Spanish dance in theatrical performances.

remembering the moment when La Argentina re-inspired him to dance fifty years after he first encountered her performance:

> La Argentina and I have been together, always, for more than fifty years… Then it came from New York. La Argentina appeared in a small painting with a small smile… I saw it and thought to myself this is La Argentina, and it was a picture, but La Argentina spoke to me. "Mr. Ohno, please dance. Please dance for me." While I was looking at the picture I couldn't look away, my heart, my spirit, and the picture all said, "Please dance."… And at that time the next words she said were "Mr. Ohno, I dance, so let's please dance together."[14]

Ohno felt the presence of La Argentina buried in his soul and often channeled her spirit in his performances.

In addition to the power of the soul and spirit in dance, Ohno believed that to dance was life itself; dance is the creation of life. In blending the two concepts Ohno often channeled his mother's spirit, expressing through his body the love and emotions of his own mother. In his *Words of Workshop*, Ohno states, "The origins of dance come from within the mother's womb. The roots of my dance come from inside that womb, that universal womb."[15] The blending of his spirituality, the channeling of the spiritual other, his assimilation of the feminine in the form of his mother, and his natural physical ability made Ohno's dance something more than *butoh* and something more than modern dance. It produced a movement quality

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[14] 私は、アルヘンチーナとTOGETHERですよ、いつも。もう五十年間…ニューヨークからね。小さな、にこっと笑ったアルヘンチーナが載った、小さなチラシを送ってきた…あ、アルヘンチーナだ、と思って見ていると、アルヘンチーナが、写真ですよ、私に語りかけてくれた。「大野さん、あなたは踊ってください。私に踊ってください」。写真をこうして見ながらさ、目が離れないで、心が、魂が、写真が「踊ってください」…そのときに、次の言葉が「大野さん、私が踊るから一緒に踊ってください」とこう言った。Ohno Kazuo, *Keiko no kotoba* (Tokyo: Firumuaato-sha, 1997), 135.

[15]舞踏の場というのは、お母さんのおなかの中だ。胎内、宇宙の胎内、私の踊りの場は胎内、おなかの中だ。Ohno, *Keiko no kotoba*, 20.

that was antithetical to, yet complementary and enhancing of Hijikata's enchantment with darkness, and a return to the Earth.

It is clear to see in the dance styles of *butoh*'s originators that the dead live on in the living; Hijikata carried with him his dead sister, and Ohno channeled the spirits of his mother and La Argentina. Both leaders had their own unique styles and incredibly charismatic stage presences; but it was the contention of their philosophies on life, dance, and choreographic style that culminated in a dance form defined by its exploration of human violence, sexuality, obsession with death and the spirit, and, in their own words, "a lack of technical virtuosity."

In the following chapters I will elaborate on the aesthetic cultivated by *butoh* practitioners, examine this aesthetic through the theoretical lens of embodying culture and performing memory, and bring the two concepts together with concrete examples in an analysis of the performance *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth*.

Chapter 1

Aesthetic of *Butoh*: Transcending the modern and the traditional

Introduction

As discussed above, the original *butoh* aesthetic was developed through the collaboration between Hijikata and Ohno as a means of opposing Western ideals of performance and beauty. It is widely accepted that Hijikata's work *Forbidden Colors* represents the first public performance of *butoh* and as such set the standard for *butoh* aesthetic around the world.

Forbidden Colors was performed at the "All Japan Art Dance Association: Sixth Newcomers Dance Recital" (*Zen nihon geijutsu buyō kyōkai—dai 6 kai shinjin buyō kōen*) 全日本芸術舞踊協会・第 6 回新人舞踊公演 on May 24, 1959.[16] The work draws its inspiration primarily from two sources. The title "Kinjiki" is taken from Mishima Yukio's novel of the same title, and, although Hijikata's work shares themes of violence, darkness, and homoerotic love with Mishima's work, the content of the dance seems to have derived more from Hijikata's readings of the French author Jean Genet.[17] Over the years *Forbidden Colors* has been distilled into a sensationalized handful of its more memorable moments and has been characterized as a radical performance that pushed the boundaries of theater and dance. However, Bruce Baird reminds us that to sensationalize *Forbidden Colors* can

[16] Bruce Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh: Dancing in a pool of gray grits* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17.
[17] Jean Genet (1910– 1986) was a French author well known for his subversion of moral values, celebration of beauty in evil, and use of criminal characters as icons.

lead to a misunderstanding of the historical context within which the performance was developed. Hijikata was very much a product of his time, and even before the debut performance of *Forbidden Colors*, the modern dance world in Japan was characterized by avant-garde artists who explored eroticism, violence, and evil in their performances.[18]

Forbidden Colors was a fifteen-minute duet performed by Hijikata (then 31 years old) and Ohno Kazuo's son, Ohno Yoshito 大野慶人 (21 years old), in which they loosely narrated homoerotic encounters between a Man (Hijikata) and a Young Man (Yoshito).[19] The dancers performed the work in near silence with some parts of the work accompanied by a soundtrack of moaning, heavy breathing, and harmonica music. The lighting was concentrated downstage left and fluctuated throughout the performance so that at times the dancers were clearly visible, and at others they performed in near darkness. The two men danced around the stage, the Man chasing the Young Man, until they met in center stage. Here the Man handed the Young Man a live chicken, the chicken flapped to escape, but the Young Man clutched it to his chest. The Young Man held the chicken between his legs and sank to the floor where he suffocated it. At this moment the audience became outraged and numerous people are said to have walked out of the venue. The two men lay on the floor to mime homosexual intercourse as the lights came down and the audience was forced to peer into the darkness to try to see what was happening.[20]

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[18] Bruce Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh*, 15-16.
[19] Ohno Yoshito, born in 1938, is the son of Ohno Kazuo. He is often referred to as Yoshito, while his father is referred to as Ohno in order to avoid confusion.
[20] For a more complete theatrical description of *Forbidden Colors* see Bruce Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh*, 17-20.

Hijikata's performance emphasized stillness, as he and his partner moved slowly around the stage. The performance as a whole was designed to shock, reveling in pain and violence—especially the closing scenes in which the chicken is suffocated and then again when the two men act out the sodomizing of the Young Man to a soundtrack of grunts, moans, and heavy breathing—and breaking free from social norms that did not allow for overt sexuality and violence to be portrayed on stage. The suffocation of the chicken led to audience outrage, but those who stomached the sacrifice were drawn deeper into the performance by a culpability of their passivity in viewing these acts. The work received great criticism for pushing the boundaries of modern dance theater, which ultimately led to Hijikata, Ohno and others to leave the All Japan Art Dance Association to pursue more artistic freedom.

Although *Forbidden Colors* set the standard for *butoh* performances, today's *butoh* audiences would likely not find it appealing. Many authors have written on the subject of *Forbidden Colors* and common themes emerge from the analyses of the performance. The work has been described as being "dead set against giving the audience a pleasurable experience," and much of Hijikata's early work is characterized as being lengthy, irrational, and intended to bore.[21] The *butoh* aesthetic, created by Hijikata and Ohno in their attempt to subvert Western-style dance norms, actively sought to remove socially constructed symbolic representations of emotion and story in their movement, refused the use of music, and probed taboo subjects through an exploration of human violence, darkness, sexuality, and spirituality. For *butoh*, the primary means of confronting Western

[21] Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 25.

ideals of performance, art, and culture in post-war Japan was by subverting mainstream society's ideals of beauty and identity through a unique grotesque aesthetic.

On the Grotesque

The use of the grotesque in *butoh* has been a defining characteristic of the performance style since its inception. The performance of *butoh* itself seems to exist in a grotesque liminal space created by its obsession with death, taboo subject matter, lighting, movement, and various uses of makeup. The philosophy that the performance should be composed of movements created from the dancer's inner world and that the story should have no scripted meaning but instead evoke emotions and memories from the audience lends itself to the use of grotesque. The grotesque is characterized by its ability to simultaneously present two or more meanings. Grotesqueries simultaneously require us to define them, while they seem to elude definition. They do not settle easily into our predefined categories, and it is precisely this that allows *butoh* to pursue its philosophical ideals through the use of the grotesque.[22]

The term "grotesque realism" and its application to the "grotesque body" were both coined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his work *Rabelais and his World*.[23] Bakhtin's

[22] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of contradiction in art and literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3.
[23] For more on the grotesque body see Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Grotesque Usage of the Body and its Sources," in *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 303-367.

grotesque realism is used to explore the unappealing corporeal aspects—openings, orifices, and disfigurations—of the material body:

> Grotesque realism images the body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish. It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices (mouth, flared nostrils, anus) yawning wide and its lower regions (belly, legs, feet, buttocks, and genitals) given priority over its upper regions (head, 'spirit', reason).[24]

As discussed in more depth below, the *butoh* aesthetic strives to incorporate many elements outlined in relation to grotesque realism. Many works of *butoh* emphasize the crippled, broken, and decaying human body, and *butoh* originator Hijikata often wrote of the human body as a corpse and a desire to become crippled. We can even see in *butoh* performances today the aesthetic tendencies towards exploring disabled, deformed, and broken human bodies.

The use of the grotesque body in *butoh* allows the material body to exist in an undefined liminal space in our predefined categories for understanding dance and movement, which allows the body to take on multiple meanings, and gives *butoh* practitioners a means of creating movement that supersedes signification in communication and often incorporates contradictory images in a single moment. The use of the body in this way is characteristic of the intention of *butoh* to create a form of communication that speaks directly to audience memories and emotions in order to create powerful theatrical experiences.

The use of Grotesque and Other Elements in *Butoh*

[24] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 9.

As discussed above, the original performances that defined a clear *butoh* aesthetic were often characterized by their treatment of taboo subjects such as death, sexuality, violence, deformity and a preoccupation with nature and spirituality. Traditional Japanese theatrical and dance traditions emphasized the use of proper form and took great care to perfectly preserve techniques by passing them down through family lineages as specialized *waza* 技 ("techniques"). The traditional arts in Japan also incorporated a smooth beauty to their movements. Many performance styles use slow, deliberate movements, and even when the movements are fast, they remain highly stylized and steeped with centuries of somewhat esoteric tradition. Compared to the traditional Japanese performance aesthetic, *butoh* stood out as radically different and as such was motivated to change the acceptable performance aesthetic.

Butoh practitioners and choreographers have developed and appropriated a number of elements that are used to define and enhance the grotesque aesthetic cultivated in early performances. By incorporating traditional performance elements stripped of their codified meaning, exploring taboo and dark subject matter, and using unrefined movement in *butoh* performances, early *butoh* practitioners were able to assert a new Japanese artistic identity, confront and transcend established theatrical norms, and create performances that forged deep and affective connections for both dancers and audience members.

Lack of Technique and Development of a Movement Vocabulary

Both Hijikata and Ohno were trained in Western-style dances, such as ballet and modern dance, which emphasize specific technical virtues in order to achieve an aesthetic based on geometric proportion, precision, and lightness. While training in Western dance styles, both Hijikata and Ohno were met with a distinctly orientalist perspective that their bodies, meaning Japanese bodies, were misshapen, deformed, and ill adept at performing Western-style dances.

These criticisms that painted the Japanese body as lesser than the Western body were part of the catalyst that inspired Hijikata and Ohno to work towards the creation of *butoh*. One major aspect of *butoh* performance that persists even into modern choreography is an emphasis on the use of simple movements and improvised choreography, while maintaining an aversion to technical movements beyond the scope of what a dancer can achieve without extensive dance training.

Ohno, who had a powerful stage presence, emphasized the use of charisma and the channeling of the spirit to give meaning to movement. In his *Words of Workshop*, Ohno says:

> When you dance, the spirit takes priority. When humans walk do they think of their feet? There's not a single person who does. When a child is called over by their mother, they move like this, right? Life is just like that. It is never stationary.[25]

Ohno's emphasis on the spirit as the guiding force of his dance enabled him to perform a dance that was not centered on form, but instead centered on feeling which then gave rise to movement that, although technically considered simple in

[25] 踊るときには、魂が先行する。人間が歩くときは、足のことを考えますか。誰も考える人はいない。子どもは、こっちえおいで、と呼ばれて、おかあさん、と、こういくでしょう。命は、いつもそういうものですよ。じっとしていない。Ohno, *Keiko no kotoba*, 83.

comparison to modern dance and ballet, produced powerful performances that could affect an emotional reaction in entire audiences.

Hijikata also frequently spoke of the need to abandon technique. Movement on stage in *butoh* needed to be open to, and simultaneously resistant to critical interpretation. By using movement that is resistant to interpretation, *butoh* practitioners hope to bypass the process of intellectualizing movement and distilling it into symbolic representations, and by doing so reach the audience in a direct channel of emotional communication.[26] One of Hijikata's goals in his performances was to allow movement to emanate from the body organically such that he hoped to do away with traditional dance technique. According to Hijikata's philosophy of dance, choreography and technical movement should not be imposed on the body—any movement imposed on the body from the outside is empty—movement should flow outward from within in order to be movement worthwhile. Hijikata wrote:

> In other forms of dance, such as flamenco or classical dance, the movements are derived from a fixed technique; they are imposed from the outside and are conventional in form. In my case, it's the contrary; my dance is far removed from conventions and techniques…it is the unveiling of my inner life.[27]

By dancing from within, drawing on his experiences, and not emphasizing the technical virtuosity espoused in other forms of traditional Japanese dance as well as modern Western dance, Hijikata allowed form to manifest itself from within himself instead of attempting to impose form from the outside.[28] To manifest the dance from

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[26] Klein, *Ankoku butō*, 28.
[27] Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of darkness* (Tokyo: Shufunotomo Co., 1988), 185.
[28] Of course by the time Hijikata began to develop his *butoh* dance aesthetic he had already been trained in both ballet and modern dance, a point that surely figured into the movement quality of his own dance—whether because he was unconsciously incorporating movements from those dances, or

within oneself in *butoh* is to dance one's feelings. As Ohno puts it, "The soul is the prime mover in dance," so that to dance from within is to bare your soul.[29] Regardless of where the movement is appropriated from, to dance from within means to use those movements to express your soul. As Ohno says:

> There's an infinity of ways (sic) in which you can move from that spot over there to here. But do your movements allow us to feel your spirit? Have you figured those movements out in your head? Or are we seeing your soul in motion? Even that fleck on the tip of your nail embodies your soul. That's why I'm forever telling you to take great care of every single moment; every single stride you make is carrying your soul.[30]

Because *butoh* practitioners rejected traditional dance techniques and strove to resist symbolic representation in their movement, in order to develop a vocabulary of movement, *butoh* forerunners were forced to appropriate movements from a multitude of other dance forms. This unique context for the development of *butoh* has created a dance form that is highly reminiscent of traditional Japanese theater, but simultaneously works to subvert and reject those similarities. Sources of inspiration for a movement vocabulary for *butoh* came primarily from Japan's own rich dance traditions and their strictly codified movement vocabularies. *Butoh* choreographers appropriated techniques, gestures, and principles from these

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because he tried so intently to avoid incorporating them. Regardless, however, of his personal movement, Hijikata worked extensively with individuals with no background in classical or modern dance training in order to help them develop a pure *butoh* movement aesthetic. Hijikata would help his dancers to understand their own internal worlds through a dance movement that was untainted by modern dance aesthetics. Specifically I would like to point out his work with Ashikawa Yōko 芦川羊子, and the other women in the group Hakutōbō 白桃房, who through meditation and dance practice worked with Hijikata to uncover the original life force of woman, master their bodies, and express a deeply elemental form of the body. For further reading on Hijikata's work with Ashikawa Yōko and Hakutōbō, please see Viala and Masson-Sekine, "Hijikata and Ashikawa" and "Hakutōbō." In *Butoh: Shades of darkness*, 84-91.

[29] Barrett, *Kazuo Ohno's World*, 230.

[30] Barrett, *Kazuo Ohno's World*, 209.

traditional dances and, in the process of appropriation, stripped the movements of their established interpretations and meanings.

Butoh choreographers actively work to resist giving any concrete explanations or interpretations of movements and techniques as the dance is not necessarily meant to convey a story, but is instead meant to evoke associations.[31] An important stage in the development of the movement vocabulary of *butoh* is early in the appropriation process. *Butoh* creators and early performers went through a period of rejection in which they attempted to remove all aspects of both traditional Japanese and modern Western performance from their dance before eventually returning to them with fresh appreciation of their value. In a personal interview with renowned *butoh* choreographer, director, and scholar Joan Laage, she explains what she terms *butoh*'s "purging" of unwanted influences:

> After the purging of the first ten years then Hijikata freed himself enough to think, "What is this? What is regaining the Japanese sensibility? What is the Japanese body? What is the Japanese experience?"[32] Because one of the things he had to purge was not only Japanese constrictions, but also Western forms and training…If you look at the American modern dance world, there was a period where contemporary dancers, or modern dancers, rejected ballet because they had to find their own way. Then when they found their own way enough they could think ballet could be good training. So it is interesting how you have to leave something, or purge something, to discover what is really important to you

[31] Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 21.

[32] *Butoh* originators maintained a nationalistic attitude about the establishment of *butoh* as a dance form. Through *butoh* dance, Japanese performers and choreographers were working to redefine and regain a sense for what it means to be Japanese. However, with modern *butoh* being an established, recognized, and appreciated dance form across the globe, how is the dance, which is so rooted in a nationalistic exploration, maintained around the world? In speaking with Joan Laage, she explained that *butoh* has become a culture unto itself, and although an understanding of the roots and Japanese context in which the performance developed, one who is not Japanese can embody an original *butoh* aesthetic. Joan spent many years living in Japan, and embodied what I would term a "*butoh* potential." She said, "When I saw *butoh*, I said 'that's it,'" meaning when she encountered *butoh* she knew that was the movement she desired to express herself though. Joan now maintains a deep connection to an original *butoh* aesthetic and seeks to carry and pass that on.

> or what is really going to come out of your body and your mind. But you don't want to be a slave to it.[33]

It is this first stage of purging outside influences that allowed *butoh* to develop its unique aesthetic, and eventually return to these influences as sources of inspiration where choreographers and performers could find the value in movements of other dances, strip them of their codified meanings, and appropriate them into a *butoh* movement vocabulary.

As long as movement remains resistant to critical interpretation and open, the movement creates a form of direct communication with viewers. By superseding a symbolic mode of communication, *butoh* practitioners hope to speak directly to the emotions of the audience, affecting a response in them. *Butoh* practitioners around the world strive for this aesthetic goal because it prevents the understanding of their performances from being hindered by conventionalized perceptions of symbolic communication.

White Make-up—A Means of Transformation

In early *butoh* performances Hijikata explored the concepts of transforming the self. He would explain movements and feelings through the idea of becoming something else—animals, plants, other humans, ghosts, dead bodies—and that through this transformation dancers would become complete. Hijikata has famously written, "Only when, despite having a normal, healthy body, you come to wish that

[33] Joan Laage, interviewed by author, Seattle, WA, February 21, 2016.

you were disabled or had been born disabled, do you take your first step in *butoh*."[34] Here he emphasizes transformation to disability in order to fully grasp a real *butoh* aesthetic. Bruce Baird succinctly distills Hijikata's philosophy of transformation in the following quote:

> It was not enough to act as disabled. It was not even enough to want to be disabled for a moment in order to understand that worldview. The dancer had to want to see the world from the perspective of disability so badly that she wished she were born that way. She needed to wish that she did not even have any memories of not having been disabled. As the goal of seeing from other perspectives came to prominence, only complete transformation was acceptable.[35]

Hijikata would call for his dancers to imagine themselves, completely and in their entirety as something else, someone else, or to imagine themselves from a completely different perspective. Joan Laage explains the importance of transformation and complete embodiment through Hijikata's movement exercise *ushi* (cow):

> When we talk about equating image and body you have this animal—you have four legs you have a head and there are horns…and you think, "What shapes you? What moves you?" So in this case, you have your cow, or *ushi*, and what's moving you now are these horns. So you're extending your energy out in these horns, this is very different than just moving your head because if you move from the tip of your horn it then moves back into your body to add to that embodiment…You have to use your mind and your energy, and that's what's magical about *butoh*—not that someone sees that there is a tree or an animal, but that you are working with your body, mind, and the space…and when the audience witnesses it they don't see that, but they sense that this is not a normal, everyday experience.[36]

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[34] Hijikata Tatsumi, "From Being Jealous of a Dog's Vein," *TDR* 44, no. 1 (2000), 56. 五体が満足でありながら、しかも、不具者でありたい、いっそのこと俺は不具者に生まれついていた方が良かったのだ、という願いを持つようになりますと、ようやく舞踏の第一歩が始まります。Hijikata, "Inu no jōmyaku ni shitto suru koto kara," in *HTZS* vol. 1, 171.
[35] Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh*, 160.
[36] Laage, interview.

Here we see that the total embodiment and transformation of the dancer leads to, not only genuine movement on the part of the dancer, but it also enables the audience to sense that what is happening in the performance is not a normal performance, but something extending beyond the series of movements to become something that reaches the audience on a direct and emotional level.

In order for dancers to fully inhabit the perspective and mindset of another being, spirit, entity, etc., they need to fully remove themselves from their own personalities and egos. The body paint became a means of helping dancers to conceal and cancel their identities in order for them to more completely embody the perspective of another.

Ohno was also known for his use of white makeup in his performances. Similarly to Hijikata, he would use makeup as a means of de-identifying his body and removing his natural expression. Once this is accomplished with white plaster makeup, Ohno would use black eyeliner to distort and accentuate his facial features. Although Ohno's use of makeup seems contradictory—using makeup to neutralize one's own facial features, only to apply more makeup to accentuate those same features—performers must be careful of how they present their "fictional" bodies on stage and under the critical gaze of an audience. It would seem in Ohno's case he "uses whatever means at his disposal to fabricate this illusion [the fictional body]. And yet, it must be said that his true objective is to render himself invisible."[37]

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[37] Barrett, *Kazuo Ohno's World*, 65-67.

The paint used in *butoh* performances greatly resembles that used in the traditional theatrical form of *kabuki* 歌舞伎. In *kabuki* theater the white makeup has a number of uses and meanings. Masks have been an important part of Japanese theatrical traditions for centuries. *Noh* 能 theater uses highly stylized masks to identify characters and their roles in the performance. *Kabuki*, similarly, uses the white makeup to turn the actor's faces into living masks, upon which could be painted detailed *kumadori* 隈取り, which would indicate to the audience a range of meanings: whether, for example, the character is a protagonist or antagonist, human or deity, ogre or a man.[38] The removal of the *kumadori* from the paint in *butoh* can be seen as another example of *butoh* appropriating theatrical conventions from traditional sources while stripping them of their intended meanings and uses in the process.

While the use of paint in *butoh* eventually came to resemble, if not outright imitate, the traditional uses of paint in *kabuki*, the original use of paint in *butoh* was actually grease or olive oil used to darken the skin of Hijikata during his performance of *Forbidden Colors* in 1959. Hijikata seems to have originally used paint to cover up a large scar, but no matter the reason for its inception, the use of paint to conceal and transform continued to expand and took on many different meanings. In his 1961 performance of *Mid-afternoon Secret Ceremony of a Hermaphrodite: Three Chapters* (*Han'in han'yosha no hiru sagari no higi sanshō*)半陰半陽者の昼下がりの秘儀参章, Hijikata was dressed in plaster and gauze to give him the appearance of the walking dead or a mummified body. Similarly the 1963

[38] Klein, *Ankoku Butō*, 47.

performance of *Masseur: A Story of a Theater that Sustains Passion* (*Anma: aiyoku wo sasaeru gekijo no hanashi*)あんま：愛欲を支える劇場の話, the performers thickly layered a plaster made from a combination of glue and chalk that cracked and prohibited smooth movements of the dancers once it hardened.[39]

The use of makeup in *butoh* has become one of its most defining characteristics and serves multiple purposes. It enhances the grotesque elements of the dance and gives the dancers the appearance of the "other"—meaning the dancers use the makeup to appear as aliens, decaying bodies, or even in reverse genders. It manifests, visually and physically, elements of the earth as if the body is made of earth and is breaking apart as the dried plaster flakes away. Although the makeup serves all these various purposes, it seems that the primary use of makeup in *butoh* has been to emphasize, facilitate, and encourage the cancellation of the self and the destruction of one's own ego in order to allow the dancers to completely embody a mode of communication that supersedes signification and concrete definition.

The Body is Mud—A Return to the Earth

Contrary to Western dances, such as ballet, which are danced upward, lifting off in defiance of gravity in seeming disconnect with the Earth, *butoh* is danced downwards, strongly rooted to the earth both literally and metaphorically.

In the development of his dance style, Hijikata maintained a close connection to the farming village in Akita that was his childhood home. Many dances developed

[39] Baird, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Butoh*, 161.

throughout Japanese history have deep connections to agriculture and embody the farmers' lives. In an interview in 2001, Tanaka Min 田中泯, a highly regarded *butoh* practitioner who trained with Hijikata, states, "In Asia and Africa it's quite similar, most of the dance (sic) started from the ground, from agriculture. In Kabuki and Noh, the movement comes from farming. They are based on an agricultural body, which is related to a farmer's life."[40] Hijikata also seems to have worked to cultivate his dance in this traditional agricultural vein. In his speech, *Wind daruma*, Hijikata emphasizes anecdotes about his childhood home and explains formative moments that continue to influence his dance style. One of the more important points he makes pertains to movements that are ingrained in the people by the places in which they live. Hijikata writes:

> Even in summer people in Tohoku, when they enter the house, stamp off the snow that gets stuck between the teeth of their wooden sandals [*geta*] during the winter. In summer they make a clatter with their geta, but even in summer they are unable to rid themselves of their winter habit. But then summer there is cool; it's a summer that can make you shiver.[41]

This idea of movement remaining in one's body even after the stimulus that requires it is gone is a large part of Hijikata's philosophy towards his dance as he felt that the experiences one has growing up continue to be embodied as memory in one's dance.

Butoh being danced downwards with feet planted on the ground is a direct response to Western-style movement aesthetics which emphasize a much more

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[40] Jonathan Marshall, "Dancing the Elemental Body: Butoh and body weather: Interviews with Tanaka Min and Yumi Umiumare," *Performance Paradigm 2* (March 2006), 60.

[41] Hijikata Tatsumi, "Wind Daruma," *TDR* 44, no. 1 (2000), 73. それから東北では、夏場でも冬の間に不駄の間にはさまった雪を落とすわけです、玄関で。夏に、ガタガタガタガタっと不駄を鳴らして、冬場のそういうしぐさが夏場になっても抜け切れない。もっともあっちの夏ってのは冷やっとした夏でねゾクゾクゾクっとする夏がありますよ。Hijikata, "Kaze daruma," in *HTZS* vol. 2, 113.

lofty character. On top of that, *butoh* is meant to embody real human movement, as is the case with Hijikata's use of memories of agricultural lifestyles from his childhood to inspire his dance. In addition to these two literal connections to the earth, Hijikata emphasized a more spiritual, metaphysical, and metaphoric attachment to the Earth. Again in "Wind daruma," Hijikata writes:

> In early spring the wind is something special, blowing over the sloppy, wet mud. Sometimes in early spring I would fall down in the mud and my child's body, pitiful to its core, would gently float there. I try to speak but it's like something had already been spoken. I have the feeling there is a knot of wood, somewhere in my lower abdomen stuck there in the mud, that is screaming something. While in the mud, it occurs to me that I could very well end up being prey. At the same time that this unbearable feeling surfaces in my body, something strange takes shape in the mud. It's as if my body had, from its very core, returned to its starting point.[42]

Hijikata often spoke of the body being made of mud and the use of the image that the body is made of mud is a common characteristic of *butoh* performance. Using the idea of the body as mud, dirt, or earth, the body seems to crumble or melt as if disintegrating in an attempt to return to its origins within the soil.

Death Moves Me—On Being a Corpse

As I explained in the introduction, both Ohno and Hijikata were moved by death in various ways—Ohno embodying the spirits of others, while Hijikata saw

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[42] Hijikata Tatsumi, "Wind Daruma," Hijikata Tatsumi, "Wind Daruma," *TDR* 44, no. 1 (2000), 73. その風が春先になりますとまた独特な風になってびしょびしょに濡れた泥の上を吹くんですよ。そうすると私が春先の泥に転んだ時の、芯から情けない子供の身体がそこに、ボワーッと浮かんで来る。喋ろうとしているのに喋られてしまったような、泥につかった下腹部のあたりから、木の瘤が何か叫びを上げているような気がするんです。それで泥の中に入っていますと「俺は何かの餌食じゃないだろうか」と思えてしまいます。ところがこれは、体の中の切ない思いが表に出て来ると同時にね、泥の中で妙な形を帯びてあらわれている。何か身体が芯から振り出しに戻ったような、そういう思いもですね。Hijikata, "Kaze daruma," in *HTZS* vol. 2, 113.

the body as a corpse vying for life. As quoted earlier, Hijikata sees himself as embodying his dead sister and he learns to move through envisioning the dead as his teachers. Hijikata holds the gestures of the dead in his body; he works to embody them and encourages the gestures of the dead to move his body from within. He is famously quoted saying, "*Butoh* is a dead body standing desperately upright."[43] This conjures the image of a body in a desperate struggle to remain upright, a body searching for structure and support while rotting away. This concept is reflected in his movement exercise known as the "ash pillar," in which dancers meditate on and experience, through their movement, this same struggle for support, as they envision themselves as a pillar made of ash that is continuously disintegrating.[44] This concept of disintegration and rotting away is integral to many early performances of *butoh*, and those who continue to practice *butoh* in a more traditional vein follow in the footsteps of this movement aesthetic.

Summary

Butoh originators Hijikata and Ohno developed a unique performance aesthetic that has continued to transform over the last six decades. Characterized by an emphasis on transformation, an avoidance of Western-style and traditional Japanese dance techniques, and a distinct connection to the Earth, *butoh* has grown from a literal and metaphoric underground performance style—performed in the

[43] Sondra Fraleigh and Tamah Nakamura, *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 51.
[44] Fraleigh and Nakamura, *Hijikata and Ohno*, 13.

underground bars of Tokyo for small audiences of close friends and family—to a widely recognized and practiced dance form known around the world.

Butoh practitioners actively distanced themselves from previous theatrical dance forms, both Eastern and Western. However, the use of white make-up and the appropriation of movements from traditional sources creates a paradox in *butoh*; as it tries to become something new, different, and revolutionary, *butoh* remains haunted by these ghosts of traditional theater.[45] However original *butoh* is, it contains a distinct cultural memory in its kinesthesia, imagery, and methodology; "*Butoh* relates to surrealism in its improvisatory spirit, its expressiveness, polemics and eroticism."[46]

The grotesque elements of *butoh* allow choreographers and practitioners to connect with their audiences in a more direct fashion. By attempting to remove meaning from their movements and conjure images and memories from their audience members, the dancers are able to connect more directly and affect their audience members emotionally. In the next chapter I will discuss a more theoretical approach to understanding *butoh* by examining *butoh* movement and dance through the lenses of kinesthesia, embodied culture, and movement theory.

[45] *Ibid*, 11.
[46] *Ibid*, 48.

Chapter 2

What Moves *Butoh*?

Introduction—what is dance?

Before discussing the theoretical and philosophical approaches to dance research, I feel it important to establish a definition of dance and its relation to the full range of human movement. Although previous inquiries into dance incorrectly draw a stark divide between dance and everyday human movement, we must admit that, although it is not so far removed from everyday movement, there is indeed a non-quotidian aspect that sets dance apart. Dance however becomes hard to succinctly define when, as Drid Williams says, "From an anthropological standpoint, there are exactly as many definitions of dancing or the dance as there are cultures, ethnicities, and groups of people who support them."[47] Creating a definition that speaks to every scenario, or to as many as possible, requires a certain amount of flexibility in order to be widely applicable, as well as to avoid making unnecessary presuppositions. Joann Kealiinohomoku has outlined a definition that I find fits those criteria:

> Dance is a transient mode of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space. Dance occurs through purposefully selected and controlled rhythmic movements; the resulting phenomenon is recognized as dance both by the performer and the observing members of a given group.[48]

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[47] Drid Williams, *Anthropology and the Dance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 185.
[48] Joann Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright, eds. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 38.

This definition eliminates the anthropological ambiguity of what is culturally defined as dance by incorporating into the definition the cultural ambiguity of allowing the dancers and spectators to define for themselves whether the phenomenon they are experiencing is dance or not. In the case of *butoh* the definition can certainly be applied. As per the first piece of this particular definition, *butoh* practitioners perform dances in the particular style of *butoh* using a specialized and highly developed movement vocabulary. Furthermore, although improvisation and choosing movement based on the situation and mood are emphasized in *butoh*, the movements are purposefully selected by the dancers for reasons known to them. The final portion of the definition—the fact that the performance "is recognized as dance by both by the performer and the observing members of a given group"—is elaborated on by Julie Gillum, a leader of the *butoh* group Legacy Butoh, and long time *butoh* practitioner. When asked what makes a movement *butoh* she responded, "Any movement can be in a *butoh* dance. I believe that. Any movement. It would be the context that it appears in that would make it *butoh*."[49] To make it *butoh* the context must be established, and in many cases this is done through the mutual understanding between the performers and audience. Moving forward with this definition of dance in mind I will enter into a discussion of various theoretical approaches to the understanding of dance and human movement.

There have been many theoretical approaches to the study of human movement. However, the study of movement gained much popularity with the advent, in the 1970's, of kinesics, a movement analysis methodology pioneered by

[49] Julie Gillum, interviewed by author, March 2, 2016.

Ray Birdwhistell that allowed for greater depth of analysis of human movement in recorded media. Kinesics approaches the body in motion in much the same way linguistic anthropologists approach language. Kinesics, as a field of study, aims to deconstruct movement into its base elements, similar to morphemes in linguistics. Once broken down into these morphemic elements, kinesics examines the intricacies of human movements and assigns to them a meaning, or variety of meanings, defined within the social and cultural context of their performance. I will briefly touch on kinesics and examine how *butoh* practitioners work to remain outside this realm of signification.

More recently, neurobiological approaches to researching dance have been employed with the increased understanding of proprioception and its role in human movement. I will explain the concept of movement and its relation to our understanding of our existence as humans through kinesthesia and proprioception. The human senses of proprioception and kinesthesia, in short, are the human body's ability to understand its posture and relative location in space and to understand the quality of its movement through space, respectively. Once I have established a biological basis for the neurobiological phenomenon that is the human body's ability to understand its position in space and in motion, I will move on to examine the impact of this kinesthetic awareness on the embodiment of meaning in gestures.

Ray Birdwhistell and Kinesics

Kinesics is a study of human motion based on the idea that movement is a learned form of communication; within different cultures movement is a patterned

and ordered system that can be broken down into individual elements.[50] Kinesics is the precursor term to the field of study known as "kinesiology," which is a method of inquiry, based on research techniques employed by psychologists as well as linguistic anthropologists, which is used to approach the study of human movement.[51] One of the central concepts of kinesics is the fact that "gestures not only do not stand alone as behavioral isolates but they also do not have explicit and invariable meanings."[52] Gestures are codified movements that are dependent on context and circumstance, not only that, but gestures can change in meaning to an enormous extent by almost imperceptible changes in the context, or even in the motion itself. Ray Birdwhistell chooses the example of a military salute:

> The salute, a conventionalized movement of the right hand to the vicinity of the anterior portion of the cap or hat, could, without occasioning a court martial, be performed in a manner which could satisfy, please, or enrage the most demanding officer. By shifts in stance, facial expression, the velocity or duration of the movement of salutation, and even in the selection of inappropriate contexts for the act, the soldier could dignify, ridicule, demean, seduce, insult, or promote the recipient of the salute.[53]

The body speaks its own language, and movements become signifiers of meaning. It is precisely this patterning and system of ordered meaning that *butoh* attempts to break out of. However, as the field of kinesics works to enumerate, every motion and gesture is laden with a kind of semantic signification within the context in which it is performed. How then do *butoh* practitioners supersede this process of signification? By performing their movements in the contextualized liminal space of

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[50] Ray Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context: Essays on body motion communication* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), xi.
[51] *Ibid*, xiii; Williams, *Anthropology and the Dance*, 187.
[52] Birdwhistell, *Kinesics and Context*, 80.
[53] *Ibid*, 79-80.

a *butoh* performance and by appropriating elements of the grotesque aesthetic *butoh* performers are able to create movements that escape easy categorization. It is in the liminality created by the audience's non-understanding that allows the movement of *butoh* to speak directly to audience members' personal memories, experiences, and interpretations. It might be said that *butoh* does not supersede signification, but opens itself to interpretation on a personal level by the audience, allowing the performance to speak more directly to the emotions of each audience member. This gives the signification of the movement as many meanings as there are people to interpret it.

Proprioception and Kinesthesia—Awareness of the Body

Theorists have long understood movement as a critical component in the human understanding of their perceived worlds—in fact the connection of movement to perception can be found in the writings of Aristotle.[54] However, a precise ontological approach based on the intersection of perception and interaction has only been used since the mid-twentieth century. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), a French existential philosopher, expanded the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and others, to develop a methodology of understanding the role of movement in the human capacity for perception. Merleau-Ponty, and those who have continued moving his original work forward have shown with ever increasing clarity that our self-movement and kinesthetic exploration of space are essential to our perceptual capacities and development of our sense of self. Before exploring the

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[54] Sam Gill, *Dancing Culture Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 23.

abstracted concept of embodied meaning in gestural qualities, I feel we must treat our understanding of movement on a more concrete biological level.

The traditional five senses of the human body are touch, taste, sight, smell, and sound. However, there are views concerning perception in the human body that these five senses of do not fully cover the sensorial spectrum of human perceptual capabilities. The sense that is often noted as being missing from this list has been termed "proprioception," or the perception of self. Proprioception refers to the biological communication of muscle fibers and ligaments with the central nervous system and brain through neurobiological receptors known as proprioceptors. Proprioceptors in the human body work to sense load and tension in the muscles and, in addition to aiding with balance and preventing injury, provide an awareness of our limbs and body parts in relation to our own bodies, as well as our surrounding space.[55] In citing a chapter by M.S Laverack titled "External Proprioceptors," Maxine Sheets-Johnstone concisely explains the evolution of proprioception:[56]

> …external proprioceptors such as the cilia of locusts and polyps were originally the all-embracing norm in the Kingdom Animalia. Over time, external proprioceptors were modified and internalized in some creatures. In effect, proprioception shifted from being rooted solely in tactile organs…to a rootedness in organs sensitive to deformations and stresses within animate bodies themselves, as in the chortodonal organs of arthropods, creatures such as lobsters that have articulable skeletons. Such a shift…opened possibilities for even further modification, namely the possibility of a directly movement-sensitive awareness.[57]

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[55] Gill, *Dancing Culture Religion*, 19.
[56] M.S. Laverack, "External Proprioceptors," in *Structure and Function of Proprioceptors in the Invertebrates*, P. J. Mill, ed. (New York: Halsted Press, 1976), 1-63.
[57] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2015), xvii.

In short, proprioception evolved from external tactile sensorial systems of self-awareness that allowed an animate body to perceive itself in relation to the environment, to internal systems of sensorial perception rooted in a kinesthesia derived from the neurophysical kinetic dynamics of muscles and tendons. This led to the creation of a "*directly sensitive movement consciousness*," in which we are able to understand our environments in relation to our bodies and define our own existence through movement.[58]

Much recent scholarship has focused heavily on proprioception for writings on postural awareness, behavior and embodiment. However, in relation to movement, one finds a lack of exploration through a proprioceptive understanding. While understanding the concept of proprioception is beneficial to rooting us biologically in how the human mind and body function to produce self-movement, and thus understand our own body in space in relation to both itself and the environment, we must be careful not to over extend the concept of proprioceptive awareness. Proprioception has been explained as a form of self-awareness that emphasizes a positional or postural awareness—as opposed to a kinetic awareness—that lends itself more to a static quality. Proprioception, as defined by Gallagher and Zahavi in *The Phenomenological Mind*, emphasizes the postural and positional awareness brought about through proprioception:

> Proprioception is the innate and intrinsic *position* sense that I have with respect to my limbs and overall *posture.* It's the 'sixth sense' that allows me to know whether my legs are crossed or not, without looking at them.[59]

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[58] *Ibid*.
[59] Shaun Gallagher and Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 162; italics added.

This emphasis on proprioception as our sense of our position and posture in relation to our bodies in space emphasizes a static understanding of our bodies. One can think of it as the sense of the body's position in a moment-by-moment freeze frame.

Therein lies the primary shortcoming of proprioception in the exploration of human movement—its focus on the position and posture *in* space as opposed to the body's movement *through* space. In addition to our proprioceptive awareness, humans innately possess a kinesthetic awareness, or the awareness of our bodies in motion. This kinesthetic awareness, or kinesthesia, forms the basis of our ability to learn our bodies and learn to move ourselves. Sheets-Johnstone explains the difference between proprioception and kinesthesia as follows:

> Clearly, it is not proprioception but *kinesthesia* that provides us a felt sense of the qualitative dynamics of our movement; its expansiveness, sluggishness, explosiveness, jaggedness; its changes in direction, intensity, range and so on.[60]

Kinesthesia allows us to explore the various movement efforts and learn the qualitative dynamics of those various movements. Of course the postures and positions understood through our proprioceptive receptors play a part in our understanding of those qualitative dynamics, however, our proprioceptive awareness does not form the foundational understanding for our bodies of the space-time-force realities of a given movement. The primary difference then, between proprioception and kinesthesia, is one of experience. We understand our bodies in space through proprioception, however, our kinesthetic awareness allows us to experiment with, learn, compartmentalize, and understand the movements of

[60] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, xix.

our own body, and through that experiential understanding, allows us to commune with, understand, and appreciate the movements of others.

Embodying meaning

With an understanding of the cultural signification of movement, as laid out in the study of kinesics, as well as an understanding of the biological structuring of movement sensations through a proprioceptive and kinesthetic awareness, we can gain a deeper understanding of how humans embody cultural and personal experience in order to perform a social self through movement. By understanding the performance of the human social self, we can then examine *butoh*, and the ways in which it maintains itself in a liminal space of creation based on past experience and future possibility.

In her book *Agency and Embodiment*, Carrie Noland examines a phenomenological approach to the embodiment of movement, mainly expanding on the work of Merleau-Ponty.[61] By examining gestures, the morphemic level of human movement outlined by Ray Birdwhistell and the field of kinesics, scholars like Merleau-Ponty, Sheets-Johnstone, Gallagher and Zahavi, and Noland all work to examine the source and development of movement as it relates to the formation of human consciousness and the social self in relation to other beings and their environments. Basing her categories off Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Noland breaks down three different, distinct categories of gesture: 1) reflex gestures, 2) gestures of habit and practiced skill, and 3) communicative

[61] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing gestures/producing culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

gestures.[62] . Because of the significant overlap between the different categories of gesture, Merleau-Ponty concludes in the *Phenomenology of Perception* by gathering all three categories under the same umbrella of gesture.[63] By expanding on the aesthetic elements of *butoh* movement laid out in the first chapter of this work I will examine how *butoh* performance incorporates gestural elements from each of these three categories.

The human body possesses an extensive range of motions with many reflexive gestures biologically pre-programmed to carry out an often times unconscious intent. Noland uses the example of a squint to explain the basis of a reflexive gesture. The biological preprogramming of this gesture can be attributed to the muscle structures employed in the gesture; "When we squint and knit our brows in a reflexive effort to protect our eyes from the sun, we can only do so in a limited number of ways because of the structure of our orbital muscles."[64] Despite the preprogrammed spontaneous nature of reflexive gestures, it is impossible to divorce a gesture entirely from the situation in which it is performed. Reflexive gestures are spontaneous behaviors that anticipate a reaction from another entity or the environment. Because of the inter-entity exchange precluded by a reflex gesture, they are always performed with the interpersonal context of the situation taken into consideration. Thus, no two reflexive gestures can be exactly the same[65]

The use of reflexive gestures in *butoh* may fall outside of a contextualized social meaning, however, many *butoh* practitioners strive to embody a movement

[62] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 57.
[63] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 57.
[64] *Ibid*, 59.
[65] *Ibid*, 58-59.

aesthetic based on an affective and kinesthetic awareness of their bodies in a specific space and time. The use of improvisational movements in *butoh* performances enables the *butoh* artist to perform movements based on reactions instantiated by the performer's immediate surroundings and allow for the performer to incorporate movements and gestures based on their understanding of the situation and the anticipated outcome of their movement. This is not to say that all improvisational movement is reflexive, however. The movement aesthetic cultivated by some *butoh* practitioners strives to achieve a reflexive quality in their performances as the body reacts to stimuli in the environment—lighting, music, etc.—in a manner consistent with their kinesthetic awareness of their surroundings and the anticipation of further stimuli during the performance.

As gestures move farther away from their original biological intentions and into the realm of socially imbued significance, the gestures change from a reflexive, biological response or bodily intention to a habitual behavior or learned gesture. Because habitual gestures are attributed social significance, their understood meanings vary greatly from culture to culture. These learned, habitual movements not only refer to acquired skill sets, like playing a sport or an instrument, but they also refer to other socially learned behaviors, like facial expressions and body languages. Noland writes about the social structuring of embodied habitual gestures:

> …a way of figuring dismay or shock with the muscles of the face is as socially constructed as a way of sewing or using a keyboard, although it may be acquired far earlier and in a different way. The expression of an emotion, then, is figurative (conventional) insofar as social forces provide it with meaning and

> indexical (necessary) insofar as a biological motivation inspires its performance and links it to a particular quality of kinesis.[66]

At the biological level, humans are able to contort their faces in any number of different ways by contracting and relaxing different muscle combinations, however, it is a socially dictated learned behavior that associates a specific facial contortion with the signification of an affective or emotional gesture.

Butoh then incorporates habitual and learned gestures in two ways. First and foremost *butoh* is a dance that performers train in and practice in order to develop the ability to move their body as a *butoh* artist. The movement aesthetic dancers cultivate, regardless of style, is based on a learned skill, a practiced ability to select and link together gestures from one moment to the next in order to produce a sequence recognized by them and an audience as a performance. Second, as discussed in chapter one, *butoh* originator Ohno Kazuo emphasized incorporating one's spirit into one's performance; similarly, Tatsumi Hijikata explored a sense of embodied memory that manifests in a body's movement at a subconscious level. Hijikata wrote in his speech "Wind daruma":

> In most families, the kids who were two or three were tied to posts in their homes. I would go to sneak a look at these kids, who are fascinating.[67] [68]They move in strange ways, like the ones who make their hands eat something. Being that age, they of course don't consider what strange things they are doing or even that they themselves are human…Their bodies were their own, but their hands they treated like things…They did all kinds of things, like sometimes twisting their ears to pull them off. Though this story sounds totally ridiculous,

[66] *Ibid*, 61.
[67] In the original Japanese transcription the children are stated as being three or four years of age (三つか四つのガキ), but the translator has rendered it here as two or three.
[68] Although it is somewhat unclear what Hijikata means by children being tied to posts, it is likely a parenting technique to keep young children from wandering away or getting into trouble.

> those movements later had a far-reaching effect on my butoh. What I learned from those toddlers has greatly influenced my body.[69]

Not only did Hijikata work to embody the movements of these children that he watched, he was also a child from that area and thus had similar experiences growing up. His embodiment of those children was also his embodiment of his own childhood experiences. These were habitual gestures that he came to realize were cultivated in the people from his hometown, and Hijikata strove to incorporate that movement aesthetic into his *butoh*. Both of Hijikata's and Ohno's approach to the performance of embodying culture and memory in *butoh* incorporate the idea of habitual gestures into the development of one's own particular *butoh* movement.

In continuing with Noland's categories of embodied gesture, we come to her third and final category: communicative gestures. Once a reflexive gesture has superseded its biological and kinesthetic bodily intention and been given a social meaning—or range of social meanings—it becomes a habitual gesture or a learned gesture. However, the socially reinforced learned signification of the gesture is only realized as communicative when embodied and performed by an individual in response to a problem or situation. If we return to the example of a squint, we can see this gestural evolution unfold with further analysis. Originally, a squint, the furrowing of the brow, is a bodily intent and reflex gesture to protect the eyes from

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[69] Hijikata Tatsumi, "Wind Daruma," *TDR* 44, no. 1 (2000), 74-75. それで三つか四つのガキってのはどこの家でも大体柱に結得られている。私はこっそりそのガキ達をのぞきにゆくんです。すると面白いですね、この幼児というのは。何か得体の知れない動きをやってる。自分の手に物を食わしたりしてるのがいるんですね。おかしなことをするもんだな、勿論自分のことを人間だと考えてるわけじゃない、そんな程度の年だからね…それで子供は自分の手を、自分の手じゃない、自分の身体だけど自分の手じゃない物みたいにして扱っている…時々耳をはずそうとまわしたり、いろんなことをするんですね。しかしこれは非常に馬鹿げたような話だけども、私の舞踏の中に、後になって大きいく影響している原因の動きがそこにあった。幼児の身体から習ったことが、ずい分私の身体に影響している。Hijikata, "Kaze daruma," in *HTZS* vol.2, 115.

bright light. However, gestures such as this can become removed from the body's original intentionality and be integrated into a network of social meaning and context. For example, instead of protecting the eyes from bright light, a squint can come to be a signifier of concentration or intense thought, giving the gesture a figurative significance outside of our body and incorporating into it a performed communication.[70]

Despite *butoh*'s desire to supersede communicative signification in movement, because of the affective nature of the performance, one finds many of the gestures particular to *butoh* are imbued with a socially constructed communicative significance. Of particular note with regard to communicative gestures are some of the many varied facial expressions used in *butoh* that communicate any number of affective factors. Ohno Kazuo famously had a very expressive face, and was well known for his use of pained expressions of longing and loneliness that he incorporated into his performance of *My Mother* (*Watashi no okaasan*)私のお母さん in 1981. Similarly, Ashikawa Yōko is famous for her use of facial expression in performance. Ashikawa created and codified over one hundred different and distinct facial contortions that she contributed to the *butoh* movement vocabulary. These contortions range in expression from the un-definable, to excruciating pain, to overflowing joy. Despite the range of use of facial gesture in *butoh*, it must be acknowledge that this is indeed a form of communicative gesture that is used to engage the audience emotionally using the most affectively significant part of the body, the face.

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[70] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 59.

Summary

While the human body is made to move by signals sent from the brain, this is not solely a reaction on the part of the muscles. The body simultaneously returns proprioceptive information—describing the body's position in space—and kinesthetic information—describing what movement qualities the body is employing to pass through space—to inform the brain of what the body needs to be doing and allow for any readjustments that must be made. This feedback system of sensory neurons embedded in muscles, tendons, and joints, allows for the body's understanding of itself in movement, and without the input of the kinesthetic sense produced by movement, human agency in defining existence through movement could not exist. These proprioceptive and kinesthetic sensory neurons are activated during the act of movement perception and allow for the constant correcting and refining of reflexive impulses in order to produce an appropriate response with an eye to the unique present unfolding around the body.[71]

Butoh practitioners navigate this sensory feedback cycle, taking into account not only information of their own bodies and kinesthetic state, but also examining on a second by second basis their unique presents. Taking into account other aspects of their surroundings, performers create a unity of successive movements that consciously work to escape clearly defined social signification by existing in the liminal space of a grotesque aesthetic. However, *butoh* dancers aim to connect with their audience on an emotional level so that although much movement expressed in

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[71] *Ibid*, 65.

butoh performances is outside the realm of easy categorization in a social context, many of the gestures employed by *butoh* practitioners communicate with the audience affectively. Although the gestures of human affect are also socially constructed, one might say that *butoh* artists are unable to overcome the social signification of their gestures, however, much of the intent of *butoh* is to connect with the audience in a more emotional way. By reducing the signification in their performances to primarily affective gestures, one could say that *butoh* dancers do precisely that.

Chapter 3

Analysis of *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth*

Performance Description

Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth, choreographed by Joan Laage, was performed on a cold Saturday evening at the Taoist Studies Institute (TSI) in Seattle, Washington on February 20, 2016.[72] The performance venue was a small chapel building behind a Presbyterian church that was rented by the TSI. We were in a single room with high vaulted ceilings filled to capacity with religious and spiritual imagery—artifacts, paintings, calligraphy, statues, and books—from Christianity, Buddhism and Taoism. Three shrines lined the northern wall adorned with fresh flowers and the lingering scent of incense. An intimate space for what was to be an intimate performance.[73] The room was longer than it was wide and was lined lengthwise on both sides with cushions and chairs, creating two levels of seating that defined the negative space to be filled by the performance. Stage lights were placed at floor level, evenly interspersed among the cushions and angled slightly upward.[74]

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[72] Thanks to a travel grant from the United Government of Graduate Students at the University of Colorado Boulder, I was able to travel to Seattle, WA to see Joan's performance of *Earth Tomes*. Thanks to Joan's hospitality, during my visit I was able to observe the preparations for the performance, witness the actual performance, and interview Joan as well as the other dancers following the performance.

[73] For more information on the performance venue visit the Taoist Studies Institute website at http://www.taoiststudiesinstitute.org/institute/.

[74] Because of the lack of definition of the performance area, I will describe the performance by using stage direction based on my relative location to the space. My location (the west wall) will be indicated as downstage, and traditional stage direction will follow from there (i.e. the east wall is upstage, the row of seats lining the north side of the stage is stage right, and the seats lining the south

I was able to spend the afternoon at the venue with the choreographer and performers and watch as they prepared for the evening performance. While the dancers worked through meditative exercises in order to gain a deeper understanding of the space and explore the type of movement they wanted to incorporate, outside was a beautiful sunny day. The hall was filled with soft, warm sunlight that was dimmed by opaque paper hung over stained glass windows on the west wall. Experiencing their preparations in this soft warm environment set a stark contrast to the actual performance, which began after sunset at 8:00 p.m.

Without the sun, the temperature in the hall dropped precipitously, and by the time the doors opened, a light jacket or long sleeves were required to be comfortable. Members of the audience sat in a state of cold suspense until the start of the performance.

The performance begins with the hall lights dimming and eight dancers walking down a flight of stairs to enter the performance space in two lines from downstage left. Previously selected cushions are reserved for the performers interspersed among the audience members, and the two lines file down the rows of seating with each dancer stopping at their predetermined cushion. Once the dancers are seated on their cushions the hall lights come down completely, and the room is plunged into darkness.

The solo musician, Dmitry Artamonov, is seated atop his amplifier against the western wall, downstage center. Seated amidst a tangle of carefully arranged electronic sound boards and wires he begins to play. The hall is filled with musical

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side of the performance area represent stage left). Please refer to Appendix B (pp. 78) for a spatial layout of the performance venue.

reverberations and Dmitry expertly alternates between his electric bass and electric guitar using his bare feet to manipulate his electrical instruments and distort the sound, turning it from musical notes into an ambiance—a mood that creates an almost meditative atmosphere of suspended reality. His gentle soundscape is a hum that rises and falls, like waves falling against a beach, punctuated with sharp notes, distorted to give them an ethereal sense. The sounds move through the hall, establishing the mood of the entire performance as being not of this world, and animating the dancers through their movements.

As the sounds rise and fall, a single stage light upstage left and directed upstage center slowly begins to brighten. As the audience's eyes adjust, the form of a dancer begins to take shape against the eastern wall. Joan Laage, moving imperceptibly slow at times, and at others moving with sharp quickness, is dressed in all black. With a black cloth mask covering her entire head, she dances with her back to the audience and her hands against the wall. As the stage light continues to brighten, so too do wall mounted lights above her. Her shadow, cast upon the wall from lights above and below, gives the impression of spilt ink running down the wall. The lights in conjunction with her movements cast the illusion that her body is melting, unable to maintain shape as if crafted from mud and in constant need of reforming.

The music and dancer moving together in the chilly darkness create a sense of suspended tension and Joan begins to move away from the wall. As she slowly makes her way downstage the lights behind her fade to blackness and the first pair of lights aimed downstage shine brightly, crisscrossing the stage and illuminating

her from behind. As Joan passes the first dancer seated among the audience members the dancer begins to slowly move onto the stage area, in front of the light, and she makes her way from stage left to stage right. The performance is homage to the Earth and to life, and the second dancer's movements do not tell a story, but bring to mind images. As she moves past the somewhat blinding stage light directed downstage, pushed forward by the flow of the music, her movements evoke images and memories, transforming on stage from stone, to mud, to plant, to tree, and returning again to the Earth.

As she approached the cushioned seating area near center stage right, evoking an image of a log returning to the Earth, the second set of stage lights come up, the first dim to dark, and two more dancers are set in motion and begin their slow progression across the stage. The dancers pass in front of the light at stage left, silhouetting themselves in contorted poses as they move slowly and deliberately across the stage. As Joan continues to move downstage, the two dancers pass closely by her and the three of them intermingle their movements before separating with the two dancers continuing towards stage left and Joan continuing her journey from upstage to downstage. As the two dancers approach the audience cushion seats at stage left, two more dancers begin to cross the boundary created by the lights between audience and performance. The two groups pass through each other in a kind of group dance before separating so the two new dancers can make their way across the stage, using the light to conceal and reveal their movements as they see fit. At this time Joan is center stage, almost two-thirds of the way to downstage, her hands begin to claw their way up her body, eventually coming to her neck where

they clasp onto the bottom of her black cloth mask. She slowly, deliberately, painfully removes the mask as if peeling off a piece of her own body. As the mask finally comes off her hair is released and falls down her back nearly to the ground. She then begins to dance with swaying and jerking movements, making her hair fly back and forth between the bright stage lights and darkness. Her hair, black but gently reflecting light, takes on an ethereal quality while the music seems to intensify.

The two dancers behind her arrive at stage right, the second set of lights fade to black and the third and final set of lights come up angled slightly downstage but shining across the stage. Three more dancers are set in motion and begin moving across the stage. As they approach center stage, the five dancers that had rejoined the audience move into the performance area. Joan continues her dance slowly, almost imperceptibly moving downstage, but now approaching the end of the performance space and the musician. The eight dancers behind her lie on the ground and begin to roll towards her, as if they are logs moving through mud and dirt. The process is slow and pained, but the other dancers close the distance between themselves and Joan.

The eight dancers gently leave the floor returning to their feet and surround Joan. As they all stand together they evoke an image of a forest growing towards the sky. Their hands begin to extend upwards over the course of a few minutes but spanning what felt like a single, long inhale. Then with a great sigh, the group relaxes, as if releasing their breath all at the same time, and their hands and bodies move as if they were the leaves of the trees rustled by a gentle breeze. The last set of

lights slowly fades to black, the room is again plunged into total darkness and Dimitry fades his music to silence so that the audience must strain to hear as the final notes fade away. When the lights come up again, the dancers are facing upstage and bow to the audience members lining the performance space they just passed through.

In its entirety, the performance takes nearly an hour and a half. The cold air, the stark contrast between light and dark, and the rise and fall of the music create a sense of suspended reality that takes the audience a moment to recover from. As the lights come up for the dancers to take their bow the audience seems to not know what to do. It was only after a significant pause that the audience was able to process the moment and begin applauding.

What is *Earth Tomes*?

Earth Tomes is a site-specific work performed at the Taoist Studies Institute in Seattle, Washington. Site-specific works in *butoh* are works that not only take place in a specific location but also are influenced by the location itself. This particular installment of *Earth Tomes* is an evolution from earlier performances created by Joan and influenced by various aspects of her life and training.

In a personal interview with Joan, she explained to me some of the influential factors in the creation of this performance. Throughout her life she has felt a connection with the outdoors and nature: from childhood adventures playing outside to fifteen years of gardening experience, she has felt a close connection to the earth and to nature. As she contemplated this work, thoughts of tectonic plates

and mudslides—the movement of the Earth—formed a foundational aspect of the performance.[75]

Joan was kind enough to let me attend the pre-performance preparations, and there I was able to witness the process through which the performance was created. There was no choreography, just the concept of the performance. Joan encouraged her dancers to feel as if they were part of the Earth through exercises in which the dancers moved as if they were a tree coming to blossom, a log rotting, a leaf blown by a gentle breeze, and through these exercises the dancers came to understand the performance concept, the performance space, and the overall feeling of the work. Joan provided simple stage directions—of the variety "you start here, move to there, and when she gets close you two begin to move there"—and coordinated the lighting. Beyond that, the performance was an un-choreographed phenomenon as dancers moved across the starkly lit stage, using an awareness of their bodies and presence to explore their personal understandings of the performance, the atmosphere created by the music, the space they filled and their relative position to other dancers. The lack of choreography, and emphasis on the dancers' awareness of their bodies in the performance is what makes *Earth Tomes* a truly site specific work.

Aesthetics of the Performance

The aesthetic cultivated in the *Earth Tomes* performance hearkens back to what Joan considers to be a more original *butoh* aesthetic, and indeed we see many

[75] Laage, interview.

parallels between *Earth Tomes* and original *butoh* performances. The movement qualities exhibited in *Earth Tomes*, as well as the improvisatory nature of the performance are both indicative of a particular *butoh* aesthetic. In addition, the stage lighting emphasized these characteristics, imbuing the performance space with a liminal quality.

Improvisation

I have spoken briefly already about Joan's methods for constructing the performance, however her use of improvisation goes beyond her skill as a performer and choreographer and accentuates her connection to an original *butoh* aesthetic. Hijikata's *butoh* lineage emphasizes embodying a specific gestural quality in the formalized world of his *butoh*. Conversely however, as Joan states, "Ohno's lineage is very much about your own individual dance—it's very philosophical and more ethereal," and this emphasis on one's own dance has encouraged branches of *butoh* that strictly emphasize improvisation.[76] Despite the fact that improvisation of this sort is somewhat removed from Hijikata's lineage, these kinds of improvisatory *butoh* performances contain the original vitality of *butoh*:

> It is in this type of dance [improvised dance] that butoh's original vitality can still be felt. These dancers have avoided the trap of an established code of expression or of overly sophisticated productions. On the contrary, their goal is for the body to become the immediate voice of the spiritual or imaginary world. As such, their work often goes beyond the traditional notion of a performance, attaining an almost religious or metaphysical dimension.[77]

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Viala and Masson-Sekine, *Butoh: Shades of darkness*, 147.

As I explained above, I was able to spend the afternoon with Joan and the dancers as they prepared for the evening performance. The first stage of preparation was, contrary to expectation, not reviewing choreography. Instead, Joan led the dancers through a variety of imaginative movement exercises where the dancers began to move and envision the kind of movements they want to incorporate into their performance. I will say again here, that the movements the dancers chose did not tell a story—they did not explain what the performance was about—but they created shapes, embodied movements, and through their awareness of their body and the space they inhabited, the dancers would move in a way that evoked images and associations. One would not say watching the performance that, as a dancer moved across the stage, they embodied the life of a tree, from seedling, to flowering, to death and then rotting. However, one might say while watching the performance they felt the dancer was a stone being eroded; or that another dancer was a tree with branches extended to the sky, rustling in the breeze; or that yet another dancer was a rotting log rolling through mud. The dancers' improvisation allows them to decide in the moment what the music and space mean to them, and using their bodily awareness, are able to use that improvisation to evoke memories, emotions, and the feeling of shared experience with the audience.

Joan did not tell the dancers what movements to use; she encouraged them to find their own movement. Joan's methods greatly emphasize the dancers' use of their kinesthetic awareness to make second by second movement decisions and work to embody their understanding of the performance concept. The only

choreographed parts of the performance would be better termed as "coordinated," as Joan explained to the dancers the general directions they would be moving in across the stage, and coordinated the lighting to follow the dancers downstage. In the end, however, the lighting cues were a matter of feel as well because the lighting technician was told to enact the handful of light cues based on his feeling of where the dancers were positioned on stage.

Movement

Joan has trained in both the Hijikata and Ohno dance lineages (dancing under Ashikawa Yōko and Ohno Kazuo respectively), and maintains a dance aesthetic closer to that of Hijikata. From the start of the performance Joan enters the stage in darkness and begins dancing against the eastern wall. Her movements are slow and twisting, sometimes fluid, sometimes jerky. This is a movement quality exhibited by the other dancers on stage too: moving across the stage in low crouches, arms twisted, or moving across the floor with their legs bent, feet in the air. The movement quality exhibited during the performance hearkens back to the grotesque movements exhibited in early *butoh* performances. The twisting of the body, contorting of the face, and the slow and pained movement of the dancers across the stage emphasize a grotesque quality that defies definition.

As with an earlier *butoh* aesthetic, Joan seeks movement that supersedes form. As discussed above, *butoh* originators—as well as subsequent *butoh* practitioners—consciously fought against imposing any kind of classical or traditional form or technique on the dance and instead worked to allow the dance to

be an expression of the dancer's emotions and spirit without concretely defined signification. As Ohno taught, the form of *butoh* is created by the spirit. It is created by dancing your feelings and using your feelings to reach out to your audience with a "real" performance—a performance untainted by the perceived technical imposition of form as in Western-style dances. Joan seeks a similar exhibition of spirit in her performance as she encourages her dancers to be aware of their surroundings and to perform based on how the atmosphere of the performance makes them feel.

Lighting

The lighting of the performance was reminiscent of famous *butoh* performances like Hijikata's *Forbidden Colors* in that it was simple, stark, and emphatic. At the beginning of the *Earth Tomes* performance, the venue lights were brought down and the stage was lined by six bright stage lights directed downstage and one single stage light directed upstage. When discussing the stage directions with the performers before the performance, Joan spoke to them about playing with the light. The way the lights dimmed and brightened, following the performers as the performance slowly made its way down stage enabled the dancers to move in front of and within the lights. The lights crisscrossed the stage, and the dancers cast dark shadows on the walls opposite them, and silhouetted themselves to audience members.

This use of light emphasized the grotesque elements of the performance, lending an air of ethereality and emphasizing the unnaturalness in the qualities of

the dancers' movement. The light and the movement together hearken back to an original *butoh* aesthetic, driven by the grotesque to inhabit a liminal space in our understanding. When combined, the lighting, music, and movement exhibit a similar aesthetic as described in early *butoh* performances that I treated in chapter one. *Earth Tomes* uses a combination of aesthetic components to deliver a performance that does not fit neatly into preconceived categories in our minds. By performing in this stark lighting, each movement of the performance was enhanced and exaggerated. At times a dancer would move away from a light and a member of the audience engrossed with their movements would suddenly be flashed with light and temporarily blinded. The ability to play with the light, the movement quality, and the improvisational nature of the performance all contributed to the feeling of ethereality in the performance and reflect an original *butoh* aesthetic.

Summary

Joan's desire to maintain a connection to the "original" *butoh* aesthetic is manifested not only in her movements and the movements of others, but also in her direction of the performance. Her instructional methodologies, her stage arrangement, lighting decisions, and aesthetic choices all have strong roots in the *butoh* aesthetic laid down by Hijikata and Ohno. The performance escapes easy definition, existing in a liminal space in our predefined categories of understanding dance and movement. In this way, the movements of the performance do not tell us a story, but evoke images from our own memories and perceptions. Joan and her dancers use the concept of the grotesque to maintain the performance's existence in

this liminal space, allowing the audience to perceive the performance without subjecting it to the intellectualizing process of assigning signification to the movements. This, in turn, allows for each movement to embody more than one meaning as each audience member—being a product of their own personal sensory experiences throughout their lives—is able to grasp something different from the performance; each movement has the potential to illicit a different affective response from each individual audience member. This is the same method that *butoh* originators employed in their performances to maintain *butoh* as an affective performance, highly divorced from both classical Western-style performance and traditional Japanese performance.

The improvisational movement sequences produced by the dancers were by and large based off their affective and kinesthetic awareness of the performance space. By being aware of the concept of the performance, listening to the music, and feeling the atmosphere of the performance, the dancers worked to move based on their personal emotional responses to the site, and by performing on an affective level themselves, the dancers moved to connect with the audience on a direct emotional level and evoke from them an affective response. Simultaneously, the dancers relied on the kinesthetic awareness of their movement qualities, their relation in space and time to the other dancers, and their proprioceptive positional awareness to explore the performance space and concept through movement. The combination of their affective awareness and kinesthetic awareness allowed the dancers to produce a gestural quality that defied easy categorization, and embodied

images and memories rather than tell stories in order to create a sense of ethereal suspended reality and connect on a direct level to their audience members.

Conclusion

In this research I have worked to develop an integrated frame to approach the study of *butoh* by examining the intersection of aesthetic with perceptual phenomenology. By drawing on aesthetic ideals expressed by *butoh* originators and modern *butoh* choreographers, and then examining them through a phenomenological lens, I hope to have contributed to a multidisciplinary understanding of the role of the moving dancer's body in embodying and communicating meaning. At the same time I have sought to develop my own praxis by deepening and refining my understanding of *butoh*'s cultural context and general movement theories.

In chapter one I drew on the writings of *butoh* originators Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo, as well as personally recorded interviews with modern day practitioner and scholar Joan Laage, to establish the core tenets of an original *butoh* aesthetic. By examining the various aesthetic characteristics of *butoh* in relation to ideas of the grotesque as laid out by Mikhail Bakhtin and Geoffrey Harpham, I examine the abstract construction of meaning, or the construction of an avoidance of meaning, in *butoh* performance. Choreographers and directors employ a variety of methodologies for enhancing the liminal grotesque aesthetic of *butoh* and incorporate them into their performances in order to establish a deep affective connection with the audience.

In chapter two I began to explore a theoretical approach to the aesthetic elements of *butoh*—particularly movement—that were laid out in chapter one. Drawing on a definition put forth by Joann Kealiinohomoku, I first defined dance in a

way that allows for cultural and situational flexibility, addressing the anthropological problems of defining dance as explained by Drid Williams. Then, using concepts explored in the field of kinesics, I explored how the social body creates signification in movement and how that is then employed in dance. After establishing signification in movement as a social construct I examined the use of movement in *butoh* and its attempts to supersede signification. Although *butoh* does not seem to fully escape the social construction of signification in movement, the use of the grotesque in movement enables *butoh* performance to exist in a liminal space in our understanding, thus allowing the body and gesture in *butoh* performance to embody multiple meanings.

Then, drawing on the phenomenological writings of Merleau-Ponty and Sheets-Johnstone, I examined the uses of proprioception and kinesthetic awareness in dance and performance and the importance of both in the human body for defining oneself spatially and existentially. After giving a brief overview of the interplay of biological proprioceptive neurons with the mind to construct a perceived reality from within the body, I drew on ideas of embodiment laid out by Carrie Noland to explore the intersection of phenomenology with embodied culture and experience. Of course the theoretical approaches I incorporated into my research are applicable to any study of dance, however I have sought to begin filling a gap in the study of *butoh* by specifically approaching it using these methodologies.

Expanding these concepts from the realm of abstraction to practice, in chapter three I examined the recent performance of *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth*. Using the theoretical concepts of the body in motion and embodiment laid out

in chapter two as well as the primary aesthetic characteristics of *butoh* performance explored in chapter one, I drew connections between the *Earth Tomes* performance and an original *butoh* aesthetic, as well as explored the use of the dancers' affective and kinesthetic awareness to understand themselves in space, and construct a movement sequence that is defined as *butoh* and forms a deep affective connection between the dancers, their performance, and the audience.

In conclusion, with this research I have sought to develop a theoretical approach to explore the *butoh* body in motion using a phenomenological methodology in order to more deeply understand the intersection of aesthetic and kinesthesia in *butoh* performance.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Japanese Names, Terms, and Performances

A

Admiring La Argentina (Ra aruhenchiina shō) ラ・アルヘンチーナ頌

All Japan Art Dance Association: Sixth Newcomers Dance Recital (*Zen Nihon geijutsu buyō kyōkai—dai 6 kai shinjin buyō kōen*) 全日本芸術舞踊協会・第 6 回新人舞踊公演

Andō Mitsuko 安藤三子

ankoku butoh 暗黒舞踏

Ashikawa Yōko 芦川羊子

B

butoh 舞踏

buyō 舞踊

C

Crow (*kuro*) クロ

E

Eguchi Takaya 江口隆哉

F

Forbidden Colors (Kinjiki) 禁色

H

Hakutōbō 白桃房

Hijikata Tatsumi 土方巽

Hijikata Tatsumi zenshū ("The Complete Writings of Hijikata Tatsumi") 土方巽全集

I

Ishii Baku 石井漠

J

Japan Athletic College *Nihon tai'iku daigaku* 日本体育大学

K

kabuki 歌舞伎

Kantō Gakuin 関東学院

Kaze daruma 風だるま

Keiko no kotoba ("Words of Workshop") 稽古の言葉

kumadori 隈取り

M

Masseur: A Story of a Theater that Sustains Passion (Anma: aiyoku wo sasaeru gekijo no hanashi) あんま：愛欲を支える劇場の話

Mid-afternoon Secret Ceremony of a Hermaphrodite: Three Chapters (Han'in han'yosha no hiru sagari no higi—sanshō) 半陰半陽者の昼下がりの秘儀参章

Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫

"Mishima Incident" 三島事件

Miya Sōko 宮躁子

My Mother (Watashi no okaasan) 私のお母さん

N

noh 能

O

Ohno Kazuo 大野一雄

Ohno Yoshito 大野慶人

S

shingeki 新劇

T

Tanaka Min 田中泯

Terayama Shūji 寺山修司

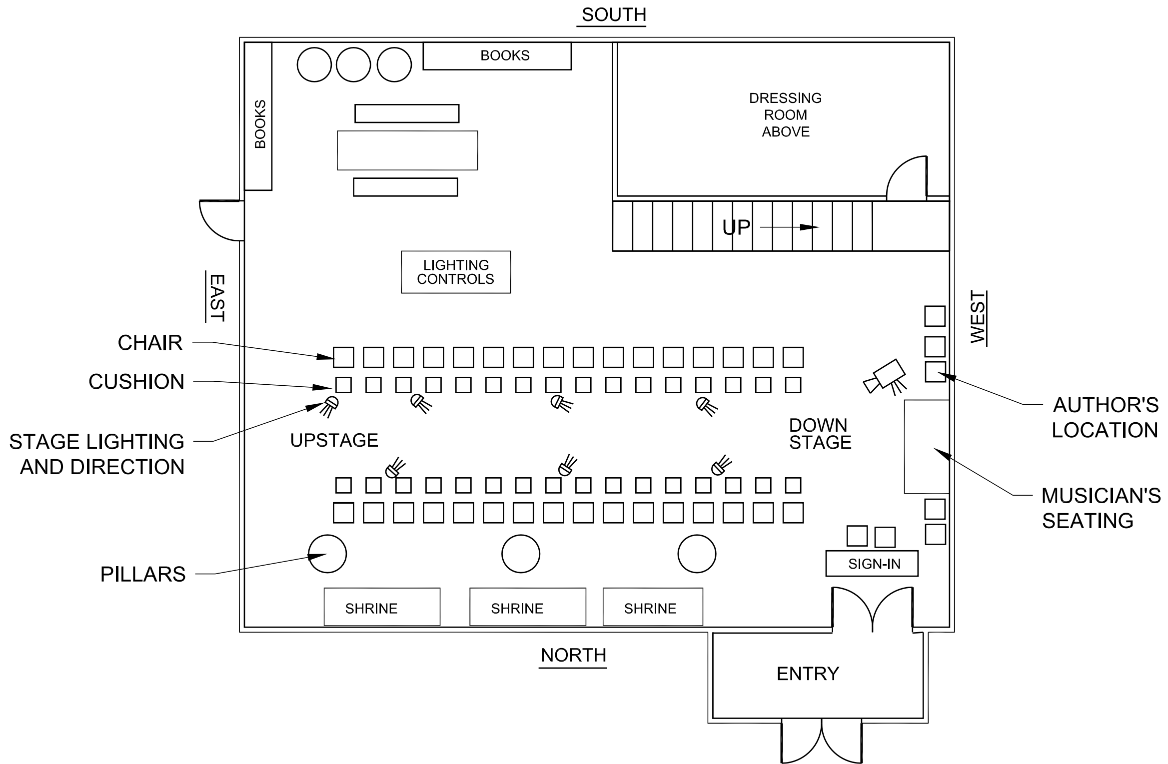
Tenjō Sajiki 天井桟敷

Y

Yoneyama Kunio 米山九日生

Yameru mai hime (“Ailing Dancer”) 辞める舞姫

Appendix B: *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth* Performance Venue Layout



Graphic representation provided by Templeton Landscape Architects, Cooperstown, NY.

Appendix C: *Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth* performance program

Kogut Butoh/DAIPANbutoh Collective present…

Earth Tomes: celebrating the earth

photo: Kaoru Okumura

February 20, 2016

8:00 pm

Taoist Studies Institute
Seattle

Directed by Joan Laage (Kogut Butoh)

Music by Dmitry Artamonov

with *Sheri Brown, Mary Cutrera, Kaoru Okumura, Marina Sossi (UK), Alan Sutherland, Helen Thorsen, Katrina Wolfe, and Shoko Zama*

Earth Tomes was first performed as a site-specific solo in a greenhouse in Malmo, Sweden as part of a symposium on the body and memory in February 2015. Before Joan takes it on her March 2016 tour, collaborating with performers in Liverpool, London and Freiburg, Germany, she has invited dancers to join her here in Seattle. In this age of an increasing use of technology to direct and control so many aspects of our daily lives, Earth Tomes is a welcome revelation of the body as earth and, through continual transformation, reveals the changing landscape of the body.